



**Statement of  
Senator Peter Welch  
Remarks as Delivered  
Fighting for Supplemental Disaster Recovery Funding for Vermont  
June 17, 2024**

Madam President, the U.S. has had 75 major disaster declarations since July 2023. Just last week, a flood tore through Southern Florida. It's only a matter of time before another state is hit. This "natural disaster caucus" is growing, and it's growing quickly. It's a caucus none of us want to join, nor do we ask to join but instead are forced into it with a single mission: to help our constituents – our communities who have been through unimaginable suffering and pain – get the resources that they need.

Vermonters know all too well the immense toll a natural disaster takes. It takes it on our community and our economy.

Madam President, nearly one year ago, Vermont experienced nonstop rain over a period of several days. It led to flash flooding, washouts, and mudslides all across our state. It was brutal. Homes and businesses and farms, and public infrastructure were damaged, and many were destroyed. It was an all-hands-on-deck moment. Neighbors helped neighbors dig out.. From the municipal level to the federal government – we tried to help people get back on their feet. And we did get back on our but the damage - if it was your home, if it was your business, if it was your farm - is still lasting.

I have come to the Senate many times since the floodwaters receded to share stories of Vermonters. Their stories are of resiliency through hardship. Vermonters have stories of community, and grit, and determination. And I'm proud of course of Vermonters but I believe this is the case of communities across our nation.

But our recovery – despite that - is far from complete. Madam President, I'll say it loud, clear, and directly: Vermont needs more recovery money. What happened to these families, to these businesses, was an act of nature no fault of their own, but they deserve a shot to get back on their feet.

As I revisit communities that were hit hard by flooding —places like Barre and Johnson, Hardwick, Montpelier, Ludlow, Londonderry — it's clear that work to recover from this flood will last for years. There are home and business buy-outs that are stalled, farmers that need help, and resiliency projects that need to get done before the next flood comes. And it will be coming.

Madam President, we need supplemental disaster funding, and we really do need it now. The funds need to be flexible so that our communities — in Vermont, in Hawaii, in

Texas, in Florida, in California, in other states — can use the funds as needed for their recovery to their unique needs. A flood and a fire require different recovery strategies, and that should be reflected in the funding. That's why the Community Development Block Grants for Disaster Recovery are so critical. They are flexible. They are local-led. These funds give the communities the flexibility needed to rebuild and recover, allowing them to prepare for future disasters and safeguard their communities. Senator Schatz has been a fantastic partner in this and I'm thankful for his leadership as Subcommittee Chair on the Appropriations Committee.

Madam President, last week, the Joint Economic Committee's Democratic Majority released a new report on the economic cost of flooding. The findings are really stunning. Flooding will cost \$180 to \$496 billion, each year.

These costs are probably an undercount. They are only a fraction of what our communities truly endure as we recover from a flood. I encourage my colleagues and everyone listening to read this report — see for yourself how climate change is ravaging our economy. There are obvious ways that flooding costs our economy: structural damage to our homes and farms and businesses, schools, transit systems, and more; infrastructure upgrades needed to protect against future flooding; and the direct and indirect commercial impacts from flooding.

But then there are the costs that you might not consider: costs associated with flood-related deaths; decreased tax revenues; increases in insurance premiums; crop loss, among the many other costs.

This should be an alarm bell. It should give pause to every one of my colleagues in the Senate and the House. Because every state could be the next victim of the severe weather that is all about us as a result of the change in our climate. Vermonters know it all too well.

But, there is good news. We can do something to mitigate these costs. Another recent analysis found that for every \$1 spent on flood resiliency efforts saves up to \$318 in flood-related damages. It's a pretty good return on investment.

If you want to talk about cost-saving measures, resiliency funding should absolutely be paired with recovery funding for natural disasters. We need to build back in a more resilient way after natural disasters hit, not build back in the same way for it to be done all over again. I was just in Brattleboro on Friday, where I saw a new FEMA-funded floodplain restoration project. It's terrific. A similar project helped downtown Brattleboro avoid damage during the July floods, and will hopefully help the community avoid flooding in the future when the rains come again. We cannot rebuild in the same way and in the same place, and hope for the best. The reality is that climate change is here, and it is unpredictable. We need to do more to make our homes, farms, and communities more resilient.

Gone are the days, by the way, of so-called “climate havens”. In 2020, ProPublica and the New York Times Magazine published a report that found in Vermont that Lamoille County, Orange County, and Franklin County, and Essex County were the top four counties in the U.S. to live in to avoid climate-change related crises. I can tell you as a Vermonter, no longer. Climate change has come to all of Vermont.

I am going to keep working with my friends and colleagues, the Senior Senator from Vermont, Senator Sanders, and Representative Balint in the House, to get Vermont the flood recovery funding we need. But I want to do that in partnership with every other Senator and Representative whose districts need flood recovery funding. But Congress and both chambers and both parties need to come together to help all of our states impacted by a natural disaster.

The next natural disaster, be it a flood, a fire, a tornado, or a hurricane, could happen in your state. And as we often say, “There but for the grace of God go I.” I urge my colleagues to have grace for their fellow Americans and fellow colleagues who need the help now – because you never know when your state could be next.

Madam President, I yield back.