

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 14, 2011

The Honorable Harry Reid  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Daniel Inouye  
Chairman  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran  
Vice Chairman  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader Reid, Minority Leader McConnell, Chairman Inouye, and Vice Chairman Cochran:

As Senators representing states severely impacted by Hurricane/Tropical Storm Irene, we are writing to express support for introduction and passage of a disaster relief bill that will provide funding for FEMA and other agencies in FY 2012 and the remainder of FY 2011.

Irene caused widespread pain and damage that will be felt in many different ways. The destruction will lead to hardship and the costs will be so great that many residents will not be able to rebuild their lives on their own. Private businesses and agriculture suffered significant losses, resulting in dramatic economic hardship for firms, farms and their employees. In addition, Irene caused extensive damage to public infrastructure such as roads, bridges, public parks and government facilities. Local governments are already facing tight budgets and they will need help from the federal government to rebuild their communities. The storm not only damaged local and state infrastructure, but it also affected federal highways and the recovery will require significant resources to repair vital federal transportation infrastructure.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency will provide the majority of recovery funding through the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF). The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) reported to Congress on September 9, 2011, that, in addition to the \$1.8 billion requested in the President's FY 2012 budget request, the DRF needs an additional \$4.6 billion to address a shortfall from natural disasters, including Irene, that have hit our country. In addition, OMB requested \$500 million in FY 2011 to ensure that FEMA has adequate resources to address needs through the remainder of this fiscal year. We support including this funding in a disaster relief bill.

While we are pleased that OMB submitted a request for the DRF, more funding from other programs will be required to help our residents, businesses, farms and local governments recover from Hurricane Irene. The storm caused sweeping damage in a variety of ways and the federal response should be comprehensive and include support from multiple programs from

different agencies. Congress has a tradition of providing comprehensive support to help states recover from natural disasters, which has included funding from various departments.

In 2008, following Hurricanes Ike and Gustav and widespread flooding, Congress appropriated emergency funding for the Disaster Community Development Block Grants at the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Emergency Relief program at the Federal Highway Administration, the Economic Development Assistance program at the Economic Development Administration, the Emergency Conservation program and the Emergency Watershed Protection program at the Department of Agriculture, the Disaster Loans program at the Small Business Administration as well as funding for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Similarly, last year, Congress passed the FY 2010 Supplemental Appropriations bill, which, in addition to the DRF, included disaster relief for Community Development Block Grants, the Army Corps of Engineers and the Economic Development Administration.

In particular, Disaster Community Development Block Grants have been an asset in responding to disasters and Congress has provided emergency funding for this program 16 times since 1992, including nearly \$6.5 billion for 23 states in 2008. Also, the Federal Highway Administration's Emergency Relief fund, which pays for the repairs to federal roads and bridges, is a valuable program but it currently faces a shortfall for addressing previous disasters and early estimates of damages caused by Hurricane/Tropical Storm Irene indicate a need for hundreds of millions of dollars in additional repairs.

While FEMA leads the recovery efforts following most natural disasters, each of the programs listed above can provide unique and valuable support that meets the needs of specific populations and sectors of society impacted by this catastrophic event. Therefore, we respectfully request that the Senate continue this tradition and provide substantial funding for these federal programs to appropriately respond to the widespread wreckage caused by Hurricane/Tropical Storm Irene.

In addition, we must offer support to the victims of this storm as soon as possible, and disaster relief funding should not be held hostage by demands for cuts to other valuable programs. Therefore, in accordance with the Budget Control Act, appropriations for FY 2012 should be designated as disaster relief to allow the use of cap adjustment authority.

Thank you for considering this request. We look forward to working with you.

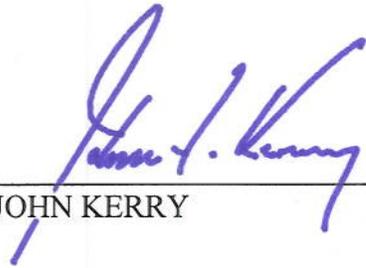
Sincerely,

  
FRANK R. LAUTENBERG

  
PATRICK J. LEAHY

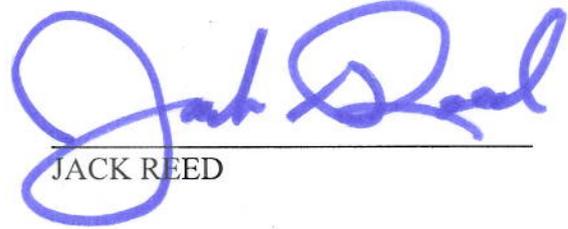
  
RICHARD BLUMENTHAL

  
KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND

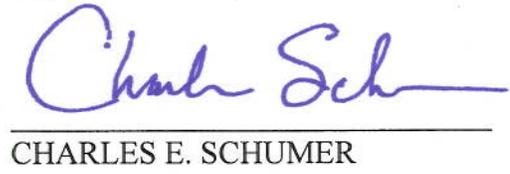
  
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JOHN KERRY

  
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JOSEPH I. LIEBERMAN

  
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ROBERT MENENDEZ

  
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JACK REED

  
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