

October 21, 2024

Speaker Mike Johnson

Leader Chuck Schumer

Leader Hakeem Jeffries

Leader Mitch McConnell

Dear Congressional Leaders:

Our states have experienced historic damage from natural disasters during the last three months. These weather events have had major impacts across the Southeast, especially in rural areas where agriculture is the lifeblood and economic engine for small communities. Hurricane Debbie, Hurricane Helene and Hurricane Milton left generational impacts on the way of life for millions as well as the landscape of rural towns and the agriculture industry.

Hurricane Helene could not have made landfall at a worse time for the agriculture industry. Farmers across our states had already begun Fall harvest and no commodity was spared. Land grant institutions have started assessing both direct and indirect losses. In what has been described as one of the most destructive weather events to impact our states, the losses will continue to grow. It is our request that these institutions be given sufficient time to accurately assemble loss data and submit it to congressional leaders. This loss data is important as you and other leaders work to provide disaster assistance to our farmers who were already experiencing difficult economic times.

Timely delivery of disaster assistance is extremely important as farmers will be unable to secure financing for planting next year's crop without this support. The groundwork Congress laid after Hurricane Michael was extremely beneficial through providing block grants to the impacted states. Affected states were given the authority by Congress to develop the infrastructure to distribute the block grant that was approved and audited by the United States Department of Agriculture. This infrastructure allowed producers to promptly receive assistance.

It is our desire that agriculture disaster assistance legislation will be provided by Congress in the form of a block grant that can be administered quickly and efficiently by the states. We further ask that this legislation move simultaneously with the supplemental disaster assistance funding that will help communities rebuild from the recent storm.

Additionally, it's vitally important for Congress to consider emergency funding for significant unmet needs for the long-term recovery of our communities completely decimated by these historic storms. We request a special supplemental appropriation be provided for the Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery (CBDG-DR) program through the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Availability of this appropriation has historically assisted States, cities and counties by providing funding for long-term recovery, restoration of infrastructure, housing and economic development.


Lastly, we request additional funds for infrastructure rebuilding. Roads and bridges have been destroyed along the path of these hurricanes and rebuilding our infrastructure will take significant time and resources. We encourage you to provide sufficient funding to the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA)'s Emergency Relief Program to ensure that FHWA can fulfill the requests of the affected states to rebuild this critical infrastructure.

We look forward to working together to provide assistance to the Americans significantly impacted by these weather events and to those who produce the most affordable, most abundant and safest food supply—the American Farmer.

Sincerely,



Jon Burns
Speaker of the Georgia House of Representatives



Nathaniel Ledbetter
Speaker of the Alabama House of Representatives



Paul Renner
Speaker of the Florida House of Representatives



Tim Moore
Speaker of the North Carolina House of Representatives



G. Murrell Smith, Jr.
Speaker of the South Carolina House of Representatives



Cameron Sexton
Speaker of the Tennessee House of Representatives