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Sens. Kennedy and Cassidy Urge Governor Bryan to Pay Louisiana Businesses

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A home on Bordeaux Mountain in St. John damaged by Hurricane Irma. By. Ernice Gilbert for the Virgin Islands Consortium

WASHINGTON, D.C. — U.S. Senator John Kennedy (R-La.) and U.S. Senator Bill Cassidy, M.D. (R- La.) announced last week a decision by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to expedite the funding process for the U.S. Virgin Islands to pay Louisiana contractors who provided immediate aid after Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

After two hurricanes devastated the U.S. Virgin Islands in 2017, Louisiana businesses were hired to provide relief and repairs to families who experienced home damage. Their work provided families with safe, clean homes immediately after the disaster, the release said.

However, many of these Louisiana contractors are still waiting on millions in past due payments for their work and have begun laying off Louisiana employees. Some of these companies have even filed for bankruptcy. Earlier this year, Sen. Kennedy joined the Louisiana delegation in sending a letter to Gov. Albert Bryan requesting the continuation of work towards a solution to paying the contractors and the scheduling of a second “strike team” meeting to iron out bureaucratic hurdles that have impeded payment, the release said.

New FEMA funds are expected to be released in the coming weeks, but there is a growing concern that significant bureaucratic hurdles remain and will, again, delay payments to Louisiana businesses, the senators said.

“Louisiana businesses have waited long enough and are dying on the vine as a result of all of this,” said Mr. Kennedy. “Now it’s up to Gov. Bryan to ensure that this funding is directed towards Louisiana contractors who badly need these funds to pay their workers before Christmas and keep their doors open. We’ve left these contractors in the lurch for far too long, and enough is enough. I’m optimistic that Gov. Bryan is aware of our dire situation and will remove any remaining obstacles in the coming days.”

“Louisiana contractors rushed to help the U.S. Virgin Islands recover in the aftermath of Irma and Maria. Two years later, they have not been paid,” said Mr. Cassidy. “This funding is intended for Louisiana contractors. Gov. Bryan making these payments is vital for these firms to remain open and able to aid in future disasters.”