



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on December 20, 2017

House Republicans Introduce Massive Disaster-relief Bill

House Republicans, contrary to their pledges of fiscal responsibility and constitutional fidelity, unveiled a proposed \$81 billion disaster-relief bill Monday night. According to [Politico](#), it is “the largest single funding request for natural calamities in U.S. history.”

[Bloomberg](#) reported on some of the items in the bill:



Of the funding, \$28.6 billion would go to the Homeland Security Department, which would reimburse 90 percent of state wildfire costs. The Transportation and Housing and Urban Development departments would get \$27.8 billion, with most of that going to the Community Development Block Grant Program. The bill has \$1.3 billion in funds to repair federal highways.

There is also money for crop losses, flood mitigation, education, small-business loans, and government-building repairs. And there’s this: “Buried in the text of the bill is a provision increasing farm subsidies for cotton producers.”

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Although Democrats played a role in inflating the cost of the legislation, Republicans bear the majority of the responsibility for it. President Donald Trump started the ball rolling with a request for \$44 billion for relief of hurricane-ravaged states and territories. Congress almost doubled that amount by both increasing the funding for hurricane relief and adding funding for wildfire relief. The latter was included at the behest of California congressmen, but House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) had already promised to deliver it. Moreover, with the relief bill likely to be attached to a “must-pass” appropriations bill to keep the government open, Republican congressmen from Texas, Florida, and California “threatened to oppose the spending bill if hurricane relief wasn’t included,” wrote Bloomberg.

GOP bigwigs appear unfazed by the massive outlays in the 184-page bill. *Politico* noted that House leaders “plan to approve” the bill “this week.”

“The dollar figures I hear are fine,” said Senate Majority Whip John Cornyn (R-Texas). “How it’s distributed may need some changes.”

Likewise, “Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell [R-Ky.] said Monday that passing a disaster bill this week is a priority,” noted Bloomberg.

House Appropriations Committee Chairman Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-N.J.), in a statement, said, “This legislation is the next step in helping our fellow Americans recover from multiple, back-to-back,



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devastating disasters, including some of the largest major hurricanes, wildfires, and agriculture losses this country has ever seen.”

“We have a commitment to our fellow citizens,” he added. “We must provide the necessary resources for them to recover from these emergencies.”

Of course, Congress has another commitment to the citizens of this country, namely to uphold the Constitution, which nowhere authorizes that body to appropriate funds for disaster relief. President Grover Cleveland understood that when he [vetoed](#) a bill to distribute seeds to drought-stricken areas of Texas, explaining, “I can find no warrant for such an appropriation in the Constitution, and I do not believe that the power and duty of the general government ought to be extended to the relief of individual suffering which is in no manner properly related to the public service or benefit.” Furthermore, he stated, “Though the people support the government, the government should not support the people.”

Despite the push from the top, the bill stands a small chance of failure. Liberal Democrats think it’s insufficient. Representative Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.), ranking member of the House Appropriations Committee, had unkind words for it, reported the [Los Angeles Times](#). Conservative Republicans, on the other hand, want offsetting spending cuts. Representative Mark Meadows (R-N.C.), who leads the House Freedom Caucus, told Bloomberg, “It would be very difficult to vote for that” without offsets, though he doubted they would be in the final legislation.

Congressional leaders appear to be counting on the fact that, as the *Times* pointed out, “the desire to help constituents facing dire emergencies outstrips the willingness to consider more cuts in programs that many lawmakers feel already have been trimmed too far.” House Rules Committee Chairman Pete Sessions (R-Texas) told Bloomberg “that conservatives will support the bill, despite a lack of offsetting spending cuts, because they understand the urgent need for aid.”

If the relief bill threatens to sink the larger spending bill, House leaders may decide to bring it up for a vote separately, hoping to gain Democratic votes. Both houses of Congress are expected to vote on the measure this week.

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