

[By Mike Lillis](#)

Vermont's only House member appealed to chamber leaders for help Wednesday after Hurricane Irene ravaged the state.

Rep. Peter Welch (D) said the storm caused "unprecedented damaged" to roads, historic bridges, homes and businesses – damage the state simply can't fix by itself.

"Vermont is responding promptly and energetically to repair and rebuild. But we cannot do it alone," Welch wrote to House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) and Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.).

Running up the Eastern Seaboard over the weekend, Irene took an unexpected turn inland as it approached New England, stunning residents of Vermont and upstate New York with a barrage of rain that turned roads into rivers and rivers into torrents. The damage was particularly pronounced in Vermont, where 12 towns were cut off from relief workers until Wednesday morning. Four-wheel drive vehicles still haven't been able to reach a 13th island, the town of Wardsboro.

Welch said he'll be pushing for federal aid as soon as Congress returns to Washington next week.

"Vermonters have always supported disaster relief for communities around the country hit hard by natural disasters, and we always will," he wrote.

"Now we ask for the support of our colleagues to assist Vermont."

The topic of disaster relief has generated some controversy in the wake of the hurricane, after

House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-Va.) insisted Monday that any emergency funding be offset by accompanying cuts elsewhere in the budget.

Cantor's office walked back that demand Tuesday, but not before the White House took a shot at Cantor. Virginia's Republican governor also said disaster aide should not have to be offset with other spending cuts.

Separately, new reports offered a glimpse at the scale of Irene's damage, with estimates ranging from \$7 billion to \$13 billion.