The devastation caused by hurricanes Katrina and Rita shocked us all, and Americans everywhere want to help. That’s certainly true for the Alaska fishing industry, which has experienced its own natural disasters -- such as our 1964 earthquake and tsunami.

Alaska and the Gulf Coast are the two most productive sources of wild seafood in the U.S. We have much more “in common” than “in competition.” We believe that anything that weakens the domestic seafood industry weakens the economic and social fabric of both our regions.

Immediately after Katrina, I was contacted by Alaskans who asked me to help establish an Alaskan-based “fishing industry to fishing community” aid effort. Of course, I said yes. We call it “AFIRM.” It exists solely to bring our industry together in a group effort to help Gulf Coast fishing communities get back into action as quickly as possible.

AFIRM has been incorporated as a non-profit entity under the laws of the State of Alaska, and is currently seeking 501(c)(3) status. AFIRM’s full board of directors is still being formed, and will consist of leaders in the fishing, seafood processing, banking and transportation industries. In addition, AFIRM Advisors are being drawn from prominent figures in Alaska and the Gulf Coast. I am honored to serve as the honorary chair of this group.

Even before AFIRM was born, Alaska seafood processors had already donated large quantities of shelf-stable products such as canned and pouch salmon, to be distributed in the Gulf region by America’s Second Harvest and other groups. AFIRM will continue encouraging such donations during the current emergency.

In the longer term, AFIRM also will solicit cash donations for trustworthy Gulf Coast institutions that can direct assistance to fishing communities. Fishermen in Alaska communities have already started organizing benefit events for this purpose. We will keep administrative costs to the minimum possible, most staff time and office expenses donated.

AFIRM is mission-specific and goal-oriented. I hope you will join me in building this important bridge between Alaska and the Gulf Coast. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

United States Senator