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NEWS RELEASE

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COURTNEY: CONGRESS SHOULD FUND DISASTER RELIEF IN TEXAS, FIREFIGHTING IN THE WEST

(SALEM) – Oregon Senate President Peter Courtney Tuesday called on Congress to immediately address the needs of areas ravaged by Mother Nature – including Hurricane Harvey disaster relief and resources needed to battle hundreds of wildfires raging across the West.

“My state is on fire. Washington, Idaho, California and Montana are on fire. Congress needs to act. They need to act now,” Courtney said. “Flooding has left thousands homeless in Texas and Louisiana. The West is burning down. This is no time for politics. It’s time for action.”

Courtney said state lawmakers stand ready to provide any needed resources at the state level but the Legislature is limited in what it can do. He challenged Oregon’s congressional delegation to lead the fight for disaster relief for the South and firefighting resources for the West.

“Oregonians know what it means to be first wagon. We know what it means to pull together when a disaster strikes. We should be leading the effort to make sure everyone gets what they need,” Courtney said.

The impact of the fires is being felt throughout the state. Migrating smoke has resulted in unhealthy air quality in much of Oregon. The Eagle Creek Fire is on the verge of entering the Bull Run watershed, threatening Portland’s water supply.

Oregon Department of Forestry officials say 8,000 men and women are fighting fires in Oregon, nearly one-third of all the firefighters currently deployed in the United States. National resources in the state are tapped out. More federal funds are needed to fight the fires and the needs won’t end when the fires are out, either, Courtney said

Oregon and other western states will need a significant federal investment for rehabilitation, restoration and reforestation. Beyond that Congress, he said, needs to reform how the United States Department of Agriculture's Forest Service is funded. Officials say firefighting is taking an ever-increasing chunk of the budget. An additional investment is needed to encourage more active federal forest management.