



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins

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We Deserve Better

I'm going to get straight to the point. Superstorm Sandy slammed into the south shore of Long Island on October 29, 2012. On that date, more than 400 days ago, millions were left without power, and tens of thousands were displaced.

Now I'm reading newspaper articles that are making my stomach turn. Apparently only FOUR (that's right, 4) of the 4,178 Superstorm Sandy-ravaged Long Island homeowners who qualified for federal housing reconstruction aid have actually received a check. Let me elaborate. More than 10,000 homeowners asked for help.

Thus far a few more than 4,000 have heard back and only FOUR have actually received a check. We watched press conference after press conference at which eager politicians promised help and took credit for new funding and here we are more than a year later and only 4 people have received a check.

Can someone please explain how this is possible?

Just think about this for a moment. More than 14 months after the storm forced tens of thousands of our fellow Long Islanders out of their flooded and broken homes, they are still waiting. More than 13 months after Governor Cuomo stood right here on our Long Island shores and told us help was on the way, they are still waiting. More than 11 months after New Jersey Governor Christie shamed Congress into finally releasing those much-needed emergency funds, they are still waiting. And now, more than 7 months after the state's program to distribute those funds was finally created, our friends and neighbors are still waiting.

A second winter is upon us now. It's actually snowing today and still people have not returned home. Where is our anger? Where is the righteous indignation for our neighbors?

Each of these Long Island homeowners have literally filled out hundreds of pages of forms, faxed just as many, subjected themselves to multiple inspections and permit applications while spending God-only-knows how many hours on phone calls with everyone from con-artist contractors to tone-deaf insurance companies to indifferent government bureaucrats – and they're still waiting! Their reward for paying some of the highest taxes in the world, their reward for being citizens of a region that sends far more money to the government than it receives in services, their reward for being universally recognized as some of the most generous people in the world when disaster strikes elsewhere – is a big fat kick in the teeth from the elected officials who promised to help. They get to spend yet another anxiety-filled holiday season ousted from their homes, crammed into rentals, explaining to their kids why they're not in the same schools as their friends.

And those officials hide behind mounds of paperwork in their offices and offer us convoluted excuses about vetting out fraud and letting the system progress, however slowly. Why is it that good hard-working people, who've never even asked the time of day from a clock, are getting stiffed?

There's literally hundreds of millions of dollars waiting to be distributed. Realistically, homeowners are not getting cash, the payments go directly to repairs so why can't the government simply finance those repairs and get our families back on their feet? At this point, any of these devastated homeowners would be more than happy to sign whatever assurances the government needs but let's face it, a new layer of bureaucracy and tons of government patronage jobs took precedence.

It's unforgivable. And no matter whom these Superstorm Sandy victims speak to – their case managers, the inspectors, the program managers – the buck always gets passed right on up the line with no answers. It has to eventually stop somewhere and plainly speaking, it stops with the Governor, so he needs to hear from us.

We must make it abundantly clear that Long Island is much more than a pit stop for the every other day press conferences that took place in the storm's aftermath. We are communities, people with families, homes, jobs and lives that we'd like to get on with. Promises were made to us that were not kept.

Whether you've been impacted by Superstorm Sandy, you have friends and neighbors who are still struggling, or you're just fed up with government red tape, contact the Governor's office and tell him that "we deserve better."