



**RICK SCOTT**  
GOVERNOR

January 3, 2018

Chairman Thad Cochran  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Room 113  
Washington, DC 20510

Vice Chairman Patrick Leahy  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Room 113  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran and Vice Chairman Leahy:

Following the devastation of Hurricane Irma, and now with hundreds of thousands of families coming to Florida who have been displaced by Hurricane Maria, our state has continued to fight for a full recovery. As I travel the state each day, one thing has been clear - Floridians are strong and resilient. However, it is imperative that we as a state see relief from Congress in the aftermath of these storms. Now that the House passed a significant relief package prior to Christmas, the Senate must act immediately to lock in this critical funding for Florida and ensure the full recovery of families in our state and across the country.

In October, I visited Washington D.C. to meet with Congressional leadership and members of the Florida Delegation on the urgent need to help our citrus industry. Last month, I also spoke with Speaker Paul Ryan to advocate for this vital industry in Florida. Florida's iconic citrus industry was devastated by Hurricane Irma, which only compounded the effects of citrus greening that we have been aggressively battling for years. I appreciate the House's efforts in ensuring Florida citrus receives the support it needs and now it is absolutely critical that this supplemental relief package is immediately passed in the Senate to save our citrus industry. I hope to see Florida citrus receive its fair share based on the documented \$760 million in losses from Hurricane Irma.

Additionally, it is critical that the \$12 billion proposed for the Army Corps of Engineers in the disaster relief package is eligible for Florida to use for needed repairs to the federally-operated Herbert Hoover Dike. In addition to ongoing environmental impacts due to discharges from Lake Okeechobee, Hurricane Irma forced me to order the evacuations of tens of thousands of people living south of Lake Okeechobee due to the risk of dike failure. In fact, the water from the Lake reached dangerous levels and overtopped during the impacts of the storm. The risk to public safety during a hurricane, or any major weather event, is too high to delay repairs any longer. Even with continuous freshwater releases into our saltwater estuaries, the Lake's water level remained at an increased threat level of more than 15.5 feet for 105 consecutive days following Hurricane Irma. If additional storm or hurricane impacts would have been felt in this region in the following weeks, the high-water levels in the Lake would have forced the state to consider mass evacuations of thousands of families in communities surrounding Lake Okeechobee in Palm Beach County.

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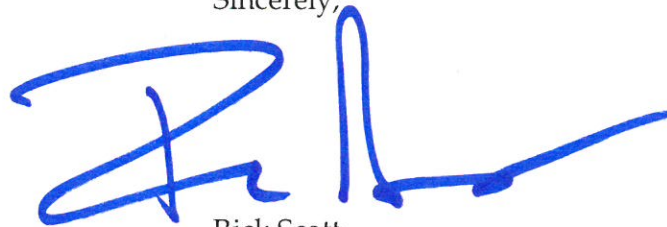
Despite the Herbert Hoover Dike being a federally-operated project, I fought for and secured \$50 million in state funding to help expedite repairs this year. I am also asking for another \$50 million in state funds to continue expediting this process in next year's state budget. The importance of this project cannot be overstated.

Lastly, following the devastating effects of Hurricane Maria in the Caribbean, Florida has welcomed many displaced families from our friends and neighbors in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. I support the funding for emergency impact aid approved by the House for displaced students so our school districts are better able to educate students who have come to Florida. I also support the prioritization of English Language Learner students, a program which will help many students from Puerto Rico, and builds upon my proposal to institute an English Language Learners Summer Academies program in Florida. Florida Commissioner of Education Pam Stewart will be traveling to Washington, D.C. in the upcoming weeks to meet with Senators to express her support for funding in this bill and the significant impact it will have on Florida's school districts. Additionally, I support aid for our colleges and universities since they have stepped up to enroll and provide in-state tuition to displaced students.

Finally, I was proud to have Florida enter into a formal host state agreement with the federal government to support the accommodation of those displaced by Hurricane Maria. As the only state willing to do so, it is my expectation that as additional needs are determined, this supplemental funding will be available to provide assistance. I have traveled to Puerto Rico twice and have been in constant contact with Governor Ricardo Rosselló since the storm hit to make sure they know that Florida will continue to do all we can to help. As Puerto Rico continues this massive recovery effort, it is also very important that there is adequate federal funding for the island to rebuild.

The House passed a meaningful relief package, and I urge the Senate to act immediately.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Rick Scott', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Rick Scott  
Governor

cc: Members, Senate Appropriations Committee