

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 5, 2010

Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States, Acting
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Comptroller General Dodaro:

We write today to request a full and complete accounting of the events surrounding the response to the Station Fire Incident from its inception on August 26, 2009 until its containment on October 16, 2009. This fire, as well as the subsequent flooding and mudslides, claimed the lives of two firefighters, consumed over 160,000 acres including numerous homes and structures, damaged homes and businesses, and is the largest fire in the recorded history of the Angeles National Forest and Los Angeles County.

Both the Forest Service and Los Angeles County Fire Department have conducted reviews of the fire and the response from both of these agencies. However, we have learned this week that critical Forest Service dispatch recordings from the start of the fire were withheld from federal review teams. This casts a dark cloud over the findings of the review panel and immediately warrants an independent review of the Station Fire response. Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell and Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack have indicated their support for such a review.

Our purpose for this review is to ensure that all actions in the response to the fire were taken swiftly, properly and competently. Our constituents must know that every possible, reasonable and proper action was taken to fight the fire, and if there were instances where the proper actions were not taken, we must know why.

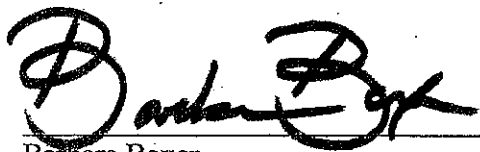
The specific issues that need to be addressed include:

- The tragic incident at Camp 16 where two firefighters lost their lives
- The new revelation that critical dispatch recordings were withheld from government investigators – specifically: the content of these recordings, why they were withheld, and whether any other documents or recordings were not previously brought to light
- Initial miscalculations of the strength of the fire
- Whether the Forest Service ban on nighttime helicopter use to fight fires played a role in the spread of the fire
- Whether all necessary resources, including aircraft, were requested, made available and used properly to fight the fire; and
- Whether all available and appropriate resources were brought to bear against the fire in Big Tujunga Canyon to protect life, property, and homes

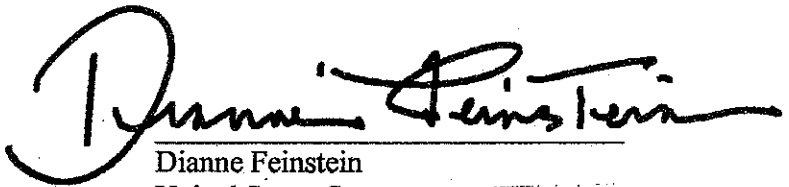
Most important, we must establish what lessons were learned from this devastating fire. By identifying mistakes made and where different choices would have caused better outcomes, agencies tasked with preventing and fighting fires will be able to better prepare and respond in the future.

Thank you for your timely response to this important issue for our constituents. As fires again are breaking out in Southern California, this review is timely and more important than ever to ensure the devastation of the Station Fire never happens again.

Sincerely,



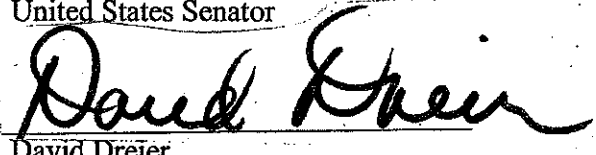
Barbara Boxer
United States Senator



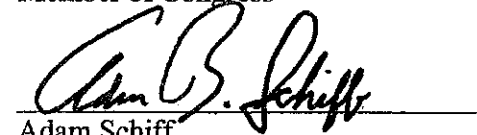
Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



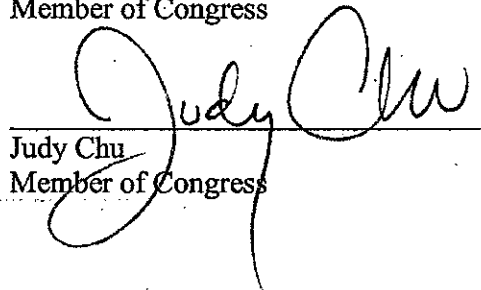
Buck McKeon
Member of Congress



David Dreier
Member of Congress



Adam Schiff
Member of Congress



Judy Chu
Member of Congress



Brad Sherman
Member of Congress