

I also heard from community members who recently returned from a medical mission to Bangladesh. They showed me the photos they brought back. One food line to feed refugees was literally 1 mile long. Healthcare is limited. Safe drinking water is limited. Cholera is detected. It is a horrible situation for these people who have been tossed out of Myanmar and now are trying just to survive nearby Bangladesh. The stories are horrific, and they are all the same.

Here is an image of this exodus that was printed in the New York Times. It shows families fleeing Burma across the border to Bangladesh with smoke rising in the background from the villages that they lived in being burned.

The stories I heard were of helpless, poor families walking on foot through jungles, crowding in boats along the Naf River, leaving behind everything with accountings of rape, killing, and arson by the Burmese military. They arrive in Bangladesh sick, exhausted, and desperately in need of the most basic things—food, clean water, medicine, a safe space to rest their heads.

Here is another image, which is heartbreaking. It is an indication of what happens in the refugee camps when food arrives, this time in a camp known as Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh.

A UNICEF report last week stated that 58 percent of the refugees who have poured into Cox's Bazar are children, noting that they are in hell on Earth. They are acutely malnourished, they need clean water and vaccines, and they are at risk of exploitation by traffickers. This is unacceptable.

I understand that Bangladesh and Burma have discussed a repatriation plan recently, but many refugees don't have any documents. They were literally burned out of their homes. We need to call on the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. Filippo Grandi was in my office last week, and he stressed how important it is for us to speak up and to help on this issue, that we ensure the voluntary right of return and we ensure the safety of those who do return and we make sure that the paper requirements for return are reasonable for people who are literally homeless and stateless at this moment.

Many are wary of returning without an assurance of full citizenship, given the risk of further persecution or the threat of being placed in camps in Myanmar when they return. I don't blame them, because the atrocities committed against the Rohingya over the past months and weeks are not new by any means.

Nasir Zakaria in Chicago told me that more than three decades ago, when he was only 14, he was kidnapped by militants targeting the Rohingya in Burma. He never saw his parents again.

Nasir eventually escaped to Bangladesh, made his way to Malaysia, where he worked for 18 years in construction before he finally made it to the United States with a green card in 2013. He learned English, worked as a

dishwasher in a hotel near Chicago, supported his wife and three children, met others in the community, and helped to create the Rohingya Center that I visited.

Here is a picture of Nasir Zakaria with his son, Mohamed, in their Chicago apartment. You can see the American flag in the background. He is very proud of this Nation that he now calls home.

The Rohingya Culture Center provides critical resources to more than 400 families in the Chicago area, one of the largest concentrations of Rohingya refugees in America. More than three decades after Nasir first escaped Burma, the Rohingya continue to be attacked and demonized.

Let me close by saying that we met today with the Myanmar Ambassador. Seven Senators sat down with him and expressed the sentiments that I have included in this statement.

First, let me give Mr. U Aung Lynn, the Ambassador, credit for coming to the meeting. He knew what we were going to raise. Yet he came, he took notes, and he assured us that he would respond to this; that we would be able to come back in a week or two for a progress report on what is being done; that he would allow or plead for access of U.N. personnel, as well as NGO groups, into the northern Rakhine area currently being denied access; that he would personally make it clear to his government we want those responsible for these atrocities held accountable. We want to make certain, as well, that those who are repatriated have a fair chance to return to a safe atmosphere in Myanmar and, ultimately, for citizenship.

It was a long list of requirements and requests that we gave to the Ambassador. He took them all in a positive way and told us he would be back to us in a matter of a week or two with a progress report.

Let me close by appealing to Aung San Suu Kyi to help resolve this crisis. I am counting on her. I do believe she is a good person. I hope that she will respond to this crisis in her own country the way she stood up with so much courage before.

I plan to meet with this Ambassador in a few weeks to chart the progress, and I look forward to working with my colleagues on a bipartisan basis to end this ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya people in Myanmar. We cannot allow the Burmese military to commit these atrocities.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, before Senator DURBIN leaves the floor, I just want to commend our colleague from Illinois. He and I have worked together for many years, and throughout that time, the Senator from Illinois has constantly been a voice for those who have no voice on these human rights concerns, laying out why the effort to step up is what we are all about as Americans.

I thank him. I enjoyed listening to him again. You don't really enjoy it because you hear about the suffering, but I am so glad that Senator DURBIN has made this case, and I thank him for it.

