



September 9, 2016

# Oversight of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Response to the Baton Rouge Flood Disaster

Subcommittee on Transportation and Public Assets, Committee on Oversight & Government Reform, United States House of Representatives, One Hundred Fourteenth Congress, Second Session

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Regional Administrator  
Federal Emergency Management Agency  
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Rick Ramsey  
Mayor  
Walker, Louisiana  
[no available testimony]

*\* Please Note: External links included in this compilation were functional at the time of its creation but are not maintained thereafter.*

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John B. Edwards  
Governor  
Louisiana  
[\[view pdf\]](#)

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*Testimony of I.M. Shelton to the Subcommittee on Transportation and Public Assets of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform on Oversight of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Response to the Baton Rouge Flood Disaster*

The City of Central, Louisiana is a 62 square mile municipality located 20 minutes north of Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The City of Central currently has a population of 27,947 people and 11,176 households.

On August 11<sup>th</sup>, 2016, a tropical weather system began that dropped more than 30 inches of rain in less than 72 hours on the City of Central, triggering a wide spread flooding event throughout the city and Southeast Louisiana. On August 14, 2016 the rivers that serve as the boundaries for the city rose to record breaking levels. The Amite River at Denahm Springs crested 46.20ft, breaking the record of 1983 by 5ft. The Comite River at Joor Rd crested 34.22ft, breaking the 2001 record by 4ft. An estimated 80% of the households and 10% of the businesses sustained damage from the flooding. The chance of a weather system such as this was less than 0.1%. This 1000-year weather system dropped three times the amount of rain as Hurricane Katrina. This weather system caused the worst natural disaster that this community has ever witnessed.

However, the people of this community are resilient. Once the waters receded, people were working hard to remove all flood-damaged materials from their homes and preparing to rebuild. Within a week of the flood, citizens were ready to start the permitting and rebuilding process. As a government, we were ready to procure contracts for debris removal to clean our city.

We worked with both the Louisiana State Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness (GOHSEP) and the East Baton Rouge Parish's Mayor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness (MOSHSEP) to address basic questions, but there are certain questions and decisions that only FEMA can answer. FEMA's response to this disaster has caused incredible frustration. As Mayor of Central, I had no liaison or point of contact for FEMA for the 21 days following the disaster. As a local municipality, we had no choice, but to establish plans for recovery efforts to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of our citizens without guidance or assistance from FEMA. The complexity of the rules and regulations for procurement wasted hours of precious time. We sorted through processes and worked with GOHSEP to gain clarity on what would be deemed as acceptable by FEMA in order to be reimbursed. The first few meetings that were hosted by MOHSEP for the mayors of the region were the only interaction with FEMA officials that our organization had during the first two weeks of this ordeal. However, those meetings still left us with confusion and unanswered questions. When contact was finally established with liaison for our city, she was still unable to answer any questions that we had or offer explanations and insight.

FEMA's response, or lack there of, has proven that the entity as a whole is inept, inconsistent, and disorganized. It was quickly apparent that the FEMA staff in our area had a lack of training and knowledge about the FEMA rules and regulations. The majority of the staff we have spoken to stated that they were brand new to the job with only 72 hours of training. Additionally, FEMA has a high turn over rate in the people on the ground. It has become common knowledge that your first interaction with a FEMA employee is more than likely to be your last with that same employee. In a disaster of this magnitude, it is important to establish consistent contacts

and relationships as people are attempting to navigate the extremely complex FEMA process. The Mobile Disaster Recovery Center, although useful in theory, became another source of confusion and frustration. People go to those DRCs looking for answers that they cannot find through any other means. Yet again, they are faced with more inconsistencies and lack of compassion when arriving at these centers. Citizens are given standard, template answers at best that give very little clarity.

