

Hurricane Harvey puts additional strain on the federal appropriations process

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Hurricane Harvey made landfall on the Gulf coast of Texas as a category 4 storm on August 25, dumping massive amounts of rain on southeast Texas and surrounding areas. Widespread flooding and storm damage ensued as the storm moved over the land, displacing and endangering the lives of tens of thousands of inhabitants. Houston, TX, the fourth most populated city in the United States, was hit particularly hard by the storm. As a result, the projected disaster relief costs may put a large financial strain on Congress when it returns to session after the August recess.

Before Harvey made landfall, President Donald Trump pre-emptively approved a disaster declaration to prepare for the hurricane's impacts; however, Congress will likely have to negotiate ways to provide additional emergency relief funds in the coming weeks.

White House Homeland Security Adviser Thomas Bossert estimated that there is currently about \$3 billion in the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) disaster relief fund. If Congress passes an appropriations bill for Homeland Security before the end of fiscal year (FY) 2017 on September 30, it would potentially authorize \$7.3 billion in discretionary funding to the disaster relief fund for FY 2018.

In response to Hurricane Sandy in 2012, Congress passed H.R.41 in 2013 to temporarily increase the borrowing authority of FEMA for carrying out the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), providing nearly a \$10 billion increase in NFIP funding for recovery and relief. Shortly afterwards, Congress passed the Disaster Relief Appropriations Act (H.R.152), authorizing approximately \$60 billion in relief funds. The NFIP is up for reauthorization on September 30. Congress also must deal with an appropriations package to continue funding the entire federal government by the same date.

Sources: E&E News, Federal Emergency Management Agency, White House Office of the Press Secretary
