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THIS WEEK IN WASHINGTON:

A Big Win Amid the Chaos

Despite the chaos and uncertainty that is rampant across Washington, this week saw at least one big win for emergency management. On Wednesday, the House Transportation and Infrastructure (T&I) Committee voted to favorably report the [Disaster Management Costs Modernization Act](#) (H.R.744). Through this vote, the committee made great progress in advancing a bill that will reduce administrative burden, incentivize faster disaster closeout, and drive down disaster costs. Special thanks to Rep. Neguse (D-CO), who introduced the bill, and the many bipartisan co-sponsors. We are working diligently to get a companion introduced on the Senate side.

Additionally, we're excited to release our [legislative priorities for the 119th Congress](#). We're eager to make progress in a variety of areas and look forward to working with our partners to improve our nation's emergency management system. These priorities include reversing funding cuts to key grant programs, increasing funding for EMAC and training and exercise programs, and passing a variety of critical emergency management legislation, among other priorities. With the passage of the [Disaster Management Costs Modernization Act](#) by the House T&I Committee, we've off to a great start!

This week also saw the House pass the Republicans' budget resolution after weeks of negotiation. Speaker Johnson can now begin work on a framework to make major spending and tax cuts, but it won't be easy and it's likely President Trump will play a vocal role in the process. The same dynamic will be at play in the Senate, which has significant issues with the House resolution. We'll keep you posted on how this proceeds, but it's likely going to be a difficult path forward for all involved. It will only be complicated by the looming government shutdown. Congress only has two weeks to find a solution before the current Continuing Resolution expires, and it doesn't appear much progress is being made.

One issue is that the Republican and Democratic appropriators do not yet have a topline spending deal. Additionally, Democrats want restrictions on how the Trump Administration spends the money that is appropriated, which Republicans have no interest in providing. The clock is ticking, and the possibility of a shutdown keeps increasing...

[Upcoming Congressional Hearings...](#)

[Future of FEMA: Perspectives from the Emergency Management Community](#)
House Homeland Security Committee
Tuesday, March 4; 10:00 AM (ET)

[More News from the Nation's Capital...](#)

GAO REPORT: HIGH-RISK SERIES ADDS NEW AREA ON FEDERAL DISASTER ASSISTANCE

On Tuesday, the GAO released their updated "[High Risk List](#)." The List highlights 38 areas across the federal government that are seriously vulnerable to waste, fraud, abuse, and mismanagement or that are in need of transformation. The GAO added a new area on federal disaster assistance due to the recent increase in natural disasters and the need for efficient and effective federal relief.

The report notes that recent natural disasters—including wildfires in Southern California and hurricanes in the Southeast—demonstrate the need for federal agencies to deliver assistance as efficiently and effectively as possible and reduce their fiscal exposure. The federal approach to disaster recovery is fragmented across over 30 federal entities. The GAO reported that so many entities involved with multiple programs and authorities, differing requirements and timeframes, and limited data sharing across entities could make it harder for survivors and communities to navigate federal programs.

The report notes that FEMA and other federal entities—including Congress—need to address the nation's fragmented federal approach to disaster recovery. Attention is also needed to improve processes for assisting survivors, invest in resilience, and strengthen FEMA's disaster workforce and capacity.

DHS OIG REPORT ON FEMA'S PROCESS TO REVIEW HERMIT'S PEAK ASSISTANCE CLAIMS

On Monday, the DHS Office of Inspector General (OIG) released a [report](#) on FEMA's process to review Hermit's Peak assistance claims. The OIG found that FEMA's Hermit's Peak/Calf Canyon Claims Office established a systematic claims process to ensure that all payments are made in accordance with the Hermit's Peak/Calf Canyon Fire Assistance Act. In January 2024, the Claims Office published the Hermit's Peak/Calf Canyon Claims Program and Policy Guide, Version 1.0, defining key roles and responsibilities related to accepting, reviewing, approving, and processing claims.

However, the Claims Office did not always determine compensation amounts within the 180-day timeframe required by the Act. The OIG analyzed claims data from the week of August 18, 2024, and found that 13 percent of active claims were overdue. This occurred because FEMA did not develop and implement a staffing plan to ensure it hired enough staff to timely process claims. This inadequate staffing may continue to delay billions of dollars from reaching current and future claimants.

Additionally, the Claims Office did not meet mandatory Congressional reporting requirements because the reports were not prioritized. As a result, Congress was unable to provide appropriate oversight of funds, and FEMA risks expending appropriated funds without paying all valid claims.

GAO ISSUES REPORT ON GUIDANCE AND ASSESSMENT OF FEMA'S REVOLVING LOAN FUND PROGRAM

On Monday, the GAO released a report titled "[Disaster Resilience: FEMA Should Improve Guidance and Assessment of Its Revolving Loan Fund Program](#)." The STORM Act includes a provision that GAO review FEMA's implementation of the Safeguarding Tomorrow Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) program.

This report includes information on how the revolving loan fund program works, the number of grants FEMA has awarded to-date, the guidance FEMA has developed for the program and whether program participants find it useful, how applicants select projects, and FEMA's efforts to develop program performance measures. To conduct this work, GAO reviewed and analyzed relevant agency documents such as FEMA's Notices of Funding Opportunity for fiscal years 2023 and 2024. GAO also interviewed officials from FEMA and all eight fiscal year 2023 RLF program awardees.

[Other News from DC and Around the Country...](#)

Rolling Stone: [What Dismantling FEMA Will Really Mean When the Next Disaster Strikes](#)

CNN: [Trump Administration Plans for Sharp FEMA Cuts Fuel Worries for Some Republicans, State Officials](#)

NPR: [Trump Administration Drops Work on Stronger Building Codes for Disasters](#)

HSToday: [Disaster Diplomats: Why the Future of Emergency Management is a Matter of National Security](#)

NPR: [What the Firings at FEMA Could Mean for the Next Hurricane or Wildfire](#)

E&E Daily: [Committee Approves Disaster Relief, Resilience Bills](#)

Politico: [GAO Warns About FEMA Staffing as Trump Fires Hundreds](#)

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