

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

January 27, 2017

Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to express our serious concerns over your recent executive action freezing federal employee hiring for 90 days and to ask for clarification on the types of positions impacted by the hiring freeze. Specifically, does the hiring freeze apply to permanent, temporary, and seasonal workers hired by the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, or other land management agencies to fight wildfires or fulfill other duties in the nation's forests necessary to prevent wildfires?

We understand that the freeze includes an exemption for military personnel and that agency heads can exempt any positions they deem necessary to meet national security or public safety standards. However, it remains unclear what the full impacts of this freeze will be on agencies preparing to staff seasonal positions. We have received many calls from Oregonians concerned about whether temporary or seasonal employees, particularly those hired to fight wildfires, qualify for these public safety exemptions. For instance, in Oregon we have had several successive years of intense and devastating wildfires. The Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management bring on additional wildland firefighting employees during the summer to manage these blazes, protecting forests, rangeland and rural communities. Failure to protect these resources could endanger lives and lead to severe economic and ecological consequences.

Some seasonal employees under the current system are considered automatic rehires, meaning that they have the experience and training to do the job, and the government can quickly put them on the payroll and back to work. Hiring these seasonal employees cannot wait for a 90-day period, and there are concerns that the freeze could force these highly skilled workers to seek other employment. In addition to temporary employees, it is crucial to recognize there are other permanent positions central to firefighting efforts that must also be considered exempt. Without staff in place to prepare for the wildfire season, which is starting earlier and earlier every year due to the changing climate and years of severe drought conditions across the country, our forests and communities are put in harm's way.

Federal hiring freezes have historically proven to cost the federal government more money while failing to address the problems they are meant to fix. Federal hiring policies should ensure vital positions remain filled and government work resumes.

Seasonal hiring will be starting soon and uncertainty about how to proceed could have serious impacts on public safety. We look forward to hearing your response.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
U.S. Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
U.S. Senator



Earl Blumenauer
U.S. Representative



Suzanne Bonamici
U.S. Representative



Peter DeFazio
U.S. Representative