When the regional FEMA leadership suggested that we host a town hall meeting, with FEMA representation in attendance, we were elated to perhaps finally get some clear answers to our citizens. However, as the FEMA representatives arrived to the meeting, they informed us that they were not given any directives as to what was the purpose of their presence at the Town Hall discussion and what role they were to play. The unprofessionalism and disorganization is astounding and would never be tolerated in the private sector. Twelve hundred citizens of the community attended that town hall discussion and left with added confusion and frustration. The Town Hall Meeting was the first indication anyone had received that they may be required to go through a substantial damage analysis and may be required to elevate, relocate or demolish their homes. As the local government, we had not received any instructions or official information on what that process entailed. This lack of communication and clear understanding created unnecessary fear and confusion among the community. With approximately 4000 residences sustaining flood damage that were located in a floodplain, the residents and businesses alike were in a panic about the future viability of the community. The trickle-down effect is potentially catastrophic. Residents are already contemplating abandoning their homes and businesses are considering permanent closures all due to the fact that there is no consistency or clarity on forced federal regulations that can potentially be ruinous to a community. Abandonment and blight would be the least of our worries. In a small, rural community like Central, every residence and every business is vital to the health of the economy. The loss of tax revenues will have a profound affect on our education system, first responders, and any other service that the municipality provides to the citizens.

Although residents are told that the max payout that FEMA will make is \$33,000, the average payout is significantly lower in most disasters, averaging around \$5300. As a community, to be faced with the majority of the residents losing everything they owned, getting denials and minimal payouts is infuriating, especially when also faced with the possibility of having substantial damage with no real hope of additional help. The Community Development Block Grant that possibly may come a year later at best, after an arduous battle at the local level, offers no real hope to individuals that are faced with this scenario. Additionally, the process for receiving temporary housing assistance creates more exasperation for people who are given ridiculous responses to applications for temporary housing. The FEMA rule that temporary mobile home units cannot be placed in a floodplain, is preposterous when you have 4000 residences with flood damage, located in a flood plain. Each disaster should be assessed individually to waive such bureaucratic regulations, when it would be impossible otherwise to absorb 4000 households in the community in any other way. Keeping people close to their homes reduces crime and expedites the rebuilding process. Common sense measures must be implemented for the overall benefit to a community.

For a nation to send billions of dollars overseas in federal aid, yet make its own citizens fight, plead, and beg for assistance is incomprehensible. FEMA does act as an agency that is there in the midst of a disaster to help. FEMA is there to impede the progress of recovery at each and every step. Inconsistency, lack of flexibility, lack of compassion, and lack of knowledge is completely unacceptable for an organization of this nature.

**From:** Marx, William William.Marx@mail.house.gov  
**Subject:** Oversight Committee Hearing Update  
**Date:** September 7, 2016 at 9:20 AM  
**To:** Jr.Shelton@central-la.gov  
**Cc:** Howell, Mike Mike.Howell@mail.house.gov

Good Morning,

The start time for the “Oversight of the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s Response to the Baton Rouge Flood Disaster.” hearing has been rescheduled for **8:30 a.m.** this Friday. This change reflects a minor conflict with Member’s schedules. I apologize for any inconvenience this may cause, please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Thank you,  
Willie

**Willie Marx**  
House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform  
(202) 225-5074 | 2157 Rayburn House Office Building  
Rep. Jason Chaffetz, Chairman

**I.M. SHELTON, JR.**  
**MAYOR OF THE CITY OF CENTRAL, LA**

Mr. Shelton was elected to office of Mayor of the City of Central for a term beginning in July of 2014. He is a lifelong resident of East Baton Rouge Parish and has lived in Central for 38 years. Married to his high school sweetheart, they have 4 children and 7 grandchildren.

Mayor Shelton is a 1973 graduate of Louisiana State University with a BS in Business Administration. Prior to being elected Mayor, he was a successful local realtor and a small business owner for 30 years. His background includes extensive leadership roles as an Associate Member of the local homebuilders association, his home church and various business organizations.

As Mayor, he has put a strong emphasis on development and economic growth. Mayor Shelton believes in involvement of all the people, with differing views, and different passions in order to come to the right decisions for his city.

