

Governor DeSantis (09:43):

Well, hello, Good morning. We're, uh, really excited to be back on Sanibel Island. For those of you who haven't been out here since the storm, you obviously see a lot of damage, but I can tell you as someone that was here, you know, a couple weeks ago, you're also seeing a lot of progress. You're seeing a lot that's being done with the power and the underlying infrastructure, a lot of the debris getting in much better shape than it was immediately after the storm. And so we're, it's great to see all these, these lights and these power trucks and everything that we've seen going on here. We were happy to be able to bring a lot of that over on the causeway. And we're looking forward to, you know, we said when we were doing the causeway, that the, uh, individual civilians would have access, uh, by the end of the month.

Governor DeSantis (10:29):

Uh, we now have a date that's even before that. And believe me, um, I'm pushing them to, to do it even earlier cuz we know how important that's gonna be. But we were able to take a boat ride coming over here, seeing the progress that they made, that they've made on that causeway is really, really great. And, uh, you know, it's, it's just instrumental in bringing, bringing our, our islands like Pine Island, which we did first and then Sanibel, bringing 'em back to life. And if you look at what we have in Pine Island, for example, uh, they have basically restored power almost a hundred percent at this point. There's some places that can't receive it because of damage, but if you had looked at how the damage on that island right after the storm, seeing that bridge washed away, and then to say less than three weeks later, you would not only have the bridge repaired, but you would have the, the power system restored.

Governor DeSantis (11:19):

I don't think a lot of people would've taken that bet. So we appreciate everyone that's been involved in that. Uh, we're also glad to be here today with our, uh, fire rescue folks. I do have Dane Eagle Secretary of DEA with me, uh, Kevin Barbot, Sanibel Fire and Rescue, uh, District Chief Captiva Island Fire Control District Chief Jeff Pawul and Upper Captiva Fire and Rescue District Chief Jason Martin. Uh, we also have, um, our mayor. Where's the mayor at? Is she here? How good. We've been working hard and so, so many other people that have really been working hard to, uh, to, to deal with what's been a very difficult circumstance. It's obviously a very powerful storm. It did historic damage, but then when you're in a little island and, uh, it's not that easy to get to when you don't have that causeway operating people have been very, um, uh, they've used a lot of ingenuity.

Governor DeSantis (12:13):

I see that. You see these little makeshift ports that have developed. People are coming in and, uh, really I think the effort has been fantastic and that that's the difference between getting an island, um, that's suffered a blow to bounce back to life. Or maybe having an island just kind of toil away and never be the same. And so I think that quick attention has really been instrumental in, um, in what we've seen with the progress so far. But it'll even be more instrumental, uh, when we start looking out six months to a year from now, wondering, well, what would've happened had we not done some of the things that we've done in the, in the beginning. We also were, you've seen the work of all the first responders during the aftermath and really the lead up during an aftermath of this storm. And we've recognized that in Florida, of course, for a long time.

Governor DeSantis ([13:03](#)):

We did two years in a row through the legislature, we got approved \$1,000 bonuses for all police, fire and EMTs in the state of Florida. And so we had done that, sent the checks last year. This year, budget became effective. The summer, obviously there's bureaucracy involved, you work on that. Checks started going out in September, actually, maybe even August, but also September. And checks were being sent to Sanibel and Captiva and all these places as the storm was brewing. And so they didn't end up making it to their intended recipients. So I told Dan, I said, You know, I know there's a lot of other things going on, but, uh, we don't want these checks to get lost in the shuffle because these guys are out there working. A lot of them may have had damage to their own homes, and we promised that they would get the bonus and we've gotta deliver.

Governor DeSantis ([13:54](#)):

So he's worked hard to make sure that we got the checks recut and ready to go to be able to distribute to our first responders here. And there were, um, already four, There were about 400 recognition checks that, that were in fact, in the mail, uh, when this happened. And, um, we were, those have been tracked and we know what we need to do. So Dane has worked very hard. And so today we've got the thousand dollars, uh, payment checks, the bonuses to first responders who've been working tirelessly after this hurricane. This, um, because we understand the, the tax man as a part of life, the goal is for you to net a thousand dollars. And so I think the checks are for like, what, 1300? They're a little bit more than \$1,300. And so, uh, you will definitely take home a thousand dollars and maybe even more depending on your tax bracket.

