Trump administration reverses decision to not send $350 million in federal aid to fight California fires

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Over 8,500 wildfires have burned over 4.1 million acres throughout the state of California since the start of 2020, according to CalFire. The onslaught of destruction has been responsible for 31 deaths and has left more than 9,200 structures in ruins.

As a way to punish California, a Democratic Party-controlled state, and its citizens for what he perceives as poorly managed forests, President Trump announced on October 15 that he would not provide disaster relief funds to the state. California Governor Gavin Newsom requested disaster relief to start cleaning up the destruction of 1.6 million acres of land recently caused by six major wildfires.

Included in the federal aid package is relief for the destruction caused by the Creek Fire in Fresno and Madera, which started on September 4 and is now one of the largest fires in the state's history. This fire alone was responsible for the damage of over 550 homes and the evacuation of thousands, yet only 60 percent of the fire has been contained.

With infrastructure damage in California exceeding $229 million, the funds would additionally be allocated toward rebuilding public infrastructure across the state, as well as roads and fire shelters.

Although the Trump administration could not come up with a coherent reason as to why the request was rejected, the answer was more than clear. It is indifferent to the crisis in the state. Thousands of people had to evacuate and are now without homes. The smoke-caused air pollution has exacerbated the public's respiratory health, and with so many people in close proximity, evacuation shelters have threatened the risk of contracting COVID-19.

However, one day after the rejection to provide federal aid to the state, the Trump administration reversed its decision on Friday after Governor Newsom announced his plans to appeal the administration's decision.

Although the federal aid package will serve as a quick fix to begin the rebuilding process in California, this will continue to be a recurring issue within the West Coast states.

A similar situation played in 2019, in which Trump repeatedly blamed the destructive wildfires on the agencies managing the forests, even threatening to cut off aid if forest management did not improve.

In January 2019, Trump tweeted, "Billions of dollars are sent to the State of California for Forest fires that, with proper Forest Management [sic], would never happen. Unless they get their act together, which is unlikely, I have ordered FEMA to send no more money."

In a desperate effort to curb the latest spread of wildfires in the state, Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E), the largest utility in California, coordinated a "public safety power shutoff" from October 14 to October 16. This move left approximately 50,000 people in Northern California without power, as the blackout spanned across 24 counties in the region.

The coordinated blackouts on behalf of PG&E was a strategic preventative measure to keep the utility's equipment from sparking any fires, an incident to which the utility is no stranger. In 2018, the utility's equipment came into contact with a dead tree, which resulted in the decimation of Paradise, California and the deaths of dozens of people.

But these planned blackouts are only a minor solution in mitigating the spread of wildfires throughout the

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region. A more intelligent and proactive solution would be to address the core of the issue: climate change. However, this is an impossible feat under the disastrous conditions of capitalism, which prioritizes profit over human life, especially under the science-denying Trump administration.

In fact, Trump has continuously refused to acknowledge the scientifically proven link between wildfires and human-induced global warming, instead downplaying the dire threat of the climate catastrophe and blaming the growing number of wildfires on poor forest management.

This issue can only worsen from here, as scientists continue to warn of the dire consequences that climate change will continue to bring to the region—including hotter temperatures, dryer vegetation, stronger winds and more arid conditions overall, serving as a perfect storm for the explosion of wildfires and their vast spread.

Rather than focusing on short-term solutions, what is desperately needed are effective long-term solutions that seek to curb greenhouse gas emissions. This is not possible under a political system in which both political parties cater to big business and who take millions of dollars of campaign contributions annually from the very industries most responsible for the climate crisis in the first place.

And although the Democratic Party likes to tout itself as the party of the working people which fights for “progressive” ideals, it is far from that. During the election campaign former Vice President Joe Biden and Senator Kamala Harris have repeatedly reiterated their commitment to the environmentally destructive oil and gas fracking. Their proposals to combat climate change and to take on the fossil fuel industry are insufficient and are just strategic ways to appease workers and youth in an effort to garner their support and secure their cozy positions within the government and trade union bureaucracy.

The Democratic Party’s Green New Deal, for example, has been presented as an ultra-progressive proposal that can significantly curb emissions and effectively address the growing climate crisis. In actuality, it is a nonbinding resolution that looks great on paper and makes congressional members who support it seem like champions for climate solutions, but relieves them of the burden of actually taking the necessary steps to combat the climate catastrophe.

The only way forward to properly address global warming and the resulting ecological disasters is to break away from the capitalist parties and mobilize the working class internationally to fight for socialism.

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