

# DEAR MR. PRESIDENT

Thursday, November 15, 2012



AP PHOTO

On the day after Sandy struck, cars are submerged at a parking garage in the Financial District. Dozens of office and residential buildings in lower Manhattan still need significant repairs – just a microcosm of the rebuilding needed in the entire region.

EDITORIAL  
**Newsday**

Dear Mr. President,

Welcome to New York. As you will see on your tour of the metropolitan region, we have suffered excruciating devastation. Entire communities were flattened, burned or flooded in superstorm Sandy's fury. Forty-three New Yorkers lost their lives. Almost a million customers on Long Island lost power to their homes.

The metropolitan area's mass transportation network – the largest in North America – was crippled for days as seawater overwhelmed our rail and vehicular tunnels. Our gasoline supply lines have been dangerously disrupted.

Sandy packed a punch few of us imagined and none of us will forget. This was the worst natural disaster in New York State history. On a national scale, the cost of Sandy's destruction was second only to that of Hurricane Katrina.

The storm could double Nassau County's deficit of \$25 million. And Long Beach – already facing a fiscal crisis – is suddenly looking at a storm bill estimated at \$200 million. Altogether, the cost of the damage is about \$33 billion for New York State and \$50 billion for the region.

We have to build back better, and we need your help.

You said in your news conference yesterday that America has an obligation to future generations to do something about climate change. Agreed.

But while the nation searches for long-term answers and solutions, our region needs to harden its aging infrastructure in the face of weather patterns that have already grown more extreme.

Our transportation system – especially those tunnels – must be redesigned to withstand tidal surges of 14 feet and more. Our fuel distribution network must be secure enough to operate no matter how severe weather conditions become. Our housing stock must be built back smarter. Our power grid urgently needs an overhaul.

We believe Washington should pay for a major part of this work, through a federal supplemental appropriation. The reason? A strong metropolitan region means a healthier federal treasury.

The New York-Long Island-New Jersey economy, with a gross metropolitan product of \$1.29 trillion a year, is the larg-

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PULITZER PRIZE ENTRY : EDITORIAL WRITING

# SANDY'S DEVASTATING BLOW

est in the country. So when we take a tumble, America feels the pain. Already, economists are saying that superstorm Sandy could slice half a percentage point off the nation's fourth-quarter economic growth.

What's more, a supplemental appropriation also happens to be fair. For every tax dollar New Yorkers send to Washington, we get back 79 cents in federal spending. Year in and year out, we have helped the nation, and now it's the nation's turn to help us. New Orleans received supplemental assistance after Katrina in 2005, as did Florida after Hurricane Andrew in 1992 and New York City after 9/11.

We deeply appreciate the fast response of the Federal Emergency Management Agency as it accepts claims from individuals and local governments for out-of-pocket expenses that insurance doesn't cover. FEMA assistance can help with everything from temporary housing and home repairs to bridge and power-line replacement. We hope the good work continues with prompt payments.

Yet our region needs federal assistance far beyond what FEMA provides. Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo has requested \$30 billion in supplemental federal aid to rebuild the state's infrastructure in a way that makes us less vulnerable to extreme weather. He wants to harden bridges and tunnels and subway and commuter rail

lines. He wants to make homes and apartment buildings safer. And he wants to replace the region's power grid over the next decade.

What we would like from you, Mr. President, is vigorous support for the governor's appropriations request to Congress. He is not proposing to build flashy monuments to his administration, and he is not trying to raid the pork barrel. He simply hopes to keep New York and New Yorkers out of harm's way the next time a cataclysm like Sandy strikes.

We would like to see his proposal passed without a corresponding loss of federal aid to New York elsewhere. We would like to see the full downstate congressional delegation working hard for its passage. And we would especially like to see Wall Street's campaign bankrollers tell opponents of the supplemental appropriation that the ATM will be closed until they adjust their attitudes. The financial community should give you plenty of help as you as you go to bat for the region.

There's a humane reason to fight for this appropriation. There's a dollars-and-cents reason to fight for it. And yes, as you say, we also have an obligation to keep future generations safe.

We're counting on your support, Mr. President.