

Rep. Eshoo Votes to Increase Funding to Fight Wildfires

Thursday, March 26, 2009

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Rep. Anna G. Eshoo (D-Palo Alto) voted today to establish a fund to help pay for emergency wildfire suppression. Last year one of the most destructive wildfire seasons in history resulted in nearly 1.4 billion acres of land being burned in California, including the devastating Summit Fire in the Santa Cruz mountains. The rapidly rising cost to fight wildland fires has forced federal agencies to “borrow” money from non-fire programs when annually appropriated funds run out. The Federal Land Assistance, Management and Enhancement (FLAME) Act creates a supplemental fund to assist with the costs of emergency wildfire suppression activities.

“Last year hundreds of my constituents in Santa Cruz County were evacuated because of several wildfires. Thousands of homes across the state were destroyed and millions of dollars were spent fighting these fires. The emergency fund established by this bill will act as a safety net in case the funds budgeted by the federal government run out,” said Rep. Eshoo.

Over the last decade, the cost of fighting wildland fires has skyrocketed and it now accounts for almost 48% of the entire Forest Service budget and 10% of the Department of Interior budget. Projections indicate that this trend will continue for years to come as the result of drought, climate change, and other factors. The fund created by this bill would be used when annually appropriated funds run out and after the Secretary of Interior or Agriculture issues a declaration that the fire is large enough and dangerous enough to warrant using money from the fund. The legislation will require the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture to submit a report to Congress one year after enactment containing a comprehensive wildland fire management strategy. The bill also creates grants for community fire prevention that will be used towards purchasing firefighting equipment and training local firefighters.

“The community grants in this bill will help our constituents who are potentially facing one of the worst fire seasons on record. The program will allow local firefighters to have the equipment and training they need to fight and prevent wildfires. It will also be used to educate the community about the danger of wildfires,” said Rep. Eshoo.

The FLAME Act is supported by the five living former Chiefs of the Forest Service, the Western Governors’ Association, the American Forest and Paper Association, the National Association of State Foresters, the National Association of Counties, the Wilderness Society, the National Parks Conservation Association, and almost 40 other organizations. The legislation passed the House by a vote of 412 to 3.

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