Governor DeSantis ([14:44](#)):

So we have our folks from, uh, that worked right here on Sanibel Island, and it's gonna really be an honor to be able to present those checks to those folks, uh, for working so hard. So, great job guys. Uh, we know there's a lot more work that's gonna need to be done and your community counts on you, but you've, uh, stepped up. We also, uh, I've reminded, uh, talking with some of the folks, the chiefs in there, we just did \$2 million from the Florida Disaster Fund to first responder organization. So we did \$500,000 each to the charitable arms of the Florida Sheriff's Association, Florida pba, Florida Fraternal Order Police, and the Florida Professional Firefighters. So what that is intended to do is basically help their members recover from, from the hurricane. So you may have some people that had had damage to their homes, maybe they get insurance and everything's fine.

Governor DeSantis ([15:36](#)):

Okay, well then maybe they don't need that. But maybe if someone else was living in a place, they said, You don't need flood insurance. So you have the, the normal homeowners, your house floods, maybe you're not covered. Maybe you fall through the cracks on some of these policies. Uh, that's gonna be money that'll be able to help people repair their homes or with other things that will help kind of get them to be, uh, working hard in, in a better piece of mind and just take care of things while they're taking care of us for so many things. So those organizations are all working to get that money out. They're trying to develop criteria for how they're gonna do it, and they'll be other needs other than just someone's home. But we wanna make sure to recognize that as folks are out here helping their communities, it's not like you're magically because you wear a uniform immune from hurricane damage yourself.

Governor DeSantis ([16:23](#)):

And a lot of people have had a lot of different losses. I have been a, I've been able to speak to some of the, some of the major, um, uh, car dealers in Florida. And, you know, there is an effort, uh, to steer some more cars to this area because we know a lot of people lost their cars. Used to be you needed a car, you went to the dealership, you bought a car. Now, uh, these things are in much short, shorter supply. So that's a challenge. So we are seeing that, but we also understand that, uh, that there's gonna be a lot of folks who need that just given how many cars flooded out. But our, the Florida Disaster fund.org has raised, I think about \$45 million now. And I know there's a lot more on the way. We're gonna have some good announcements on that.

Governor DeSantis ([17:03](#)):

So I want to thank the first lady, my wife, for doing so much to really get people invested in this recovery and in helping, uh, the communities. You know, it's great to say, Oh, we had all this power, uh, equipment stage, turn the power back on quicker than most people thought was possible, building these bridges quicker. And that's great and we want to be rapid with it. But I think the flip side of that is sometimes people think like, Oh, well, things are getting done. There's not necessarily, there may not be as many needs on the charitable. No, there's a lot of needs on the charitable. And so we want to continue doing that. So we're, uh, gonna have more announcements about how that fund is helping the affected communities in the coming days. And I look forward to being able to do that. Um, and actually the, uh, uh, my wife was just at Harley Davidson in, um, uh, I think in Jacksonville. And they are now selling a Florida Hurricane Relief T-shirt, Harley Davidson t-shirt with all proceeds going to the Florida Disaster Fund. So we appreciate businesses stepping up and doing that. And that is Florida disaster. Uh, fund.org, Florida disaster fund.org if you want to help. So, uh, Dane's gonna come up here, uh, we'll hear from the, uh, the other folks here involved with, uh, fire rescue. And then we will, uh, we will hand out, uh, the big mula to everybody. Okay. All right.

Dane Eagle ([18:24](#)):

I really just wanna thank the governor for his leadership on this issue amongst many others during, uh, hurricane and recovery, which we are, uh, all hands on deck and boots on the ground, making sure that that's happening. But as the governor mentioned, you know, we announced the first responder bonus payments, uh, several weeks ago in Jacksonville. And here we have Hurricane Ian that just, uh, distorted where they were going, some loss in the mail. Obviously FedEx couldn't get on the island to any of these islands. Uh, so we're gonna be the FedEx delivery today and hand these out, not only in person for the, uh, the folks on the island fighting to make sure that we've got cleanup and recovery happening, but other pockets of Southwest Florida. So if you're missing your check, uh, we're gonna get it to your chief by week's end and make sure you have this money in your pocket to help with recovery.

