

STATEMENT

BY

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BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS  
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Chairman Griffith, Ranking Member Castor, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to testify about the wildfires that have devastated our Maui 'ohana.

Like all of you, I want answers. Not a day has gone by that I don't ask myself questions. How did this happen? What could have been done differently? How do we make sure this never happens again? How do we keep our people safe? What now?

Why?

I have also been asked many questions. When can I go home? Is the air safe to breathe? How will I pay my mortgage? Who can help me rebuild my business? How do I tell my student their friend didn't make it?

One question that sticks with me came shortly after the fire. A woman approached me and asked if I could please find her husband. They'd gone to all the shelters, hospitals, given a DNA sample. What should they do now? She showed me a picture of her husband's burned up truck and asked me why the backdoor was open? Did he escape? Where is he now?

I could not answer her questions that day. All I could do was hold her hand. Put my arms around her and comfort her. In the weeks that followed I looked for her husband's name on every list that came out. First, it was on the list of the missing. Then a few weeks ago, identified among the dead.

I share this with you because there are many questions about this tragedy that must be answered. People want answers. People want accountability.

But our people are still grieving. They are frustrated, angry, and grappling with their new reality. Far too many have lost loved ones in this tight-knit community. Some are still waiting

anxiously for news of their loved ones, wanting some kind of resolution, but fearing that knock on their door. While it's been almost two months, most still have not seen what remains of their homes, with the first Lāhainā residents being allowed to enter their properties just this week.

The question we need to be focused on right now is how do we keep the help coming to Maui? We are two days away from a shutdown. Our people have gone through enough, the wheels of government must keep turning to provide support and resources, so they focus on recovery and rebuilding.

Last week, in a House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee hearing, one of our colleagues suggested that the Maui fires were the result of Hawai'i's pursuit of renewable energy. He then insinuated to FEMA Administrator Criswell that the federal government should not support recovery efforts for disasters in states that pursue net-zero policies.

Unfortunately, these comments betray not only a lack of understanding of Hawai'i's unique energy infrastructure but also a willingness to exploit our pain and tragedy for political gain.

What we already knew, even before this disaster, is that Lāhainā is not unique among rural and remote communities across the country that have not received enough investment and where ensuring access to services is a constant struggle.

This tragedy has highlighted the disparities that exist in energy, telecommunications, transportation, and water infrastructure. Our rural communities lack access to health care and mental health services, emergency services, and more.

The investments we have made through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act must be a first step, and we understand the urgent need to do more.

The path ahead for Maui will be long and difficult. It will take years if not generations to recover and rebuild from this disaster. Homes, schools, and businesses will be rebuilt, but the scars of trauma on people will take much longer to heal.

As various local, state, and federal entities continue to investigate the cause of the Maui wildfires and the emergency response across all levels of government, we must not forget the human element of this tragedy. Behind the whirlwind of investigations and litigation that have emerged from this disaster is a community still healing and fighting every day to recover and rebuild.

While the historic banyan tree has become a symbol of hope, we must never forget that the people of Lāhainā are her roots. There is no Lāhainā without the vision and the voice of her people.

Like you and I, our people have questions. We all deserve answers. Right now, the most important question must be, how do we keep the help coming?

Mahalo for allowing myself and Congressman Case to testify before this committee. We will continue to count on your support in the weeks, months, and years ahead. But with all of you as part of our extended ohana, I have hope that our people can and will continue to stay Maui Strong.