



Primer: FEMA & The Border Crisis

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Background

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is the federal entity responsible for coordinating a response to a disaster that occurs in the United States. Though FEMA was created to assist Americans during violent weather events and other disasters, the agency has been doling out an enormous amount of money through an accounting sleight of hand to support the record number of illegal aliens that have entered the country since the Biden-Harris administration took office.¹

On a yearly basis, Congress allocates funding to all of the agencies in the Federal government, including the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), to ostensibly control and secure the border. However, Congressional Democrats inserted language into a previous funding bill that allows the transfer of millions of taxpayer dollars from CBP to a FEMA program called the Shelter and Services Program (SSP), which gives financial support to non-federal entities to provide humanitarian services to “noncitizen migrants.”² Between October 2023 and October 2024, at least \$1 billion has been funneled from CBP to the SSP program.³ Sadly, the House majority in Congress has yet to remove this language.

This clever legislative maneuver has allowed Democrats to boast about robust funding for CBP and border security while allowing almost a billion of this funding to go toward providing free housing, free food, free healthcare, and more for illegal aliens at Americans’ expense. For example, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre has recently stated that “President Biden did not take FEMA relief money to use on migrants” despite saying in September 2022 that “FEMA funding was available to support migrants.”⁴ The media has conducted a full-court press of so-called “fact checks,” labeling attempts to expose these facts as “disinformation.”⁵ However, there is clear evidence that FEMA funds have been used to support illegal aliens, that FEMA has been taking taxpayer dollars allocated for Customs and Border Patrol, and that the administration has been promoting a disaster relief response that prioritizes diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

FEMA Assistance for Migrants

There are several different funds at issue here—the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF), the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP, EFSP-H), and the Shelter and Services Program (SSP)⁶:

- The DRF pays for relief following disasters like Hurricane Helene and Hurricane Milton. It is also used to fund recovery efforts from past disasters (hurricanes, wildfires, COVID relief, etc.).⁷
 - Despite DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas’s recent claim that FEMA will run out of hurricane relief funds before the end of the year, FEMA received \$20 billion in DRF funds via the Sept. 26 continuing resolution.⁸
- EFSP, a longstanding FEMA grant program dating back to 1983, provides shelter, food, and supportive services to individuals and families experiencing hunger and/or homelessness or at risk of experiencing them.⁹
- EFSP-Humanitarian was created several years ago to help pay for costs associated with illegal aliens. Under the Biden-Harris administration, this program has been renamed the Shelter and Services Program, and the dollars allocated to it have increased substantially as the Biden-Harris border crisis has continued to grow.¹⁰

The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 directed the establishment of the Shelter and Services Program (SSP). Passed during the speakership of Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), the bill transferred \$800 million from CBP to FEMA “to support sheltering and related activities provided by non-Federal entities, including facility improvements and construction, in support of relieving overcrowding in short-term holding facilities of CBP.”¹¹ In FY2024, Congress transferred an additional \$650 million for SSP.¹²

The SSP originated in 2019 as a one-time \$30 million funding side-car within the Emergency Food and Shelter Program for “assistance to aliens released from” DHS custody.¹³ In just five years, it has ballooned from a temporary one-time infusion of \$30 million to a new program receiving appropriations requests of \$5 billion from some Democrat Senators.¹⁴ This would be an increase of more than 16,500 percent from the program’s modest 2019 origins—underscoring both the severity of the escalating border crisis and the growing illegal immigration industrial complex. It also serves as a case-in-point for the old adage that nothing is so permanent as a temporary government program.

