

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 11, 2025

Gary Washington  
Acting Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Acting Secretary Washington:

We write with significant concerns regarding the impact of halting the disbursement of funds for forest management and restoration projects, as well as the universal hiring freeze for Department of Agriculture personnel, including permanent and seasonal firefighters. As we have recently seen in Los Angeles, addressing the threat of wildfire—even in winter months—should remain a top priority for the Forest Service and the Department of Agriculture. The funds provided by Congress for this work led to record-breaking accomplishments in forest management in 2024. Halting these payments is not only unlawful but also endangers our rural communities by removing a vital component of their economies and delaying critical work to mitigate the threat of wildfire.

We understand that you halted these payments in accordance with President Trump's Executive Order 14154, which indiscriminately ordered a stop to the disbursement of any funds provided by the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* (IIJA) or the *Inflation Reduction Act* (IRA), including for forest management projects. President Trump also ordered a hiring freeze across the Federal government, and in response, you instituted a hiring freeze on all personnel, despite the presidential memorandum explicitly exempting public safety personnel. To make matters worse, the Trump Administration issued a memorandum illegally freezing the disbursement of funds for grants, agreements, and contracts that it was eventually forced to rescind after a court rightfully found that it violated the law.

Not only does the Constitution vest the power of the purse with Congress and provide no power to the President to impound funds, there have been several bedrock fiscal statutes enacted to protect Congress' constitutional power of the purse and prevent unlawful executive overreach, including the *Antideficiency Act* and the *Impoundment Control Act of 1974* (ICA). The ICA prohibits any action or inaction that precludes Federal funds from being obligated or spent, either temporarily or permanently, without following the strictly circumscribed requirements of that law, which have not been honored in this instance.

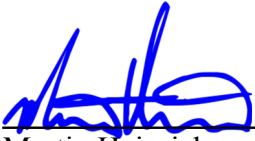
Significant questions remain around which projects, grants, and agreements have been affected by these executive actions, but there is no doubt that these actions will damage essential programs that Americans rely on to keep them safe. Given the scope of the programs affected and their importance for public safety, we request additional information, provided no later than February 26, 2025, regarding the implementation of Executive Order 14154 and the Secretarial

memorandum sent on January 21, 2025. If obligations and disbursements resume for any office or program before your response is delivered, please answer the question as it applied to the time funding was withheld:

1. Please provide a full list of Forest Service programs for which disbursements are paused, including any paused under Executive Order 14154 or the now-rescinded memorandum from the Office of Management and Budget.
2. Please provide a full list of individual projects, including the location and total award amount, for which funds were obligated but disbursements are now paused. Please include projects carried out by Departmental personnel as well as those carried out through grants, contracts, or agreements. If obligated funds have been paused, what is the legal basis for pausing the disbursement of already obligated funds?
3. Did the agency inform non-federal partners affected by the pause before halting their payments? Has the agency communicated with those same partners concerning the status of the affected projects since the pause was initiated? If so, please provide examples of any communications notifying applicants or current participants of the affected programs.
4. What is the status of agency personnel that were hired under funds appropriated by IJA and IRA? Are those personnel still being paid their salaries? How many personnel, if any, have been terminated, furloughed, put on administrative leave, or otherwise notified of future administrative leave?
5. How many Forest Service employees have been terminated, furloughed, put on administrative leave, or otherwise notified of future administrative leave since January 20, 2025? Please provide the job titles and duty stations for each category described above.
6. How many Forest Service employees accepted the deferred resignation offer being offered to federal employees by the Office of Personnel Management? Please provide data broken down by position, grade, and duty station.
7. Does the Department plan to reimburse contractors whose payments are paused but are continuing to act under the terms of their contract with the Department? What is the status of Departmental reviews of these paused projects?
8. Please provide the minimum amount of time the pause could last.
9. Why did the Department freeze the hiring of all personnel, despite the exception in President Trump's order for those personnel with a public safety role?
10. In recent years, the Forest Service has spent months at a time at Preparedness Level 4 and 5, indicating that staffing levels were stretched to a breaking point. How does the Department plan to effectively fight wildfires if the Forest Service cannot hire firefighters?

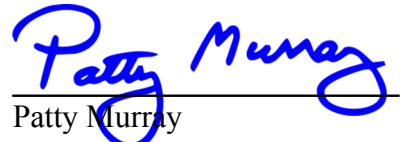
The Forest Service provides a critical support function for communities across the country, from supporting the nation's wood products sector to mitigating the threat of catastrophic wildfire. Continuing to carry out this work as Congress prescribed is not only required under the law but essential for our nation's security. Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



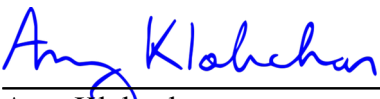
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Martin Heinrich  
Ranking Member, Committee  
on Energy & Natural  
Resources



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Patty Murray  
United States Senator  
Vice Chair, Committee on  
Appropriations



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Amy Klobuchar  
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Agriculture, Nutrition, and  
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Jeffrey A. Merkley  
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