

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 18, 2018

Mr. John Kelly
Acting Inspector General
Office of Inspector General/MAIL STOP 0305
Department of Homeland Security
245 Murray Lane SW
Washington, DC 20528-0305

Dear Acting Inspector General Kelly:

As Members of the Florida Congressional delegation, we strongly support Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) reimbursement of disaster recovery costs incurred by state and local governments. However, we are concerned that tens of millions of federal taxpayer dollars are being squandered as a result of exorbitant price-gouging orchestrated by the governor of the state of Florida in an inept and possibly corrupt procurement of debris removal services following Hurricane Irma.

Our concerns are based on recent media reports indicating that in September of 2017, Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) officials set aside the existing local debris-hauling contracts that Monroe County officials had in place before Hurricane Irma, and quickly signed contracts with two other firms that charged substantially higher rates, despite local officials' protests.

For instance, the state reportedly ignored Monroe County's existing roadway clearing contract of \$32 per mile, and replaced it with a state FDOT contract that cost taxpayers \$913 per mile—a 2,753 percent increase. For another service, Monroe County had an appliance pickup contract in place that charged taxpayers \$75 per item picked up. Yet the FDOT contract paid \$969 for the same service, resulting in a 1,192 percent cost increase.

One of the state's chosen firms reportedly had no previous experience, according to media reports, and other, more qualified firms were prevented from bidding. These unnecessarily costly, unorthodox contracts were also signed over the objections of Monroe County officials, who have stated that they did not request any type of state aid or interference in its debris removal contracting process.

Unfortunately, satisfactory explanations for these unusual and highly questionable contracting decisions have not been forthcoming from the state of Florida. Even more troubling, Governor Rick Scott has said publicly that he “would do the same thing again.”

Given this lack of transparency, the absence of any indication that state officials plan to assess what went wrong, and the massive sums of federal tax dollars at stake, we respectfully ask that

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the Office of Inspector General (OIG) include the Monroe County debris cleanup contract issues referenced above into your ongoing audit projects of FEMA oversight of Hurricane Irma recovery efforts. An OIG audit would go far to restore public confidence that taxpayer funds spent on disaster relief will not be allocated inappropriately or inefficiently.

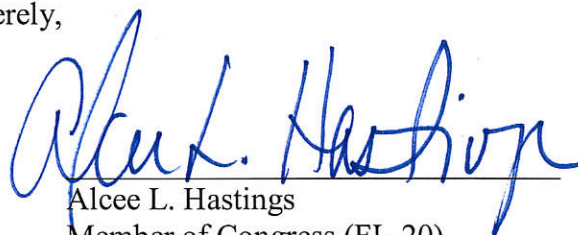
The state's policies for dealing with debris removal must be clarified and streamlined before we face the same dangerous realities this hurricane season. While we recognize that the state's failings are not under your office's purview, an OIG audit of these specific contracting practices would provide the sort of financial accountability and public transparency we have been unable to obtain from the state. The results of a fair and objective audit will help promote badly needed improvements at the state level to ensure that both state and federal taxpayer dollars are spent appropriately.

All Americans, especially those whose communities have been damaged by a natural disaster, deserve the basic assurance that the precious federal funds that Congress allocates to recovery efforts are being spent competently and without favor or influence. We respectfully ask that your timely response to our request include an explicit answer as to whether these specific contracting issues will be looked at as part of any ongoing or future audit projects.

Sincerely,



Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Member of Congress (FL-23)



Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress (FL-20)



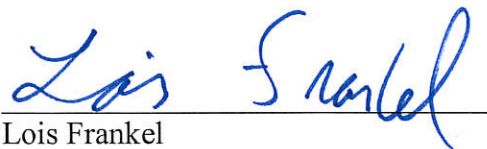
Kathy Castor
Member of Congress (FL-14)



Ted Deutch
Member of Congress (FL-22)



Frederica S. Wilson
Member of Congress (FL-24)




Lois Frankel
Member of Congress (FL-21)



Charlie Crist
Member of Congress (FL-13)



Val Butler Demings
Member of Congress (FL-10)


Al Lawson, Jr.
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Member of Congress (FL-9)