**The Great Flood of 2016: Remarks to the Subcommittee on Transportation and  
Public Assets of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform**  
**Mayor Gerard Landry, Denham Springs, Louisiana**  
**September 9, 2016**

The Great Flood of 2016 began with a flash flood on Friday, August 12, 2016. Man-made barriers in the middle of the interstate, combined with the lack of completion of a diversion canal, made the water pool quickly and prevented it from draining naturally. Homes in areas near canals and drainage ditches flooded fast and residents in those areas lost everything by noon that Friday.

By the early morning hours of Saturday, August 13, 2016 the muddy waters had begun to creep over our streets and into the rest of our homes and businesses. These waters came from the stress placed on the Amite River—a second cause of our flooding. By noon, City Hall had 3 feet of water and it continued to rise to 4 ½. Many structures that had never flooded before had water up to the rooflines. Before the end of the next day, 4 trillion gallons of water had fallen in South Louisiana due to a thousand-year rain event. That’s enough to fill 6 million Olympic-sized swimming pools, or to provide the City of New Orleans with indoor water usage for the next 320 years. In the end, these two causes of flooding left ninety percent of the homes and businesses in our city under water.

Even as a storm rages against us, nothing can stop the citizens of South Louisiana. It did not take long before the “Cajun Navy,” as we call it now, came out in full force. Friends and family from all over our community performed search and rescue missions in their bateaus and bass boats. Strangers from across the state and all over the nation came to lend a hand. The Lord blessed these rescue efforts and we thank Him that very few lives were lost. Our faith, our families, and our friends got us through those deep waters.

As the waters receded, we began to assess the damage. We quickly realized that the waters did not respect the lines drawn on our flood maps. In the greater Baton Rouge area, 160,000 properties were flooded.<sup>1</sup> Most of the families whose homes were flooded were uninsured, because their homes were not in a flood zone. Therefore, we must rely on FEMA to assist us in getting back into our homes.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency’s mission statement says that it exists “to support our citizens and first responders to ensure that as a nation we work together to build, sustain and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from and mitigate all hazards.” We are thankful for this partnership and FEMA’s assistance, but thus far, FEMA has had very little impact on our community and has not fulfilled the totality of its mission.

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<sup>1</sup> Ballard, Mark. *Understanding FEMA Flood-Recovery Programs, Why You're Not Getting 'Thousands of Dollars' Immediately*. The Advocate; September 2, 2016.  
[http://www.theadvocate.com/louisiana\\_flood\\_2016/article\\_70ccea8-7136-11e6-b6cf-7719e44e945f.html?sr\\_source=lift\\_amplify](http://www.theadvocate.com/louisiana_flood_2016/article_70ccea8-7136-11e6-b6cf-7719e44e945f.html?sr_source=lift_amplify).

We are angered by the lack of effective response from FEMA, by the lack of accurate and timely information given to the citizens FEMA is designed to help, and by the requirement that the majority of the homes and businesses in our community elevate in order to receive assistance.

My frustration stems from the fact that FEMA is applying strict, generalized rules to a flood of epic proportions. Nothing like this has ever happened in Denham Springs, nor in any of the many other areas impacted by these waters. It is unlikely that a flood of this magnitude will ever happen again. Yet, FEMA continues to treat this event as if it were a routine, localized flood that affected a small number of individuals.

It seems that the rules imposed by FEMA are intentionally designed to prevent our citizens from obtaining the assistance they desperately need—the same assistance promised when their tax dollars were used to fund this program. We, as a community, opted to participate in FEMA’s National Flood Insurance Program in exchange for the assurance that FEMA would be there for us when disaster struck.

#### Lack of Timely Response

We expected help from FEMA to arrive quickly. Or, at the very least, we expected that FEMA representatives would come and assist us in beginning the process of applying for federal aid. After all, a fully-staffed, full-time FEMA Joint Field Office exists in downtown Baton Rouge, just seventeen miles from our City Hall. A short twenty-six minute drive.

