

February 17, 2021

Dear Chairman Clem and members of the House Special Committee on Wildfire Recovery,

My name is Gene Pelham, and I was a member of the Governor's Wildfire Economic Recovery Council, and I serve as the President/CEO of Rogue Credit Union. I have seen firsthand the devastation of the Almeda and other Southern Oregon fires. Whether driving through impacted communities or helping staff and members displaced by the loss of their homes, it is easy to see community and individual recovery is still just a hope for many. After listening to individual testimony on the Governor's Council, the impact is so much more than the financial loss... the emotional toll on those impacted by the fires was the most impactful to me.

While we are making progress, there is such a long way to go to house all of those displaced by the fires. I drive by the Jackson County Expo each day and see the temporary homes move in and move out, which reminds me we still have so many in temporary housing. The wildfires left very few untouched, and as we move farther from September 8, 2020, I fear the challenges faced by so many will be brushed aside as other events disrupt our communities.

There are multiple community service agencies involved in the recovery. Through our foundation, we have received over \$2 in wildfire relief grant requests. I am proud to say that in just a few short weeks, the Rogue Credit Union Foundation was able to raise over \$1 million and distribute these funds to 23 different community service agencies in just a few weeks more. However, we were unable to fulfill over \$1 million in requests. Our community has joined with several local, state, and national agencies to make a difference, but the need for ongoing support continues.

I fully support the committee's effort to understand the impacts and the needs of those impacted by the fires. The recovery will take much longer than any of us ever thought. With each week, month, and year the recovery takes, we increase the risk of losing impacted residents to other communities with housing. This impacts our schools with the loss of students, our communities from the loss of tax and fee revenue, and our businesses with the loss of their workforce. It is clear, that time is of the essence, and hope for those impacted is critical to ensuring vibrant communities in the future.

Thank you for your efforts to understand the impact and identify solutions. Our communities need you!

Respectfully,



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