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THIS WEEK IN WASHINGTON: Two Steps Forward, Two Steps Back

The spookiness of inter-party divide continued as Democrats punted for the second time after failing to get all members on board to pass the social spending package in the Senate. However, the Biden administration announced this week a proposed \$1.85 trillion framework, down from the proposed \$3.5 trillion price tag, for the Build Back Better initiative which includes free universal preschool education, subsidies for child care, an increase in the maximum Pell Grant award, hearing coverage under Medicare, tax incentives to increase electric vehicle manufacturing, and more, but leaves off many initiatives including free community college access and paid leave for workers.

Just because there has been seemingly no movement on the blockbuster policy packages in Washington this week, does not mean there was not work being done on the emergency management front! This was a busy week on Capitol Hill for the emergency management community. On Tuesday, NEMA's own Andrew Phelps of Oregon represented the association before the House Transportation and Infrastructure (T&I) in a hearing on the emerging and dynamic threats posed by wildland fires. With thought-provoking statistics and proposals discussed among NEMA committees, Phelps outlined legislative action that can be taken to strengthen the federal, state, and local partnership in the fight against the vast threat of wildfires.

In addition to the wildfire hearing, T&I held a mark-up on key pieces of emergency management legislation. Additional detail is available below. Finally, the House Homeland Security Committee held a hearing on efforts to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion in FEMA's programs.

Hearings the Week of November 1, 2021

[20 Years After 9/11: Examining Emergency Communications Part 2](#)

House Committee on Homeland Security
Tuesday, November 2, 2021 at 10:00am ET

[Countering Domestic Terrorism](#)

House Committee on Intelligence
Wednesday, November 3, 2021 at 9:30am ET

[Evolving The U.S. Approach to Cybersecurity: Raising the Bar Today to Meet the Threats of Tomorrow](#)

House Committee on Homeland Security
Wednesday, November 3, 2021 at 10:00am ET

[The Evolving Cybersecurity Landscape: Industry Perspectives on Securing the Nation's Infrastructure](#)

House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure
Thursday, November 4, 2021 at 10:00am ET

More News from the Nation's Capital...

NEMA Member Testifies in House Transportation & Infrastructure Subcommittee on Wildfires

On Tuesday, Andrew Phelps, Oregon State Emergency Management Director and NEMA R&R Committee Chair, testified on behalf of NEMA on the effects of wildfires and how we can be better prepared and respond to the growing threat these disasters pose. In the hearing, Chairwoman Titus (D-NV) discussed legislation being drafted, the "Resilient America" Act, which will boost pre-disaster mitigation by increasing funding for building code, space projects, and fire-resistant materials in new construction projects among other things. The discussion encompassed the idea that wildfires need to be treated and responded to in their own, unique manner, and current policies for other hazards like hurricanes and flooding are not suitable for the dynamic hazard of a wildfire. Phelps also stressed the need for coordination of land management agreements and pre-disaster conversations as ways that states and the federal government can more adequately increase preparedness on the front end, in order to save money on suppression costs.

The full hearing and written statements by witnesses can be found [here](#).

T&I Leaders Introduce Legislation to Help Communities Prepare for and Respond to Disasters

On the heels of the wildfire hearing, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee also held a mark-up to address a range of issues. NEMA supported and/or assisted in the development of four of the marked-up bills:

