

LOU BARLETTA

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April 6, 2017

The Honorable Tom Wolf
Governor
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
508 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Governor Wolf:

I am writing to you today regarding the unprecedented and devastating snowstorm that swept through Pennsylvania the week of March 13, 2017.

As you know, parts of northeastern Pennsylvania, including Luzerne, Wyoming, Montour, and Northumberland counties, which I represent, received more than 30 inches of snowfall. The affected areas struggled to clear major roads and intersections, which prevented the movement of emergency vehicles and presented a major safety issue for residents.

After speaking with local officials, including first responders, it is my understanding that the snowstorm was of such severity and magnitude that state and local resources are overwhelmed, and the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) is unable to provide further assistance. Therefore, I believe it is imperative that you request that the president issue a major disaster declaration to bring much needed relief to these counties.

As you know, by law, members of Congress cannot request that the president issue a major disaster declaration. That request must come from the governor of the affected state.

I understand that the damage costs related to last month's snowstorm did not exceed the state's per-capita threshold. However, there is significant precedent for a governor to request a presidential disaster declaration when the affected state's per-capita dollar thresholds have not been met. When the Congressional Research Service analyzed 79 major presidential disaster declarations in fiscal years 1999 and 2000, it found that in 19 of those declarations, the statewide per-capita dollar thresholds were not met. That is because the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) must consider a host of factors when assessing a request, including localized impacts, insurance coverage, hazard mitigation, and recent disasters. The current situation in Luzerne, Wyoming, Montour, and Northumberland, and other counties in the region, seems to meet this localized exception criteria. In fact, it is my understanding that Montour County incurred \$63.93 in per capita damages – significantly above FEMA's county threshold of \$3.61.

I would like to set up a meeting with you to further discuss this issue. I look forward to working with you to ensure that residents of northeastern Pennsylvania get the assistance they so desperately need.

Thank you for your kind attention to my request.

Sincerely,

Lou Barletta
Member of Congress