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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS & ENTREPRENEURSHIP
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6350

April 26, 2007

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On Friday, April 20, 2007, Senator Susan Collins, Governor John Baldacci and I hosted Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Director David Paulison and Small Business Administration (SBA) representatives Charlie Summers and Roger Garland on a tour of Maine areas devastated by the Patriot Day Nor'easter. Specifically, the storm ravaged the Maine counties of York, Cumberland, Sagadahoc, Lincoln, Knox, Waldo, Hancock and Washington. The storm left more than 140,000 people without power, and damage estimates are approaching \$30 million.

During our tour of the devastation, I called on FEMA Director Paulison to create a "one-stop shopping" website for disaster relief assistance resources. Clearly, in this electronic era of websites and the Internet, the Federal government should establish a single, easily-remembered web address where citizens can go for all-inclusive links to the wide range of public assistance available after disasters strike. During the most difficult of times, the Federal government should make it as easy as possible for disaster victims to get back on their feet.

I understand that in 2002, as part of your "Disaster Management E-Government Initiative," which is one of your top three electronic government-wide initiatives, the Office of Management and Budget and FEMA rolled-out the "Disasterhelp.gov" website. According to the FEMA website, the mission of Disasterhelp.gov is to be a "one-stop portal for disaster preparedness and response information." However, I believe that Disasterhelp.gov website has failed to meet this goal.

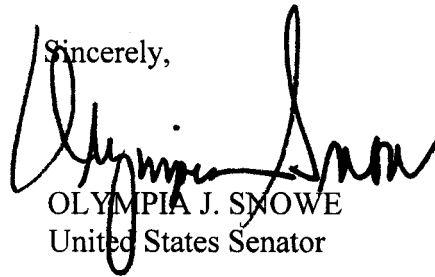
For example, according to the White House E-Government website, Disasterhelp.gov has registered only 41,693 users since August 4, 2005. This is a surprisingly low number given the widespread effects of the 2005 Gulf Coast hurricanes, not to mention the 80 subsequent events for which the Federal government has issued a major disaster declaration. Furthermore, much of the website's information is outdated. The information available on the SBA's link shows a picture of former Administrator Hector Barreto, who was replaced by current Administrator Steven Preston over nine months ago. The SBA page on Disaster.gov has not been updated since December 8, 2006. Additionally, this page provides no specific links or information regarding SBA services available to home and business owners who have been impacted by a disaster. This is particularly troubling considering the SBA is the nation's primary resource for assistance in rebuilding businesses and homes affected by disasters.

Mr. President, it has been over four years since Disasterhelp.gov was launched, and I believe that the Federal agencies charged with assisting disaster victims are short-changing this potentially valuable resource. Disasterhelp.gov should be an indispensable tool to citizens, state and local governments before, during and after a catastrophe. I urge you to harness the vast resources of the Federal government and make this website realize its promise. Specifically, the agencies of the Federal government should work together to further coordinate and develop the Disasterhelp.gov by supplying up-to-date links to all resources and details about disaster preparedness and recovery. This would truly make Disasterhelp.gov a "one-stop portal for disaster preparedness and response."

In the wake of a disaster, assisting our nation's citizens to rebuild their homes, businesses and ultimately their lives should remain one of the Federal Government's foremost priorities. I am grateful that you have made expedited disaster response one of your top E-Government goals, and I look forward to working with you to make Disasterhelp.gov the powerful tool it has the potential to be.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Olympia J. Snowe", is written over the printed name and title.

OLYMPIA J. SNOWE
United States Senator

cc: The Honorable Henry M. Paulson, Jr.
The Honorable Mike Johanns
The Honorable Michael Chertoff
The Honorable Mark W. Everson
The Honorable R. David Paulison
The Honorable Steven C. Preston