

June 8, 2012

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

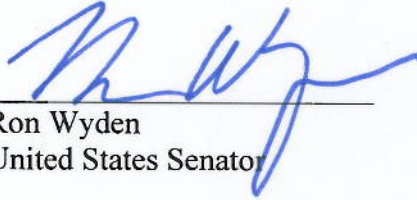
I write to respectfully request that you expeditiously sign S. 3261, legislation to allow the Chief of the Forest Service to award certain contracts for large air tankers. I introduced this legislation, which was cosponsored by Senators Bingaman, Mark Udall, Tester and Feinstein, on June 4. This legislation passed in the United States Senate by Unanimous Consent on June 7 and today passed in the House of Representatives, also by Unanimous Consent. It is urgent that this legislation be signed by you as soon as possible to address the Forest Service's dire shortage of air tankers to combat ever mounting wildfires.

In 2006, the Forest Service had 44 large air tankers under contract in their fleet. Last week, entering another fire season, they had just 11 large air tankers under contract and ten of those averaged 50 years of age. Last weekend, two of those air tankers were lost. The first was lost in a tragic crash that resulted in the deaths of two Forest Service contractors, and the second was lost in a crash landing at the Minden-Tahoe Airport near Carson City. These accidents remind us that any delay in getting the Forest Service better resources to combat these fires is unacceptable.

On May 25, as is required by law, under 41 U.S.C. 3903(d), the Forest Service gave Congress a 30-day notification of its intent to award four multi-year contracts for seven additional planes. Those contracts contain cancellation ceilings in excess of \$10 million and thus required the 30-day Congressional notification. The Forest Service requested that Congress waive the requirement to wait the full 30 days to award these important contracts. The critical legislation that was passed by the Senate and the House within days of being introduced waived the 30-day waiting period. It is clear that both Chambers of Congress felt that little could be served by simply delaying the award of these contracts while action is urgently needed. With hundreds of thousands of acres burning and a severely depleted capacity for sending air tankers to battle those fires, your signature on this legislation is desperately needed. The sooner the Forest Service can award these contracts, the sooner the companies that receive the awards can begin to prepare to deliver those next generation air tankers and get them out fighting fires.

I look forward to working with you and your administration to further resolve issues related to agency resources for combating wildfires.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator