

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 19, 2016

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

Dear President Obama:

We write to urge you to approve a disaster declaration for the Erskine Fire in California and approve the state's request for disaster assistance. Hundreds of Californians in the Kern River Valley have lost their homes and federal disaster assistance will provide essential support to help them cope and recover from this tragedy.

The Erskine Fire is the 18<sup>th</sup> most destructive fire in California history and the most destructive fire in Kern County burning approximately 48,000 acres within a rapid 36-hour period. Extreme fire behavior, fueled by five years of catastrophic drought and dangerously hot weather, resulted in the immediate evacuation of 2,700 homes and left 8,700 homes without power. Two fatalities were reported.

The state's request for disaster assistance indicates that as of July 14, 2016, the Erskine Fire destroyed 290 homes in a rural and economically distressed California community.

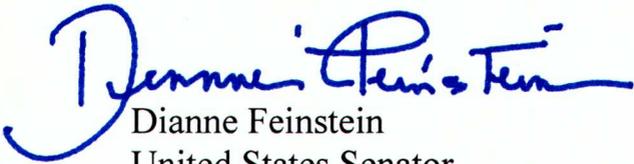
Kern County's unemployment rate is almost double the state's average and nearly one-quarter of residents live in poverty. Federal disaster assistance is necessary to provide critical support, including temporary housing, home replacement, unemployment assistance, disaster loans, crisis counseling and hazardous material and debris removal. More than 90 percent of those who lost their homes continue to seek temporary housing during the rebuilding process. Many residents are living 50 miles from their community, further hindering the local economy from recovery.

The Erskine Fire has devastated an entire community. All affected communities are rural and small, with a high percentage of elderly and disabled residents. More than 800 residents were displaced and four emergency shelters were filled to capacity. Many of these individuals lost their homes and belongings,

and federal disaster assistance is needed to help them recover. We have attached pictures taken in the Kern River Valley communities of Squirrel Valley and South Lake to show the devastation caused by the fire.

We urge you to approve the state's request for a disaster declaration and federal assistance for the Erskine Fire. It is our strong belief that the degree and extent of the damage constitutes a major disaster.

Sincerely,



Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator



Barbara Boxer  
United States Senator

Enclosure

Cc: The Honorable Craig Fugate  
Administrator, Federal Emergency Management Agency

DF/sm

