

Washington, D.C. - According to press reports ([Report: Cantor Softens on Disaster Relief](#)), after initially indicating that additional funds for disaster relief in the wake of Hurricane Irene would have to be offset by cuts to certain government programs, House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-VA) is now declining to confirm or deny whether disaster relief funds will be held hostage to budget cuts. Today, Rep. David Price (D-NC), ranking democrat on the House Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee, which oversees disaster relief funding, pushed for the Majority Leader to provide more certainty to communities affected by recent disasters such as Hurricane Irene.

"People affected by natural disasters need to hear with certainty that Republicans are not going to hold emergency relief hostage to political objectives, and we still haven't heard that," Rep. Price said. "Saying your position is 'maybe we will hold relief funds hostage' until we get cuts to things like education or infrastructure or state homeland security grants is not good enough when Americans are in dire need."

Funds are needed to replenish the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Disaster Relief Fund (DRF), which will run out of money before the end of the fiscal year. The looming shortfall has already forced the agency to shift disaster assistance funding from the tornadoes and flooding that devastated the Midwest and Southeast earlier this year to provide immediate disaster relief in the wake of Irene, effectively pitting parts of the country affected by natural disasters against one another. Rep. Cantor's suggestion that disaster funding might have to wait for budget tradeoffs departs from past bipartisan practice of designating emergency funding.

Earlier this week, Republicans indicated that they would not provide FEMA's DRF with additional resources unless the funds are offset by spending cuts elsewhere in the budget. Rep. Cantor has reportedly said democratic objections to this unprecedented approach to emergency disaster relief funding were an attempt to "try to make a political story out of" the situation.

"I have no sympathy for Mr. Cantor's lament that this is a 'political' story," Rep. Price said. "This is a story about the core values that inform the Republican party's policy decisions. That they would even contemplate holding emergency relief hostage to the demands of the tea party caucus is abhorrent."

PRICE RESPONDS TO REPORTED REPUBLICAN SHIFT ON DISASTER RELIEF FUNDING

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