Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

February 3, 2026

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Trump,

We write in strong support of the state of South Dakota's major disaster declaration request submitted by Governor Larry Rhoden on January 27, 2026. This disaster declaration request would assist in recovery efforts from a severe storm that occurred December 17 through December 18, 2025.

During the third week of December, a historic windstorm swept across western South Dakota destroying trees, electrical infrastructure, and homes and left a significant amount of debris on roadways and public rights-of-way. Wind gusts in excess of 90 miles per hour were recorded, downing electrical lines and triggering fires. South Dakota's preliminary damage assessment, conducted in collaboration with FEMA, identified $4.6 million in total damage across Custer, Fall River, and Pennington counties.

As a result of the storm, approximately 53,174 households experienced power outages, and Black Hills Electric Cooperative, the sole power provider of the region, lost 96 percent of its power, the largest outage in its history. The restoration of power was difficult, particularly in the rural and off-road areas, and, in some cases, took seven days to restore.

The state, county, and local governments stepped up to address this disaster with all available resources and authorities. First responders worked overnight to keep fires from spreading and cleared roadways of downed power lines and trees. However, though the governor activated the state emergency operations plan, the severity and magnitude of the storm is beyond the capabilities of the state. Therefore, granting a major disaster declaration would allow the state to continue removing debris, repairing roadways, and rebuilding critical electrical infrastructure, as well as continue disaster mitigation activities.

We support the state's disaster declaration request and urge you to approve a major disaster declaration as soon as possible so the necessary federal resources are available to assist the relevant areas of South Dakota. Thank you for your prompt attention to this request, and please do not hesitate to contact us if we can provide any additional information.

Sincerely,

JOHN THUNE
United States Senator

M. MICHAEL ROUNDS
United States Senator

DUSTY JOHNSON
Member of Congress