But FEMA aid did not come quickly. We waited for five days before the first food and water deliveries were made to our city by FEMA. It took two weeks for a FEMA representative to contact me about setting up a Disaster Recovery Center within the city limits and it was nineteen days after the flood began before it opened.

This is unacceptable. FEMA promises aid and relief in times of great need. But FEMA has not delivered, and has only made our struggle more difficult. FEMA must evaluate its practices and procedures in order to ensure a quick response in times of great crisis. FEMA must efficiently and effectively utilize its vast resources and already-existing field offices in order to meet the needs of our communities. To date, this has not happened.

#### Lack of Accurate Information

In addition to failing to quickly lend assistance, FEMA has failed to deliver critical information to our citizens in an accurate and timely manner. Just last week, after I was invited to speak to this Subcommittee, four FEMA representatives appeared at my office to ask how they could help. I asked all four of them the same question: can residents living in the City of Denham Springs have FEMA RVs or mobile homes to live in while we rebuild? All four of them responded, “no.”

Gerard Stolar, FEMA's federal coordinating officer, testified before the state's House committee on Homeland Security that FEMA was "running into red tape" with cities.<sup>2</sup> There is no red tape in the City of Denham Springs. At the first City Council meeting shortly after the flood, our City Council made it clear that they were suspending the ordinance preventing recreational vehicles from being parked in our citizen's yards. Further, any ordinances FEMA requires the city to suspend in order for it to provide our citizens with the assistance they need will be suspended. To date, FEMA has not asked us to alter, amend or suspend any of our city ordinances, nor have they asked us to provide assistance in any other way. Time and time again, FEMA has not only been unable to assist us in meeting its stringent criteria, but has also placed the blame for their inefficiency and failures on our city ordinances.

In addition to misinformation at the city government level, FEMA is providing misinformation to our citizens. Mr. Clyde Meyers, a ninety-year old resident of Denham Springs, was told by FEMA two weeks ago to clear his yard of debris in preparation to receive a FEMA mobile home. After accomplishing this task, Mr. Meyers was told by FEMA that our city ordinances would not allow him to put a mobile home in his yard. FEMA also told Mr. Meyers that a mobile home could not be placed within a flood zone, despite the fact that FEMA lifted this ban last week. I am outraged that our citizens are being forced to fight with FEMA to receive assistance promised to them.

Failure to accurately and timely disseminate critical information essential to our recovery is unacceptable. Clear communication before and during a crisis would prevent this situation from occurring. FEMA must, at the very least, provide its employees with accurate information to give to the citizens in the affected communities. FEMA must provide qualified, experienced personnel to assist community leaders in making the adjustments needed in order for their communities to qualify for FEMA assistance. I am confident that FEMA can improve the lack of communication and provide qualified, experienced employees to assist us in recovery. I ask that they do so immediately.

### Substantial Damage and Elevation

The most frustrating part of our experience with FEMA thus far has been navigating the substantial damage determination process and elevation requirements imposed under FEMA's stringent rules. FEMA is blaming the City's ordinance for the requirement that homes within the city that were substantially damaged be elevated to a foot above current base flood elevation. FEMA spokeswoman Robin Smith has publicly stated that elevation decisions are up to local governments. The local governments write their building codes, she said, not FEMA.<sup>3</sup> She conveniently forgets the fact that FEMA required the city to pass this ordinance in order for its citizens to be eligible for NFIP.

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<sup>2</sup> Allen, Rebekah. *Two Big Reasons Why Just 1 FEMA Trailer Is In Place After Louisiana Flooding*, The Advocate, August 31, 2016. [http://www.theadvocate.com/louisiana\\_flood\\_2016/article\\_63028fc6-6f9c-11e6-9a68-a3f30012eae4.html](http://www.theadvocate.com/louisiana_flood_2016/article_63028fc6-6f9c-11e6-9a68-a3f30012eae4.html).