Dane Eagle ([19:02](#)):

But the governor's been, uh, spot on when it comes to helping to make sure that we are focused on what's needed. Uh, being a southwest Floridian, seeing lights, power, water, bridges, reopening, and record time, it's amazing to see, an honor to be a part of that. But even more an honor just to help serve those people, our first responders, our firefighters primarily here today, who are fighting day in, day out, to help make sure that we are getting up and recovered quicker than ever. And also mention the hometown hero's down payment for, uh, first home assistance that the governor announced several months ago as well. So, any firefighters, teachers, nurses, uh, veterans who need assistance buying a home. We're working with Florida Housing and Finance Corporation to help with your down payment assistance. Uh, obviously some people are gonna be rebuilding their homes, but if you need a new one, come talk to us to make sure that we can help you with that. And thank you again for the governor, for

your leadership and to everyone here today for all the work they're putting in for this community. Thank you.

Governor DeSantis ([19:55](#)):

Okay. All right. Uh, Sanibel Fire Rescue District Chief Kevin Barbot.

Kevin Barbot ([20:03](#)):

Thank you Governor. Thank you Members of this administration, everybody that could be here with us today. Uh, the timeliness of this relief check couldn't come at a better time. Uh, Sanibel Fire has, uh, done a pivotal role here on our island to make sure that we were involved in all aspects of search and rescue, all aspects of, uh, now restoring our island and welcoming people back to, to our community. Uh, many of our team members pushed aside their own, uh, devastation of their own homes to ensure that we were covered, excuse me, to ensure that we were covered and we had staffing and we were taking care of this community. Our team is, uh, welcoming this first responder check from our great state of Florida, as it will lessen the burden of the financial impact that this has caused on their personal levels, whether that be on, uh, uh, insurance, deductibles, or whatever may come with it.

Kevin Barbot ([20:50](#)):

There was a lot of devastation, a lot of loss from our team. Sanibel Island guests and residents are blessed to have a fire district with a crew that has shown more love, compassion, resiliency, grit and determination for our island than anyone can comprehend. And what has happened over the last three weeks, Our team has worked endlessly and given all to forge ahead as we rebuild and grow our community together. Sanibel Fire and Rescue District is and always has been committed to our community. We are ready to serve and restore our island sanibel. We look forward to welcoming you home at the end of the week. Thank you.

Governor DeSantis ([21:26](#)):

All right. Captiva Island Fire Control District Chief Jeff Powell. Thank you, Jeff.

Jeff Pawul ([21:38](#)):

Good morning everyone. Um, I'd like to just start by saying thank you to Governor Ron DeSantis, uh, Dane Eagle and the whole state of Florida for the support that you guys continually show and provide to the whole public safety community, not just firefighters here on the islands. Um, I can say how hard my crews that stand here before you, how hard they worked those days after the storm. Um, as Chief Barbot said, many of them whose homes were also destroyed, and they are out here 24 hours a day, uh, working to get these islands safe, doing search and rescue and getting us back up and running. Uh, cause that's what we do. Um, so, you know, it's an honor to be recognized the second year in a row. Um, as the governor said, two years in a row by someone outside of the community. Um, none of us get into this profession looking for recognition.

Jeff Pawul ([22:26](#)):

That's not what we do. Um, we do this career because we love it and we want to help people. Um, but at times like this, um, it feels really good to know that the, the state of Florida is standing next to us and everything that we do, um, like myself, many of the firefighters standing here before you, um, and their families were severely impacted by this hurricane. Um, as we work tirelessly to rebuild our home and serve our communities, uh, these thousand dollars bonuses could not have come at a better time. So, on

behalf of the members of the Captiva Island Fire District and the community of Captiva, uh, we sincerely wanna say thank you to Governor DeSantis, um, for always having the backs of first responders in Florida.

