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December 22, 2017

The Southern California Thomas Fire raced through Ventura and Santa Barbara counties in early-December on the heels of what has already been a highly destructive wildfire season this year for the west coast. As of December 22, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) reported that the Thomas Fire has destroyed over 1,000 structures and burned 273,400 acres of coastal foothills and national forest, making it the single largest wildfire the state has experienced on record.

On December 18, the House passed the United States Fire Administration, AFG, and SAFER Program Reauthorization Act of 2017 (H.R.4661) to reauthorize the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA), the Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG) program, and the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grants program through fiscal year (FY) 2023.

AFG provides funding for equipment and training for firefighters, paramedics, and other first responders, whereas SAFER grants are awarded directly to local fire departments so they can recruit, hire, and retain trained firefighters. The current authorization for the AFG and SAFER grant programs contains a sunset provision that would permanently eliminate both programs on January 2, 2018. However, the new legislation introduced by Representative Barbara Comstock (R-VA-10) would extend the sunset provision until September 30, 2024, and authorize \$750 million for six years for these programs that help to ensure that emergency responders can safely fight and prevent devastating fires.

H.R.4661 passed in the Senate without amendment on December 21 and awaits signature from President Donald Trump.

Sources: California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, Library of Congress, U.S. Fire Administration