<sup>3</sup> Griggs and Hardy. *Where You Live Could Determine Whether Permits or Elevation Required for Flood Damaged Homes*. The Advocate; September 3, 2016. [http://www.theadvocate.com/louisiana\\_flood\\_2016/article\\_dc70f312-7081-11e6-a10c-bbd74487cd6b.html?sr\\_source=lift\\_amplify](http://www.theadvocate.com/louisiana_flood_2016/article_dc70f312-7081-11e6-a10c-bbd74487cd6b.html?sr_source=lift_amplify).

FEMA's blanket rule, to be applied to all situations, states that in order for a community to participate in the National Flood Insurance Program, the community *must* adopt and enforce regulations and codes that apply to new development in Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHAs) and to structures that are "substantially damaged."<sup>4</sup> The FEMA Substantial Improvement/Substantial Damage Desk Reference defines "substantial damage" as follows: "**Substantial damage (SD)** means *damage of any origin sustained by a structure whereby the cost of restoring the structure to its before-damaged condition would equal or exceed 50 percent of the market value of the structure before the damage occurred. Work on structures that are determined to be substantially damaged is considered to be substantial improvement, regardless of the actual repair work performed.*"<sup>5</sup>

Due to FEMA's requirement that the city pass such ordinances in order to participate in the NFIP, the City of Denham Springs passed an ordinance using FEMA's definition of "substantial damage." The City of Denham Springs had only two options: to leave its citizens paying outrageous amounts for flood insurance, or to pass this ordinance at the direction of FEMA. As Denham Springs is a city that, until recently, had never sustained damage from flooding of this magnitude, the City chose to pass the ordinance required by FEMA. Our hands were tied and we did exactly as FEMA instructed us to do. We used FEMA's own definition of "substantial damage" in our ordinance.

In effect, this rule means that the vast majority of homes in our city, most of which have never even come close to flooding before, must now elevate in order to obtain the assistance they need to return home.

Elevating homes is not something that is unfamiliar to South Louisianans. We've seen the blight it causes to major cities and can only imagine the blight that it will cause in our small town. We've been eye-witnesses as this requirement has taken its toll on New Orleans, Kenner, Metairie, Gretna, and more. Many homes in these areas remain abandoned, some with spray painted "X's" still on the doors. Many remain in various states of disrepair while they wait for grants to elevate and rebuild, eleven years after Hurricane Katrina made landfall.

This is not a problem that is unique to South Louisiana. We've watched as it's caused the abandonment of many homes on the East Coast following Superstorm Sandy.<sup>6</sup> The effects of FEMA's stringent rule can be seen in almost every area of our nation that has experienced a catastrophic flood. This rule is a broken one, which has devastating consequences that I am sure its drafters never intended. Its effects worsened when this rule is unquestioningly applied to a city that has never seen a flood of this magnitude; to families who, before last month, would have bet their lives on the fact that their homes would never flood.

An example of one such family is Mr. and Mrs. Hewitt Underwood. Mr. Hewitt is a WWII Coast Guard Veteran who served his country proudly in the Pacific Theater from 1943 to

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<sup>4</sup> FEMA Rule P-758.

<sup>5</sup> FEMA Substantial Improvement/Substantial Damage Desk Reference. FEMA, May 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Vanacore, Andrew. *A Look Into The Future? Hurricane Sandy Victims Still Struggling To Rebuild Amid Red Tape, Crooked Contractors.* The Advocate; September 2, 2016.

1946. After he returned home from the war, he married his bride and they built a life together in the town their families had called home for 200 years. In 1957, they built a home on land on which the Underwood family had lived for 100 of those years. They built their home on this property in order to pass the family's legacy on to their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Their roots are firmly planted in Denham Springs soil.

At 90 years of age, having survived the Great Depression and WWII, Mr. Hewitt experienced the Great Flood of 2016. Last month, the waters on his property exceeded any flood he had ever had known by at least five feet.