WILDFIRE DISASTER FUNDING ACT

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, across the West, 2017 will be long remembered as the year when fire was seared into our collective consciousness and ash rained down on homes and cars. There were mass evacuations, and scores just lost their hopes and dreams.

Devastating fires have hit my home State of Oregon, but Idaho, California, Washington, Colorado, Montana, Nevada, and more all were hit by fires that always seemed bigger and hotter and more powerful than what we have seen in the past.

These are not our grandfathers' fires. There are a whole host of reasons behind this, and today I just want to talk a bit about what happened, what it has meant, and at least a commonsense approach that Senator CRAPO and I have advocated for moving forward on a bipartisan basis.

The fact is, in the West, dozens of lives have been lost. Entire communities have been wiped out. An iconic national treasure in my home State, a place that Oregonians have always regarded—a special love for our Columbia River Gorge is practically in our chromosomes—it was burned over this year.

This month, a huge part of Northern California was burned. We talked to our colleagues Senator FEINSTEIN and Senator HARRIS about that. It is not just rolling hills and unoccupied land; the fires swept through entire cities. Some of the stories about those whose lives were lost in California just break your heart. School has been disrupted for more than a quarter million children. In some cases, it could be weeks before classes are back up and running.

In my home State, more than 600,000 acres were burned, nearly a third of that in the Chetco Bar fire that burned through southwestern Oregon. I was there to visit with folks in the community and the volunteers. There were volunteers from all over the country who were stepping up to help us deal with these fires. It sure was needed because, nationwide, almost 9 million acres burned. It is an area bigger than the size of eight States in our country—all of it up in flames. Compare that to the 1980s and the 1990s, when an average of around 3 million acres burned per year.

A brandnew report is out from the Department of the Interior forecasting how much the cost of fighting these fires is going to climb in the near future. The agency predicts a jump of 20 percent from fiscal year 2018 to 2019, and they believe that is a conservative estimate. If conditions are dry and temperatures are high, it could be even worse.

I am of the view—and it is something Senator CRAPO and I have worked on

together for years now. Sometimes we believe it is the longest running battle since the Trojan War. It is based on the proposition that Congress should no longer sit back and accept that these fires can only get larger, cost more, and that somehow the Forest Service is not all that big a problem. We just call it the fire service, which is the way a lot of people describe it in our part of the world.

Now, the way the Federal budget works for these fires is a broken, commonsense-defying policy, and it literally adds fuel to the fires and in effect disrupts not just the West but the rest of the country because the consequences of this broken budgeting process for fighting fires takes a toll on communities across the country.

A few years ago, I came back from Oregon for a visit, and I learned that our colleague and friend, the distinguished senior Senator from New York, Mr. SCHUMER, had signed on to legislation that I am going to describe shortly that Senator CRAPO and I have been working on. When I heard Senator SCHUMER had signed on to it, I, of course, was very pleased to have someone of his influence. I said to my colleagues: What am I missing here? I don't remember there being a lot of Federal forests in Brooklyn.

Well, it turns out that at that time, Senator SCHUMER, because he goes all over his State, was I believe in Upstate New York. There was a company that made baseball bats. As a result of this broken system of fighting fire, when Senator SCHUMER's constituent had a problem with the baseball bats because there was an invasive species that was eating its way through these baseball bats, the local Forest Service folks didn't have the money to help him deal with this economic issue.

It might seem like a small thing to some people, but when you are talking about these smaller communities, if they don't have the resources because they are victims of this broken system of fighting fire, this is a problem. It is a problem that Senator CRAPO and I have taken on now to ensure that, once and for all, we substitute common sense for a system that is everything but common sense.

What I am going to describe now is something called fire-borrowing. It starts like this: Over the years, prevention, which everybody talks about—Smokey is the symbol of prevention. Prevention gets short shrift. It gets hot and dry in our part of the world in the West, and if you don't go in there and do the preventive work, if you don't thin out the forests and it gets hot and dry, and then all of a sudden you have a lightning strike on your hands, you will have what amounts to an inferno. It just whips through the area. It knows no boundaries. Federal land is affected. Private land is affected. State land is affected. There are bigger and more expensive fires, and I can tell you that what we have seen are unprecedented fires.