Governor DeSantis ([23:07](#)):

Thank you. Thank you. Okay. Upper Captiva Fire and Rescue District Chief Jason Martin.

Jason Martin ([23:18](#)):

Thank you, Governor. Yes, we've been blessed. Uh, the North Captiva Island community has been blessed because there have been no injuries and no fatalities, thank goodness, uh, through this horrible and epic storm. I've had several firemen come in from out of state cut vacation short because they felt the need to come and help that community. Their response made all the difference in the early days there. And I can't say enough about them. Uh, we've been there from the beginning once the storm was identified to planning our response for that protection for the community in the short term and relief afterwards. There's many phases to this event. I think it's been said a lot that this is going to take a very long time to recover from this. These checks from the state administration, the governor's administration, the legislatures, are physical proof that these responders are held in high regard and valued. My staff can be a lot more effective knowing that they have their communities, their state support. And we thank you for that generous support. Not only one time, but as a second time having that first program come out before this, this is not storm related. This was the state's commitment to its responders before this program. And echoing, uh,

Jason Martin ([24:51](#)):

The chief's sentiments, the timing couldn't be any better, any better. I have no firemen. My men and women, every single one of them has been affected by this storm at home. Yet they come on, they pick up extra time, they put that extra effort in to make their community safe and still be able to take care of their families. Again, I thank you the legislature. I thank you Governor DeSantis and your administration, sir. Yeah, absolutely. I really appreciate it. Of course. And be on behalf of my men and women. Thank you very much. Okay.

Governor DeSantis ([25:26](#)):

All right. Well, I think we've got, uh, we can pass out some checks now. So do you want to just gonna read 'em off and you guys 'em off want to come, uh, say, Well, why don't you stand right there. You got it. Then you guys just come right in front of here and I'll hand it to you.

Speaker 7 ([25:39](#)):

\*hands out checks\*

Governor DeSantis ([28:04](#)):

So we're, you know, looking around the island, you know, as you're coming up on the boat like we did today, and having been here before and seen, you know, a lot of the devastation, it's um, you know, not a great sight to see, but at the same time, you know, you can tell that underneath all the trouble and underneath all the debris, lies a really special piece of property. It's a beautiful piece of property, and it's gonna be a place that that is gonna come back to life, uh, and not gonna necessarily happen tomorrow, next week, next month. But, but it's gonna happen. And we're gonna make sure we continue to have support. We continue to help, uh, help with the efforts because I know how important, not just here,

Sanibel Captiva, but the other communities that were affected, uh, how important. Those mean not only the the region, uh, but to the entire state of Florida.

Governor DeSantis ([28:53](#)):

So I just wanna thank everyone who's been a part of it. We said that we would do the causeway, uh, for civilians by the end of the month. Then we, we were able to move that up and, uh, uh, I'm moving to have that that sooner. So just stay tuned. You never know when we're gonna be able to pull the trigger on that, but as soon as we can do it, uh, you're gonna have that. And, um, I think if we were sitting here, it wasn't even three weeks ago, uh, cuz the storm hit three weeks ago tomorrow, But if we were here the day after the storm, not even three weeks ago, and someone said, you know, that three weeks later, you know, you'd be having cars go back over that after seeing the destruction, I don't think a lot of people would've thought that that was something that, that that was likely.

Governor DeSantis ([29:35](#)):

So, uh, we want to keep up that momentum, but I do want to thank everybody that's been working on that project because reuniting, uh, Sanibel to the mainland's gonna be a big, big deal. It's gonna help the efforts. You saw how great it was to get those trucks on the temporary basis over here. You've seen such great things happen and I appreciate everyone on the, on the water, but like, you gotta be able to do that. And so to have people come work on their homes, help doing all that stuff, uh, I think that that's gonna be really, really wonderful. So I'm looking forward to be able to welcome the general public back, uh, to the island very soon. Okay. Any questions?

Question ([30:11](#)):

Be my first question. Are we gonna meet that deadline? And it sounds like we definitely,

Governor DeSantis ([30:17](#)):

I'm gonna get a, I'm gonna get an update when I leave here. But, um, you know, our view is, you know, set an ambitious goal, but try to beat the goal. And that's what we've done on all these things. And I think that's what'll happen here.