A proud veteran, Mr. Hewitt turned to his country for assistance. All he has requested is assistance in repairing his home so that he and his bride can spend their remaining years in the home they built together. Rather than receiving much-needed assistance, Mr. Hewitt was met with long lines, brief meetings and explanations of why he can't receive assistance until he meets a myriad of confusing, complicated regulatory requirements. Even if he meets these requirements, the assistance he so desperately needs is not guaranteed. If Mr. Hewitt is required to elevate his home it will cost around \$100,000, a cost almost equal to the value of his home. He, like so many others, will be forced to abandon his home if he is required to elevate.

All of his life when help was needed, whether by his country or his community, Mr. Hewitt was there. Now, in the twilight of his life, he needs his country to be there for him. And his country is letting him down. The system is broken, and it must be repaired.

The time to act is now. The experiences of Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Gustav, along with Superstorm Sandy, have proven to everyone that elevation requirements imposed on an entire city will cause communities to crumble and blight to take hold. Elevation requirements imposed in the aftermath of a flood of epic proportions, a flood which was largely caused by man-made barriers and uncompleted drainage projects, are absolutely unnecessary for mitigation. The majority of the structures that will face elevation requirements will be a distant memory before a thousand-year flood of this magnitude occurs again.

We are not asking for FEMA or their Flood Insurance Administration to waive requirements for new construction in our city. We are pleading with them both to waive the current "substantial damage" determination process and elevation requirements in the wake of this unique, unprecedented event that will not happen again before these buildings return to dust. These requirements have failed to serve as they were intended in the past, and they are sure to fail again.

It is within FEMA's, or their Flood Insurance Administration's, power to grant this request. FEMA should take this opportunity to address the substantial damage requirement that has been a recurring issue in every unique, catastrophic flood event. To fail to do this will permanently damage our recovery.

FEMA has historically created pilot projects to deal with unique catastrophic events. We ask that they use this catastrophic disaster event as a pilot project to change the substantial damage determination process and elevation requirement.

Please, Congressmen, don't make us wait for FEMA to fix the broken system that they have proven they are unwilling to fix. The rules, regulations, policies and laws that are causing our frustrations and inability to rebuild were designed to apply to events considered to be a 100-year flood or less. This event was a 1000-year flood. What we are asking you to create is an exemption from the rules, regulations, policies and laws for any event that exceeds the 100 year statistics. Anything exceeding the statistical 100-year flood these rules were designed to address should not trigger enforcement action.

Let me be clear about one thing—the people of Denham Springs and of South Louisiana are resilient. We are strong. We will continue to help each other and to rebuild. These flood waters will not destroy the heart and soul of our city. However, FEMA, the FIA and Congress must do their part as well. If FEMA continues to enforce strict, generalized standards that have repeatedly proven ineffective to this flood of historic proportions, our city will be unable to rebuild and will fall into blight because of the actions of FEMA. Instead, FEMA must, as its mission states, support our citizens.... to ensure that as a nation we work together to ...respond to, recover from and mitigate all hazards.” I urge you to consider this request as quickly as possible, and I appreciate your time today. Thank you.

### Biographical Information

Gerard Landry was elected as Mayor of Denham Springs on November 4, 2014. Prior to running for office, Mayor Landry was the owner and manager of Landry's Markets, Inc. for seventeen years. He is the former District Manger for National Supermarkets, a position in which he oversaw twenty stores in three states with nearly one thousand employees. He is the former Director of Retail Development for Associated Grocers.

Gerard Landry served his country as a member of the U.S. Army's 4013<sup>th</sup> Garrison Unit. He attended Louisiana State University, served as a member of the Denham Springs Planning and Zoning Commissions, Livingston Parish Council on Aging, the Livingston Parish Chamber of Commerce, the Denham Springs Athletic Association and the Krewe of Denham Springs.

Mayor Landry is a member of Immaculate Conception Catholic Church and serves on its Administrative Council. He has been married to Marian Miller Landry for thirty years. They have seven children and thirteen grandchildren.



