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# United States Senate

August 31, 2020

COMMITTEES  
APPROPRIATIONS  
CHAIRMAN OF  
FINANCIAL SERVICES  
GENERAL GOVERNMENT  
BANKING, HOUSING, AND  
URBAN AFFAIRS  
BUDGET  
JUDICIARY  
SMALL BUSINESS AND  
ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The Honorable Peter T. Gaynor  
Administrator  
Federal Emergency Management Agency  
400 C Street SW  
Washington, DC 20472

The Honorable Jovita Carranza  
Administrator  
U.S. Small Business Administration  
409 3rd Street SW  
Washington, DC 20416

Dear Administrators Gaynor and Carranza,

Thank you for your efforts to ensure a strong federal response and recovery for areas of Louisiana impacted by Hurricane Laura. Search and recovery work by first responders and volunteers revealed this catastrophic storm was both deadly and destructive. Over the next several days and weeks, FEMA, the SBA, and other federal agencies will transition away from response activities and enter recovery mode. I am concerned that the decision by FEMA and SBA to host virtual recovery centers in lieu of traditional “boots-on-the-ground” recovery centers could unnecessarily prolong the recovery process for many individuals and small businesses in affected parishes. Right now, the situation is dire. I know my people, and I know the areas of the state that were impacted. We will recover, but there is no substitute for the “boots-on-the-ground” facilities to share America’s federal resources effectively.

It is my understanding that, due to COVID-19, FEMA and the SBA intend to operate “virtual disaster centers” or conduct components of the disaster recovery process virtually when those services would otherwise occur in person. Louisianians cannot afford to wait until reliable power and internet are restored to apply for federal relief, disaster loans, and other necessary steps virtually. Additionally, limiting certain recovery functions to the virtual sphere may discourage some Louisianians from taking part in the recovery process because they lack access to technology or WiFi. Limiting certain aid to virtual platforms could also make disaster victims vulnerable to scammers and fraud.

While we do not know the full extent of damage from Hurricane Laura, it appears that recovery will be a long road for many Louisianians. Right now, the people of Louisiana are worried about their families, their businesses, and their homes. In that aftermath of this disaster, access to high-speed internet is hard to find. I respectfully ask that you reconsider the decision to make disaster center resources “virtual.” We need boots on the ground, not bureaucrats with iPads on Zoom.

Sincerely,



John Kennedy  
U.S. Senator