



September 6, 2011

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The twin disasters of unprecedented floods in the Midwest and Hurricane Irene have had a devastating impact on our Nation that is not yet fully measurable in dollars. Lives have been lost, neighborhoods flooded, and businesses displaced by Nature's fury. Tens of thousands of Americans need your leadership to help them recover. As Irene approached landfall last week, you demonstrated the good that government can do by warning of its dangers and of the need to take action in the interest of public safety. Now, in the wake of widespread inland and coastal devastation, only the Federal government has the expertise and financial resources to repair damage to critical water infrastructure. Your leadership is vital to making recovery a reality, which can only be done if your Administration proposes an Emergency Disaster Relief package shortly after Congress returns from its recess.

The Federal agencies tasked with leading the response and recovery effort are currently lacking the appropriated funds necessary to carry out this mission. Federal Emergency Management Agency's Disaster Relief Fund now has a balance below \$1 billion, requiring FEMA to reduce Midwest recovery expenditures to meet the immediate response needs in the wake of Hurricane Irene. The Army Corps of Engineers alone will need in excess of \$4 billion for repairs to inland and coastal infrastructure. Many miles of protective dunes have been breached, barrier islands have been overwashed, and scores of East Coast ports and waterways must be restored to their authorized depths and dimensions. Failure to repair damage to our coastal water infrastructure will leave residents, businesses and infrastructure of hundreds of coastal communities vulnerable to more flooding.

It is also important to highlight the fact that a tropical storm is currently approaching the Gulf Coast with predictions for more severe coastal flooding. At the same time, in response to an unprecedented drought, you have issued Presidential Disaster Declarations due to the wildfires across the central and northern parts of Texas. When events such as these are combined with

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the serious inland flooding that has occurred in the Midwest as well as the East Coast, the importance of Federal intervention in response to natural disasters becomes all-the-more important.

An Emergency Disaster Relief package will not only protect hundreds of thousands of lives, it will provide the long-term infrastructure investment our country needs. The investment of a dollar of Federal funds in storm damage infrastructure along the coast provides a return of at least \$4 in property and infrastructure damages avoided. That is millions of dollars in savings that otherwise would have been spent by FEMA in post-disaster relief. Of course, no dollar figure can be assigned to the value of avoiding risks to public safety.

Hurricane Irene provides a unique opportunity for a multi-agency assessment of its impacts, including the level of erosion it caused and how federal coastal projects for navigation and coastal protection fared. We urge the inclusion of funding for such an assessment in the Emergency Disaster Relief package. This effort is well suited for the capabilities of NOAA and the Corps of Engineers.

In the past several years, supplemental appropriations bills have been used to fund defense expenditures that could well have been anticipated and included within the regular budget process. We fully understand your opposition to this practice. However, the inland and coastal flooding the Nation has recently experienced are of historic proportions. Neither the events nor their devastation could have been anticipated when you prepared your FY 2012 budget.

We respectfully ask that you send to Congress an Emergency Disaster Relief package that will provide funding for the Corps of Engineers, FEMA, NOAA, and other agencies charged with leading recovery and response efforts. Without this type of timely intervention that only you as President can lead, these economically vital riverine and coastal areas of the country will not be able to recover.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Harry Simmons', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Mayor Harry Simmons
President

Cc: Majority Leader Harry Reid
Minority Leader Mitch McConnell
Speaker John Boehner
Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi
Chairman Daniel Inouye
Ranking Member Thad Cochran
Chairman Harold Rogers
Ranking Member Norm Dicks