

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 22, 2015

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

We write to urge you to immediately declare a Presidential Disaster Declaration for the Valley and Butte Fires in California and approve Governor Brown's request for individual disaster assistance and hazard mitigation for the state. Thousands of Californians have lost their homes in these fires, and federal disaster assistance will help these individuals cope with and recover from this tragedy.

The Valley and Butte Fires have burned a combined 145,871 acres, and neither are fully contained. The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection rank the Valley and Butte fires as the third and seventh most destructive in the state's history. After starting on September 12, the Valley Fire burned 40,000 acres within 12 hours, demonstrating extreme fire behavior. These destructive fires were fueled by the result of four years of catastrophic drought and dangerously hot weather. Five fatalities have been reported in these fires.

Governor Brown's request for disaster assistance indicates that as of September 21, 2015, the two fires have destroyed at least 1,713 homes and 493 non-residential structures, including businesses. This is more than double the average number of homes destroyed in previously declared disasters in the state, which is 801 homes. The number of homes and other structures destroyed may continue to increase as damage assessments continue. Federal disaster assistance will provide Californians affected by the fires with essential support including temporary housing, home repairs or replacement, unemployment assistance, disaster loans, and crisis counseling.

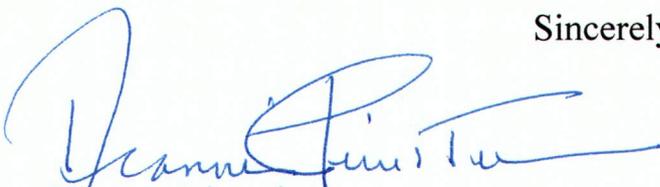
The Valley and Butte Fires have devastated entire communities. Many of these communities are rural, small, and have a high percentage of elderly and disabled residents. More than 31,300 residents were issued mandatory evacuations during the fires, and hundreds remain in emergency shelters. Many of the individuals and families who are displaced have lost their home and possessions. The governor's office estimates that many homeowners either did not have home insurance or were underinsured. Some displaced residents are likely now unemployed. These fires have created immense suffering, and there is an urgent need for federal disaster assistance to

help individuals and families recover from these destructive wildfires. We have attached pictures taken in the community of Middletown, which was devastated by the Valley Fire.

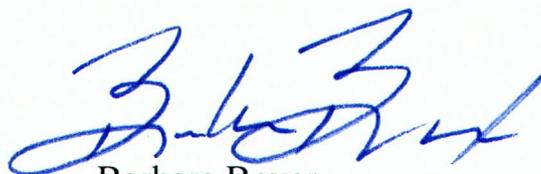
The state also needs hazard mitigation funds to address the damage caused by the Valley and Butte Fires. These fires have created high risk areas for flooding and mudslides, and significant mitigation efforts will be needed to reduce this risk. This risk is especially worrisome as the National Weather Service indicates there is a 95 percent chance storms caused by a strong El Niño will impact the state in December. Furthermore, California's resources have been severely depleted by four years of drought. There have been over 5,345 fires since January, 2015, which have burned approximately 300,000 acres, nearly triple the acres burned in past fire years. The governor's office reports the state has spent more than \$200 million in additional emergency wildfire suppression operations over the past two years. Furthermore, the University of California, Davis, estimates that in 2015, the state will lose \$2.7 billion in economic activity and 21,000 jobs due to the ongoing drought.

We urge you to immediately approve the Governor's request for a Presidential Disaster Declaration and federal disaster assistance for the Valley and Butte Fires given that the degree and extent of the damage clearly constitutes a major disaster.

Sincerely,



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Barbara Boxer
United States Senator

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Jeh Johnson
Secretary of Homeland Security

The Honorable Craig Fugate
Administrator, Federal Emergency Management Agency

Denis McDonough
White House Chief of Staff

DF/tc