In our Columbia River Gorge that I mentioned, we saw a fire leap the river. It used to be that rivers were a break. They were a break to ensure that the communities were safe. Now, in my home State, we have seen a fire actually leap the river.

So what is happening is, as prevention gets short shrift, these big fires break out, the Federal Government borrows from the prevention fund to put the fires out, and the problem just gets worse. Common sense is defied. There is absolutely irrational budgeting that ripples not just through the West but through communities all across the country, producing what I think most colleagues would say they would never expect, which is forestry personnel—when Senator SCHUMER visits in New York—having challenges paying for local forestry matters.

Fire prevention programs help thin out dead and dying material from forests and clear dried grasses from open landscapes—the kindling that goes up in flames when lightning strikes or when a small ground fire grows out of control. Those are the very real problems we have in the West. The programs we need to deal with this are being robbed because of the cycle I just described. Fire-borrowing. Prevention. Short shrift. The government borrows from the prevention fund to put the fire out, and the problem gets worse. That is fire-borrowing in our part of the world.

You can look at the recent fires in California to see how dangerous this is. If fire prevention had gotten a fair shake, lives could have been saved, and businesses and property might have been spared. Western communities would not be trying to recover from the ravages of summer and fall 2017.

Many of our colleagues of both parties and now 205 groups—timber companies, scientists, environmentalists, academics, and people from all across the political spectrum—are joining Senator CRAPO and me in saying that what is needed is a clean fix for the wildfire budgeting system and a complete end to fire-borrowing. We have been working on this, as I said, for years.

We know some of our colleagues want to see a variety of other policies attached, particularly policies dealing with forest management. One of the reasons I wanted to come to the floor tonight was to say that I take a back seat to no one when it comes to finding the right approach to forest management. I have written bipartisan forest management laws. But let's make sure that as we go forward on this issue, we understand that we cannot let other matters get in the way of stopping the cycle of fire-borrowing once and for all.

What Senator CRAPO and I have proposed is essentially to say that the really big fires, once and for all in America, will be treated like what they really are—natural disasters. And you can look at that relatively small number of fires and say: We are going to

deal with them through the disaster fund. Then you don't raid the prevention fund. And what the government scorekeepers have said in the past is that not raiding the prevention fund through fire-borrowing will, in their judgment, mean fewer fires in the first place; hence, there will be fewer natural disasters if you end fire-borrowing once and for all.

My view is that we are going to go forward this year on the disaster relief issue, and I want it understood that I am going to work with Senators of both political parties to finally see this matter wrapped up and an end to fire-borrowing.

I think anyone who has kept an eye on the news or has read stories or seen reports about natural disasters understands that unfortunately disasters have visited too many of our communities—hurricanes flooding Houston, violent winds and rain in Florida. Weeks after Maria made landfall, millions of American citizens in Puerto Rico are still in desperate need of help. Our neighbors to the south suffer with the aftermath of a massive earthquake. Tornados are a threat across much of the country. In our part of the world, these wildfires are our natural disasters.

The Congress can't get up one day, come to the floor of the Senate, and just say: We are going to stop all the hurricanes and the earthquakes. There is something that Congress can do about preventing so many wildfires. We, with our legislation, want to build a new ethic of fire prevention. That is what ending fire-borrowing is really all about. It is saying that we are in effect going to take—it is almost like an old stage with a dilapidated set on it, and you just pull it out because it is outdated. That is what we are talking about with fire-borrowing. It is like an old stage that is dilapidated. It doesn't make sense for the times. We are talking about replacing fire-borrowing with a modern policy so that we can deal with the big fires as the natural disasters they are and get back in the business of putting fire prevention first and replacing a commonsense-defying Federal budget plan that has caused so much harm to folks in the West.

I hope my colleagues will support the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act. Senator CRAPO and I want to work with every single Senator in this Chamber to get across the finish line. We are not saying that ending fire-borrowing is going to mean there will never be another fire in this country. What we are saying is that it is past time to replace such an illogical, commonsense-defying budget system as that presented by fire-borrowing. With that, we can reduce the risk of major wildfires to communities across the West.

With that, Mr. President, I yield the floor.

ADJOURNMENT UNTIL 10 A.M.
TOMORROW

Senate stands adjourned until 10 a.m. Thereupon, the Senate, at 7:10 p.m.,
tomorrow. adjourned until Thursday, October 26,
2017, at 10 a.m.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr.
PERDUE). Under the previous order, the