

Office of the Governor
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August 23, 2016

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I would first like to thank you for visiting Louisiana and for the support your administration is giving to our state in this time of great need. As Louisiana rebuilds from this catastrophic and historic flooding event, our federal partners have been responsive to all of our requests. In particular, I want to express my appreciation for the work done by Administrator Fugate and his team at FEMA. From the very beginning of this event, FEMA has been by our side and I am confident this cooperation will continue through our recovery.

As you know, this flood event has been devastating for south Louisiana. It has resulted in destruction to homes, businesses, and public infrastructure in twenty-six (26) parishes, with twenty (20) of those parishes being included in the Major Disaster Declaration. Further, this event comes on the heels of the March 2016 flood event which saw flooding in every corner of the state and included thirty-seven (37) parishes in the Major Disaster Declaration. As in previous times of difficulty for Louisiana, our people have risen to meet the challenge and to help their friends, families, and neighbors – or even total strangers – begin the process of starting anew. While we do not doubt the ability of our citizens to recover, we need the help of the federal government. Thus, after careful consideration of Louisiana's needs, I ask that you consider the following requests.

- 1) **State cost share reduction.** I ask you to grant Louisiana relief from the 25% costs share from this event and for the March 2016 flood event. Given the amount of destruction from both of these declared disasters, I am confident that we will exceed the threshold of \$137 in damages per capita. In this event, we believe well over 100,000 homes were damaged or destroyed. In March, more than 29,000 homes were damaged or destroyed. Further, the damage to public buildings, roads, and bridges has been devastating. While we are still assessing damages from this flood, we know that from the March floods we have over \$20 million in damages to roads and bridges. The damage from this most event will be considerably higher. I therefore ask you to reduce Louisiana's cost share from 25% to 10%. Further, because the need to get our citizens back in their homes and communities quickly and safely is so acute, I ask that you forgive completely the state's

cost share for the the Temporary Shelter Assistance (TSA) program and the shelter in home assistance available under Category B.

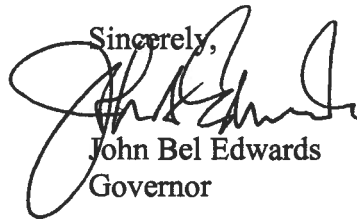
- 2) **Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funds.** As you know, this was a one in a thousand year flood event, and most of the affected homeowners did not, nor were required to, have flood insurance. The Individual Assistance funds that will be available, while critical, will simply not be sufficient to allow our citizens to rebuild their homes. Without an appropriation of CDBG-DR funds, many neighborhoods and communities will not be able to recover. I ask that you include a supplemental appropriation in your budget request to Congress to fill the enormous gap that will exist between the available funds and the costs to rebuild. Given that we are still assessing the damage to homes, businesses, and public infrastructure, I ask that you allow me to supplement this request in short order with hard data about the needs for Louisiana. Within ten (10) days, I believe I will be able to provide you with clear information about the damage assessments and specifics about the necessary federal assistance.
- 3) **Hazard mitigation funds.** Administrator Fugate has confirmed that this event will not cause FEMA to revisit its flood maps, and that those homes and businesses not in flood zones will not need to be elevated. This is a very welcome statement, which will allow for homeowners to immediately begin the process of rebuilding their homes. We do not plan to encourage or require homeowners and businesses to simply build higher. Instead, I intend to focus on large scale and community based mitigation projects. One such project is the Comite River Diversion Project. This project, which was first authorized in 1994, would have diverted a significant amount of the flow of the Comite River into the Mississippi River and away from homes and businesses in East Feliciana, St. Helena, East Baton Rouge, and Livingston parishes. The Corps reports the construction plans are 95% complete. In the First Extraordinary Session of the Louisiana Legislature this year, I approved state funds to relocate utilities. Residents have paid taxes for this project for nearly 20 years. All that remains to be funded is the congressionally authorized federal share. To facilitate this request, I ask that you allocate \$125 million to the Army Corps of Engineers to construct this critical flood protection project. Further, I ask that you further empower Louisiana and allow for inclusion of Work-In-Kind on this project. I also request that Louisiana be able to use recovery funds to satisfy the non-federal share of acquisitions of Land, Easements, Rights of Way, Relocations, and Disposals (LERRDS). This worthy and necessary project is only one part of the hazard mitigation plan that we intend to develop with federal funding and assistance.
- 4) **FHWA Emergency Highway funding.** This flooding event inundated many roadways throughout southern Louisiana, affecting interstate highways, along with dozens of state, parish, and local roads. Our Department of Transportation and Development is actively inspecting all affected roads and bridges, and it is certain the infrastructure needs will be immediate and significant. To help Louisiana respond to this disaster, the Emergency

