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Floor statement on Sandy Supplemental

*Excerpts of the Statement of
U.S. Representative Christopher H. Smith
Member of Congress
Floor Remarks, U.S. House of Representatives
Jan. 2, 2013*

Mr. Speaker, this two-tiered amendment disaster relief bill we had hoped to bring to the floor to get us to the \$60 billion is so desperately needed to assist families, businesses and municipalities devastated by Superstorm Sandy. Our appeal—and it's a bipartisan appeal—is that there is still time to bring this vital legislation to the floor for a vote and then down to the President for signature.

Numerous towns in my district in New Jersey, as well as our friends in New York and further north, are still coping with and recovering from the most destructive storm ever in our region—and perhaps the second or third most costly in all of American history.

Today, families lack housing, businesses are in shambles, and municipalities have been decimated.

According to New Jersey Governor Chris Christie's office:

- 346,000 housing units were damaged or destroyed—with 22,000 units rendered uninhabitable. An estimated 11,000 Housing Choice Vouchers will be needed to ensure that residents have a roof over their heads this winter;
- Approximately 100,000 new storm-related unemployment claims have been filed in New Jersey;
- Over 235,000 people have already registered with FEMA for individual assistance;
- 75 percent of New Jersey's small businesses were adversely affected—10 percent of which, or nearly 19,000 businesses sustained damage of \$250,000 or more. Total business losses are estimated at a whopping \$8.3 billion;

- An estimated 10,000 structures statewide will need to be demolished and 1,000 sites across New Jersey will require remediation after hazardous material discharge;
- 51 schools sustained serious damage—including 6 that will not reopen this school year;
- Transit, roads and bridges have been damaged to the tune of \$2.9 billion, which includes 294 damaged rail cars and 74 damaged locomotives;
- One of the main roads that runs through my district—Route 35—will require an estimated \$120 million to repair;
- Power and gas line repairs are expected to cost roughly \$1 billion, understandably given that at the peak, power outages left 2.4 million New Jersey citizens in the dark;
- Waste, water and sewer will require around \$3 billion to repair and protect; and
- Hospitals, assisted living and other health facilities have seen over \$153 million in storm damage.

These facts—and there are many more—underscore the devastation unleashed by Sandy, and it is without precedent.

I would say to my colleagues that no recovery is ever accomplished in a single year, but it is the predictability and certainty of funds to rebuild and restore that ensures that the work proceeds immediately, comprehensively, efficaciously and without interruption.

For days and weeks, like many of my colleagues, after the storm hit, I met hundreds—even thousands—of tenacious women and men who despite crippling losses were happy to be alive and determined to rebuild. I'll never forget one resident of Belmar who came up to me the day after Superstorm Sandy and said, "I've lost everything, but at least I'm alive."

We need to now backstop these individuals; we need to ensure that the moneys are there, that they flow quickly to ensure that they can rebuild, and their homes or businesses and the municipalities that have done a yeoman's work in helping them all gather and unite behind them.

Congress assisted those pummeled by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 with \$62 billion in a mere two weeks, we are now past two months and we need to be clear; the President didn't send this up until December 7, there was a loss of several weeks, but we do have a bill. It's about 25% less than what the states said they needed; they said about \$80 billion, it's down to approximately \$60 billion, so it is less. And I've seen and gone through the numbers that our state has sent to this body as well as to the President. They are very well vetted. Chris Christie used to be an attorney, many of the people around him are all former prosecutors. They hate waste, fraud, and abuse, and they're trying to ensure that the money is there in the amounts needed to make a difference.

Finally, let me just say, Mr. Speaker, we need to act. As my colleague before me said a moment ago, New Jersey, New York, we are contributing states. We get back less from the federal government than we pay in every year...

But we've been devastated, and I would hope the Speaker would bring this to the floor as quickly as possible because the people who have suffered—the victims—deserve no less.