This program operates as a slush fund for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that aid illegal aliens after they enter the United States.¹⁵ NGOs have expanded their role in facilitating the illegal immigration industry under the guise of “humanitarian aid” and provide cash debit cards, food, clothing, medical treatment, shelter, and even transportation to illegal aliens.¹⁶ This

increasing infusion of taxpayer money into the coffers of NGOs is, in some cases, comprising significant percentages of their overall funding. For example, the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service reported as recently as 2021 that such grants make up more than 80 percent of its funds.¹⁷

According to a March 2023 Office of the Inspector General (OIG) report, millions of FEMA dollars going to care for illegal aliens may have been broadly abused.¹⁸ Per the OIG, “FEMA did not provide sufficient oversight” of the use of these funds, and some fund recipients used those dollars to provide services to illegals who escaped into the interior of the United States.¹⁹ It remains to be seen how many of these individuals being assisted by taxpayer-fueled NGOs are felons or violent criminals.

A Policy That Puts Americans Last

Customs and Border Protection (CBP) transferred \$800 million from its FY2023 budget and an additional \$650 million in FY2024 to FEMA for the Shelter and Services Program.²⁰ This serves as a scheme by the Biden-Harris administration to further facilitate the open-border invasion of the U.S. by depleting border security resources, infusing left-wing NGOs with enormous taxpayer-provided funds to continue their efforts to resettle millions of noncitizens inside the United States. To make matters worse, Title V, section 501(c) of the FY 2024 appropriations bill for DHS provides:

“Up to 5 percent of any appropriation made available for the current fiscal year for the Department of Homeland Security by this Act or provided by previous appropriations Acts may be transferred between such appropriations if the Committees on Appropriations of the House of Representatives and the Senate are notified at least 30 days in advance of such transfer, but no such appropriation, except as otherwise specifically provided, shall be increased by more than 10 percent by such transfer.”²¹

That statutory designation gives the DHS secretary significant power to move (or “reprogram”) money from one FEMA account—like SSP—to another, such as DRF. In fact, Mayorkas could potentially reprogram any DHS appropriations for such purposes.²² While there is no evidence to date that DRF funds have been specifically diverted to pay for costs associated with illegal aliens, there is nothing stopping the Biden-Harris administration or a future Harris administration from doing so.

However, concerns with FEMA operations under the Biden-Harris administration extend beyond its current status as a repository for facilitating aid to illegal immigrants. FEMA has reoriented its priorities to focus on DEI initiatives. The administration’s 2022-2026 strategic disaster relief plan lists as a primary objective “instilling equity as a foundation of emergency management,” which means that FEMA intends to prioritize disaster relief and emergency response on the basis

of Critical Theory precepts.²³ This objective appears to condition agency support and response with a neo-Marxist “oppressor versus oppressed” prism that distracts from assisting those actually struggling in a crisis. The plan states that “diversity, equity, and inclusion cannot be optional; they must be core components of how the agency conducts itself internally and executes its mission.”²⁴ This is a clear admission that DEI concepts that intentionally divide Americans and prioritize individuals based on race, ethnicity, biological sex, and other immutable characteristics have infected FEMA. It goes without saying that such a paradigm—particularly in a federal agency tasked with facilitating emergency response operations—will endanger the very lives of the citizens it is supposed to be helping.

Conclusion

The Biden-Harris administration’s slow response to recent natural disasters is no accident. Increased taxpayer-funded assistance for illegal aliens stands in stark contrast to the inadequate response by FEMA to aid Americans affected by Hurricanes Helene and Milton, which devastated the Southeastern United States. For example, North Carolina is home to numerous military installations, including the Army’s recently-renamed Fort Bragg, Fort Liberty, which houses more than 43,000 active-duty soldiers, and the Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, which hosts more than 63,000s active-duty military.²⁵ It was not until October 2—five days after Hurricane Helene hit western North Carolina—that President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris approved active-duty military personnel and equipment to support ongoing rescue, relief, and recovery operations.²⁶ The infusion of radical ideologies into the federal government is wreaking havoc on the lives of American citizens, further separating Washington, D.C., from the will of the people and contributing to a growing antagonism that threatens the very lives of the people that the government is supposed to serve.

Endnotes

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