

**Washington, D.C.** - As federal, state, and local first responders throughout the country work to assess the damage inflicted by Hurricane Irene and begin the process of recovery, Republicans in Congress have indicated that they will not provide the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Disaster Relief Fund (DRF) with additional resources unless the funds are offset by spending cuts elsewhere in the budget. Yesterday, Rep. David Price (D-NC), ranking democrat on the House Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee, which oversees FEMA's budget, condemned Republicans for putting budget politics ahead of communities affected by Irene and other recent natural disasters and called on Congress to ensure that FEMA has the resources it needs to respond to all disasters.

*Today, Rep. Price joined CNN to discuss this issue.*

"Now is not the time for another round of budget politics," Rep. Price said. "Livelihoods and local economies depend on swift relief and assistance in the event of a natural disaster, and the millions of Americans affected by Irene and other recent events can't afford to wait around while Republicans pick another budget fight with the president by holding disaster relief hostage to further spending cuts."

According to recent press reports, the looming shortfall in FEMA's DRF will force the agency to shift disaster assistance funding for the tornadoes and flooding that devastated the Midwest and Southeast earlier this year to provide immediate disaster relief in the wake of Irene. FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate confirmed the agency would cease accepting applications for new repair work stemming from previous disasters. But even after prioritizing immediate relief ahead of disaster recovery work, FEMA's DRF will still be exhausted well before the end of the current fiscal year.

***LA Times: Storm Brews in Congress Over Paying for Disaster Relief***

By Lisa Mascaro, Washington Bureau

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Reporting from Washington—

Americans who saw their homes flooded, streets ripped apart and businesses disrupted by last weekend's hurricane are about to face another storm: a new congressional battle as House Republican leaders seek to match any additional spending for disaster relief with equal cuts elsewhere in the federal budget.

Unless additional disaster aid is appropriated, federal officials said communities trying to rebuild from natural disasters this year in the Midwest and South will have to wait while funds are diverted to help victims of Hurricane Irene.

The recent string of disasters, including a tornado that tore through Joplin, Mo., and a flood that inundated Minot, N.D., is running into the same political buzz saw that nearly forced the government into default during the bitter fight over the debt ceiling this summer.

The federal budget fight has largely focused so far on gargantuan sums and giant bureaucracies. The dispute could hit home in a real way now, affecting families whose homes or livelihoods were destroyed.

Congress doesn't return until next week, but the battle was joined Monday when House Republican leaders called for cuts to offset any new spending for disaster relief and reconstruction.

Democrats immediately resisted what they called an unfair and unprecedented approach to emergency management.

The House and Senate are headed toward a showdown as the Federal Emergency Management Agency's disaster relief fund runs out of money, possibly as soon as next month.

"We will find the money if there is a need for additional money, but those monies are not unlimited," Rep. Eric Cantor (R-Va.), the House majority leader, told Fox News. "We'll find other places to save so that we can fund the role the federal government needs to play."

Cantor's district in central Virginia was the epicenter of a magnitude 5.8 earthquake that rumbled up the Eastern Seaboard last Tuesday. The quake rattled nerves and buildings, but caused little damage.

Hurricane Irene, which eventually was downgraded to a tropical storm, was less fierce than originally feared. But the wind and rain are believed to have caused billions of dollars in damage.

**"Now is not the time for another round of budget politics," said Rep. David Price of North Carolina, the top Democrat on the Homeland Security appropriations subcommittee. "Livelihoods and local economies depend on swift relief and assistance in the event of a natural disaster, and the millions of Americans affected by Irene and other recent events can't afford to wait around while Republicans pick another budget fight with the president by holding disaster relief hostage to further spending cuts."**

President Obama, speaking at the White House, promised the federal government would help communities affected by the storm.

"We're going to make sure folks have all the support they need as they begin to assess and repair the damage left by the storm," Obama said.

Federal disaster assistance helps in ways large and small — including covering the rent for those who lost their homes and rebuilding roads, schools and libraries.

The problem is that aid money is running out. FEMA has less than \$800 million left in a special disaster fund. It already was spending \$400 million a month before Hurricane Irene swept ashore.

As a result, FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate said Monday the agency would not consider any new applications for what it calls permanent repair work in pre-Irene disasters, citing damage from tornadoes in Missouri, Alabama and Mississippi, and flooding in the Dakotas. He said the agency was discussing a supplemental funding request with the White House.

"Any projects that have not come in for approval, we're not going to be able to fund those as this point. We're going to postpone those," Fugate told reporters at the White House.

"Our goal is to keep this disruption as short as possible, but it was prudent," Fugate said. He emphasized that individual assistance programs were not being affected.

Federal disaster funds have run low in years past, but rarely have so many back-to-back emergencies forced FEMA to publicly choose which communities will receive help and which won't.

In the past, the White House has routinely sent Congress requests for supplemental funds to replenish disaster relief funds. And Congress generally has given its approval, as it did after Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

But the GOP-led House has made clear that new spending this year must be offset by cuts in other programs.

The House approved a new FEMA budget for the coming fiscal year, upping disaster aid by \$2.6 billion, well above what Obama had requested. After Midwestern storms this year, Republicans led the effort to approve an additional \$1 billion to aid recovery.

But Republicans slashed funds elsewhere to cover the increased aid. Gone were Homeland Security grants to train and equip firefighters for natural disasters, forcing the loss of 1,600 jobs, congressional aides said.

Money for an urban security initiative, which helps big cities buy equipment and training to prepare for terrorist attacks and other disasters, was cut, as was funding for research into new security technology. Republicans also dipped into an Energy Department account, cutting spending for alternative-powered vehicles, to offset the disaster aid.

Rep. Robert B. Aderholt (R-Ala.), chairman of the Homeland Security appropriations subcommittee, is expected to press to offset any new disaster spending.

Democrats don't necessarily oppose building emergency funds into the annual budget, rather than just approving them as disasters happen. But they oppose the deep cuts elsewhere to pay for it.

Sen. Mary L. Landrieu (D-La.), chairwoman of the Senate's Homeland Security appropriations subcommittee, called the GOP cuts "shortsighted." The Senate is expected to present a larger disaster budget, she said.

"The House bill would say to America's communities: You can't count on the federal government as a reliable partner," Landrieu said Monday. "The excessive cuts in the House bill would be pulling the legs out from under state and local governments at the time when they need a helping hand the most."

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