

# No, Biden didn't take FEMA relief money to use on migrants – but Trump did

Donald Trump falsely accuses President Biden of redirecting disaster funds, a budget maneuver Trump himself approved in 2019.

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*“The Harris-Biden administration says they don’t have any money [for hurricane relief]. ... They spent it all on illegal migrants. ... They stole the FEMA money just like they stole it from a bank, so they could give it to their illegal immigrants that they want to have vote for them.”*

– **Former president Donald Trump, remarks at a campaign rally in Saginaw, Mich., Oct. 3**

Trump has been trying to weaponize the Hurricane Helene relief efforts, accusing the Biden administration of failing to provide adequate assistance. As part of his critique, he claims there is no money available for hurricane relief because it was spent already to handle the surge of migrants at the southern border.

“They stole the FEMA money just like they stole it from a bank,” Trump charged, referring to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, adding in the additional falsehood that Vice President [Kamala Harris](#) wants illegal immigrants to vote for her. As we have explained many times before, this would be against the law and there is no evidence to support this claim.

Trump’s claims have been echoed by his supporters, such as billionaire Elon Musk. But Trump is completely wrong.

Even though Trump was once president, he still appears to have little clue about the appropriations process. What’s even richer is that when he was president, he did exactly what he claims Biden did — take money from FEMA’s disaster fund to fund migrant programs at the southern border.

## The Facts

FEMA is part of the Department of Homeland Security. On Wednesday, DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas told reporters: “We are meeting the immediate needs with the money that we have. We are expecting another hurricane hitting. FEMA does not have the funds to make it through the season.”

He emphasized there was plenty of money to deal with the current disaster. “We are meeting the moment,” he said, adding: “We have the immediate needs right now. On a continuing resolution, we have funds, but that is not a stable source of supply, if you will.”

Congress, as part of a short-term spending bill, recently provided \$20 billion to the FEMA disaster relief fund. But Mayorkas noted: “That doesn’t speak about the future and the fact, as I mentioned earlier, that these extreme weather events are increasing in frequency and severity, and we have to be funded for the sake of the American people. This is not a political issue.”

In other words, Trump falsely claimed that there is no money left for Hurricane Helene survivors. That’s the opposite of what Mayorkas said.

“FEMA has what it needs for immediate response and recovery efforts,” FEMA spokeswoman Jaclyn Rothenberg said on X. “As [FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell] said, she has the full authority to spend against the President’s budget, but we’re not out of hurricane season yet so we need to keep a close eye on it. We may need to go back into immediate needs funding and we will be watching it closely.”

So how does Trump link this to migrants? A Trump campaign spokesman pointed to FEMA’s Shelter and Services Program, which gives grants to local governments and nonprofits to take care of undocumented immigrants. Congress boosted the budget from \$360 million in fiscal year 2023 to \$650 million in fiscal year 2024. The program’s 2023 annual report says it provides shelter, such as hotel/motel services, food and transportation, including plane tickets up to \$700 a person.

As we said, Congress appropriated this money, just as it did the disaster fund. There’s no evidence that any money from the disaster fund was used to help migrants.

“These claims are completely false,” DHS said in a statement Thursday night. “As Secretary Mayorkas said, FEMA has the necessary resources to meet the immediate needs associated with Hurricane Helene and other disasters. The Shelter and Services Program (SSP) is a completely separate, appropriated grant program that was authorized and funded by Congress and is not associated in any way with FEMA’s disaster-related authorities or funding streams.”

Trump has a habit of assuming other politicians act in the same way as he would. So we wondered why he would accuse Biden of raiding the FEMA disaster fund to handle undocumented migrants.

It turns out that’s because he did this. In 2019, the Trump administration, in the middle of hurricane season, told Congress that it was taking \$271 million from DHS programs, including \$155 million from the disaster fund, to pay for immigration detention space and temporary hearing locations for asylum seekers who had been forced to wait in Mexico. “The U.S. is facing a security and humanitarian crisis on the Southern border,” the administration said in its notice that it was redirecting the funds.

The monthly reports issued by the FEMA disaster fund show \$38 million was plucked and given to Immigration and Customs Enforcement in August that year — just before the prime storm period of September and October.

The Trump campaign did not respond to questions about Trump's actions in 2019.

## The Pinocchio Test

Trump falsely claims FEMA has run out of disaster money — and then falsely says that's because money instead was spent on migrants. There is no evidence the Biden administration spent FEMA disaster money on migrants. Rather, that's what Trump did.

He earns Four Pinocchios.

## Four Pinocchios

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