



Statement of
Senator Peter Welch
Remarks as Delivered
One-Year Anniversary of Vermont Floods
July 10, 2024

Mr. President: One year ago, this very week, rain started to fall in Vermont and for days on end and it did not stop. The rain turned into catastrophic flooding. We had our entire usual rainfall in just days.

The damage was immense. We experienced landslides. Vermonters were stranded and had to be rescued. Three people tragically died. Homes, farms, and businesses were damaged and destroyed. The infrastructure and services that we take for granted and depend on—the wastewater plants, our dams, our bridges, and even our capital city’s post office—were damaged by the flood. Some have not yet been repaired—many, in fact.

The [statistics](#) from Vermont are astounding:

- There were 214 swift-water rescues—*swift-water rescues*, people who couldn’t get out of their home except by being rescued by folks on boats—and 70 evacuations.
- 18 drinking water and 33 wastewater systems were damaged. 3 wastewater systems were damaged beyond repair.
- 139 of our municipalities experienced flood damage.
- 64 state bridges and 46 state roads were closed.
- Over 6,000 tons of debris were removed by the State of Vermont.
- There were 6,146 FEMA Individual Assistance registrations.

It was an all-hands-on-deck moment in Vermont just as it is in other communities where they face a major disaster. People showed up: neighbors and volunteers; first responders, police officers, medical professionals and emergency workers, the National Guard—local news reporters, by the way, did an incredible job keeping Vermonters informed. From every level of government and every political leaning, folks worked together for a common goal: to help.

A moment of appreciation to my colleagues, including the President, who may be listening: Nine states helped Vermont by sending personnel or resources. Thank you to the Governors of and Senators in New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Michigan, Florida, and Colorado—states that supported us and colleagues who supported us. It's very reassuring, I just want to say—to all my colleagues, Republicans and Democrats—to hear your expressions of goodwill on behalf of Vermonters when we suffered that catastrophic loss.

Since the flood, I've revisited many of the communities that were hit hard last July, and in every community, I've seen strength and resilience—and it gives me confidence that we will come back stronger than before.

You know, our Vermont values—and I think they're American values, I know they're rural values—have shown the country what is possible in the times of great adversity. Our perseverance has remained long after the flood waters have receded.

But Mr. President, this takes a toll on folks. You know if it's your farm, if it's your home, if it's your business, if it's a town where you're the select board and it's your bridge—that is tough, and it goes on. I have come to the Senate Floor many times to talk about how critical the resources are that the appropriations process have provided. But we need flexible funding dollars to actually finish the job and get past the red tape that's holding things up.

The President's Revised Disaster Supplemental Request is absolutely critical. Not just Vermont, by the way, but for many communities that have suffered catastrophic weather-related events around the country. It would bolster the Community Development Block Grants for Disaster Recovery program that gives communities the flexibility necessary to recover. And Vermont does need substantial disaster relief money to help lower- and moderate-income communities fill in the gaps of insurance and state assistance.

As I go to places in Vermont—beautiful places, really damaged— like Ludlow, and Londonderry, and Barre, and Johnson, and Hardwick. And our own capital, Montpelier—this iconic photograph that was across the United States after our weather event. I keep hearing from the hardworking Vermonters and local leaders who would directly benefit from the disaster relief program. It could help them move out of potential flood zones or away from waterways.

And by the way, we have to start making some of these decisions because these once-in-a-hundred-year events are once every ten years, or even more often. It could help elevate a bridge. It could help them strengthen and repair their wastewater treatment facility. These things really, really matter. It matters whether you're in a red state or a blue state.

I think too often we lose, also, the voices of the victims; those that have been hit directly. Too often, we forget in the aftermath of the initial recovery where things go

back to normal except for the people who have been really hit hard. You know, I'll give a few examples:

Marie, a Vermonter, said to me: "Every time it rains for several days or comes down hard, she watches the river behind her house and prays that it doesn't come over the bank like it did last July."

Doug said: "Our shop and home were impacted by the flood and we had to shut down. We are still in the process of repairing our business with the hope of opening during this summer." And the summer is here. "The impact of the flood has been traumatic on our lives and our community."

John, another Vermonter, said: "Our entire property was flooded, and we lost everything in the cellar. We are retired, we're on a fixed income, so these were huge losses. The future worries us, we have been flooded three times and may be flooded again."

Amy said: "I appreciate the assistance from FEMA," And I appreciate the assistance from FEMA. They were there on the job right after the flood. But the pain endures for those people directly affected. "But it is nowhere near adequate. My employer was also affected hugely because our offices and warehouse was flooded, and many of the farmers we work with were flooded." And by the way, those crops were just coming in—it was July, so a lot of these vegetable farmers were wiped out in rural Vermont—as our friend knows. "We had to spend huge amounts of money to repair our space, and we lost sales because of the loss of the crops."

So, folks are still hurting. And they still need help. So yes, we respond in the immediate aftermath after the storm, but to get the response done we have to get people in farms and businesses back on their feet.

You know, I talk about these Vermonters, but I want to stress to my colleagues that your state could be next—something we all know. Just look at the recent tragedies in Texas, Minnesota, and elsewhere. And of course, last year's flood was hardly isolated. We're expecting more rain this week. The remnants of Hurricane Beryl could cause flooding again tonight. Again, our brave emergency crews are out there doing everything they can.

Mr. President, emergency supplemental funding will help our state and many other states—there's no question about that. And I'm working with colleagues to pass legislation that does provide that supplemental funding that's flexible and vitally needed. And, after the flood, I introduced new legislation that will help rural communities in Vermont and across America hit by floods and other natural disasters.

For instance, the *Rural Recovery Act*—streamlines and provides technical assistance. We have towns like Weston that got totally smashed. They have this beautiful Weston playhouse—that people come from states all around Vermont to see great performances—totally flooded. And that town has a population of less than 600 people. So, they don't have somebody on staff who knows how to deal with the various federal programs and regulations and so on. Our legislation would help provide technical

assistance in rural communities so that the capacity to get what you're entitled to will be available.

Another bill is the *WEATHER Act*, which helps farmers—and I'm talking about small farmers with vegetable crops—it would help them by having a practical crop insurance program. You know, the crop insurance programs we have—they're really important and I support—they tend to be for big commodity operations. If you're a vegetable farmer in Vermont—and your potato crop, your onion crop, your tomato crop, got wiped out—it's incredibly complicated to try to make a claim.

And it doesn't work, and you can only try to get damages for the "wholesale value," even when many of these farmers—who are the lifeblood of many of our communities—sell their products at retail at local farmers markets. So, we've got to have a program that works for them. Because whether it's in Georgia, or it's in Vermont, or any state, those local farmers—farm to table, farm to school—they really, really matter, and we've got to give them a shot at getting back on their feet when a weather event takes them down.

The *BUFFER Act*, which will help Vermont farmers take full advantage of flooding and erosion prevention programs.

So, I'll continue in Vermont partnering with our governor, Governor Scott—who's been on this case from day one—and my Vermont colleagues in the Congressional Delegation—Senator Sanders, the senior senator from Vermont, and Congresswoman Balint—as well as the Biden Administration and our local leaders to help Vermont recover from the flood more resiliently, preparing for the future, and recognizing the reality that these huge weather events are here to stay.

I want to thank the people of Vermont, who have as they have always done, found a way to come together and just deal with the reality of what they face.

Mr. President, I yield back.

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