



Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

Peter A. DeFazio
Chairman

Katherine W. Dedrick
Staff Director

Sam Graves
Ranking Member

Paul J. Sass
Republican Staff Director

September 22, 2020

The Honorable Kate Brown
Governor
State of Oregon
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Governor Brown:

Today marks two weeks since devastating fires ignited throughout the Cascade Range, Oregon Coast, and southern Oregon. Lives have unfortunately been lost, thousands of homes and businesses have burned, and many thousands more Oregonians remain displaced. I write you today to urge the State to quickly develop a shelter plan that prioritizes keeping communities together and providing stable, reliable shelter for those who are unable to return home. Further, as Chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, which has jurisdiction over the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), I offer you my assistance and expertise in working with Federal agencies to ensure the State maximizes the assistance available to recover from this disaster.

As you may have heard, late last week hundreds of constituents I represent in the 4th Congressional District received less than 24 hours' notice that they would need to leave hotel rooms provided by the American Red Cross. This caused panic and uncertainty for these evacuees who had nowhere else to go, many of whom had already lost everything in the fires. My staff immediately intervened with the Red Cross, Travel Lane County, and other community leaders to ensure nearly all those survivors had a place to stay through the weekend. While I am relieved to be told by the Red Cross that all people who are currently in Red Cross-provided hotel rooms will be able to stay through October 2, this never should have happened and we must not let it happen again.

With less than two weeks until October 2, I would like to know how the State plans to shelter evacuees who cannot return home. With the number of structures lost due to the fires, this will be a long and slow recovery for hundreds, if not thousands, of Oregonians. The immediate months will be even more challenging, with the rainy season and likely mudslides, the approach of winter and the holidays, all compounded by the ongoing pandemic.

It is incumbent that the State develops a clear and coordinated plan as quickly as possible to keep survivors reliably sheltered and as close to their communities as possible. I have spoken with county and local leaders throughout the 4th District who are already organizing on a grassroots level

to recruit area lodges and retreats with housing facilities to welcome evacuees. This spirit of ingenuity and hard work exemplifies what it means to be an Oregonian and typifies what our coordinated whole of community response should look like: compassionate, locally-driven, and effective.

Given the scale of the fires and an already existing shortage of affordable housing, I encourage the State to be as creative and flexible as possible in finding solutions. I stand at the ready to assist in facilitating conversations with local leaders as well as using my influence with FEMA and other Federal partners to eliminate red tape. Getting Oregonians into stable and secure housing as we enter the winter months is my top priority and I will do everything in my power to assist in that effort.

In addition to shelter, I encourage the state to seek further Federal assistance under FEMA's Individual Assistance programs. Specifically, displaced Oregonians will need crisis counseling, disaster case management, and disaster legal services to improve their recovery efforts. As you know, the communities hardest hit by this disaster already have the fewest resources or access to immediate government services. FEMA's slate of Individual Assistance programs can help simplify the complex bureaucracy of Federal assistance and can provide case management and legal services to ensure survivors in need benefit from every resource available to them.

I've observed far too many disaster responses and recoveries during my tenure in Congress. With that experience, I've learned that the most successful recovery efforts are the result of close coordination between local, State, and Federal partners. I encourage your administration to engage directly with local partners, including community-based organizations who know the immediate on-the-ground needs yet lack the expertise to navigate the State and Federal recovery programs or who to call for assistance. I will continue to work to be a bridge between the Federal government and the communities I serve and am committed to working with you and our State partners to make sure all needs are met.

Thank you for your efforts not only on behalf of the residents of southwest Oregon, but the entire State. This is a tragic time for Oregon, but we will get through this and we must do it together. If there is anything I can assist with, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,



Peter A. DeFazio
Chairman