

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 9, 2025

Mr. Tom Schultz
U.S. Forest Service
201 14th St, S.W.
Washington, DC 20227

Dear Chief Schultz:

We write to request immediate clarity and transparency regarding the source of the funds being used to carry out the Deferred Resignation Program (DRP) and Voluntary Early Retirement Authority (VERA) program at the Forest Service.

As you know, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has lost more than 15,500 personnel through the DRP and VERA to date; approximately 5,000 of those were at the Forest Service. In a recent document provided by the USDA to Congress, these resignations from USDA require more than \$200 million in taxpayer funds from this fiscal year to pay out the accrued sick leave and vacation time for those employees; approximately \$48 million of that is for Forest Service employees. However, this reporting does not include the costs of continuing pay for employees participating in DRP who are no longer working yet are collecting salary and benefits through the end of the fiscal year.

In your testimony before the Senate Appropriations Committee on June 11, 2025, you said that the funds necessary for DRP came from annually appropriated program dollars, including funds that were shifted into salary and expenses line items. Two accounts this year show such a shift: Forest and Rangeland Research and State, Private, and Tribal Forestry. The total amount diverted from program funding within just those accounts was \$64.65 million this year, 35 percent more than what USDA leadership stated was necessary to cover the reported DRP “accrued leave payout” costs for the entire agency.

At the hearing before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee on July 10, 2025, you instead said that the funds for DRP came from the *Inflation Reduction Act* (IRA) and *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* (IIJA)—supplemental bills meant to stimulate wildfire preparedness and forest health that have no connection to your annual budget or regular salaries and benefits. This statement directly conflicts with your statement a month prior before the Senate Appropriations Committee. Further, the IIJA and IRA included limits on how funds provided under those laws could be used, such as capping the amount provided for State, Private, and Tribal Forestry that could be spent on salaries or administrative expenses.

These significant discrepancies require clarification and accounting to Congress. Please provide answers to the following questions as soon as possible, but not later than September 22, 2025:

1. Please explain why you provided different answers to the Senate Appropriations Committee and the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee about the sources of funds to be used to pay for the DRP and VERA?
2. What is the total amount required to pay out both the salaries and expenses and accrued leave to Forest Service employees who opted into the DRP and VERA programs as of the date they no longer reported to work, delineated by program area?
3. For each program area in the Forest Service, please provide the amount required to pay DRP, VERA, and associated accrued leave for all participating employees.
4. For each program area in the Forest Service, please provide a table showing the following details for participating employees in DRP and VERA: GS-level, Duty Station, and State.
5. For each program area's payout for DRP, VERA, and associated accrued leave, please provide the source of funds (e.g., annual programmatic appropriations, IRA, or IIJA). If the source is annual appropriations, please identify the originally intended program and how the money was going to be spent before being shifted to this purpose. If the source is IRA or IIJA, please indicate the original authorizing section and what those funds were going to be spent on before being redirected.
6. Please verify what amount of Fiscal Year 2025 annual programmatic appropriations continues to be held back from Research and Development and State, Private, and Tribal Forestry and why. Are you using funds provided for Research and Development and State, Private, and Tribal Forestry to pay for personnel costs in other program areas funded by different appropriations? If so, what is your statutory authority to do so?
7. Are you using funds provided by IRA and IIJA to pay for the DRP or VERA program? If so, please provide the specific appropriations being spent from those bills and your statutory authority to use those funds for that purpose. Does your use of those funds comply with statutory caps on amounts used for salaries and expenses?
8. Were any of the funds from IRA and IIJA previously obligated to specific projects that have since been cancelled or rescinded? If so, please provide the list of projects and the amounts redirected.
9. If the total amount of funding diverted from annual appropriations, IRA, or IIJA is greater than the amount necessary to pay employees for their accrued leave, please explain why.

We look forward to a full explanation of the funding sources used to pay for the DRP and VERA program.

Sincerely,



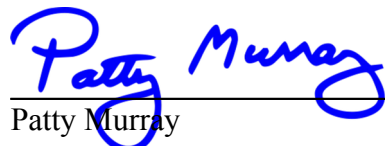
Martin Heinrich
United States Senator
Ranking Member, Committee
on Energy and Natural
Resources



Jeffrey A. Merkley
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior,
Environment, and Related
Agencies
United States Senate
Committee on Appropriations



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator
Ranking Member, Committee
on Agriculture, Nutrition, and
Forestry



Patty Murray
United States Senator
Vice Chair, Senate
Committee on Appropriations