

FRANCIS ROONEY
19TH DISTRICT, FLORIDA
FRANCISROONEY.HOUSE.GOV

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE
JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0919

120 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-2536

3299 TAMiami TRAIL EAST, SUITE 105
NAPLES, FL 34112
(239) 252-6225

1039 SE 9TH AVENUE, SUITE 308
CAPE CORAL, FL 33990
(239) 599-6033

February 28, 2019

The Honorable Peter Gaynor
Acting Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street SW
Washington, DC 20472

Dear Acting Administrator Gaynor:

The federal government devotes much time and resources reacting to the impacts from natural disasters and while the government has developed rapid assistance and responses for hurricanes, it is woefully lacking in dealing with harmful algal blooms (HABs). Accordingly, I write today to invite you to a roundtable I am hosting in hopes that we will be proactive in developing procedures to address the damaging impact from HABs.

Two years ago, Hurricane Irma made landfall in Southwest Florida causing life-threatening risk, major economic disruption, and environmental damage. The devastating impact left our citizens feeling hopeless going into the vital winter economic season. Yet, our resilient citizens overcame the impediments caused by Hurricane Irma to yield a successful year.

Last summer, Florida faced a different type of overwhelming natural disaster. Large spring and summer rainfall, and a tropical depression generated massive discharges from Lake Okeechobee causing HABs throughout our local waterways. As water is the lifeblood of our community, this event crippled our local economy, generated property damage, triggered major health concerns and inflicted serious environmental destruction. Local municipalities spent over \$2 million removing more than 400,000 gallons of blue-green algal blooms from local waterways.

Despite many similarities, the federal response to the two different types of natural disasters is much different. For example, the debris cleanup from HABs is not reimbursable while debris cleanup from a hurricane is reimbursable. Municipalities handle the removal of HABs in a similar manner to removing debris after a hurricane. Further, the major safety and health ramifications are equal if not greater after a HAB, yet more attention is provided to hurricanes. Local officials are tracking the short and long-term health effects related to exposure to HABs which could lead to future evacuations for people living near the affected water with respiratory issues.

Local officials were left to clean up over 2,000 tons of sea life from beaches and shorelines. The HABs also created long term sea life dead zones. Grouper, manatees, dolphins and sea turtles

were just some of many marine creatures that washed onto our beaches leading to massive loss of income to our real estate, fishing, and tourism industries which are the drivers for our economy.

Moving forward, it will require a collaborative federal, state and local government effort to respond to HABs. After each hurricane, we fine-tune our efforts which leads to a more efficient response. It is imperative we replicate those efforts when it comes to HAB outbreaks. This will require effort and uncharted procedures. We owe it to the taxpayers to act now.

I look forward to assisting your agency in any way possible to help our community prepare for future outbreaks. Please accept my invitation to join with state and local stakeholders for a roundtable discussion I will be hosting to take the first steps to prepare for HABs. Details of the event will be provided in a follow-up communication.

I urge you to join me in moving forward in future recovery efforts. Our actions today can lead to a better tomorrow with our communities knowing that we have a system in place to handle every natural disaster.

Sincerely,



Francis Rooney
Member of Congress

cc: National Oceanography and Atmospheric Administration
Environmental Protection Agency
Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Florida Division of Emergency Management
Florida Department of Economic Opportunity