

Dear Joint Interim Committee,

The LC 28 budget bill to appropriate money to the Emergency Board is critical for my community, which has been ravaged by the recent wildfires.

I wear several hats, as the acting Mayor of the City of Gates, as part of the leadership of the Santiam Canyon Rebuilding Team, and as a family who lost everything in the wildfire disaster.

Speaking for the City of Gates, we have been overwhelmed by the disaster. We were completely unprepared for a disaster of this extent. Our staff cannot handle the workload, which is far more than a tiny city staff could be expected to take on. Our city budget has been decimated by both the costs to repair the damage and the loss of revenue from the homes that are now gone. That revenue loss is projected to continue for years to come, as a considerable number of our residents have chosen to move out of the community or to wait to rebuild at a later date. We simply do not have the resources to keep the city operational, without help from the state and federal sources.

I really wanted to offer oral testimony for the City of Gates, but unfortunately our City Council meeting tonight conflicts with the Committee's scheduled meeting.

Speaking as a leader of the Santiam Canyon Rebuilding Team, which is a group of the citizens of the Santiam Canyon who are working to facilitate the rebuilding and recovery of our community and to prepare for its economic future, our community from Lyons to Idanha and everything in between has been badly hurt by the Santiam Canyon wildfires, which was the largest and most expensive disaster in Oregon's history.

Many of the property owners in our community are facing difficulty rebuilding because of septic problems, building code issues, and the high costs of rebuilding. Around half of those who lost homes in our community were renters, who have no housing to return to and no prospect for finding a home in our community at this point. More often than not, the families in our community—who were already struggling—have lost all their belongings and have none of the basic essentials that are necessary to make a house into a home.

We need the resources to rebuild, to restock, and to prepare against future disasters. The wildfires of 2020 are not guaranteed to be the last wildfires of this scope which will be seen in our state. Next year could easily bring wildfires which are much worse than we've already experienced. We need an emergency alert system in place and more protection against future wildfires and other disasters. We can't wait until later to get started on that.

Finally, as a husband and father of four children, my family lost everything. We escaped with the clothes on our backs and a tiny number of belongings. We never were given an evacuation alert and know of very few others who did. My family was within minutes of being casualties of the fires. By what can only be described as a miracle, after the entire family went to bed that fateful night, my eldest son decided to get up to get a snack—and that saved our lives. Our home burned down less than an hour after we escaped with our lives.

Just four years ago my family came out of homelessness from another disaster we had experienced. We were rebuilding our lives and things were going very well. Less than one week before the fire we

purchased the first brand-new refrigerator my wife and I have ever bought in our lifetimes. It's now ash along with the rest of all that we worked so hard to build of our lives.

The LC 28 budget bill is critical for our community. Please make certain that it is passed, so that we can get the relief our community so desperately needs. If anything, the wildlife relief portion of the budget should be even greater.

Respectfully,

John McCormick
Acting Mayor
City of Gates, Oregon