Disaster Relief Is Badly Needed, but Congress Fails to Act

Hurricanes, floods and other climate-change disasters affect HIV communities too.

May 30, 2019 By AIDS United

After being caught up in partisan gridlock for several months, a disaster relief bill to provide much-needed funding to areas of the country experiencing climate-related emergencies finally passed the Senate and was all set up to be signed into law by President Trump before Congress closed its doors for Memorial Day recess. That was, until a single Republican member of Congress, Rep. Chip Roy (R-TX-21), raised objections to the legislation on the House floor, delaying the passage of the bill for at least another 10 days and compounding the suffering of communities that are in desperate need in financial assistance.

Last Thursday afternoon — fittingly enough as a tornado warning was blaring through the nation's capital — the Senate passed a $19.1 billion disaster relief bill that would grant new money to Puerto Rico, which is still suffering from the fallout of several devastating hurricane seasons, and a series of Southern and Midwestern states that were impacted by intense flooding and hurricane damage last year. House leadership had planned to pass the disaster relief bill by a process of unanimous consent on Friday morning, but Rep. Roy threw a wrench in those plans when he complained about the bill's failure to include billions of dollars in emergency funding sought by President Trump for policing immigration on the U.S.-Mexico border and demanded that a roll call vote be held. As most members of the House had already returned home for their 10-day recess, this meant that the bill would not be approved until the first week of June.

For months, the bill had been held up in the Senate over the question of how much funding to provide to Puerto Rico. Following the lead of President Trump, who White House officials said "doesn't want to include additional Puerto Rico funding in further spending bills" and who has routinely issued vitriolic tweets and statements against the American citizens of the island, many Congressional Republicans opposed including money for Puerto Rico in the disaster relief bill. For their part, Democrats sought a bill that supported Puerto Rico in proportion with the levels of relief funding being sent to Midwestern and Southern states. Eventually, thanks in part to the advocacy of Senate Appropriations Chair Richard Shelby (R-AL) and Senator David Perdue (R-GA), who had billions of dollars in disaster aide to their home states tied up in the bill, President Trump eventually relented and agreed to support it.

At the same time that the drama around the disaster relief bill was going on, House appropriators

were busy feverishly marking up Fiscal Year 2020 spending bills in an attempt to keep up with House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer’s (D-MD-05) ambitious goal of passing all 12 appropriations bills by the end of June. As Congress left for recess, 10 of the 12 appropriations bills had made their way through their respective subcommittees, with only the Financial Services and Homeland Security bills lagging behind.

AIDS United is pleased that a bill to provide additional recovery funding for Puerto Rico and for Midwestern and Southern states impacted by climate emergencies has been passed in the Senate and will continue to work with allies in Congress to pass legislation, both disaster relief and appropriations, that supports people impacted by HIV and the programs and institutions that serve them. Check back regularly to the AIDS United Policy Updates for all the latest on HIV funding and legislation.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

http://beta.docker.poz.com/blog/disaster-relief-badly-needed-congress-fails-act