



February 19, 2021



Picture Credit: NASA/JPL-Caltech

THIS WEEK IN WASHINGTON:

Perseverance Will Get You Anywhere

NASA landed a new robotic rover, [Perseverance](#), on Mars this week to seek signs of ancient life and collect samples for a potential return to Earth. Watching the processes deployed to pass coronavirus relief legislation over the past year has felt similar to waiting for the rover to land in many ways, not least of which is the perseverance required to watch the months-long journey to successfully passed legislation (the rover was launched back in July 2020). At present we are hopeful that the legislation expected to come in for a landing in the next few weeks will include emergency management-related funding (here's hoping NEMA staff feel as good as the NASA employees pictured when the rover landed).

After this week's Congressional recess, the House Budget Committee is scheduled to prepare the bills committees drafted earlier this month – the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee's portion currently includes \$50 billion for the Disaster Relief Fund and an extension and expansion of funeral assistance. It is still expected that the House will seek to pass the measure by the end of the month and pitch to the Senate for approval by mid-March when many pandemic-specific programs are scheduled to sunset.

Looking beyond this relief proposal, up next on President Biden's legislative agenda is a package that is expected to include infrastructure spending and funding for expanded broadband networks. Rumored to be included is funding for hardening the electric grid, which may be an idea that picks up momentum after the rolling blackouts in many areas nationwide as a result of extreme winter weather. This package is still in its formulation stage and thus is subject to significantly change.

Hearings the Week of February 22, 2021

[Markup of: American Rescue Plan Act of 2021](#)

House Committee on the Budget
Monday, February 22, 1:00pm ET

[Pathway to Protection: Expanding Availability of COVID-19 Vaccines](#)

House Committee on Energy & Commerce
Tuesday, February 23, 10:30am ET

[Confronting the Coronavirus: Perspectives on the COVID-19 Pandemic One Year Later](#)

House Committee on Homeland Security
Wednesday, February 24, 9:30am ET

More News from the Nation's Capital...

Stakeholders Brief Appropriations Staff on Emergency Management Assessment

On Tuesday, NEMA Vice President and Vermont State Director Erica Bornemann joined FEMA officials and representatives from IAEM, BCEM, and EMAP to provide a briefing on assessing emergency management programs. The briefing came about as a result of FY19 appropriations report language which stated: *"The Committee notes that SLTT emergency management programs in the United States vary in size, scope, and approach. Improvements and a comprehensive understanding of capability can be gained when these programs are evaluated and recognized for compliance with voluntary standards."*

FEMA was therefore directed to brief, in coordination with stakeholders, on the utilization of existing assessment programs, the potential for development of new tools, and the obstacles to using such programs. Bornemann stressed that standards are necessary to ensure national and state gaps identified through the THIRA/SPR process are addressed holistically; cautioned against turning FEMA into a regulatory agency; and reiterated the need for continued federal grant support to sustain built capabilities.

Applications are Open for FEMA National Advisory Council

FEMA is currently accepting applications to serve on the National Advisory Council (NAC). The NAC is a 35-member committee that advises the FEMA Administrator on all aspects of emergency management to ensure the state, local, tribal, territorial (SLTT), non-governmental, and private sector perspectives are considered as part of FEMA's national plans and strategies, grant programs, and risk assessment methodologies. Committee participation is a three-year term, with positions currently open in the following disciplines:

- Cybersecurity (Special Government Employee (SGE));
- Communications (SGE);
- In-Patient Medical Providers (SGE);
- Elected Local Officials (Representative);
- Emergency Management (Representative); and
- Emergency Response Providers (Representatives) (two positions open).

The FEMA Administrator may appoint up to four additional candidates to serve as FEMA Administrator Selections (SGE). Applications must be submitted by **11:59pm ET March 12**.

Additional information is [available here](#).

DHS OIG Report on Needed Oversight and Planning for Transitional Sheltering Assistance Program

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Inspector General (OIG) released its final report, *Better Oversight and Planning are Needed to Improve FEMA's Transitional Sheltering Assistance Program*. The report was done to assess FEMA's operational efficiency and effectiveness providing hotel rooms after the 2017 California wildfires and Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria. OIG found that FEMA did not verify accuracy of hotel taxes and records, paid for unoccupied hotel rooms, did not ensure a timely transition for survivors from hotel rooms to interim or permanent housing, and did not have a Standard Operating Procedure or dedicated program office for the TSA program.

The report contains two recommendations for improving the program:

- FEMA should establish a business unit, assign responsibility, and delegate authority to ensure the TSA program is implemented and managed effectively and efficiently.
- FEMA should develop, document, and implement standard operating procedures for the program specifically related to the issues mentioned above.

FEMA concurred with the recommendations. The report is [available here](#).

Other News from DC and Around the Country:

The Highland County Press: [Ohio Cyber Reserve Member Deployed in Cybersecurity Response](#)

Firehouse: [NFPA Launching 'Outthink Wildfire' Initiative on Facebook Live](#)

ClimateWire: [Northwest Rivers Expected to See 60% Bigger Floods](#)

GovTech: [How West Virginia Tackled COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution](#)

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