



STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA  
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EARL RAY TOMBLIN  
GOVERNOR

September 14, 2016

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

Dear Mr. President,

As you know, on June 23rd of this year West Virginia experienced devastating floods across more than 20 percent of our state's counties. Four counties were critically impacted and a State of Emergency still exists in those counties nearly three months later. This flooding proved to be one of the most deadly, if not the most deadly, natural disaster in the country this year. Twenty-three people lost their lives in what experts have labeled a "thousand year flood." The velocity and ferocity of the water wiped entire communities off the map, and uprooted and mangled water and waste water systems, highways and countless other public infrastructure components.

You and your administration responded within hours of my request for a national declaration. You mobilized federal resources in seemingly record time. Millions of dollars in individual assistance has already been distributed to triage the needs of West Virginians throughout the flood impacted areas. I am very grateful for both your personal concern and the responsiveness of your entire administration, particularly the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

At the same time, Mr. President, the path to successful and sustainable long-term recovery in an area of West Virginia that had already been struggling through economic upheaval will require even further support. Most of the areas devastated by these floods were towns and communities that had been reliant on coal. That industry's downturn has

left most of them with no capacity to build back on their own. These areas typically now have populations that are older and often poorer. Many of the flood-impacted regions were outside the flood plain and, as a result, most victims were without flood insurance. Even within the business communities affected by the floods, the ability to recover on their own is limited. Of the 1,200 businesses registered with FEMA as impacted by the flood, only 145 applied for loans with the Small Business Administration (SBA) and only 62 have been approved for loans to date. Unfortunately, the SBA loan approvals are not reflective of need; it simply is an acknowledgment that the vast majority of the affected businesses were already leveraged to a point where additional debt is unsustainable. Most of these businesses have fewer than 10 employees; but nevertheless they are important drivers in those community economies.

Because of these real concerns, I am asking for your support of a Congressional appropriation of CDBG-DR funds for West Virginia and that the appropriation be approved during the September session. Based on the information thus far, I believe \$310 million of CDBG-DR funds for investments in housing, economic development and public resilient infrastructure will be necessary for the sustainable and effective recovery of our state.

The recovery plan for West Virginia represents an atypical strategy. It recognizes not only the unique challenges associated with rebuilding in an area that has limited developable land in a rural and mountainous region of Appalachia, but it also acknowledges that dramatically depressed economic conditions require us to reposition and reinvent these communities in a way that will make them sustainable for our citizens and give them hope of economic diversification and opportunity.

We believe that unmet needs in housing repairs and replacements, which are typically far greater than FEMA verified estimates, could easily exceed \$160 million. Historically, 15 to 20 percent of the residents in a flood zone don't register with FEMA. We have no reason to think this event is any different. In spite of that, to date 4,436 homes have been registered with FEMA. More than 1,400 homes were destroyed and more than 2,300 had substantial damage. In order to receive help in many cases, those homes now must have their foundations raised to a level that lifts them out of the flood plain. In most of those cases, doing so is simply economically unfeasible for the homeowner or the value of the home won't justify it. While nearly 1,000 homeowners had some form of flood insurance, it is proving inadequate for many of them. It also appears that most of the flooded homes were outside the identifiable flood plains and were without flood insurance.

The challenging topography of the affected area of West Virginia will make the development of new neighborhoods outside the flood plain extraordinarily expensive. The identification of appropriate sites in this region is challenging, even on a limited basis. We will need to acquire or modify significant tracts for this undertaking. All new infrastructure will be required and because of the depressed income levels, subsidized construction will be an essential element.

Our initial estimate as to the economic impact in the communities affected could easily exceed \$75 million. More than 50 businesses were destroyed, just fewer than 200 were severely damaged and many businesses that are reliant on the tourism industry were closed during the peak of their season. An example of the scope of the impact is The Greenbrier, which was forced to cancel a PGA tournament, as golf courses were destroyed and the hotel became a shelter for affected residents even while it remained closed to the general public with limited power. The loss of business in the surrounding area alone likely reaches tens of millions of dollars.

While the calculation of damage to public infrastructure continues, it would appear that the non-compensated loss of public infrastructure and the improvements necessary to create resiliency in this region could easily exceed \$200 million. The public school system alone had 35 schools damaged, six likely beyond repair including two high schools.

A more general overview of the impact paints a challenging picture:

- Widespread damage in the disaster area affecting 5,130 homes and businesses, where 73 percent of all FEMA applicants incurred some form of the FEMA verified loss (FVL);
- FEMA estimates that the average grant award for each applicant will be less than \$9,000;
- Close to 90 percent of the impacted homes and businesses did not have flood insurance at the time of the disaster and will not have resources they need to rebuild to the higher codes and standards they need to stay out of harm's way;
- Approximately 75 percent of homes damaged by this flood were deemed unsafe after inspection;
- Hundreds of miles of state and local roads remained under water for extended periods. Estimates indicate more than 1,300 sites on state roads washed out, 123 bridges were damaged with 15 destroyed, and more than 1,100 were inspected;
- More than 250 roads were closed during the event and sections of Interstates 64 and 79 were damaged;
- Along with the many road closures during the event, estimates of \$56 million in road and bridge damage, plus non-reimbursable costs for inspections and administration;
- 1,153 disaster related unemployment claims have been filed;
- Approximately 1,300 businesses have inquired about assistance due to the impact of this disaster;
- More than \$8 million in stream debris clearance is underway, but likely twice that much needs to be devoted to stream restoration and bank stabilization.

I understand that your support of this request does not eliminate the responsibility on our state's part to be smart, efficient stewards of the tax dollars with which we would be entrusted. We have organized a team within my administration that is experienced in

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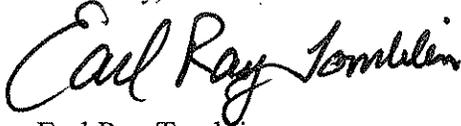
documenting and meeting compliance requirements of funds like those we are requesting. We understand that every dollar's impact must be maximized. We recognize the state must also participate financially; and, to that end, I am asking our Legislature next week to allocate \$75 million toward our match of FEMA's assistance.

We also understand that we must utilize the funds we receive to minimize the impact of future weather events, regardless of how rare they may be. That is not an insignificant challenge in the mountains and valleys of Southern West Virginia. It will require us to modify habits and habitats that often extend generations in this region of the state.

As we rebuild infrastructure, we will be sensitive that our strategies must reflect new realities in its scope. Population shifts have changed the size and ability to sustain much of our public education and support community infrastructure in this region. Recreating and strengthening the technology infrastructure that ensures access to reliable broadband for individuals and businesses in this rural area must be a priority and will be essential if we are to be able to give them an opportunity to compete and thrive.

To be successful for the long term, we know we must look around the corner to begin reinventing these communities and local economies. But I have great confidence in the spirit and determination of West Virginians to do what is necessary to overcome obstacles, regardless of how challenging they may be. It will not be easy, but with your support it will be within our reach.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Earl Ray Tomblin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Earl Ray Tomblin  
Governor