

# Biden offers contemptible \$700 per household for survivors of Maui wildfires

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As more facts about the death and destruction and what caused the Maui wildfires emerged, amid growing public outrage over the US government's criminally inadequate response, President Joe Biden boasted on Tuesday of pathetic "one-time payments of \$700 per household" for those who have lost everything in the disaster.

Authorities reported on Tuesday that one-third of the burn area in the town of Lahaina had been searched for victims, and the number of confirmed dead had risen to 101. Hawaii Governor Josh Green told CNN on Monday evening that the number of confirmed deaths could double over the next 10 days.

Maui County reported that just four of the sets of remains found have been identified so far. The identities of these individuals will be released after families have been notified.

Among those who died were four members of the same family, who were engulfed while trying to escape the flames, according to a statement released to CNN affiliate Hawaii News Now. "On behalf of our family, we bid aloha to our beloved parents, Faaso and Malui Fonua Tone, as well as our dear sister Salote Takafua and her son, Tony Takafua," the statement read.

Another victim, Franklin "Frankie" Trejos, 68, who had lived in Lahaina for 30 years, had tried to save his property, along with his friend and roommate, Perez Grant. Grant escaped the blaze while suffering burns, only to discover the remains of his friend several blocks away.

The painstaking process of identifying the dead was highlighted when county investigators reported that they had obtained the DNA profiles of 13 more people, and a total of 41 DNA samples had been obtained from the family members of those who are unaccounted for. Meanwhile, there are still more than 1,000 people

missing, and thousands more have been left homeless.

Three climate change-fueled wildfires that began on August 8 were whipped into a firestorm by winds from passing Hurricane Dora, destroying the town of Lahaina. So far, an estimated 4.45 square miles has been burned. Two of the three fires are still burning, with firefighters working by ground and air to contain the blazes and looking for hot spots and flare-ups.

Fire officials said the Lahaina fire, the largest of the three at 3.39 square miles, had been 85 percent contained by Tuesday. The Upcountry/Kula fire, which has burned just over a square mile and destroyed 19 homes, was 65 percent contained.

On Tuesday, President Biden, who refused to comment on the devastation in Maui on Monday, expressed the indifference of the White House to the disaster while speaking to the media at a previously scheduled event in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Fumbling his way through an overview of the thoroughly inadequate response of federal authorities to the crisis on the Hawaiian island, Biden said FEMA authorized "one-time payments of \$700 per household to those who have been displaced so they can do the immediate things," like obtain the medications they need. He then announced that he and his wife would eventually travel to Maui to survey the damage, but gave no firm date for a trip.

On a Twitter/X post earlier in the day, Biden claimed the administration was "laser-focused" on providing aid to survivors of the Maui wildfire, including the one-time payment, "during an unimaginably difficult time."

Biden's post was roundly denounced on social media, with many people calling it "insulting" and "outrageous," and others contrasting it to the commitment of resources by the US government to the proxy war against Russia in Ukraine.

One tweet pointed out that \$700 per 3,500 households whose homes were destroyed is approximately \$2.5 million, while one M1 Abrams tank costs \$13 million. The US government has sent 31 of these tanks to Ukraine.

Media reports on Tuesday said evidence exists showing that the island's electric utility was the immediate source of some of the fires. The *Washington Post* reported that at 10:47 p.m. on Monday, August 7, "a security camera at the Maui Bird Conservation Center captured a bright flash in the woods, illuminating the trees swaying in the wind."

According to Jennifer Pribble, a senior research coordinator at the center, that was the moment when a tree fell on a power line. Pribble posted on Instagram, "The power goes out, our generator kicks in, the camera comes back online, and then the forest is on fire." This is likely one of the sources of the fire in Maui's Upcountry.

In Lahaina, the *Post* report says, "About 38 miles away from the bird sanctuary on Aug. 8, in Lahaina, a young woman named La'i woke up suddenly around 3 a.m. Something bright had flashed outside her second-story window, coming from the power poles and Hawaiian Electric substation right up the hill from her family's home next to Lahainaluna Road. Then it was dark again. Before falling back asleep, she couldn't believe how strong the wind sounded, said La'i, whose parents asked that her full name not be used."

The *New York Times* interviewed Lahaina resident Shane Treu on Tuesday, who said, "The wind is still blowing super strong and I hear a pop. I look and the line is just arcing, laying on the ground and sparking." Treu said the power line was "like a fuse." As it lay in the grass, he continued, it blackened the ground and began to ignite the grass in yards nearby.

The *Times* report went on: "It was precisely the location where the brush fire that would eventually engulf much of Lahaina was initially reported, at 6:37 a.m., a *Times* analysis of video and satellite imagery shows."



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