- [Amendment in the Nature of a Substitute \(ANS\) to H.R. 1066](#), Wildfire Recovery Act H.R. 1066, statutorily codifies that Fire Management Assistance Grants (FMAG) shall have a federal share of not less than 75%. It also requires FEMA to conduct a rulemaking establishing for when the FEMA administrator can recommend a cost share adjustment for FMAGs of a certain magnitude.
- [H.R. 5641](#), Small Project Efficient and Effective Disaster (SPEED) Recovery Act The Small Project Efficient and Effective Disaster (SPEED) Recovery Act updates the threshold for what qualifies as a "small project" and increases the amount to \$1 million. This update will allow more recovery projects to proceed under simplified procedures and in turn streamline the process and paperwork for many projects, reduce administrative burdens, and provide more certainty in the recovery process for communities. More information can be found [here](#).
- [H.R. 5689](#), Resilient AMERICA Act H.R. 5689, includes a significant set of enhancements for mitigation and resilience activities to improve the provision of federal resources to help build capacity and fund risk-reducing, cost-effective mitigation projects for eligible state, local, Tribal, and territorial governments and certain private nonprofit organizations. More information can be found [here](#).
- [H.R. 5673](#), Safeguarding Tomorrow through Ongoing Risk Mitigation Technical Corrections Act H.R. 5673 makes several corrections to the resilience revolving loan fund program authorized in the Safeguarding Tomorrow through Ongoing Risk Mitigation (STORM) Act (P.L. 116-284).

The full press release from the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee can be found [here](#).

House Committee Holds Hearing on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Disaster Relief

On Wednesday, the House Committee on Homeland Security, chaired by Rep. Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS), held a hearing for Members to learn about inequitable outcomes that arise from the nation's current disaster response framework. Members were able to ask questions about regulatory and legislative changes the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and Congress should enact to address these deficits and improve equity in disaster response. Discussion in the hearing focused on how FEMA can remove barriers for vulnerable populations through increased field staffing, expansion of eligibility for particular assistance programs, and a streamlining of application processes and policies. The witness panel included Dr. Lori Peek, Director of the Natural Hazard Center, Chauncia Willis, Co-Founder and CEO, Institute for Diversity and Inclusion in Emergency Management, Christopher Currie, Director, Homeland Security and Justice Team at GAO, and James Joseph, VP for Response, Tidal Basin.

The full hearing and can be watched [here](#).

GAO Releases Report on Barriers to Recovery Assistance

On Wednesday, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report looking into where improvements can be made to federal disaster recovery programs to help disaster survivors and state, local, territorial, and tribal governments. In the report, GAO makes multiple highlights, including issues with providing assistance to disabled populations, communities with higher levels of social vulnerability were less likely to receive assistance, and the complexities of the FEMA Personal Assistance program. GAO makes multiple recommendations, including technical assistance to navigate complicated application processes, and states that FEMA has taken action to address to these recommendations.

The full GAO report can be found [here](#), and the highlights can be found [here](#).

Representatives Demings and Bacon Introduce Bipartisan Anti-Terrorism Legislation

Last week, Representatives Val Demings (D-FL) and Don Bacon (R-NE) introduced the Homeland Security Capabilities Preservation Act, which would direct the DHS to review past disbursements under the Urban

Area Security Initiative (UASI), then create a plan to continue federal anti-terrorism support for UASI-funded homeland security capabilities.

Links to the full [bill text](#) and [fact sheet](#). For the full press release, click [here](#).

GAO Releases Report on FEMA Flood Maps

On Monday, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report looking at the need to have better planning and analysis to address current and future flood hazards. GAO found that FEMA's flood maps do not reflect the best available climate science or include information on current flood hazards (e.g., heavy rainfall that overwhelms existing storm drainage systems). Further, GAO found FEMA's flood mapping program may take years to address these issues and has been operating under an out-of-date plan. Along with these findings, the report provides recommendations to FEMA to address these flood mapping issues, including updating the Risk MAP program, develop mechanisms to assess the usefulness of its nonregulatory flood risk products; and consider ways to leverage its flood risk data to help prioritize its mapping investment decisions.

The full report can be found [here](#) and the highlights of the report are [here](#).

Other News from DC and Around the Country:

HSToday: [DHS BioWatch Can and Should Be Replaced Within Months, Report Urges](#)

RouteFifty: [The States With New Restrictions on Public Health Emergency Powers](#)

Oregon Capitol Chronicle: [Oregon's Emergency Management Director Testifies to Congress about Wildfire Issues](#)

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