Question ([30:28](#)):

Governor, this may sound trivial.

Governor DeSantis ([30:43](#)):

So yeah, so, so the question was about, uh, people are having issues with like internet. Some of the Comcast I was in, in Northport, but I talked to a fellow from Charlotte County and he was talking about some of the, the problems that they've had. So here's, uh, and Kevin Guthrie can give you more information, but basically what's happened is some of those fiber lines were severed as a result of the storm. They have repaired some of them, but with the debris removal and some of the other things going on, that is aggravating some of those, those fiber lines. And so they're, they're, they're working on it. I ask Kevin to give me a timeline, talk to all the companies involved, and then see if there's anything we can do at the state level. Maybe, maybe clear the way in the meantime, you have at these places, the, the Elon Musk star link is at, uh, a lot of these places.

Governor DeSantis ([31:31](#)):

So if there's a pod here, we have it. The fact that most of the internet has been restored in other parts of the state, we have been able to collapse some of those devices. So I'm asking Kevin to look at, if we want to deploy the Elon Musk devices on a community basis, like in different neighborhoods, what would that look like? How would we be able to do it? Because my sense is there's some parts that have just been out of internet. There's some parts that have it, maybe it's a little more spotty than you like, but at least you have some connectivity. But there's still some neighborhoods that, that have not had Comcast reconnected yet. And look, that's just the way our lives are. It's like, you know, it's not as important maybe as the power, but it's pretty close because so much stuff is tied onto that. So Kevin Guthrie is, is looking at ways that, uh, we can help, uh, facilitate that, that going forward. But I do think that there are underlying infrastructure issues with the fiber lines is why some of those areas haven't been connected yet.

Sanibel Mayor Holly Smith ([32:40](#)):

Well, I think first of all, thank you governor. And I can't say enough about the governor and all his staff and what he's done for this island in southwest Florida. Every place that's been impacted to think three weeks later, as he said that we are standing here today, we're gonna have a causeway that's open. We want people to come across and be cautious. Our life is gonna be different, but mainly we need to bring our community back. We need to get our families back here. We need to get them the help they need so we can get this community regrowing. Again, it's gonna be a marathon, not a sprint, but every little piece you talked about, the internet, I mean, people work from their homes. So those are the next pieces. Getting our power up, making sure it's safe for everybody to get back here and live and rejoin the community. And that includes our business community as well, because we need our business community for our residential community to thrive. So a lot of next steps, we're taking them one day at a time and can't thank the governor enough for all the work he's done to get us where we are. A mere three weeks after one of the most major disasters that has hit our, hit our state. So thank you.

Governor DeSantis ([33:43](#)):

Yeah, and I just, I mean, I think, look, it's, um, you know, we're gonna have, we're actually getting into the time now where a lot of the, the snowbirds come back down. Uh, the fact that they're gonna be able to get back on and if they haven't had a chance to look at their property to do that, you know, some of the, the new construction was, was very good in terms of the roofs and everything, but you know, if you were right there, you know, who knows how much water, uh, was in the house and how much damage. So there's just a lot of stuff I think, for people to take stock on. And I really appreciate the folks in the marine, uh, community who've been ferrying people back and forth. But, you know, that's not, that's tough and that's not conducive to getting all the people back to be able to look at their property.

Governor DeSantis ([34:22](#)):

So this causeway is really, really significant. So we're looking forward to be able to see those cars on, I mean, I remember when we were here, uh, earlier actually last week when we were, had the power trucks ready and we thought maybe by three o'clock that afternoon they'd be cleared. And they got cleared earlier and literally as we were speaking, they started going across the causeway. That was a great site to see. And you see the difference it's made because I, uh, uh, for those of you who were here right after the storm, I mean there was, uh, uh, it was, it was tough. I mean maybe more overall damage here than, than anywhere. When you account for all the, the vegetation, how many power lines were snapped or power utility poles, power lines, you know, Fort Myers Beach, as bad as that got hit, the main utility power was intact and they didn't have it on because they didn't want first responders to, to get, uh, electrocuted while they're trying to help people, rightfully so.