OFFICE of the GOVERNOR

JOHN BEL EDWARDS

**Written Testimony on the “Oversight of the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s Response to the Baton Rouge Flood Disaster”**

**Subcommittee on Transportation and Public Assets of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform**

**Governor John Bel Edwards, State of Louisiana**

*As prepared for delivery*

**September 9, 2016**

Chairman Mica, Ranking Minority Member Duckworth, and Members of the Subcommittee on Transportation and Public Assets:

I want to thank you for the opportunity to be here today to serve as a voice for the incredible people of Louisiana – who happen to be the most resilient people I know.

First, Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for taking the time to travel to Louisiana to witness this devastation first-hand. It’s hard to imagine what the people of Louisiana are going through without seeing it for yourself, so we thank you for bringing attention to the disaster.

Last month, an unnamed storm dropped over **7 trillion gallons** of rainwater in South Louisiana, flooding more than 100,000 homes and claiming 13 lives. Roughly 30,000 search and rescues were performed, with 11,000 citizens sheltered at the peak of the flood. There were 19,900 Louisiana businesses and 278,500 Louisiana workers disrupted by the flood.

To put the truly historic nature of this flood into perspective, some areas of Louisiana received more rain than the equivalent to the amount of water discharged by the Mississippi River into the Gulf of Mexico over the course of 80 days.

It was a 1,000 year storm that left three times as much rain in Louisiana as Hurricane Katrina did 11 years ago.

The storm didn't have a name, but every person it affected does. Homes and businesses that had never flooded before were suddenly under water. Many families lost everything – and not just their homes. They lost priceless possessions that no amount of assistance can ever replace. Entire communities were uprooted. Children were left without schools to return to and thousands of small businesses – the cornerstone of these communities in South Louisiana – were destroyed.

As of just yesterday, nearly 140,000 households have registered for assistance with FEMA. Our early, and it is still early, estimates show at minimum an \$8.7 billion loss for the state of Louisiana as a result of this flood event. To put a dollar amount on the devastation, thus far, the federal government has distributed nearly half a billion dollars in housing assistance to the people in my state who lost their homes.

The flood waters did not discriminate. Neighborhoods of all shapes and sizes were left uninhabitable. And the story is the same whether you live in the more populated Baton Rouge or rural Lake Arthur where their residents stepped up to build a flood wall all on their own. The miles upon miles of sheer destruction is hard to imagine, but it's heartbreaking to see as you walk the streets in Southeast and Southwest Louisiana.

As the flood waters rose, I requested a federal disaster declaration for the affected parishes. Within hours, that initial request was granted by President Obama, and within the next 48 hours, 20 Louisiana parishes received major federal disaster declarations. At times, we were working both response and recovery as waters receded in some places yet caused more flooding in others.

Twenty-six parishes granted in this declaration joined an additional 36 parishes declared a major disaster just last March in the first round of historic flooding Louisiana experienced in the last eight months. Right now – 56 of Louisiana's 64 parishes have received a federal disaster declaration as a result of March and August flooding this year alone.

Recovery from a disaster of this magnitude takes time and an abundance of resources. I am grateful for the help we have already received from FEMA and our federal partners, and the outpouring of generosity from people across the country has been unparalleled.

Thanks to the quick response of the federal government, we received word yesterday that the federal portion of the cost share will be adjusted to 90 percent of the costs associated with this disaster, as opposed to the customary 75 percent. I can tell you, there is not a state in the nation, in my opinion, where this will have such a significant impact as in Louisiana.

And from the moment we began monitoring this storm, the federal government has been alongside us to help. FEMA representatives were on the ground with our emergency preparedness team to streamline the disaster response coordination with the federal government. I have had the opportunity to meet with Administrator Craig Fugate on several occasions, and Tony Robinson, who you'll hear from today, traveled to **every single parish** affected by this flooding with me as we worked both on the response and as we transitioned to recovery.

