

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

August 21, 2020

The Honorable Joseph V. Cuffari  
Inspector General  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
245 Murray Lane, SW  
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Inspector General Cuffari:

As Members of the California delegation in the House of Representatives, we are writing to request that you open an investigation into whether the federal government improperly denied or delayed aid to the victims of California fires.

Over the past few years, our communities—both rural and urban—have been devastated by several deadly wildfires. Today, numerous other fires continue to burn in the state.

We are deeply disturbed by recent statements made by Miles Taylor, the former Chief of Staff at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), regarding assistance to fire victims. Mr. Taylor reported that during a call with DHS and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), President Trump directed FEMA to deny assistance to wildfire disaster victims in California. Mr. Taylor said, “He told us to stop giving money to people whose houses had burned down from a wildfire because he was so rageful that people in the state of California didn’t support him and that politically it wasn’t a base for him.”<sup>1</sup>

The President is elected to serve all the people of the United States. The notion that the President made decisions about disaster assistance based on the political preferences of disaster victims is alarming and carries with it possible legal implications. As such, we request an investigation into whether any inappropriate or illegal behavior has occurred with regards to California wildfire assistance. We ask that the investigation include but not be limited to the following questions:

- Did the President or DHS officials improperly influence the issuance of any fire management assistance grant?
- Did the President or DHS officials improperly delay granting or deny any requests for an emergency or major disaster declaration?
- Did the President or DHS officials attempt to revoke or delay the distribution of any assistance that had already been granted to California fire victims?

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<sup>1</sup> Bierman, Noah, and Eli Stokols. “Trump Sought to Withhold California Fire Aid Because of Politics, Former Official Says.” *Los Angeles Times*, Los Angeles Times, 17 Aug. 2020, [www.latimes.com/politics/story/2020-08-17/trump-sought-to-withhold-california-fire](http://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2020-08-17/trump-sought-to-withhold-california-fire).

- Did the President or DHS officials improperly deny requests from the State of California to adjust state and local cost share requirements associated with debris removal and emergency protective measures assistance?

It is imperative that decisions related to disaster assistance be free from improper political interference. Our constituents have suffered gravely from these fires and deserve to know whether any improper or illegal behavior has occurred.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



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Ted W. Lieu  
Member of Congress



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Julia Brownley  
Member of Congress



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Judy Chu  
Member of Congress



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Mark DeSaulnier  
Member of Congress



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John Garamendi  
Member of Congress



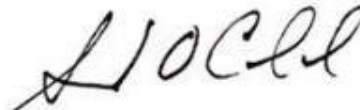
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Jared Huffman  
Member of Congress




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Karen Bass  
Member of Congress



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Salud O. Carbajal  
Member of Congress



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Gilbert R. Cisneros Jr.  
Member of Congress



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Anna G. Eshoo  
Member of Congress



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Jimmy Gomez  
Member of Congress



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Ro Khanna  
Member of Congress



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Barbara Lee  
Member of Congress



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Alan Lowenthal  
Member of Congress



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Jerry McNerney  
Member of Congress



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Scott Peters  
Member of Congress



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Adam Schiff  
Member of Congress



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Eric Swalwell  
Member of Congress



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Mike Thompson  
Member of Congress



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Zoe Lofgren  
Member of Congress



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Doris Matsui  
Member of Congress



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Grace F. Napolitano  
Member of Congress



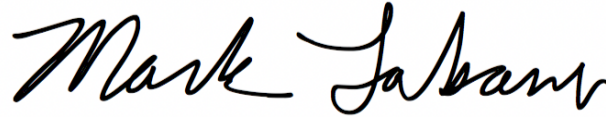
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Harley Rouda  
Member of Congress



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Brad Sherman  
Member of Congress



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Mark Takano  
Member of Congress



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Ami Bera, M.D.  
Member of Congress