

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 1, 2021

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Room S-128, U.S. Capitol

The Honorable Richard Shelby  
Vice Chairman  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Room S-128, U.S. Capitol

The Honorable Rosa L. DeLauro  
Chair  
House Committee on Appropriations  
2413 Rayburn House Office Building

The Honorable Kay Granger  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Appropriations  
1016 Longworth House Office Building

Dear Chairman Leahy, Vice Chairman Shelby, Chair DeLauro, and Ranking Member Granger:

We respectfully request that you prioritize funding accounts related to infrastructure improvements and disaster recovery with emphasis on energy resiliency and housing, as you work through appropriations bills for Fiscal Year 2022 in order to address the growing number of disasters affecting Americans across the country and in our home state of Oregon.

While navigating the devastating COVID-19 pandemic and lasting effects of the climate-driven wildfires from last year, Oregonians recently had to endure one more unprecedented challenge: a historic and deadly ice storm that cut power for days on end to record numbers of Oregonians. This storm left power lines and trees coated in ice, both of which brought down power lines when they snapped under the additional weight, broke utility poles, and blocked roads. The ensuing power outages extended across the state, cutting off power in subfreezing weather to more than 400,000 people. The sheer scale of the damage, combined with the extreme weather, slowed recovery efforts, causing some residents to remain in their homes without power for weeks, including many who are still without power at the writing of this letter.

Facing the extreme cold without power was a life-or-death situation for many Oregonians. At least four deaths have been attributed to carbon monoxide poisoning as people had to resort to alternate sources of heating to keep warm. Unable to heat their own homes, others congregated together to share heating sources, further risking the spread of COVID-19. The extended loss of power also disrupted life for vulnerable populations such as the elderly, who rely on electricity to run life-saving medical equipment and keep medications refrigerated. Additionally, the weather complicated COVID-19 vaccination efforts in Oregon, forcing vaccination sites to cancel appointments and move vaccine doses to limit spoilage. Beyond these unique and tragic consequences, the everyday effects of the prolonged loss of power were the waste of thousands of pounds of perishable food, and students missing valuable hours of learning and study.

While many parts of the country have suffered harsh weather conditions in recent weeks, Oregon's prolonged power outages stem from unique challenges that require additional assistance to remedy. Rather than challenges related to surging demand or a lack of available electricity, it was unprecedented loads of ice and snow that brought down thousands of transmission and distribution lines, fracturing the electrical grid and cutting off power to hundreds of thousands of Oregonians. Recovery efforts will continue long after the ice melts as utility crews work to protect transmission and distribution assets that remain in danger due to broken branches and trees still at risk of falling onto power lines weeks or months later. Additional funds are urgently needed to restore critical power infrastructure that was damaged or destroyed during the storms and to improve the resiliency of these important assets.

These recent disastrous weather events dramatically highlight the need to deeply consider preparations for future climate-driven calamities. Thinking ahead about these funding priorities will complement ongoing congressional efforts to improve our nation's infrastructure and strengthen the resiliency of our power grids long term.

We thank you for your consideration of our urgent request.

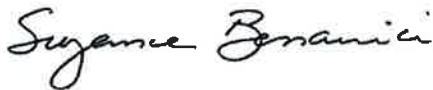
Sincerely,



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



Suzanne Bonamici  
Member of Congress



Earl Blumenauer  
Member of Congress