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## House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee passes a series of disaster aid bills

**April 2, 2019**

Several disaster aid bills were introduced in the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee beginning on February 15 in a continuing effort to mitigate the economic and physical impacts of future natural disasters.

Congressman Mark Meadows (R-NC-11) has now introduced two bills that seek to make the disaster assistance process more transparent. The first, H.R. 1307, the Post-Disaster Assistance Online Accountability Act, was introduced in mid-February and strives to improve the disaster assistance assessment process by requiring agencies that offer disaster support to regularly report data to USA Spending, which would help consolidate disaster relief information. The second bill, H.R. 1984, the Disclosing Aid Spent to Ensure Relief (DISASTER) Act, was introduced on April 2 with the intention of requiring the Director of the Office of Management and Budget to submit an annual disaster aid spending report to Congress. This bill would allow the federal government to set an annual cap on disaster aid spending based on a calculated average of how much the U.S. has spent within a 10-year period.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has approved the replacement of the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant Program with the newly created National Public Infrastructure Pre-Disaster Hazard Mitigation fund. This fund, created by the recently passed Disaster Recovery Reform Act (DRRA), will provide between \$400 million and \$600 million per year in grants for infrastructure investments in states that are most threatened by hurricanes, flooding, and other natural disasters. The fund focuses on pre-disaster mitigation to help susceptible areas improve their infrastructure and so increase their resilience to natural disasters. H.R. 1306, the Federal Disaster Assistance Coordination Act, was introduced on February 15 and would amend the DRRA to develop a study on streamlining and consolidating hazard damage assessment information.

H.R. 1311, introduced on February 19, amends the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act to expedite the process of making federal relief money available to those in need. Subcommittee on Aviation Ranking Member Garret Graves (R-LA-6), one of the bill's cosponsors, said that "this bill starts to fix the slow, unnecessary federal processes that often re-victimize people and jeopardize recovery for entire communities."

FEMA's disaster management budget has recently come under question as the White House budget proposed a \$71 million cut to the Emergency Management Performance Grant program. FEMA Acting Administrator Peter Gaynor has assured critics that the proposed budget effectively prioritizes disaster resilience by providing funds for preparedness and mitigation projects, citing the DRRA as one such measure allowing them to do so.

The bills will be taken to a voice vote and then move on to the Senate for consideration if approved.

*Sources: E&E News; Federal Emergency Management Agency; Library of Congress; U.S. House, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Garret Graves, Mark Meadows.*

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