

The Virgin Islands Consortium

White House Requests \$44 Billion In Disaster Funding For States And Territories; Mapp Says White House Has Reaffirmed Its Commitment To USVI

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The Trump administration has submitted its third emergency disaster funding request for states and territories affected by this year's storms. But the request, \$44 billion, is being criticized by mainland government officials whose states were affected by the storms, with Republican senator John Cornyn of Texas calling the ask "wholly inappropriate."

If approved by Congress, the \$44 billion in disaster aid would bring the total funding so far to almost \$100 million. The latest request includes \$25.2 billion for FEMA and Small Business Administration (SBA) disaster programs, \$1.2 billion for emergency agricultural

assistance, \$1.2 billion for an emergency education fund, and \$12 billion for community development block grant funds for flood mitigation projects.

The White House also announced that it would be sending a fourth major supplemental disaster bill to Congress at the end of the year, after additional damage assessments are completed by federal agencies.

Government House issued a release coinciding with the White House announcement. It revealed that Governor Kenneth Mapp met with Vice President Mike Pence and U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Director Mick Mulvaney earlier in the day. Government House said Mr. Pence and Mr. Mulvaney both reaffirmed to the governor that the Virgin Islands would receive all of the federal resources needed to recover from Hurricanes Irma and Maria, including funds to harden its infrastructure and make its essential facilities more resilient to withstand future storms.

Mr. Mulvaney also affirmed that the Virgin Islands is eligible for funding for all the programs included in the latest supplemental request, noting that the request was not the final numbers for any of the affected states or territories. According to Government House, Mr. Mulvaney committed that funding for the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico would also be included in the supplemental disaster bill to be sent to Congress at the end of the year, after FEMA and the Army Corps of Engineers complete their damage assessments in both territories.

Government House said Mr. Mulvaney explained that it takes the federal government 60 days to assemble initial recovery cost estimates and up to 90 days to verify recovery numbers. He said that the supplemental included money for disaster response and initial recovery activities in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, but, because Hurricane Maria was more recent and federal assessment was ongoing, the additional disaster funding for areas affected by Maria will be included in the next supplemental at the end of the year after the assessments are complete.

Mr. Mapp praised what he described as the federal commitment to the Virgin Islands and other storm-ravaged areas of the United States. "As I testified earlier in the week before the House and Senate hearings on disaster recovery, there is not [a] country on earth that responds to the needs of its citizens better in the aftermath of a natural disaster than the United States," he said. "I have been given every assurance by the highest officials of our national government that we in the Virgin Islands will be provided all of the resources we need to not only recover, but to build back stronger and better."

During his trip in Washington, the governor has met with the congressional leadership, including Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, Speaker of the House Paul Ryan, House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi and key members of the House and Senate appropriations committees and tax-writing committees, according to Government House. The governor was slated to be on the mainland for two weeks.

Mr. Mapp also commended Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett for her efforts in Washington. "The Delegate has been doing an excellent job in Washington advocating for our needs in the Territory and working with my recovery team," he said.

