

United States Senate Committee on Appropriations

July 21, 2026

Senator Alex Padilla (D-CA)

Chair Collins, Vice Chair Murray, Members of the Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the people of California, and more specifically, the survivors of last year's Los Angeles County wildfires.

Eighteen months ago, nearly 60,000 acres across Southern California were reduced to ash – roughly 3 ½ times the size of Manhattan! Over 16,000 homes, businesses, schools, and other structures were destroyed. Most devastating of all, 31 Californians lost their lives in these tragedies.

More than 7,500 firefighters worked around the clock for over three weeks to extinguish these infernos. And those firefighters weren't just from California. They came from neighboring states like Oregon and Washington, and from as far away as Montana, Texas, Utah, and Arizona. Because that's what we do. When disaster strikes, we don't first ask about the politics of a community or who they voted for in the last election – we help all those in need.

Walking around the Pacific Palisades and Altadena communities afterwards, not even the hardest of hearts could fail to be moved by the scale of the devastation – the skeletal remains of chimneys the only markers where families' homes once stood. Cars melted into the street and driveways where they had been parked.

In the wake of disasters like this, Congress has historically come together in a bipartisan fashion to provide aid and long-term recovery funding to help communities recover and rebuild – regardless of whether the disaster was in a red state or blue state. But instead of following that bipartisan tradition, this Administration has left Californians waiting for more than a year and a half while asking Congress to fund hundreds of billions of dollars for other objectives.

Make no mistake, disaster will strike again. Whether it's a tornado, flooding from a hurricane, or the increasingly frequent, devastating, and unpredictable wildfires we're seeing year after year across the West. So, while I am here today advocating for funding for the survivors and communities in my state, I also want to be crystal clear: no disaster-impacted community, regardless of where it is located, should ever be held hostage and treated as a bargaining chip for other political priorities.

Californians in Altadena and the Palisades have now waited eighteen months for disaster relief. Yet long-term recovery funding is still absent from the Administration's request. Instead, it asks taxpayers to spend hundreds of billions more on an illegitimate war that this Congress has never authorized—a war that is raising gas prices, worsening supply chains, and making our country less safe while Californians are still waiting to rebuild their lives.

We know this committee can address disaster relief without tying it to a laundry list of unrelated priorities – because it's done it before. As recently as December 2024, Congress passed more than \$100 billion in bipartisan disaster relief. There's no reason we can't do that again. We cannot accept the premise that it is okay to keep survivors waiting for help until President Trump – or any Administration – decides they need something else from Congress to get it.

To that end, I want to thank my colleagues, Senators Tillis, Schiff, and Curtis, for joining me in sending a bipartisan letter to this committee yesterday supporting long-term disaster recovery funding. Madame Chair, I would like to enter that letter into the record at this time. This letter reflects the bipartisan spirit that disaster survivors deserve. And I urge this committee to follow that example by ensuring that communities recovering from catastrophic disaster receive the resources and support they need – without delay and without political games.

I also want to reiterate what I said just a moment ago – the next disaster is coming. Anyone who stepped outside here in Washington – or in more than a dozen states – this weekend saw and breathed the very real impacts of wildfires. It's Canada now, but will inevitably be one of our states next.

As of last week, the federal government has already spent over \$3.3 billion on wildfire suppression this fiscal year even though the peak of fire season – August and September – still lies ahead of us. That should concern this committee. We cannot allow wildfire suppression funding to run dry before the end of the fiscal year. So in addition to the long-term disaster recovery funding, I would urge the Committee to examine the need for emergency suppression funds as well.

I would also note that the Fire Fix, which has provided a steady resource for fighting wildfires, will expire in FY2027. Congress needs to extend and increase that funding to ensure our firefighters have all the resources they need to respond to the ever-growing number of catastrophic wildfires.

Chair Collins, Vice Chair Murray, Members of the Committee, I will close by reiterating what I said at the outset: disasters do not distinguish between red states and blue states. And when it comes to disaster aid, Congress shouldn't either.

So thank you again for holding this hearing and allowing me to be a voice for my constituents in the Palisades and Altadena. I look forward to continuing to work with this Committee to ensure that my constituents – and disaster survivors across the country – have the resources and support they need to recover and rebuild, regardless of which state they call home.