Governor DeSantis (35:17):

Uh, but that basic thing, and the substation actually did very well, um, here in Sanibel a lot of those poles, I mean, I've never seen so many poles down. So this is a major thing. They've made huge progress and we just want to keep that momentum going forward. And I do think the, when people see the progress, it boosts the morale and it gets people to, you know, realize, you know, all hope is not lost. You don't want to go into one of these things where everyone just ends up, down in the dumps and act like that, that it's never coming back. And so I think the consistent progress has been good and we just want to continue that. Governor,

Question (35:50):

I tried to anticipate questions from have responders on beach. Were they able to get their checks at day?

Governor DeSantis (35:59):

They got 'em. Yep. They got 'em. Yep. And he's also got, so Dane, um, we have the Sanibel police, right? So you're you're working on that and we're gonna Yeah, yeah. So we're gonna get, we're gonna get those distributed. He's like, you know, how do you wanna do it? I was like, just get it to him. I was like, just get it to 'em as quickly as possible so you guys are linked up and you'll be able to do that. And I think that that'll end up being really, really good. You know, these things are in reality when we did the bonuses uh, last year, we did it partially because they were defunding law enforcement in other parts of the country. And I'm like, wait a minute. You know, these are the guys that any time anything goes wrong, you need first responders. Not just police, but fire and emt, especially during Covid.

Governor DeSantis (36:42):

And so we're like, this is insane. So we're gonna show that we support. And so we did those payments and we sent it out to checks and most of the guys would come up to me and say, you know, honestly the money's nice, but it's really just showing that the community, the state supports what we're doing. And that was really why they appreciated. And I think that's still true, but I do think right now, particularly in this region, given all that's happened, uh, this is gonna be a great little lifeline for people because they've had to kind of put their own interest aside to do the job for the public. And that may mean they haven't been able to take care of everything they need to with their property or their affairs. And so this is a little bit, I think is gonna come at the right time.

Question (37:20):

Governor, you touched a little bit on people who have water damage, blood damage and maybe their policies don't cover that, or they didn't even realize that was something that they would need to get for. Do you have an idea what scope of that?

Governor DeSantis (37:33):

Not, not yet. I mean, I think that that's gonna be the big question. And you know, there's sometimes someone can buy a home, maybe they're in a flood plane, they opt against it. I think in this case you had areas that were flooding that traditionally don't flood. They would've qual they qualified for their mortgage without needing to get to get flood insurance. And I don't think it was trying to be irresponsible. If someone tells you it's not something that you're likely to see, then okay, like you insure against risks that are, that are uh, possible to happen. Uh, so we don't know yet. Uh, I do know though the fact that we got approved for individual assistance from fema, people that suffer those flood losses



without flood insurance, they do get an award from FEMA and they're entitled to that. It is not likely gonna be enough to, to do what insurance would do.

Governor DeSantis ([38:15](#)):

Uh, but the fact that we got approved from that is a big deal on the first responder with the awards we did for the Florida Disaster Fund, One of the reasons we wanted to do that is just for those situations. You know, you may have a police officer or firefighter who, uh, homeowner policy may not cover rising water and flood and they were told they didn't need flood. And so maybe they have \$50,000 in damage that's not insured. Well the, they can now get potentially grants from these organizations that can help do that. So I think that that is of course gonna be an issue just because the flooding and it's not just in this part of the state. I mean, you go interior into the parts of the state, there were areas that flooded that had never flooded before. I mean, people had been living there for 40, 50 years and say, I'd never seen anything like it. So we'll get a sense of that I think as the weeks go on. But bottom line is Florida Disaster Fund, that is one of the reasons why we're trying to raise money cuz we understand there's gonna be needs that may not fit into every wicket of fema, uh, flood policy, homeowner's policy. And that's just the nature of the beast. So. Okay, we are gonna see you guys very, very soon about this causeway. I don't know when yet, but I am gonna make sure it's very, very soon. So stay tuned. All right.