



## Record Damage from Natural Disasters in 2017 and Insufficient Response So Far

New data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) showing that natural disasters caused a [record \\$306 billion](#) in damage during 2017 underscores the need for immediate federal relief to Puerto Rico and other areas hit by disasters last year.

Yet, disaster relief, along with extending protections for those enrolled in Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and reauthorizing the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), is now caught in Republicans' negotiations to reach a budget agreement before the government runs out of money on January 19.

Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria accounted for \$265 billion in damage, according to NOAA. Damage from Hurricane Maria alone reached \$90 billion. Sixty-five people died in Puerto Rico as a result of the storm, according to NOAA, though other estimates put the death toll at [more than 1,000](#). In addition, the wildfires in the West caused \$18 billion in damage and killed 54 people. So far, Congress has approved about [\\$50 billion](#) in disaster relief, well below the estimated need.

Recovery since the hurricanes has been slow, especially in Puerto Rico. [About half](#) of Puerto Rico's residents – 1.5 million people – still do not have power, more than 100 days after Hurricane Maria made landfall. It is estimated that 5,000 businesses [will not reopen](#) due to infrastructure problems. The hurricane even has led to a [shortage of intravenous \(IV\) bags](#) on the mainland, after a major producer in Puerto Rico had to reduce production after Maria.

[Nearly 300,000](#) Puerto Ricans have fled the island for Florida. While the massive influx could pose near-term strains on housing, education, and employment resources in Florida, ultimately, the new arrivals will contribute to a stronger economy. Health care is an immediate challenge as well: many of the Puerto Ricans arriving in Florida had health coverage through Medicaid, but because [Florida did not expand Medicaid](#) under the Affordable Care Act, many of those arriving in the state will no longer be eligible for Medicaid coverage.

In its response to the recent disasters, the White House has sent mixed signals. The administration's request in November for \$44 billion in additional disaster assistance was [widely criticized](#) as inadequate. It also suggested [offsetting](#) any additional disaster monies, recommending that Congress extend nondefense sequestration for an additional two years.

Rep. Nita Lowey, the top Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee, observed "...it is [galling](#) that the Administration is requesting offsets in exchange for helping Americans rebuild their lives."

Getting people the resources they need to begin rebuilding their lives is a top priority after any disaster. But [rebuilding smarter](#) and ensuring that communities are better prepared for the next natural disaster is also vital. Unfortunately, both of these important activities are now held up by a budget stand-off.

[Never before](#) have three Category 4 hurricanes made landfall in the United States in the same year. That reality demands an extraordinary response, but what we're getting instead from the Republicans is politics as usual.