

Written by gallupsun
Tuesday, 23 January 2024 11:30

WASHINGTON D.C. — New Mexico Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernández, alongside Senators Ben Ray Luján and Martin Heinrich, wrote a letter to Deanne Criswell, Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) on Jan. 22, expressing deep concern over the delay processing decisions to over 100 claimants affected by the Hermit's Peak/Calf Canyon Fire. The letter, emphasizing the urgency of the situation, calls for immediate action to address the backlog of claims and ensure swift justice for the victims.

Expressing solidarity with the people of northern New Mexico who endured unimaginable suffering due to the Hermit's Peak/Calf Canyon Fire, Leger Fernández, Luján and Heinrich urged Criswell to do everything in her power to expedite the compensation process for claimants.

"The people of northern New Mexico have faced immense challenges, and it is crucial that we expedite the claims process to bring them the justice they deserve. We call on Administrator Criswell to take immediate action to address the backlog and ensure that the victims of the Hermit's Peak Calf Canyon Fire are compensated without further delay." Leger Fernández, Luján, and Heinrich stated in the letter.

In the letter addressed to Criswell, the Members of Congress highlight the failure of the Hermit's Peak Calf Canyon Claims Office to meet the congressionally mandated 180-day deadline for settling each claim. The Members stress the importance of expediting the claims process and providing the necessary staff and resources to address this serious issue, ensuring that New Mexicans receive the compensation they deserve.

"Our legislation, the Hermit's Peak Calf Canyon Fire Assistance Act (P.L. 117-180), mandated that the Claims Office settle each claim within 180 days and called for 'expeditious consideration and settlement of claims'," the members stated in the letter. The letter goes on to express concern that the Claims Office has missed the 180-day deadline on over 100 claims and is expected to reach the deadline on many more in the coming weeks. The Members emphasize the urgent need for increased staffing to alleviate the backlog.

Finally, the Members underscore the importance of ensuring that any new claims reviewers brought on to address the backlog understand their role is not that of insurance adjusters trying to save money but rather to use the resources provided by Congress to fully satisfy claims and

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provide justice for those who have suffered significant losses.

