

coverage on television and turn people's gaze away from Texas, to Florida and now to the devastation in Puerto Rico, the mayor's concern makes some sense.

But I want to assure Mayor Freeman—as I know the Presiding Officer would, and as we would to our friends in Florida and the east coast, who were hit by Hurricane Irma, or our friends in Puerto Rico, who were devastated by Hurricane Maria—that we will not forget and that we will stand together to make sure that the Federal Government plays its essential role in helping them recover and in helping them restore their lives.

But I also remember another civic leader, Mayor Becky Ames of Beaumont, and what she said to me right after the storm. Smiling, she declared:

We had a downpour; now we have an outpour. The outpour is coming right into our city.

That is what we saw time and again. Yes, the Federal Government responded. Yes, the State responded, led by Governor Abbott and emergency operations. Yes, the mayors and the county judges responded. But the truth is neighbors helped neighbors. We talked again. I sort of chuckle when I think about the Cajun Navy, but our friends from around the country, including next door in Louisiana, came to help pluck people off the tops of their flooded houses and places of business, and of course many people have lent a helping hand.

I think it is best to combine Mayor Freeman's concerns with Mayor Ames's optimism. In other words, we need to make sure that outpour she was speaking about continues. I know the outpour hasn't dried up places like Friendswood, TX, where the Presiding Officer and I helped Team Rubicon clean up some of the houses that were trashed by Hurricane Harvey. We joined the Speaker of the House, PAUL RYAN—and we are delighted he saw fit to come join us in this effort—as well as the chairman of the House Appropriations Committee and virtually the entire Houston congressional delegation.

We also know the outpour has not stopped in places like Aloe Elementary in Victoria, a school that was severely damaged by the storm. There I saw second graders get packages from their counterparts in West Lafayette, LA. The school may have temporary walls. Certain classrooms and hallways had to be cordoned off as the building continues, but these “Aloe-gators”—the school mascot—are permanently grateful for the help they are getting from children from Lafayette, LA, and Cumberland Elementary in Indiana.

I think we owe it to these youngsters—and the many other Texans we met with in Victoria, Friendswood, and Houston—to explain what we here in Washington are doing to address the storm, which, let's not forget, rained down more water—34 trillion gallons—than any storm in U.S. history. I think

they are wondering if we remember the sheer scale of the disaster zone—an area larger than West Virginia, Delaware, and Rhode Island combined. We want to assure them that the answer is yes.

We have been working hard trying to match the scale of the storm with an appropriate congressional response. Here are just a few of the ways in which the Federal Government has responded:

First, the President—and we thank him for his leadership and initiative—issued a major disaster declaration under the Stafford Act, which is the trigger for the Federal Emergency Management Agency's, or FEMA's, public assistance grants to be provided. This is, to be clear, not a handout. Each State is responsible for part of the cost. Secondly, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers conducted infrastructure assessments and assisted with State debris management. Third, FEMA has coordinated with the American Red Cross and other local governments to find and provide temporary housing for the displaced.

As I said, these are just a few of the ways the administration has been responding. I realize they are just on the first step. That is why last week I led a bipartisan letter, along with my colleague in the Chair, calling upon the Department of Housing and Urban Development to speed up allocation of relief funds. We were able to appropriate, and the President signed into law, a \$7.4 billion allocation for community development block grants, or CDBG funds, that Congress has decided are appropriate as a downpayment on the recovery from Hurricane Harvey. These CDBG funds, community development block grant funds, will help Texas communities repair their infrastructure, rebuild schools, and reopen the businesses that are integral to recovery. I might add, given Texas's contribution to the national economy, it is really important not just to folks in Texas, this is important to the country that we get our businesses back on their own two feet, opening doors, and helping contribute to the economy while they continue to create jobs.

I am grateful to my colleagues for moving with such dispatch in appropriating the funds. I know Congress's quick action can quickly be undone by delays at the bureaucracy level. We need to make sure that doesn't happen. On the State level, Governor Abbott has announced the Commission to Rebuild Texas, which will be led ably by Texas A&M System Chancellor John Sharp. I met with Chancellor Sharp last week in Texas, and he assured me the commission will be traveling around the State and working to prioritize projects to help restore roads, bridges, schools, government buildings, and impacted communities. The Texas delegation will be working with him as we focus on our response. I know we all look forward to working with the commission and Governor Ab-

bott in the months to come. It will be months, if not years, before the recovery will be complete.

One additional way we can help victims is through targeted tax relief. I want to highlight in this regard a non-controversial section of the Federal Aviation Administration reauthorization bill that House Democrats blocked yesterday. It contained a number of disaster tax provisions, like those that were passed after Hurricane Katrina, that will help hurricane victims get back on their feet. It is unconscionable that the House minority leader held that relief hostage to cater to the most extreme elements of her own political party. If we were talking about earthquake victims in San Francisco instead of hurricane relief in Texas, Florida, and Puerto Rico, surely she wouldn't be playing politics like she is now with this important hurricane relief package.

Spearheaded by Chairman KEVIN BRADY, the legislation would have helped victims keep more of their paycheck, deduct more of the cost of their property damage, and have more immediate access to their retirement savings without penalty. It would also have encouraged even more Americans to generously donate to hurricane relief.

It is imperative the House act a second time later this week to overcome the objection of Ms. PELOSI, to make sure hurricane tax relief is delivered to those in need on a timely basis and without further delay. Shame on those who would play politics with the sort of relief the President and we have all committed would be forthcoming in response to these terrible hurricanes, whether it is Harvey, Irma, or Maria. The fact remains that Federal, State, and local actors will have to continue to work side by side to make sure Texas is made whole again.

Colleagues, let's keep Mayor Ames and Mayor Freeman in mind. Let's remember that those still recovering in their communities and elsewhere need and deserve our support. Let's make sure Texas resembles the home we all have come to know and love following this terribly devastating hurricane.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:37 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. PORTMAN).

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2018—MOTION TO PROCEED—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I wish to talk about the latest attempt from my