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joined Gov. Chris Christie on Monday to announce federal approval of the state's plan to spend \$1.8 billion to rebuild after superstorm Sandy.

May. 03, 2013

HIGHLANDS, N.J. — He brought the money — \$1.8 billion to be exact.

Shaun Donovan, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development secretary, joined Gov. Chris Christie on Monday to announce federal approval of the state's plan to spend \$1.8 billion to rebuild after superstorm Sandy. Homeowners and businesses should be able to start applying for the funds next month.

"I thank Shaun for coming. I really thank him for bringing the money. He's going to give it to me in the back there," Christie said during the announcement in Highlands, which was hit hard by the storm six months ago.

"It's a lot. There's a few suitcases involved."

But after waiting more than three months for Congress to approve it, the relief aid could start making its way to New Jerseyans by the end of May.

"What does this announcement today mean for a family that's sleeping on the couch at a relative's house for six months?" Donovan said. "What this announcement today means is they have hope of getting back in their home very soon. It means their child will no longer have to commute an hour to get to school every day."

While Christie said the majority of New Jerseyans are back to normal, he can still see the emotion on the faces of those still struggling with the losses inflicted by the Oct. 29 storm.

“One of the things I want people to understand today is we are not here to take a

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Wednesday's deadline.

Christie said the grants will meet unmet needs and residents should be prepared to “dot their i's and cross their t's,” showing what insurance or federal relief funds they already received.

“We are not going to have a situation that we had in previous disasters — or at least we are going to try — where people are ripping us off,” he said.

Among the highlights of the plan:

- \$600 million will be set aside to help homeowners rebuild, elevate and mitigate against damage that Sandy caused. Eligible homeowners could receive up to \$150,000.

- A \$180 million program will give out \$10,000 grants to encourage homeowners considering selling or abandoning their homes to stay.

- Nearly \$325 million will be allocated to replenish the rental housing stock and build affordable rental housing.

- Some \$460 million will be set aside under the program to help businesses, which Christie said could make its way out into the community faster.

Among those economic programs are grants of up to \$50,000 to help small businesses that suffer physical damage to rebuild and restock.

That grant program was key for Gert Sofman, who lost her home and her three-month-old business, Gert's Snacks & Spices, when Sandy inundated both.

Sofman can't afford to rebuild her home, which needs to be demolished, until she rebuilds her business and starts making money again. But the Small Business

Administration denied her a federal loan because she has no income.

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job for me. This is a mission.

New Jerseyans affected by superstorm Sandy should visit www.sandyhelp.nj.gov to apply for housing or business assistance.

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