

Trump To Tour LA Wildfire Devastation Amid Barbs With Newsom Over Water and Climate Change

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Homes in mandatory evacuation area at Castaic, California, are seen as the Hughes Fire burns from afar January 22, 2025.

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President Trump will visit Los Angeles on Friday to survey the damage caused by wildfires and meet with California’s governor, Gavin Newsom. Will he steamroll Mr. Newsom and put pre-conditions on federal disaster aid to the state?

This will be Mr. Trump’s first trip from the White House since he was sworn into office on Monday. In a gesture to supporters, the president will first stop in North Carolina, which was ravaged by Hurricane Helene in September, before making his way to the Golden State.

Messrs. Trump and Newsom feuded in the president’s first term, and they are trading jabs in the first days of the second. “We are watching fires still tragically burn from weeks ago without even a token of defense,” Mr. Trump said in his inaugural address.

“They’re raging through the houses and communities, even affecting some of the wealthiest and most powerful individuals in our country, some of whom are sitting here right now,” Mr. Trump said. “We can’t let this happen. Everyone is unable to do anything about it. That’s going to change.”

The Palisades and Eaton fires are still not fully contained after more than two weeks. The fires have killed at least 28 people, destroyed more than 16,000 structures, and damaged thousands more. Several other fires have since ignited, including the Hughes Fire on Wednesday. A red flag warning due to high winds is extended through Thursday.

Mr. Newsom responded to Mr. Trump’s comments on X with magnanimity. “In the face of one of the worst natural disasters in America’s history, this moment underscores the critical need for partnership, a shared commitment to facts, and mutual respect,” he [posted](#). “I look forward to President Trump’s visit to Los Angeles and his mobilization of the full weight of the federal government to help our fellow Americans recover and rebuild.”

Mr. Newsom needs federal disaster aid, and he has presidential ambitions of his own. Mr. Trump ordered 1500 troops to the southern border on Wednesday, 500 of whom are reportedly [Marines previously assigned to FEMA](#) to assist with the wildfires.

A Republican strategist, Matthew Bartlett, tells The New York Sun he thinks Mr. Trump will make the visit a “bipartisan moment” and showcase his strength — a contrast to President Biden who took more than a year to visit the train derailment disaster at East Palestine, Ohio.

“Trump could easily show up and shock people, not by going after Newsom, but rather really rising to the occasion and putting a focus on the devastation in California,” Mr. Bartlett says. “The big blue state that he admires so much with Hollywood, he’s looking to show up there. He’s not looking to spike the ball in their face, but he’s looking to be a president in their eyes.”

Yet Mr. Trump does seem to enjoy goading Mr. Newsom as “Newscum” and criticizing Democrats’ failures with uni-party control of the state. At a press conference Tuesday night, Mr. Trump called California Democrats “crazy” and said environmentalists’ concern with protecting fish species like the Delta Smelt has put people in harm’s way. Mr. Trump issued a Day One executive order, “Putting People over Fish: Stopping Radical Environmentalism to Provide Water

to Southern California,” which orders federal agencies to “route more water” to the central and southern parts of the state.

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As Mr. Trump takes a sledgehammer to environmental protections — withdrawing America from the Paris Climate Accords, terminating offshore wind leases, eliminating electrical vehicle mandates, and promising to “drill baby drill” — Mr. Newsom is pushing back. He says the water supply “are at [near-record levels](#)” in southern California and that Mr. Trump’s claims about poor forest management and firefighting budget cuts are false. He also says climate change is a serious threat to the state.

“If you don’t believe in science, believe your own damn eyes,” Mr. Newsom said in a [press release](#), accompanied by photographs of the Los Angeles area fires.

The big question for Californians is whether Mr. Trump and Congressional Republicans will try to tie wildfire aid to policy changes or put it in a large reconciliation bill attached to other priorities in the Trump agenda. “If you add Los Angeles into it, then you can really do one, big, beautiful bill, because, frankly, they want that so badly,” Mr. Trump told [Dan Bongino](#). “And when Los Angeles is included, we get everything we want.”

“It seems as if this California rescue package will be tied to the debt ceiling,” Mr. Bartlett says.

Mr. Trump is a builder, and he may have suggestions on Friday for how to streamline the rebuilding process and further cut regulations and red tape. Mr. Newsom issued an executive order temporarily suspending environmental permitting and review requirements under the California Environmental Quality Act and California Coastal Act. He issued an executive order on Monday to speed up the fire debris removal process.

“Goodbye red tape. Goodbye bureaucratic nonsense,” Mr. Newsom [posted to X](#). Red tape, though, is the name of the game to build in California.

“It takes most people five years before they can get their home built from burning down,” a real estate investor whose Malibu home was damaged in the 2018 Woolsey Fire, Rich Fettke, tells The New York Sun. “Between getting the permits

and going through four agencies at the building department. You have to get approved by one, and then get to the next, go to the next, and then the Coastal Commission is a huge one in California.”

“They really hold things back in the name of policy and bureaucracy,” Mr. Fettke says. He thinks cutting out California Coastal Commission review will “chop two years off the process.”

A TV producer whose home was destroyed in the Woolsey Fire, John Watkin, tells The New York Sun the process for rebuilding is unnecessarily complicated and insurance put him through “ludicrous hoops.” He says he rebuilt relatively quickly — two-and-a-half years — but for many of his neighbors it took much longer or is still ongoing. He says many of these people face delays because they tried to build a bigger house than regulations permit. His ex-wife lost her home this month in the Palisades Fire.

The insurance market is another concern. California mandates caps on homeowner insurance premiums, so private insurers started cancelling plans over the last few years because it wasn’t financially feasible for them with the elevated fire risk. This forced people like Messrs. Watkin and Fettke to buy their insurance through the state-run FAIR program. The problem is that the FAIR program is nearly insolvent and caps insurance payouts at \$3 million in an area where many homes are valued substantially higher.

“There’s tremendous anxiety amongst people who’ve lost their homes out here that the FAIR plan doesn’t have enough money to cover the damage,” Mr. Watkin says. He doubts many of the homes on the Malibu waterfront will ever be rebuilt. “That’s a rumor that’s spreading as fast as the fire itself,” he says.

Messrs. Newsom and Trump both have an interest in getting the Los Angeles area rebuilt as quickly as possible. The city is scheduled to host the Olympics in 2028.

Mr. Fettke says despite the fire risk and insurance issues, he’s staying put for “the beauty, the surfing, the mountain biking” and the creative “think tank” spirit of the place. Plus, he’s installed two pool pumps, 200 feet of hose, and bought a fireproof suit, gloves, and a full gas mask to fight future blazes himself.

“And then I have scuba tank, mask, and regulator for the worst-case scenario,” he says. “If the fires ever come raging through, I would just hang out at the bottom of my pool for a half hour.”