



United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0905

BILL NELSON
FLORIDA

February 6, 2018

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
S-230, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
S-221, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer:

As I've discussed with you and your staff, it has been nearly five months since Hurricane Irma struck Florida, and Floridians are still trying to recover. Yet, while Florida businesses, schools, and households continue to struggle, Congress has failed to adequately address the needs created by this disaster. Again, I ask you to please attach a robust supplemental funding bill to any funding bill moving through the Senate this week.

Hurricane Irma caused tremendous damage to Florida's agriculture industry. Florida's citrus industry alone experienced at least \$760 million in losses. Combined with the ongoing battle against citrus greening, Irma's destruction resulted in USDA's current estimate that only 46 million boxes will be harvested for the 2017-2018 season. That's less than a quarter of the nearly 204 million boxes Florida growers harvested ten years ago. Without immediate federal assistance, family farms will decide not to re-plant and will go out of business. And citrus isn't the only crop that sustained damage. In total, the State of Florida estimated \$2.5 billion in agricultural losses, with peanut, cotton, nursery, and dairy farmers all suffering significant damages as well.

Additionally, schools in Florida are strained dealing with both the aftermath of Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Maria. Schools around the state have now enrolled nearly 12,000 students who evacuated from Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. But they have yet to see extra resources to assist them with their added responsibilities. Every child has a right to a quality education, but schools can't do it all on their own. A supplemental must ensure every child's right to a quality education is not hindered by natural causes outside of their control.

Lastly, Florida's infrastructure is desperately in need of immediate assistance. Funding is needed to restore Florida's natural infrastructure, like beaches, dunes, and coral reefs, as well as major flood protection features like Herbert Hoover Dike. Natural features such as wetlands provide environmentally and economically beneficial buffers to help protect residents and coastal economies from storm surge and damage. Similarly, Herbert Hoover Dike protects the thousands of Floridians around Lake Okeechobee from catastrophic flooding. It is critical that we repair these natural systems and finish construction on Herbert Hoover Dike as quickly as possible to mitigate the threat of future storms.

While certainly not an exhaustive overview, these examples point to how important aid money is for the people of Florida, and why this can't be kicked down the road once again. The longer the Senate fails to act, the more people, students, and businesses suffer. Thus, I strongly urge a disaster relief measure be brought to the floor and passed by the end of the week.

Sincerely,

Bill Nelson