

Don Gaetz  
Chairman  
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October 25, 2018

**VIA U.S. MAIL & EMAIL**

Ralph Thomas, Chairman  
Wakulla County Board of County Commissioners  
3093 Crawfordville Hwy  
Crawfordville, FL 32327  
[rthomas@mywakulla.com](mailto:rthomas@mywakulla.com)

RE: Florida Counties Designated As Federal Disaster Areas - Hurricane Michael

Dear Chairman Thomas:

On behalf of the Triumph Board of Directors please accept our sincerest condolences for the losses inevitably experienced in Wakulla County from Hurricane Michael. As fellow Northwest Floridians we appreciate what you are going through and send our thoughts and prayers to you and all of those suffering in the wake of this great storm.

The devastation wrought by Hurricane Michael was felt throughout the Triumph Region, but most particularly in Bay, Franklin, Gulf and Wakulla Counties. Three members of the Triumph Board—Ben Lee, Allan Bense, and Jason Shoaf—all live in the area most heavily impacted and were not spared the damage and destruction from this Category 5 Storm. The winds have calmed, but the ravaged landscape bears witness to the brutality of the strongest hurricane to ever make landfall in the Panhandle. While we grieve for those who lost their life in the storm, the damage and destruction around us forces us to realize how blessed we are that the death toll was not higher. It is not the first time this region has faced adversity and our history proves the resilience of our people. We are hopeful and optimistic that better days will come as we start the long re-building process with you.

The damage wrought by the storm serves to underscore the importance of Triumph's mission to diversify and enhance the economy in the eight counties disproportionately impacted by the BP Oil Spill. As your recovery efforts progress, please remember that Triumph is here to help in any way we can that is consistent with our statutory charge. As you examine and re-evaluate the particular priorities for your county, please let us know if those priorities shift away from any earlier proposals submitted to the board. Invariably some high priority projects on the lists previously submitted to Triumph may pale in comparison to others in the post-Michael reality. Additionally, if this experience has identified new needs that provide an opportunity for partnership, please keep Triumph in mind. Our administrative, economic, education, and legal staff are available to assist you with any questions regarding Triumph. We are anxious to hear your stories and goals for the future.

Together we have faced hurricanes, recessions, oil spills, fires, and other disasters—natural and manmade. In every instance, the people of the Panhandle rise to the occasion to meet these challenges and work for a better future. The damage and destruction of Michael is unprecedented, but we also

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believe temporary. The effort will be herculean for our citizens and our local governments but we will recover and we will rebuild.

If we can help, please contact Cori Henderson, Rick Harper, Frank Fuller or Susan Skelton at 850.387.9405 or email us at [info@myfloridatriumph.com](mailto:info@myfloridatriumph.com). Our board members are part of the recovery efforts in their own communities, but you can reach any of us through the same phone number and email address.

Thank you for your strength. Thank you for your perseverance. Thank you for showing kindness to neighbors and strangers.

Respectfully,



Don Gaetz

*Chairman of the Board*

cc: Northwest Florida Legislative Delegation

Senator Doug Broxson  
Senator George Gainer  
Senator Bill Montford  
Rep. Jay Trumbull  
Rep. Halsey Beshears  
Rep. Brad Drake  
Rep. Clay Ingram  
Rep. Mel Ponder  
Rep. Frank White  
Rep. Jayer Williamson

Triumph Board Members

Don Gaetz, Chair  
Allan Bense  
Benjamin Lee  
Pam Dana, Ph.D.  
Steven Riggs, IV  
Jason Shoaf

Cori Henderson  
Susan Skelton  
Rick Harper, Ph.D.