

**Congressman Scott Tipton**  
**On the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives**  
**June 5, 2013**

As I stand here, wildfires are burning in my district and in the state of Colorado.

The bark beetle epidemic, rampant drought, intense weather occurrences, and deteriorating forest health conditions have increased the propensity for devastating wildfires throughout the Western United States. According to the National Interagency Fire Center, last year more than 9.3 million acres of land burned. That is an area approximately the size of Rhode Island, Delaware, the District of Columbia and Massachusetts combined. These fires tragically claimed thirteen lives, destroyed more than 2,000 homes and led to hundreds of millions of dollars in damages. Nearly 400,000 acres burned in Colorado alone at a tragic cost of six lives.

The status quo of addressing a problem when it's too late, is no longer good enough. The status quo has given us decades of declining forest health, the status quo has given us years of increasingly catastrophic wildfires, the status quo puts people, communities and ecosystems and risk. We must do more.

Forests are vital for the Western United States. They provide limitless environmental and economic benefits when healthy. It's our responsibility to preserve this incredible natural resource and do all we can to restore forest health, and do all we can to prevent future loss of life and property to catastrophic wildfire. I urge this body to join with me and my colleague in taking a step to prevent these tragedies. For too long we have been working to stop fires once they start, and mitigate damage once it has already occurred. As the old saying goes, 'An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.'

That is what this amendment is about; getting ahead of this problem by investing greater resources toward prevention so we can take a more proactive approach to restoring our forests to a healthy natural state.

Rep. Polis and I have introduced this amendment to direct \$7,655,000 to FEMA's National Predisaster Mitigation Fund, a program uniquely suited to assist in our effort to reduce the occurrence of wildfire, as it would fund projects aimed at mitigating conditions that lead to these fires. Despite the need for proactive programs such as this in the wake of increased occurrences of extreme weather events including wildfire, the National Predisaster Mitigation Fund is facing a reduction of nearly \$2.5 million this year. Considering the value of this program and the term savings it generates through prevention of destructive fires, I believe that there are more appropriate areas within the federal government where we can realize budget savings.

Our amendment is offset by decreasing the same amount of funding in the Automation Modernization account of the Department of Homeland Security which received an increase of \$7,655,000 this year for IT modernization despite concerns with transparency of spending within

the agency. I share these concerns. Senator Coburn's Wastebook provided some troubling finding about wasteful spending at DHS including the fact that this agency has spent over \$35 billion of taxpayers' money just in the last ten years. In FY10, DHS spent \$6.5 billion on IT spending alone. In 2013, DHS planned to spend \$4 billion on 68 major IT programs. A third of these programs cost around \$1 billion and were identified by the Government Accountability Office as containing waste and not meeting specified commitments. Besides being replete with wasteful government spending, many programs at DHS have been found to be overlapping, unnecessary or lacking in transparency.

Until these concerns are addressed, I do not believe we should be providing additional resources for these programs at DHS. Instead we could better use that \$7,655,000 to take steps toward proactively reducing the occurrence of devastating wildfires by redirecting those funds to the National Predisaster Mitigation Fund.