Relief funding backlog must be cleared. By clearing this \$724 million backlog, Louisiana would be able to receive \$14 million from the March 2016 flood and up to \$25 million for this most recent flooding. Further, given the backlog, I ask that you also waive the 180 day limit on Emergency Relief funds. I also request that the state be allowed to use ER funds to mitigate roadway inundation to ensure that interstate highways remain open and available, even during future flood events.

- 5) **Title 32 status for Louisiana National Guard.** In an August 17, 2016 letter to Secretary Ashton Carter, I requested that the Louisiana National Guard be granted Title 32 USC 502(f) status for up to 2,800 Soldiers and Airmen called up in active duty in response to the flooding. I ask that you and Secretary Carter give strong consideration to this request which would allow for 100% funding of the LANG response for 30 days of service.
- 6) **Waiver of state cost share for Hurricane and Storm Risk Reduction System (HSDRRS).** While this storm was not a named tropical system, it is a stark reminder of the destruction that could be caused if a hurricane were to strike Louisiana. To protect against such a future disaster, we must restore our coast. However, the costs to do so are enormous. Because of the funding arrangement and state share requirements for the Lake Pontchartrain and Vicinity (LPV) and Westbank and Vicinity (WPV) projects, Louisiana is obligated to make approximately \$100 million in annual payments to the federal government through 2048, which will result in payments of over \$3 billion. These obligations are crippling to the state as we attempt to fund Master Plan projects designed to save the Louisiana coast. The 2012 Master Plan has a 50 year cost of \$50 billion, and I fully expect the 2017 Master Plan to have significantly higher costs. As such, I request that you grant Louisiana a full waiver of the cost share requirements for these projects. A full waiver will allow Louisiana to spend these needed funds on coastal projects to prevent future disasters. Further, these coastal protection projects will protect the federal investments in the LPV and WPV as well as the necessary infrastructure of the oil and gas industry.
- 7) **Community Disaster Loan Program.** While this is a program normally used for local governments, I request that you allow FEMA to use this program to provide needed funding for Louisiana. Because of the significant budget shortfalls I inherited from my predecessor and the low price of oil, Louisiana is in the throws of a budget crisis. Even before this disaster, we anticipated significant cash flow issues in the fall that which will be worsened and more imminent with the recent spending in response to the flood. Before this event, my administration was in consideration of floating revenue anticipation bonds to carry us through this cash flow crisis. If this loan program were to be made available to the state, Louisiana would be able to recover from this event more effectively, while at the same time getting back on sound financial footing.

- 8) **Recovery Task Force.** In the coming days, I intend to issue an Executive Order creating a task force to oversee the recovery from this flood event. Given the need for federal help, I ask that you trigger FEMA's National Disaster Recovery Framework to assist this task force in the coordination of Louisiana's recovery. Further, I ask that you delegate members of your administration from Housing and Urban Development, Homeland Security, Transportation, Commerce, and Health and Human Services to be full participants in this task force. With meaningful participation in the planning and development of programs to assist our citizens to return to their communities, our federal partners can continue to be a part of rebuilding Louisiana.

The people of Louisiana are strong and resilient. However, the severity of this flood event, combined with the other difficulties faced in this state over the last several months, is testing our spirit in ways we have not seen since the challenges posed by Hurricane Katrina. While I know our best days remain in front of us, we need help from the federal government to get us there. I ask that you please consider all of these requests and that you encourage your administration to continue its strong support for Louisiana's recovery.

Sincerely,

John Bel Edwards
Governor

cc: FEMA Administrator, W. Craig Fugate
Senator David B. Vitter
Senator William G. "Bill" Cassidy
Congressman Stephen J. Scalise
Congressman Cedric L. Richmond
Congressman Garret N. Graves
Congressman Charles W. Boustany, Jr.
Congressman Ralph L. Abraham, Jr.
Congressman John C. Fleming, Jr.