

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 24, 2011

The Honorable Eric Cantor
Majority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-329, the Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Leader,

We are writing to express our serious concern over your recent comments suggesting that federal funds for emergency disaster relief must be offset with spending cuts before being authorized by Congress. If this policy is enforced, it could cost the loss of lives, risk the health of thousands, and lead millions of Americans to doubt that Congress can act rapidly and forcefully in the aftermath of extreme natural disasters.

In just the past few years, devastating storms have left thousands dead and even more without food or shelter. As Members of Congress from states vulnerable to natural disasters, we are all too familiar with the devastation and aftermath of these storms, but we are also grateful for the immediate benefits disaster aid has offered ravaged communities in our states.

Families in the aftermath of these natural disasters live through enormous uncertainty. At the very least, those affected should have confidence that their government will stand with them while rebuilding, not cause greater uncertainty by delaying vital emergency aid in the name of fiscal responsibility. Through the funding of search and rescue programs, temporary housing, and basic human needs such as food and water, we have the ability to immediately offer tragedy stricken areas the resources to sustain themselves and begin rebuilding. However, your suggestion could lead to lengthy and unsuccessful debates on the House floor while Americans struggle to survive after a natural disaster. These families and communities simply cannot wait as weeks of budget negotiations languish in Washington, D.C. Instead, they are expecting the government to act swiftly and forcefully.

How to reduce the deficit and balance our budget is an important debate to have, but not while lives hang in the balance. Subjecting federal disaster assistance to a partisan budget debate would result in a halt of immediate relief in the form of hazard mitigation and personal aid programs such as disaster housing, disaster grants and loans, and disaster-related unemployment assistance. Congress's failure to immediately implement these programs will lead to devastating, prolonged effects of natural disasters that we have the power and means to prevent.

Federal aid in the Gulf states after Hurricane Katrina and in the Southern United States and Ohio River Valley after the Super Tuesday Tornadoes was critical to the recovery of these areas. Given recent disasters along the Mississippi River, the tornadoes in Joplin and throughout our heartland, and the current hurricane season in Florida and other Gulf and Atlantic states, it is imperative that Americans have confidence that disaster assistance will continue to save lives and rebuild communities.

While we cannot control where a storm may hit or the devastation it may cause, we can aid those who are suffering and restore the communities lost. We urge you to reverse course and ensure that after the news media leaves a disaster area, America's promise to sustain and rebuild will be kept.

Sincerely,



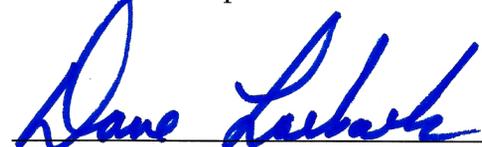
Ted Deutch



Bennie G. Thompson



Alcee L. Hastings



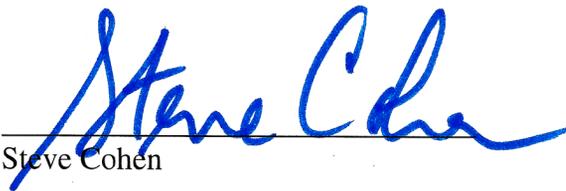
David Loeb sack



David E. Price



Frederica S. Wilson



Steve Cohen



Terri Sewell



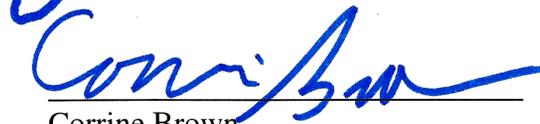
John A. Yarmuth



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Bill Pascrell Jr

Bill Pascrell, Jr.

Pete Stark

Fortney "Pete" Stark

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