

## WALDO CANYON FIRE. OBAMA VISIT



President Barack Obama visits firefighters and views damage to the Mountain Shadows neighborhood from the Waldo Canyon fire in Colorado Springs. “We’ve got to make sure that we have each other’s backs,” Obama said during his visit to the fire zone. *Joe Amon, The Denver Post*

# “Heartbreaking”

## President praises sense of community, firefighters’ efforts

**Posted online  
beginning at 11  
a.m. on June 29.  
June 30 print  
version featured.**

Story by  
Sarah Burnett

COLORADO SPRINGS - Standing among the charred remains of the neighborhood hardest hit by the Waldo Canyon fire, a stunned President Barack Obama on Friday told the same firefighters who days earlier had fought to contain the flames and their devastation that the families whose homes they saved — and the rest of the country — are in their debt.

“For those families, the work and the sacrifice of those firefighters means the world to them,” Obama said later during a speech outside a Colorado Springs fire station.

“They are genuine heroes.”

Obama flew to Colorado on Friday afternoon, just hours after he designated the state a federal disaster area.

He toured the Mountain Shadows neighborhood — where more than one-third of the 347 homes burned by the Waldo Canyon fire were located



— as well as a fire station and a Red Cross evacuation shelter.

As his motorcade made its way into Mountain Shadows, it passed stretches of charred grass and homes burned to the ground, with water shooting from melted pipes. Burned-out cars sat in driveways. Everywhere, fences were torn down and thrown into the street. Smoke was visible from the area around Blodgett Peak to the north. The only people to be seen were firefighters and other emergency personnel.

“The devastation is enormous,” Obama said afterward.

But he noted that it’s in a crisis that America comes together.

“We’ve got to make sure that we have each other’s backs,” Obama said. “And that spirit is what you’re seeing in terms of volunteers, in terms of firefighters, in terms of government officials. Everybody is pulling together to try to deal with this situation.”

Obama asked Gov. John Hickenlooper earlier in the week about coming to the area to see the damage and to personally show support to the firefighters, evacuees and the rest of Colorado.

The visit was not without its critics. Some said it would divert resources from fighting the fire — which Hickenlooper and Colorado Springs Mayor

Tim Bigman was among 19 firefighters of Bighorn 209, a hand crew from Montana, checking for hot spots by Cedar Heights road in the Waldo Canyon on Friday, Colo. *Hyoung Chang, The Denver Post*



Steve Bach insisted would not be the case — while others said Obama was using his office and the fire to make a high-profile stop in a battleground state in a tight election year.

And while there's no doubt the visit demonstrated one of the political benefits of incumbency, Bach and U.S. Rep. Doug Lamborn — both Republicans — said they appreciated that the president came.

"It was more than a photo op for him. He clearly wanted to say to the people, the firefighters, 'This matters, and the country has your back.' That means a lot," Bach said. "Yes, it is election season, but this is a conservative county not likely to vote for him. So the fact he would come into this bastion of conservatism shows me a lot. I'm very thankful."

Lamborn, typically one of Obama's biggest critics, said he gave the president "a heartfelt thank you."

"I told him I appreciated his concern for Colorado Springs and for Colorado," he said.

Lamborn said after the visit that more planes used to drop fire retardant will be coming to Colorado from the East and West Coasts.

The federal-disaster designation means Colorado will receive disaster- unemployment assistance and crisis counseling, said FEMA spokesman Jerry Felice. Hickenlooper has submitted a request for a major disaster declaration that would include additional programs, as well as state-wide hazard mitigation, but that request is still under review, Felice said.

Lamborn and U.S. Sen. Michael Bennet flew to Colorado with Obama aboard Air Force One. They were met on the tarmac by Bach; Hickenlooper; U.S. Sen. Mark Udall; Rich Harvey, incident commander for the Waldo Canyon fire; and Jerri Marr, forest supervisor for the Pike and San Isabel forests, among others.

Bach rode through the city in the same vehicle as Obama, passing crowds that lined the sidewalks in some areas. Along Garden of the Gods Road, a pair of children held a sign that read, "Save Colorado."

As they drove into Mountain Shadows, Bach said, the mood in their vehicle was somber. Obama was "very taken by what he saw."

Along Majestic Drive, now a line of blackened foundations with an oc-

SMALL FIRMS POST BIG STOCK GAINS  
LUNCH & LEARN: HER TURN  
Summer Jam 52% off

Voice of the Rocky Mountain Empire  
**THE DENVER POST**

Today: Read how the city remembers slain Denver police Officer Celena Hollis. COLORADO WILDFIRE | OBAMA TOURS WALDO CANYON

# "Heartbreaking"

President praises sense of community, firefighters' efforts



**WALDO CANYON TRAGEDY**  
Authorities seeking tips on wildfire's cause

**"They are a great couple. They were very quiet. There isn't much left of their house."**

**By Matt Walsh | The Denver Post**

Standing among the charred remains of the neighborhood home he built in Denver, a Colorado firefighter who lost his life in the Waldo Canyon fire said that the devastation that has befallen the city is one of the most heartbreaking he has ever seen.

The fire broke out in the north side of the city on Tuesday, and firefighters from the city and surrounding areas arrived within minutes. The fire spread quickly, and firefighters were forced to evacuate the area.

Obama said he was struck by the sense of community and the firefighters' efforts. He said he was "very taken by what he saw."

IF YOU NEED A FILING AND A CLEANING, YOU NEED A SERVICE  
IF YOU NEED DENTAL IMPLANTS, YOU NEED US!  
NEW IMAGE DENTAL IMPLANTS



casional home still standing, the president got out to speak with and thank firefighters. At Fire Station 9 a short time later, he did the same.

At his final stop of the day, the Southeast YMCA Family Center, Obama was greeted by cheers from the crowd of about 40 volunteers and evacuees.

“You guys are making us proud and are a great source of inspiration,” he told volunteers.

Denise Locke, whose family of five was evacuated from the Air Force Academy, said they came to the shelter to have lunch. When they heard the president was coming, they stayed.

On Tuesday night, Locke said, a helicopter pilot circled her neighborhood five or six times, dumping water he had scooped out of a reservoir.

“He actually put the fire out and saved our homes,” Locke said. “It’s a blessing. He was not giving up.”

Locke said having the president here was “awesome.”

“I know that everybody’s bashing him ... but whatever,” she said. “It means a lot to know we’re not just getting pushed by the wayside. He knows homes are lost, and he’s just out here to say, ‘Hey, I know homes are lost, and we’re doing what we can to help.’ ”

President Barack Obama visits a YMCA shelter that is housing Waldo Canyon fire evacuees in Colorado Springs on Friday. The shelter is being operated by the Red Cross with services provided by Catholic Charities and the Salvation Army. *Joe Amon, The Denver Post*