

United States Congress

Washington

For Immediate Release
Tuesday, December 8th, 2020

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Washington State Lawmakers Continue to Seek Major Disaster Declaration after Devastating Wildfires

*Senator Murray led full WA congressional delegation in letter to
President Trump and FEMA Administrator Gaynor*

*Letter urges approval of Governor Inslee's September request for a
federal emergency disaster declaration to address wildfire destruction in
Whitman County that destroyed community of Malden, other areas in
Eastern Washington*

*Spokesman-Review: "Malden, Pine City residents wait to rebuild as
federal aid stalls" – [MORE HERE](#)*

*Members: "For 83 days, thousands of displaced Washingtonians have
watched as FEMA trailers assist those in neighboring states but have
seen no federal aid coming their way [...] 83 days is too long to sit in
limbo after experiencing such a damaging wildfire season"*

*Members: "Malden has met the threshold for Small Business
Administration (SBA) assistance but none can be provided until the
Governor's requests are approved"*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, U.S. Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) led the full Washington state congressional delegation in writing a [third letter](#) to President Trump and FEMA Administrator Gaynor in support of Governor Jay Inslee’s request for a statewide federal emergency disaster declaration in response to this year’s devastating wildfires. The Governor’s request includes Individual and Public Assistance for eligible communities across Eastern Washington, including the town of Malden, where wildfires destroyed 80% of homes and businesses leaving most of its residents unable to return. Other Western states ravaged by wildfires this year, such as Oregon and California, have received essential federal assistance provided under major disaster declarations, but the thousands of Washingtonians forced to evacuate remain without aid as the Governor’s request still awaits approval. U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA) and U.S. Representatives Adam Smith (D-WA, 9th), Rick Larsen (D-WA, 2nd), Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA, 5th), Jaime Herrera Beutler (R-WA 3rd), Suzan DelBene (D-WA, 1st), Denny Heck (D-WA, 10th), Derek Kilmer (D-WA, 6th), Dan Newhouse (R-WA, 4th), Pramila Jayapal (D-WA, 7th), and Kim Schrier, M.D. (D-WA, 8th) also joined the letter.

“In the five day period from September 7th to the 11th, an estimated 626,982 acres burned throughout the state...” the lawmakers wrote. *“In particular, the town of Malden, a small, rural community in Whitman County, saw most of their community reduced to ashes. An estimated 80 percent of homes and other structures in the town including the town’s only post office, town hall, fire station, food bank, and library were destroyed or seriously damaged. Individual and Public Assistance for this town would provide critical support, particularly for eligible individuals who evacuated and are unable to return to their community.”*

“83 days have passed since the Governor requested federal assistance,” the lawmakers added. *“For 83 days, thousands of displaced Washingtonians have watched as FEMA trailers assist those in neighboring states but have seen no federal aid coming their way. For 83 days, the state of Washington continues to be overwhelmed as it copes with clean-up and rebuilding efforts on top of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. 83 days is too long to sit in limbo after experiencing such a damaging wildfire season.”*

On September 17, Senator Murray led the full Washington state congressional delegation in [sending a letter](#) to President Trump in support of Governor Jay Inslee’s request for a major disaster declaration for the state, as well as public assistance and individual assistance for Whitman County, following the unprecedented wildfires in Eastern Washington and other areas. In the letter the lawmakers also offered support for emergency federal assistance in additional areas in the state impacted by wildfires that have cost lives, destroyed structures, forced thousands of families to evacuate their homes, and caused communities to lose power for extended periods. Senator Murray also [led an October 13 letter](#) from the Washington state congressional delegation in support of Governor Inslee’s October 8, 2020 request for a Major Disaster declaration for the State of Washington and supplemental federal assistance, and to reiterate support for the governor’s September 16 request.

Read the full letter below or [HERE](#).

December 8, 2020

*The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Northwest
Washington, DC 20500*

*The Honorable Peter T. Gaynor
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street SW
Washington, DC 20472*

Dear Mr. President and Administrator Gaynor:

We write to inquire about Governor Jay Inslee's September 16, 2020, and October 8, 2020 request for a Major Disaster Declaration for the State of Washington and supplemental federal assistance.

As you know, Washington state grappled with a wildfire season of historic scope and intensity this year. In the five day period from September 7th to the 11th, an estimated 626,982 acres burned throughout the state. That area alone exceeded each of the total burned acreages in each of the fire seasons between 2002 and 2019, with the exception of 2015's devastating wildfire season. These wildfires forced the evacuations of thousands of people, threatened 3,000 homes and structures, and deteriorated air quality to hazardous levels at that time.

In particular, the town of Malden, a small, rural community in Whitman County, saw most of their community reduced to ashes. An estimated 80 percent of homes and other structures in the town including the town's only post office, town hall, fire station, food bank, and library were destroyed or seriously damaged. Individual and Public Assistance for this town would provide critical support, particularly for eligible individuals who evacuated and are unable to return to their community. Thankfully, nobody died in Malden. But most of its 300-some residents were uninsured and already living on the economic margins. According to state records, Malden has met the threshold for Small Business Administration (SBA) assistance but none can be provided until the Governor's requests are approved.

Now, 83 days have passed since the Governor requested federal assistance. For 83 days, thousands of displaced Washingtonians have watched as FEMA trailers assist those in neighboring states but have seen no federal aid coming their way. For 83 days, the state of

Washington continues to be overwhelmed as it copes with clean-up and rebuilding efforts on top of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. 83 days is too long to sit in limbo after experiencing such a damaging wildfire season.

Again, we fully support Governor Inslee's request for a major disaster declaration statewide as well as Public Assistance and Individual Assistance for eligible counties. Please let us know if you need further information to inform your decision.

Sincerely,

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