

Only weeks ago, wildfires swept across Southern California leaving unprecedented destruction in their wake. The result was more than half a million acres burned, seven lives lost, and total damage estimated at more than a billion dollars. Never before has Southern California experienced a firestorm of this magnitude.

I would like to express my gratitude to the thousands of firefighters, first responders, volunteers, and military and emergency personnel who gave their time and risked their lives to protect the lives and property of Southern California residents. It is because of their efforts that the loss of life was held to an absolute minimum and the fires were eventually extinguished. For that we must truly count our blessings.

Now that the smoke has cleared our community faces a new and different set of challenges. Already, California has a world-class emergency response system that serves as a model for the rest of the nation. Our challenge is to take the lessons from this most recent round of fires and use them to improve our response to future natural disasters. The unfortunate reality is that wildfires are a fact of life in Southern California. When the next one comes, we must ensure that we have the plans and the resources necessary to rise to the occasion.

These measures are only a first step. We must continue working to provide speedy relief to family members, friends, and neighbors affected by this tragedy. The federal government has already made a broad range of resources available to those impacted by the fires. These resources range from dispersing disaster assistance funds to helping replace lost documents to helping locate lost pets. Together we will help our neighbors recover from this loss.

I am pleased to report that Congress has acted swiftly to provide \$500 million in emergency funds for the fire ravaged areas of Southern California. These funds will go toward rehabilitating lands destroyed by the fires and hopefully preventing devastating mudslides when the rainy season comes. FEMA is also on the ground assisting local communities with recovery efforts and has already distributed millions in disaster assistance. Should more federal funding be needed, my colleagues in Congress and I stand united in our determination to make it available.

As the region recovers, my thoughts and prayers are with all those who have been displaced or who have lost their homes. Please know that a community stands behind you ready to help you recover and rebuild.

GARY G. MILLER
Member of Congress