

September 18, 2008

Washington, DC—Today Representatives Peter DeFazio (OR-04) and Mike Thompson (CA-01), along with 10 other members of Congress wrote to President Bush urging him to distribute the full \$170 million in disaster aid to fisherman suffering from the closure of the salmon fishing season on the West Coast. The National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) announced this week that it would be releasing only \$100 million of the \$170 million in funds appropriated by Congress this summer. Given that the Administration attempted to reallocate \$70 million earlier this year to pay for cost over runs associated with the 2010 Census, members are concerned that they again intend to reallocate the remaining money to fix the mistakes made by Bush's political cronies.

"I am absolutely astounded that the Administration is not distributing the full \$170 million Congress allocated in the Farm Bill to deal with the salmon disaster. Instead, they are trying to steal \$70 million from salmon fishermen and give it to an incompetent defense contractor," DeFazio said. "The fishing community of Oregon is already suffering because of the flawed Bush policies in the Sacramento River basin. They should not have to suffer again because the President has hired people in Florida who can't count. We've been there before."

"The Bush Administration has once again put politics ahead of people. Because of the Administration's disastrous policies Pacific coast fishing families have been devastated," said North Coast Congressman Mike Thompson (D-CA). "Congress appropriated \$170 million in federal disaster relief, but this latest proposal by the Bush Administration to withhold a large portion of these funds shows no regard for hardworking fishing families nor their livelihood."

On May 1, the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) decided to close the salmon fishery in California and most of Oregon, after the Pacific Fishery Management Council recommended the closure. The closure is due to the unprecedented

decline in salmon returning to the Sacramento River, which typically makes a significant contribution to the Oregon fishery. Unfortunately, since these depleted stocks will be co-mingled with other stocks, the season must be almost entirely closed. The closure signals the worst commercial and recreational fisheries failure in Oregon history, and is the first ban on salmon fishing since the industry began 150 years ago. Washington, Oregon, and California estimated damages to the fishing industry to total \$290 million dollars. Short-term assistance is critical so that fishers can make boat payments, insurance payments, mortgage payments, and keep food on the table.

In June, the Office of Management and Budget, which puts together the President's annual budget, sent Congress a revised budget request for more funding to carry out the 2010 Census. The White House is requesting \$546 million more for the Census, and has proposed using \$70 million of the \$170 million in salmon disaster money allocated in the Farm Bill, to pay for the cost over-runs. The Administration entered into a contract with the Harris Corporation, a Florida defense contractor, to conduct the Census, but the contractor has run into serious cost over-runs in the amount of hundreds of millions of dollars. Congressmen DeFazio and Thompson, along with 13 other members of Congress, sent President Bush a letter at that time which was largely ignored by the Administration.

The House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform held a hearing on the Harris Corporation and the problems with the Census on June 11, 2008. <http://oversight.house.gov/story.asp?ID=2001>

The text of the letter sent to President Bush is below:

September 18, 2008

The Honorable Jim Nussle, Director

Office of Management and Budget

Washington, DC. 20503

Dear Director Nussle:

We write with increasing concern regarding full disbursement of the \$170 million appropriated by Congress to compensate fishers for the unprecedented closure of the West Coast salmon fishery.

Earlier this week, NOAA Fisheries (NOAA) indicated that it would be dispersing \$100 million of the \$170 million appropriated by Congress to provide aid to affected fishers. NOAA further indicated that the remaining \$70 million may be disbursed if further need was demonstrated, and "if Congress did not act to rescind the funds." We have been informed that NOAA is not dispersing the full amount now because OMB has not yet released the funds. We find this unconscionable.

First, as we expressed to you in June, it is unacceptable that the Administration has proposed – and now seems to be trying to implement – a plan to take disaster aid from the fishing communities of California, Oregon and Washington to pay for cost overruns associated with this Administration's questionable contract with the Harris Corporation to complete the 2010 census. Indeed, the reason why Congress had to step up to provide this emergency aid to fishers in our states is because of this Administration's unlawful and shortsighted policies regarding the Pacific Northwest's rivers.

Second, we have received no satisfactory explanation for why OMB can legally withhold funds that Congress has appropriated for a specific purpose such as this. The states of Oregon, Washington, and California have followed the process set out in the Magnuson-Stevens Act, which provides for emergency assistance. Now that NOAA has accepted the application from Pacific Fishery Management Council, and has approved the \$170 million grant to the states, OMB is legally obligated to release the funds so that affected fishers may receive the aid they desperately need. The law provides for no further "assessment of need," and we are aware of no precedent for OMB's alleged "phased" disbursement of these funds.

To us, the fact that OMB is withholding \$70 million, when it proposed in June to reprogram this exact same amount to pay for the Administration's mistakes with its census contract, smacks of political gamesmanship. Playing games with the livelihood of fishers across the Pacific Northwest is yet another sign that the Bush Administration has no commitment to protect our valuable river systems, and no interest in helping the fishing communities and economies that rely on them. It is also completely unacceptable. We insist that you comply with congressional intent and immediately release the full \$170 million in federal disaster aid for Pacific Northwest fishers.

Sincerely,

Baird

Blumenauer

Capps

DeFazio

Eshoo

Farr

Hooley

Matsui

Thompson, Mike

Woolsey

Wu

Miller, George