

Memo to: XXXXX
From: Representative Peter Welch
Date: November 1, 2011
Subject: Vermont disaster relief (REVISED VERSION WITH UPDATED ESTIMATES)

Hurricane Irene was the worst natural disaster to hit Vermont in the last 100 years. It moved across our state on August 28, dropping record amounts of rain and triggering widespread catastrophic flooding and related damage. While the efforts of FEMA and other federal agencies to date have been extraordinary, it will likely take years for Vermont to fully recover.

Vermonters are resilient and we are doing our best to help ourselves. But we simply cannot recover from a natural disaster of this magnitude without additional federal help.

I respectfully request your assistance in fiscal year 2012 with the following three programs that are essential to Vermont's recovery.

FHWA Emergency Relief (ER): This account provides funding for repair or reconstruction of federal-aid highways and roads on federal lands which have incurred serious damage as a result of a natural disaster. It is currently severely underfunded when matched against nearly \$1.2 billion in outstanding requests nationwide.

The toll on Vermont's highway and bridge infrastructure has been devastating. 2,399 roads and 324 bridges were either partially or totally destroyed. In the aftermath of the storm, damage to roads and bridges stranded residents of 13 towns for several days. Governor Peter Shumlin estimates total damage to Vermont's federal aid transportation infrastructure to be between \$175 million and \$250 million.

To meet Vermont's unprecedented needs, I ask that you include the Senate Appropriations Committee's FY12 position related to ER in the appropriate House bill which:

- appropriates \$1.9 billion for the ER account;
- allows states to exceed the \$100 million state cap;
- allows states additional time to complete emergency repairs; and
- allows for 100 percent reimbursement to states for permanent repairs if total damage is more than double a state's normal FHWA allocation.

USDA Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP): This account provides funding to restore streambeds, remove stream debris from fields, and clear rivers of debris. It is the only federal program available to protect homes threatened by imminent flooding. It is currently oversubscribed and nearly exhausted. Vermont needs an additional \$5 million from the EWP program to repair major damage to streams and rivers that pose imminent danger to nearby homes.

I ask that you include the Senate Appropriations Committee's position of \$200.2 million in FY12 for EWP in the appropriate House bill.

USDA Emergency Conservation Program (ECP): This account provides assistance to farmers rehabilitating farmland damaged by flooding. It is also oversubscribed. In Vermont, thousands of acres of farmland were flooded and remain covered in river silt. ECP funds are needed to make these farm lands fertile again. It is my understanding that USDA has approximately \$77 million in outstanding requests from FY11 and anticipates needing an additional \$72.45 million for requests during FY12.

I ask that you include the Senate Appropriations Committee's position of \$127 million in FY12 for ECP in the appropriate House bill.

I would appreciate your immediate personal attention to this request. If you have any questions, please let me know, or have your staff contact my chief of staff, Bob Rogan, or my legislative director, Jake Oster, at 5-4115.