While I am grateful for the quick response we have received from this flooding, I am under no illusion that the response has been perfect. I urge FEMA to ramp up the delivery and installation of manufactured housing units in Louisiana. While the response with manufactured housing units has been quicker than any other Louisiana disaster, it has not been fast enough for the families in Louisiana who have lost their homes and have no place to go.

Nearly one month after this flooding began, 662 families have been approved for manufactured housing. However, only 48 manufactured housing units are currently in the process of being installed.

I am asking FEMA to explore ways in which it can expedite the MHU process to ensure that those who have been impacted by this flood can transition into a stable living environment.

I recognize that this isn't the FEMA of 11 years ago, but we can always learn how to best serve those in need. We can always improve upon our response to

disasters. And we can always strive to make times of disaster easier on the people who are impacted.

Flood waters in Louisiana touched places that never before flooded. This has put many of our local communities and homeowners – who were in compliance before the flood – in the untenable position of not being able to afford to rebuild their own homes, even though the flood maps will not change as a result of this event.

Louisiana has learned from the aftermath of other weather events, like Superstorm Sandy, how to effectively mobilize from response to recovery as we work to address the housing needs of individuals and families displaced by the flood. Our state has implemented an innovative housing program called “Shelter at Home.”

The Shelter at Home program enables eligible individuals or families whose homes were damaged to take shelter in their own homes while they rebuild if up to \$15,000 of work in that home can create a safe, secure, habitable place for the family to live while they continue their permanent home rebuilding.

The focus of this program is simple – we want to get people back into their homes and communities operating as quickly as possible. This program doesn’t make a home whole or fully repaired, but it does help families get a jumpstart on their full recovery. Louisiana is operating the Shelter at Home program in partnership with the federal government, and we have had more than 17,500 homeowners register for this program in the two weeks since we launched it, indicating a real desire for Louisiana families to return home and to a sense of normalcy.

It is within this framework that we have traveled to the nation’s capital to secure much-needed assistance in our state’s recovery efforts.

I am calling on Congress to support a supplemental appropriation of \$2 billion of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to allow for additional public investments in housing, economic development, and resilient infrastructure. Louisiana’s housing need is projected to exceed \$1.2 billion alone. With an outlook of \$3 billion in economic loss, and preliminary estimates of \$8.7 billion in damages, not including public infrastructure loss, a \$2 billion request in CDBG funds is a necessary first step to rebuilding Louisiana. Simply put, we cannot recover without this assistance.

I am also asking Congress to clear the \$724 million backlog of Federal Highway Administration emergency relief funding to ensure that Louisiana can effectively manage the rebuilding of infrastructure crippled by the flood. Rising flood waters forced the closure of over 200 highways statewide including every interstates except one. There were approximately 30 state roads that were washed out as result of the flood. By clearing the emergency relief funding backlog, Louisiana would be able to receive \$14 million from the March 2016 flood and up to \$25 million for this most recent flood to help address our critical infrastructure needs.

Although this was a 1,000 year flood event, it is imperative that we protect our state and its citizens from more extreme weather events in the future. To that end, I am requesting \$125 million in funding for the Army Corps of Engineers to fully fund the Comite River Diversion project, which has been underway for nearly 20 years yet never completed. The completion of this project, coupled with the completion of the Amite River Basin study, will allow our state to rebuild communities in a safer and more resilient manner.

I also believe that is it critically important to address the social service needs of Louisiana families, particularly children, who have suffered through the trauma of this disaster. The ability of our state to provide quality mental health and support services to disaster-affected populations is crucial. To that end, I am requesting a supplemental appropriation of \$92 million in Social Services Block Grant funding to provide support services to the vulnerable individuals and families affected by this disaster.

Louisiana **will** move forward. The resilient spirit of our people never ceases to amaze me, but we still need help to truly recover. We have a long road ahead of us to meet the diverse needs of our citizens, communities, economy, and infrastructure. I look forward to working with Congress, with the support of Louisiana's Congressional Delegation, as well as with this administration and the next to ensure that our great state fully recovers from the historic and unprecedented flooding that has turned too many lives upside down.