

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 3, 2026

The Honorable Brooke Rollins
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Rollins,

By many indicators, this year's wildfire season is expected to be one of the worst in years. Sadly, we've already tragically lost ten wildland firefighters so far this year. Right now, the nation is at Preparedness Level 5, with dozens of large and uncontained fires burning across the country. It is as critical as ever that every Forest Service (USFS) asset and resource be deployed appropriately according to the agency's guidelines and needs on the ground.

Given the situation, the recent reports about USDA Under Secretary Michael Boren's intervention in the coordinated federal response to the Cabin Creek Fire near his private ranch in Idaho are deeply concerning. And, if true, this is an appalling misuse of authority and a serious breach of public trust.

According to reporting, Under Secretary Boren repeatedly contacted USFS officials to question their decision-making, specifically to inquire why more aircraft were not being deployed to suppress the five-to-seven-acre wildfire in the Sawtooth National Forest that was approximately 15 miles from his ranch in Idaho. After, Under Secretary Boren called several members of USFS regional and national leadership, including at least one in the middle of the night. Ultimately, this fire received an extraordinary response involving approximately nine aircraft. This response is far greater than would be typical for a fire of this size not near a heavily populated area that did not pose a significant threat to life or property. Many of these aircraft had to be diverted from other more dangerous wildfires across the region in order to protect the Under Secretary's ranch.

This is precisely why the reported conduct is so troubling. Officials responsible for our National Forests should be focused on allocating wildfire resources through the established wildfire management response systems based on an objective analysis of risk and need, not pressure from a senior political appointee to protect his private property. Every aircraft that was diverted to the Cabin Creek Fire was an aircraft that could have been fighting another fire in the region thereby protecting another rural community.

The USDA's response to the reporting has been disingenuous at the least, suggesting that this is common practice. It is not. The stated justification is wholly inadequate and lacks the transparency and specifics that would assure the public that resources were not mismanaged.

We request that USDA immediately provide the Committee with the information that the public and rural communities across the west deserve:

1. A complete accounting for all federal firefighting resources deployed to the Cabin Creek Fire, including aircraft, crews, and any other federal assets including the originating location of those assets and the duration of their deployment to the Cabin Creek Fire.

2. All communications between Under Secretary Boren and any personnel of federal, state, or local affiliation concerning the Cabin Creek Fire, including all emails, texts messages, telephone logs, and any other written or electronic communications such as Signal messages.
3. A detailed explanation of the criteria used to determine the resources assigned to the fire, including how the response to the Cabin Creek Fire compared to similar fires in Idaho and throughout the West.
4. A complete accounting of all federal and state firefighting recourses that were diverted from other fire incidents as a result of the response to the Cabin Creek Fire.
5. An explanation of all policies and safeguards that are in place that are intended to prevent senior political appointees from influencing the allocation of federal emergency resources to the benefit of their own property or personal interests.
6. Regular updates on any investigations being conducted by the USDA Office of Inspector General as it relates to the Cabin Creek Fire.

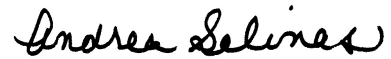
Our wildland firefighters put their lives on the line for this country. They deserve a clear chain of command, professional and rational decision-making, and the confidence that their own lives will not be put at risk due to the influence of high-ranking political appointees. The Forest Service deserves better. Career personnel should not be placed in the position of having to choose between following established practices and protocols based on risk and need and responding to pressure from a political official who oversees their agency.

We look forward to receiving prompt and substantive responses to these requests.

Sincerely,



Angie Craig
Member of Congress
Ranking Member, Committee on
Agriculture



Andrea Salinas
Member of Congress
Ranking Member, Subcommittee
on Forestry and Horticulture



Shontel M. Brown
Vice Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture



Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress
Ranking Member, Subcommittee
on Interior, Environment, and
Related Agencies



Jim Tokuda
Member of Congress



Jim Costa
Member of Congress