

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 11, 2025

The Honorable Doug Burgum
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Gary Washington
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Charles Ezell
Acting Director
U.S. Office of Personnel Management
1900 E Street, NW
Washington, DC 20415

Dear Secretary Burgum, Acting Secretary Washington, and Acting Director Ezell:

We write today following reports that hiring and onboarding for federal seasonal firefighters has stopped due to the Trump Administration's federal hiring freeze. We are extremely concerned to hear that this is happening across the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and National Park Service ahead of what's expected to be another devastating wildfire year. The Administration must not sacrifice the safety of the American people for the benefit of implementing a political agenda. We urge you to immediately reverse course, begin hiring and onboarding seasonal firefighters again, and continue supporting and growing the federal firefighting workforce.

President Trump's January 20th memorandum ordered a hiring freeze for all federal civilian employees. It also explicitly exempted public safety personnel from this freeze and allowed the Director of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to grant further exemptions. We are appalled that federal seasonal firefighters are not already exempted, given the critical role they play in public safety throughout our communities. Federal seasonal firefighters are brave public servants who risk their lives to protect those around them. They work long hours in dangerous environments to not only fight fires on private, public, and Tribal lands, but also carry out hazardous fuels management, which is crucial to preventing and mitigating the effects of future fires.

Wildfires are increasing in frequency and destructiveness in the U.S., necessitating even greater seasonal firefighter hiring. In 2024, over 64,800 wildfires occurred across the country, which is up from approximately 56,500 in 2023. Additionally, fires burned nearly 9 million acres in 2024, compared to only 3 million in 2023. Such fires also no longer stick to a particular season, meaning that we must be prepared 365 days per year to fight fires, putting even more stress and strain on a workforce that desperately needs additional support and higher pay. While the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law led to some small increases from the 18,700 seasonal and career federal firefighters we had in 2022, this investment is still not meeting our current wildfire needs.

Although there is an urgent need to hire more federal firefighters, the Trump Administration's hiring freeze does the opposite and is pausing hiring at a critical time for this already understaffed workforce.

On top of this, firefighter retention continues to be a problem, with reports indicating that the attrition rate of firefighters at the Forest Service has been 45 percent over the past four years. We therefore need to focus on recruitment and retention of this critically important workforce, rather than place more uncertainty within it through an arbitrary freeze. The federal seasonal firefighter hiring process is already time consuming, and we don't need to delay it further with more bureaucratic red tape.

The bottom line is this: pausing the hiring and onboarding of federal seasonal firefighters – while historic wildfires destroy communities and upend livelihoods across the West – is simply irresponsible and dangerous. We will be woefully unprepared to fight the fires to come and instead will continue to see record levels of damage, ultimately costing communities and taxpayers even more at a time when the cost of living is already too high. We urge you to put the safety of families and communities across the country first and allow the federal seasonal firefighter hiring process to continue without delay. Every moment that we wait puts lives and livelihoods at greater risk.

Sincerely,



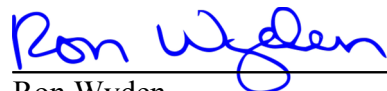
Jacky Rosen
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich
Ranking Member, Committee
on Energy & Natural
Resources



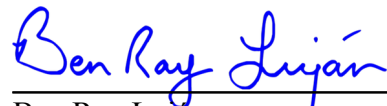
Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



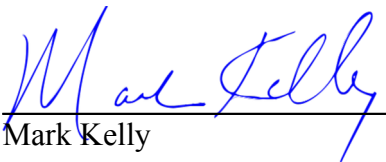
Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
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United States Senator



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United States Senator



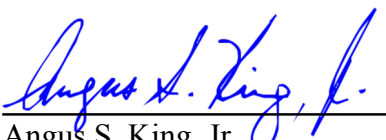
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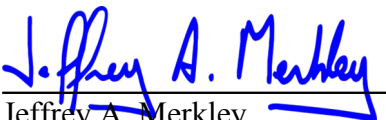
Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
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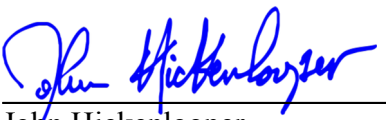
Bernard Sanders
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