

*Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024*

**Letter to the Speaker of the House of Representatives on Federal Disaster Relief Funding**

*November 18, 2024*

*Dear Mr. Speaker:*

With the Congress now back in session, I write to request urgently needed emergency funding to provide for an expeditious and meaningful Federal response to Hurricanes Helene and Milton and other natural disasters. In the weeks since these deadly storms tore through communities across the Southeast, members of my Administration and I have traveled to Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina to meet with families, business owners, farmers, local and State officials, and first responders to stand with these communities in the wake of these disasters and to hear firsthand what they need from the Federal Government in order to make a full recovery. Additional resources are critical to continue to support these communities.

Over the past month, members of my Administration have written to you and other congressional leaders to underscore the urgent need for additional funding to replenish key disaster response programs. Most urgently, the Small Business Administration's (SBA) disaster loan program has completely exhausted its funding and the Congress must act as soon as possible to restore this funding. As I outlined in my October 4th letter, my Administration has repeatedly underscored the need for the Congress to prevent a shortfall. SBA loans are a pivotal lifeline for local businesses as well as individual survivors who use these loans to repair and rebuild their homes and replace or repair damaged property, including their personal vehicles. SBA has already received over 100,000 loan applications for Hurricanes Helene and Milton, and the American people cannot afford any further delay in the restoration of this vital funding.

Urgent funding is also needed for the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF), which the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) uses to help individuals and communities across the Nation recover from disasters. Without additional funding, the DRF will face a shortfall this fiscal year, which will impact FEMA's ability to provide life-saving and life-sustaining assistance to disaster survivors, as well as slow recovery from ongoing and prior disasters. Funding for the Department of Agriculture is necessary to provide assistance to farmers, ranchers, and rural communities across the Nation affected by natural disasters. Funding for the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery program is critical to help communities respond to the impacts of Hurricanes Helene and Milton, as well as the devastating fires in Maui and tornados in Mississippi, Iowa, and Oklahoma. My Administration is also requesting funding for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to protect critical access to safe drinking water, for the Department of Energy to rapidly restore power and rebuild the electric grid to better withstand future storms, and for the Department of Transportation to support rebuilding roads and bridges across 40 States and Territories, including Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. Additional funding for the EPA is also needed to protect drinking water infrastructure, fund water system upgrades that would improve system performance, mitigate further future damage from extreme weather, and improve systems for low- and moderate-income households.

Additional action must also be taken to address the severe shortage of intravenous (IV) fluids and other critical medical products caused by Hurricane Helene. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) took critical steps this month to support access to these products, including ensuring restoration of key production sites, protecting products, and opening imports in partnership with manufacturers, distributors, hospitals, and other stakeholders. My

Administration is requesting funding for HHS to build supply chain capacity and resilience for IV fluids and other critical medical products to respond to current needs and to better prepare for disasters in the future. In addition, Hurricanes Helene and Milton are expected to exhaust available funding balances for the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), forcing the program to add to its debt to the Department of the Treasury. My Administration urges the Congress to cancel some or all of the NFIP's debt to ensure NFIP policyholders and disaster survivors have a sustainable flood insurance program that provides the assistance they need after disaster strikes. The Congress must also extend the deadlines for Hermit's Peak fire claimants to request FEMA assistance, in order to ensure all applicants can receive compensation for losses in the aftermath of the fires in New Mexico.

The Congress has previously responded on a bipartisan basis to support communities in the wake of natural disasters—including providing over \$90 billion in aid after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, over \$50 billion following Hurricane Sandy in 2013, and over \$120 billion following Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria in 2017. Just as the Congress acted then, it is our sworn duty now to deliver the necessary resources to ensure that everyone in communities reeling from Hurricanes Helene and Milton—and those still recovering from previous disasters—have the Federal resources they need and deserve.

From rebuilding homes and reopening critical infrastructure, such as schools and roads—to supporting the Nation's farmers and ranchers and ensuring access to healthcare services—impacted communities await your response. There can be no delay. I urge the Congress to act quickly to pass a supplemental funding package to assist communities impacted by these hurricanes—and every other disaster since the Congress last passed a comprehensive disaster package in 2022—so that the people, families, businesses, and communities affected have the support they need to respond, recover, and rebuild responsibly.

Since the need for this funding arises from unforeseen and unanticipated events, my Administration continues to request that the amounts in this supplemental request be designated as emergency requirements pursuant to section 251(b)(2)(A)(i) of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985.

My Administration will be with those affected until the job is done. This request of supplemental funds is focused on the accounts that are most critical to aiding disaster survivors and impacted communities. My Administration will continue to assess the full resource requirements associated with long-term rebuilding and resilience efforts resulting from Hurricanes Helene and Milton, including those costs related to impacts to Federal facilities and infrastructure, and we will share those estimates as they become available. I urge the Congress to take immediate action, and I look forward to your partnership in delivering this critical relief to the American people.

Sincerely,

JOSEPH R. BIDEN JR.

NOTE: This letter was sent to J. Michael Johnson, Speaker of the House of Representatives. An original was not available for verification of the content of this letter.

*Categories:* Communications to Congress : Federal disaster relief funding, letter.

*Subjects:* Bipartisanship; Drinking water, safety improvement efforts; Environmental Protection Agency; Federal disaster relief funding; Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA); First responders, service and dedication; Infrastructure improvements; Medical supplies and devices, supply improvement efforts; National Flood Insurance Program; Natural disasters, Hurricane

Helene; Natural disasters, Hurricane Milton; New Mexico, wildfire damage and recovery efforts;  
Small Business Administration; Small businesses, low-interest loans.

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