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Trump Moves to Abolish FEMA, Shift Disaster Response to States

President Trump, who calls FEMA “not good,” has issued an executive order and established a commission to look at ending the agency. He favors having states respond to their own disasters, but they may not have adequate resources.

Feb. 4, 2025 • **Jennifer Shutt, Stateline**



Last week, President Trump visited Swannanoa, N.C., which was devastated by Hurricane Helene. Disaster relief could be affected by the administration's freeze on grants and loans.

Mandel Ngan/TNS

WASHINGTON — Governors and state legislatures may have to bolster their natural disaster response and recovery efforts in the coming years as President Donald

Trump looks for ways to shift the federal government's role onto states.

Trump, who proposed doing away with the Federal Emergency Management Agency altogether last week, has since established a 20-member committee via executive order to review the agency and propose ways to overhaul its work.

The fate of the National Flood Insurance Program, managed by FEMA and relied on by more than 4.7 million homeowners, will also be up in the air as the process gets underway.

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"I think, frankly, FEMA is not good," Trump said in North Carolina on Friday. "I think when you have a problem like this, I think you want to go and — whether it's a Democrat or a Republican governor, you want to use your state to fix it and not waste time calling FEMA."

Trump said he planned to recommend that "FEMA go away and we pay directly — we pay a percentage to the state."

"But the state should fix this," Trump said. "If the state did this from the beginning, it would have been a lot better situation."

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'Full-Scale Review' for FEMA

Trump's executive order states that "Americans deserve an immediate, effective, and impartial response to and recovery from disasters."

"FEMA therefore requires a full-scale review, by individuals highly experienced at effective disaster response and recovery, who shall recommend to the President improvements or structural changes to promote the national interest and enable national resilience," the executive order says.

Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth will co-chair the 20-member group. The White House did not respond to a question as to when Trump would name the other members.

The council is supposed to release a report later this year comparing FEMA's response to various natural disasters with how the state affected by the emergency responded. The report is also expected to include how states responded to natural disasters before then-President Jimmy Carter signed in executive order in 1979 establishing FEMA.

U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson said during a **news conference** Monday that he supports reviewing how FEMA operates, but he stopped short of eliminating the agency.

"In my experience, it is very often the case that local workers, people who are working through FEMA, do a pretty good job," said Johnson, a Republican. "But often, it's the leadership at the top that can affect the outcome of how a disaster is handled."

Johnson said no department or agency should be considered out of bounds for evaluation as Trump looks to "make the government more efficient and effective" and Republican lawmakers look for ways "to limit the size and scope of government."

"FEMA has been a partner, but they probably could be a better partner," Johnson said.

Let States Run Response

Republican U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham said Monday that Trump's preferred approach would be to let states run their own emergency response and be reimbursed with federal dollars.

"FEMA is frustrating at times," Graham told reporters in Columbia, South Carolina. "I like to make it easier to help people with disaster relief."

Graham expects anything that comes out of the study to land somewhere in the middle — not completely eliminating the federal agency but cutting through some of the red tape.

“If you want to look at FEMA, reshape FEMA, to make it more effective, count me in,” Graham said.

Congress appropriated \$25.3 billion for FEMA in the last full-year spending bill for the agency, which was \$72.9 million less than its previous funding level and \$267.7 million less than then-President Joe Biden’s budget request, according to [a House GOP summary](#).

Lawmakers provided an additional \$29 billion for FEMA’s disaster relief fund in [an emergency spending bill](#) that Congress approved in late December.

Democratic Governors Association national press secretary Devon Cruz wrote in a statement that the GOP was “floating dangerous ideas.”

“When natural disasters hit, Democratic governors have been a leading example of putting politics aside, and helping families rebuild and recover,” Cruz wrote. “Now, Donald Trump and Congressional Republicans are shamelessly politicizing disaster aid, and floating dangerous ideas that would make it harder to help families rebuild their homes, schools, and communities. This is just the latest example of the growing contrast between Republican-led dysfunction in D.C. and Democratic governors getting real results in their states every day.”

The National Governors Association declined to comment on how the potential changes would affect states and their budgets. The National Conference of State Legislatures and the Republican Governors Association did not respond to requests for comment.

Billions in Federal Dollars Sent to States

FEMA has an interactive [state-by-state breakdown](#) of how much the federal government has spent on natural disaster response and recovery since 2017, though it doesn’t include the emergency funding for COVID-19.

The webpage shows how much FEMA has spent to help each state or territory recover from emergencies, as well as how much the departments of Agriculture, Defense, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Interior and Transportation have spent.

The webpage shows the departments and agencies have allocated about \$250 billion on the natural disasters covered in the data, with significant amounts going to red states that backed Trump in the presidential election and are predominantly represented by GOP lawmakers in Congress.

Speaker Johnson's home state of Louisiana, for example, has been allocated \$19.3 billion in funding, with \$11.5 billion of that from FEMA.

South Dakota, home to Senate Majority Leader John Thune, has been allocated nearly \$400 million from the federal government, with FEMA accounting for \$275.6 million of that total.

Florida, which has borne the brunt of several hurricanes and tropical storms during the years covered, was allocated \$29.5 billion in federal disaster assistance, with \$19 billion of that from FEMA.

South Carolina Daily Gazette senior reporter Jessica Holdman contributed to this report.

This story was first published in Stateline. Read the original [here](#).

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