



Office of the Governor

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Gov. Lujan Grisham, Western governors, join President Biden to discuss local and federal wildfire preparedness and response

SANTA FE – Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham on Wednesday, along with a bipartisan group of Western U.S. governors, joined President Joe Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris and members of the Biden Administration to take part in a virtual briefing and discussion of wildfire preparedness and response.

The White House did not publicly broadcast the briefing. The Governor’s Office has requested a transcript from the White House.

The following is a staff readout of the discussion.

President Biden welcomed participants to the virtual briefing and thanked governors for taking part. The president talked about how wildfires have grown in intensity in recent wildfire seasons, which are lasting longer, and said the United States needs a coordinated, comprehensive response. The president said he wanted to know what states and tribal governments are facing – so that the entirety of the federal government can work in close coordination with those states to help their populations remain safe.

The president said it is essential that the United States ensure there are enough firefighters trained, ready and on call for increasingly lengthy wildfire seasons. To that end, the president proposed working with Congress to improve benefits for federal firefighters, saying they take incredible risks and deserve to be paid well. The president also mentioned training and equipping National Guard members to be able to join firefighter crews in “surge” periods of enhanced risk. The president asked questions of governors and staff, as well, after they spoke.

Vice President Harris referenced her personal experience with wildfires as a former Senator representing California. In addition to other subjects, she spoke about the importance of water conservation and planning water management for the future across the West.

After other governors and Biden Administration personnel spoke about individual wildfire experiences and policy, **Gov. Lujan Grisham** spoke about her administration's efforts to improve forest management, including the passage and implementation of [the bipartisan Prescribed Burning Act](#) earlier this year. The governor mentioned her idea for a federal insurance pool that would enhance the U.S. government's ability to work with private sector partners in both fighting fire and mitigating wildfire risk, an idea she said she had broached with Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack dating back to her time as a congresswoman.

The governor observed that fire season is exhausting for fire management personnel under normal circumstances; after the pandemic, she said, those personnel are beyond exhausted, echoing the president's proposal of improved pay and benefits and suggesting an annualized workforce of federal firefighting personnel to correspond with the increasing intensity and duration of wildfire seasons across the West.

Gov. Lujan Grisham, echoing the comments of other Western governors, referenced the intense drought affecting wide swaths of the state – and the consequent risks of fire, flood, watershed management and more. The governor specifically highlighted that tribal nations, some of which are surrounded by open space and forest, face particular risk of fires started elsewhere carrying over and into their sovereign land.

The governor was grateful for the bipartisan nature of the briefing, recognizing that wildfire prevention and mitigation is a priority across the political spectrum in the West, expressing her optimism about that shared priority potentially leading to a cohesive and more aggressive response to the effects of climate change in Western states.

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