

Hawaii Congressional Delegation: We Are All-In for the People of Maui

By Sens. Brian Schatz and Mazie Hirono and Reps. Ed Case and Jill Tokuda

Given how bitterly polarized Washington is today, it's rare when leaders of both parties agree on something. Yet in the weeks following the devastating fires on Maui, that's exactly what we've seen. We've repeatedly heard from President Joe Biden, House Speaker Kevin McCarthy and colleagues on both sides of the aisle that they are committed to helping Maui.

Many of them, including the President and Speaker, have visited Maui to see the destruction in person. They heard heartbreaking stories from survivors of loss and grief and about the urgent need for help to get back on their feet.

Since President Biden's federal disaster declaration on August 10th, we've seen a historic mobilization of federal resources for Hawaii. More than \$200 million in federal aid has already been allocated and more than a thousand federal emergency response personnel have been on the ground helping people and undertaking an enormous clean-up operation.

The help is welcome and needed. But we're clear-eyed about the fact this will not be a weeks- or even months-long endeavor. Short-term relief won't be enough. Maui's recovery will take years, and while its course will be determined by its people, the federal government will need to provide billions of dollars in aid.

Our delegation is united, and our promise to the people of Maui is this: in the months and years ahead, we will do whatever it takes to deliver federal relief for the recovery. It is our number one priority, and we will continue to work closely together to get it done.

A month after the fires, the initial shock may be receding for some, but the pain is not. People's lives have been upended in every way possible. They're still coming to terms with life without loved ones and friends. Most people haven't been able to visit their properties – not only to survey the damage but also to find closure for the places and things they've lost, some of which were generations-old. This new reality is rife with uncertainty – about finding a new home, getting a job, going to school, and all the other facets of daily life that we ordinarily take for granted.

Nothing prepares you for such sudden and total loss. But in Hawaii, people are never on their own. Communities have done what we always do here: have each other's backs. Blood-related or not, close friends or total strangers, in times like these, everyone is ohana. People have opened up their homes, driven their boats and cars to fetch supplies, and donated anything they had to help one another. Brave first responders have put their lives on the line to protect their communities. They will forever be heroes in our history books.



The long-term task of recovery, however, is too great for the community, county, or state to shoulder alone. Federal help is necessary. Over 7,000 people are [living in temporary housing](#) like hotels and Airbnbs and need assistance to find permanent housing. Critical services, including three health care centers and King Kamehameha III Elementary School, have been destroyed and will need to be restored. Major infrastructure – from roads and highways to water facilities and wastewater treatment plants to Lahaina’s Small Boat Harbor and county parks – require extensive repair. While it’s critical this rebuilding process is guided by the vision of the Lahaina community, all of this work will take substantial resources, much of which will need to come from the federal government.

We have already received a great deal of support from the federal government. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) personnel began helping survivors get assistance just days after the fires. So far, [FEMA](#) and the [Small Business Administration](#) have provided over \$103 million in direct assistance for thousands of homeowners, renters, and businesses who were affected.

Earlier this month, FEMA announced [an additional \\$95 million](#) in funding to Hawaii for survivors to cover the cost of temporary housing, meals, and other services. Meanwhile, following the conclusion of a thorough search and recovery process for remains, the Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will continue the [complex process](#) of removing toxic waste and debris off the streets and transporting it out of Hawaii – a mammoth effort that alone may take up to a year and cost over \$1 billion.

But more will be needed and Congress will need to act to build on this initial response. With negotiations over federal government spending getting underway, we will continue to work with our colleagues on a bipartisan basis to pass additional disaster relief funding so that Maui has the money it needs to recover. While it won’t be the entirety of what’s needed in the long haul, it will be an important first step, and we will remain focused on securing more funding next year and in the years to come.

The four of us have served communities in every part of Hawaii over the past several decades. But we’ve never seen anything like this. The toll of this tragedy is unimaginable. Going forward, everyone will have a part to play in Maui’s recovery – our role will be to bring the full extent of the federal government’s resources to bear.

We are all-in for Maui’s recovery, for as long as it takes.

