

Congress refuses to pay the bill to fight fires

By Darryl Fears, Washington Post

As Congress headed home for the Christmas break after passing a budget deal, Agriculture Department Secretary Tom Vilsack presented lawmakers with an angry ultimatum: Put up more cash if you want the U.S. Forest Service to keep putting out huge wildfires.

Vilsack is fuming because Congress set aside \$1.6 billion to pay for wildfire suppression in 2016 despite the service, which he controls, spending \$100 million more than that to fight blazes this year. Year after year, Congress has underfunded the firefighting effort, forcing the Forest Service to borrow hundreds of millions of dollars from other departments in the agency to pay for equipment and firefighters.

Congress allocated \$1 billion for fire suppression in 2015 – a year fast approaching another record for most acres burned.

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