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Remarks for the Record submitted by Congressman Jim Himes (CT-4)

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This October, Connecticut experienced one of the worst storms in its history. Superstorm Sandy left hundreds of thousands of Connecticut residents without power, tore homes from their foundations, and resulted in historic levels of flooding along the coastline and billions of dollars in damage.

First and foremost, I want to thank the first responders who put their own comfort and safety on the line to ensure the well-being of my constituents in the direct aftermath of this storm. Theirs is a difficult, dangerous, and often thankless job, and their efforts to clear roadways, restore power, and bring food and water to families after the storm hit have our unyielding gratitude.

Any other year, this enormously devastating storm would seem like a freak weather event. But it is hard to view Sandy as an isolated incident when it comes just one year after Tropical Storm Irene, making this the second hurricane-level storm to hit Connecticut in as many years. Add in the powerful nor'easter of March 2010, which left one million households without power across the Northeast, and the record snowfalls of the October 2011 snowstorm, and it is clear that major weather events are only going to become more common in the coming years.

In the days following Superstorm Sandy, I toured damages across my district with emergency personnel, and federal, state, and local officials. Most recently, I toured damages in Fairfield with FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate. It was absolutely heartbreaking to see rooftops floating in the Long Island Sound, tree branches crashed through windows, and lawns scattered with debris. They say a man's home is his castle: imagine being brought down to the beach by the National Guard to find yours standing underwater.

Everywhere I went, I was inspired by the resiliency of my constituents. But there was frustration there – and justifiably so. When I met with constituents, whether they were still staying at their local emergency shelter or back home clearing out their yards, I was always met with one question: What can we do to keep this from happening in the future? After four unspeakably devastating storms in just three years, it is clear that there is more we can do to prepare for future weather catastrophes. We cannot control the weather, but we can take the steps necessary to limit the damage when the next big storm hits – and it will hit.

The bottom line is that we must invest more heavily in revitalizing our infrastructure. I have said this many times in the past, but it is no more apparent than after Sandy hit. Roads were torn up. Live power lines were whipped across backyards. Utility poles crashed down onto cars, across major roads, and into driveways. It is time we invested in a twenty first-century electricity grid, one that can better withstand the heavy rainfall and powerful wind gusts that made Irene and Sandy so incredibly devastating. It is time that we brought more microgrids and mobile generators to Southwestern Connecticut so that when the power does go out, we will be able to keep our citizens out of the dark and the cold.

Establishing a modern, more reliable energy grid will not come cheap. I have no delusions as to the cost or magnitude of such an undertaking. But an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Paying what we must for this prevention now has the potential to save us billions of dollars in recovery efforts down the road. And what better way to put people back to work than on repaving our roadways, rebuilding our bridges, and overhauling our grid?

Most importantly, there are steps we can and must take to limit the severe flooding that ravaged coastal Connecticut. These measures are years in the making, and I am as frustrated as anyone with the pace of progress. Back in 2010, my office secured authorizations for the Army Corps of Engineers to conduct flood mitigation studies for all bodies of water within Fairfield and New Haven Counties – studies that would culminate in important recommendations for preventing future flood damages. These studies have not yet even begun, and with the current backlog at the Corps, it is unlikely they will receive the funding they need now. If we are serious about flood prevention, then we need to get moving, and we need to allow for the funding of so-called new start projects. With the renewed sense of urgency that Superstorm Sandy has brought upon us, I hope that these studies can finally commence so that we may learn how best to prepare ourselves and our shoreline for future storms.

Across my district, residents are beginning to rebuild. As they do so, they think not only of themselves, but also of their neighbors. This renewed sense of community and commitment to our fellow man is nothing short of inspiring. I applaud FEMA for its work to keep us safe in the immediate aftermath of the storm, but we must bring the federal government to the table to not only to continue recovery efforts, but also to prepare for the next big storm.