

Trump's visit to Los Angeles foreshadows massive attacks on social programs, democratic rights

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As wildfires continue to rage across California, engulfing communities and leaving devastation in their wake, Donald Trump's visit to Hurricane Helene-affected Asheville, North Carolina, and wildfire-devastated Los Angeles on Friday stands as a brazen display of political reaction, capitalizing on environmental disasters. While presenting himself as a leader offering solace and support, Trump's actions and rhetoric underscored his administration's callous indifference to human suffering—past, present and future.

Trump's tour is a warning that the ruling class in the US will not allow any disaster to go to waste and will seek to benefit from it, akin to an organ trafficker inspecting a corpse before selling its parts for profit. It is a prelude to policies that will further exploit the crisis. From privatizing disaster response to dismantling environmental protections, Trump's agenda ensures that future catastrophic events will be even more devastating.

As of Trump's visit, the Los Angeles wildfires that began on January 7 had scorched over 55,000 acres of California land. Nine fires (Palisades, Eaton, Hughes, Border 2, Laguna, Sepulveda, Clay, Gibbon and Gilman) are still active as of this writing. Air quality in the region has plummeted to hazardous levels, creating a public health crisis in addition to the immediate dangers posed by the flames.

These fires are not isolated incidents but part of a broader pattern fueled by corporate-driven environmental degradation, decayed infrastructure and inadequate disaster preparedness. Yet Trump has consistently denied the reality of climate change, rolled back environmental protections and slashed funding for disaster response. His visit to Los Angeles serves not to address systemic issues but to propagate lies, deflect blame and pave the way for the further privatization of public resources.

Through his anti-scientific policies, climate change denial and slashing of crucial environmental services, his first administration contributed to the conditions that led to

hurricanes and wildfires and denied adequate support for those affected, such as in Puerto Rico in 2017 from hurricanes Maria and Irma.

In his remarks on Friday from North Carolina, Trump repeated the lie that water from the northern parts of California was being withheld from firefighters due to environmental regulations. He issued two demands as conditions for further federal aid to the devastated region and its population: "Voter ID and water to be released."

The implementation of voter ID laws would disenfranchise hundreds of thousands of Californians, disproportionately affecting low-income individuals including racial minorities and transgender people. It is important to note that countless studies have found that in-person voter fraud—the type that voter ID laws claim to prevent—is extremely rare.

As for the water supposedly being withheld, this falsehood is part of an attempt to focus blame only the Democrats and gut environmental measures that protect endangered species and maintain ecological balance in California's waterways, in order to favor agribusiness profits.

In reality, water resources are not a limiting factor in firefighting efforts. The challenges lie in the sheer scale of the fires, lack of preventative measures, insufficient infrastructure, climate patterns and the erosion of public funding for disaster management—all presided over by the Democrats and exacerbated by Trump's own policies.

Trump's intention to get rid of federal aid was repeated in his statements while visiting North Carolina: "FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] has turned out to be a disaster," the president said. "I think we're going to recommend that FEMA go away. The states should fix this."

Trump's framing of FEMA's actions is deeply cynical. His administration's pattern of underfunding public agencies while outsourcing critical functions to private contractors hollowed out FEMA's capacity to respond effectively. During the 2019 hurricane season, the Trump administration redirected \$155 million from FEMA's

Disaster Relief Fund to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to expand detention facilities for migrants.

On Friday, he suggested that FEMA's role should be assumed by a marriage between state and religious charity organizations. Instead of adequate funds for FEMA relief, "we want to bring it locally, so that a state takes care of its problem and then they can bring it down to a local level, like Samaritan's Purse and Franklin [Graham, son of Christian evangelist Billy Graham]."

Trump's comments are a prelude to further privatization, funneling social resources to private organizations and, alarmingly, a further erosion of the separation between state and church. He is essentially saying that state governments should become responsible for disaster management and that private companies or religious outfits should take over disaster response and recovery efforts. This shift would free federal funds for wars and funnel public funds into the hands of corporations while leaving vulnerable communities with even less support than the already completely inadequate federal and state support.

The Democrats' response reveals their own complicity in perpetuating the conditions that have led to the wildfire crisis. Far from confronting Trump's lies and policy failures, California's Democratic leadership has signaled its intention to receive him with ceremonial fanfare. This is despite the contempt Trump showed toward North Carolina Governor Josh Stein and California Governor Gavin Newsom, both Democrats.

After incessant attacks and open insults from Trump, Newsom, in particular, went out of his way to express how "glad and grateful" he was about Trump's visit, greeting him "with an open hand, not a closed fist." In a press conference on Thursday, as he signed a \$2.5 billion aid package for Los Angeles, Newsom emphasized that "we're all in this together" and went out of his way to thank Republicans like California State Representative Tom Lackey, known for his ties to the energy industry and his advocacy of exempting energy corporations from environmental regulations.

In a statement that amounted to a self-indictment for the criminal neglect displayed during the COVID-19 pandemic, Newsom said that he and Trump "had a great relationship during COVID, well-established and well-defined." He continued: "I don't think there was a Democratic governor in the country that worked more collaboratively with the president of the United States." This confession was repeated on Friday as a supine Newsom greeted Trump upon the president's arrival at LAX.

Under Newsom's leadership, California has failed to take meaningful action to address failed infrastructure, lack of

emergency preparedness or environmental issues. The Democratic administration has likewise failed to regulate the utility companies whose negligence has sparked many fires or to invest in robust public infrastructure. Instead, Newsom has pursued policies that prioritize the interests of the wealthy and powerful, from tax breaks for tech companies to bailouts for PG&E (Pacific Gas & Electric).

The wildfire crisis in California is not simply a natural disaster. It is a social and political catastrophe rooted in decades of bipartisan policies, social spending cuts, environmental degradation and the subordination of public needs to private profit. Trump's visits to North Carolina and Los Angeles serves as a stark reminder of the bipartisan alignment in perpetuating these conditions.

To address the wildfire crisis and prevent future disasters, it is essential to break with the policies of both Trump and the Democratic Party. To rebuild public infrastructure, combat climate change and hold corporations accountable for their role in creating and exacerbating these crises requires a movement of the working class that rejects the bipartisan politics of austerity and privatization responsible for hollowing out public services.

Trump's visit to Los Angeles is a cynical display. His lies about water shortages, his plans to get rid of FEMA and his broader agenda of privatization and environmental destruction reveal what his presidency will further pursue. The complicity of Democrats like Gavin Newsom only underscores the urgency of building an independent political movement capable of confronting the root cause of the crises facing California and the world: capitalism. Only through a genuine socialist program can humanity build a society that prioritizes human needs over profit and ensures a sustainable future for all.



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