

Statement of Representative Ed Case

House Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Investigating the Role of Electric Infrastructure in the Catastrophic Maui Fire

September 28, 2023

Chair Griffith, Ranking Member Castor and Members of the Subcommittee, good morning and aloha. From all of the people of Hawai'i, mahalo for your expressions of concern and for your focus in this hearing.

I appear before you as the former representative of Hawaii's 2nd district, in which Maui is located, and as one, who like so many around our country and our world, feels a deep sense of personal loss at the Maui wildfire tragedy.

More importantly, I appear alongside Representative Tokuda as one of Hawaii's two U.S. Representatives for all of our Hawai'i. In our Hawai'i district lines don't matter; we are all part of one Hawai'i. This incredible tragedy was and is a West Maui and greater Maui tragedy, but it is a deeply felt tragedy for all Hawai'i, and we are all all-in for Maui.

My colleague, who has been a constant presence on Maui and has been devoted to their needs since the early days of this tragedy, will describe for you in greater detail what happened, what the situation has been and what our path must be going forward. As you consider our testimony today and our own future path here in Congress, I'd like to provide you with three thoughts:

First, Congress' involvement is critical. In a tragic disaster such as this, only our federal government can deliver the sheer range and scope of critical assistance over the time needed for a full recovery, and only our federal government can forge the national standards and programs to reduce wildfire risk. By focusing the attention and concern of Congress on the Maui disaster, you highlight the critical needs there and our own commitment to deliver.

Of course, the lessons of every tragedy must be understood and learned; otherwise, the tragedy will be repeated and the lives lost and communities disrupted will be disrespected. Your focus here, including the role of electric infrastructure in the Maui fire, is a welcome and necessary part of our lesson-learning, and your questions and ours must be answered.

Second, the full focus of our collective efforts must remain for now on Maui. We are only 51 days past a sudden and terrible tragedy. Please understand the reality of Maui and Hawai'i today. Almost one hundred are confirmed dead, but we are continuing to identify the remains of those lost and determine who is still missing. A community of some 12,000 are displaced from their homes, 7,800 people are in hotel rooms and many are devoting their full efforts to locating interim housing for our 'ohana. Debris removal efforts that will take well over a year have only just begun. Our businesses are devastated and are only now beginning to face the reality of whether and how they will survive.

We have the full resources of our federal, state and county governments, the community and our Congressional delegation fully focused on the necessary efforts required for Maui today. This is where our efforts should remain. We have at least three independent, expert investigations as well as multiple

legal actions, all of which will uncover many of the answers you are asking today.

This is all to say that, while Congress has a critical oversight role to play, we should not disrupt what must be done for Maui. There will be time for Congress to investigate fully and learn the lessons of Maui when stability has been restored to the people of Lahaina.

Finally, we need to focus on how Congress can help now. There is much that Congress can and should do today.

To start, I encourage all of my colleagues to join our delegation on Maui and understand for yourselves this tragedy. No words or images can replace the personal experiences of Lahaina today – the devastation and challenges, the collective effort and hope.

We also have a duty to fully fund the federal emergency relief efforts now, especially the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Disaster Relief Fund. These resources are essential to sustaining relief for not just Maui but disasters across our country.

To close, I want to express, for Maui, for my community in Honolulu, for our Congressional delegation and for all our Hawai'i, my deepest appreciation for your attention today in this hearing. We stand ready to work with you for Maui and for broader efforts to prevent and mitigate against the risk that this terrible tragedy will be revisited on other communities across our country.

Mahalo.