

In 2020, FEMA finally decided to begin consolidating assessments for Puerto Rico to speed up the delivery process across multiple Federal agencies. Many of these assessments are small, often one part of a larger project, which has continuously slowed down the recovery process.

H.R. 255 would establish a Federal working group led by FEMA, in collaboration with the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, to identify ways to reduce duplication and modernize the Federal management assessment process to make it truly agile and efficient. We need to ensure assistance is provided while safeguarding taxpayer funds. I think with this bill we can do both.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is critical that these agencies are working together to minimize overlaps in their assessments and consider the use of the newest technologies to streamline processes. Very often, we, in the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, have these same discussions about what happened in Louisiana, what happened in Florida, what happened on the East Coast, what happened on the West Coast every time we have a natural disaster. It always is the same problem.

I trust this bill will expedite disaster recovery across the Nation. As we have learned in Puerto Rico, it is not if the next disaster will occur, it is when it is going to happen and how we are going to face it.

Every 1st of June, another hurricane season begins for the territories and the eastern coast. Since the last time this language passed the House in the 117th Congress, we had another direct hit with Hurricane Fiona.

I am pleased we are considering this bill so early in this 118th Congress, and that is the reason I thanked our chairman for his marvelous job bringing this bill to the floor.

I can, therefore, work quickly to make this proposal the law of the land as part of our efforts to better prepare for disaster response.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage my colleagues to support this bipartisan legislation.

□ 1230

Mr. LARSEN of Washington. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I am prepared to close. I inquire of my colleague if there are any remaining speakers on his side.

Mr. GRAVES of Missouri. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers.

Mr. LARSEN of Washington. Mr. Speaker, in closing, this bipartisan bill passed the House on suspension in the 116th and 117th Congresses. It will help disaster survivors by taking a step toward streamlining the Federal Government's fragmented approach to disaster assistance.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. GRAVES of Missouri. Mr. Speaker, in closing, H.R. 255 is just good gov-

ernment legislation that is going to help streamline disaster recovery efforts by improving the coordination efficiency of Federal agencies involved in disaster assistance.

Mr. Speaker, I urge support of the bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. GRAVES) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 255.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

POST-DISASTER ASSISTANCE ONLINE ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

Mr. GRAVES of Missouri. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 259) to provide for an online repository for certain reporting requirements for recipients of Federal disaster assistance, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 259

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Post-Disaster Assistance Online Accountability Act".

SEC. 2. SUBPAGE FOR TRANSPARENCY OF DISASTER ASSISTANCE.

(a) ESTABLISHMENT OF REPOSITORY FOR REPORTING REQUIREMENTS.—The Director of the Office of Management and Budget, in consultation with the Secretary of the Treasury and the head of each covered Federal agency, shall establish a subpage within the website established under section 2 of the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006 (31 U.S.C. 6101 note) to publish the information required to be made available to the public under this section.

(b) SUBMISSION OF INFORMATION BY FEDERAL AGENCIES.—Not later than 30 days after the end of a calendar quarter, each covered Federal agency that made disaster assistance available to an eligible recipient during such quarter shall, in coordination with the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, make available to the public on the subpage established under subsection (a) the information described in subsection (c), and ensure that any data asset of the agency is machine readable.

(c) INFORMATION REQUIRED.—The information described in this subsection is, with respect to disaster assistance provided by the covered Federal agency—

(1) the total amount of disaster assistance provided by the agency during such quarter;

(2) the amount of disaster assistance provided by the agency that was expended or obligated to projects or activities; and

(3) a detailed list of all projects or activities for which disaster assistance dispersed by the agency was expended, obligated, or used, including—

(A) the name of the project or activity;

(B) a description of the project or activity;

(C) an evaluation of the completion status of the project or activity;

(D) any award identification number assigned to the project;

(E) the Catalog for Disaster Assistance number assigned by the Federal Emergency Management Agency;

(F) the location of the project, including ZIP Codes; and

(G) any reporting requirement information being collected by a covered Federal agency with respect to that agency's disaster assistance.

(d) GUIDANCE.—Each covered Federal agency, in coordination with the Director of the Office of Management and Budget and the Secretary of the Treasury, shall issue such guidance as is necessary to meet the requirements of this Act.

(e) AGREEMENT WITH PRIVATE ENTITY.—The Director, if necessary for purposes of transparency, may enter into an agreement with a private entity, including a nonprofit organization, to develop the subpage required under this section.

SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.

In this Act, the following definitions apply:

(1) COVERED FEDERAL AGENCY.—The term "covered Federal agency" means—

(A) any agency providing assistance under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5121 et seq.);

(B) the Small Business Administration; and

(C) the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

(2) DISASTER ASSISTANCE.—The term "disaster assistance" means any funds that are made available by the Federal Government in response to a specified natural disaster, including—

(A) any assistance provided by the Administrator of the Small Business Administration as a result of a disaster declared under section 7(b) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 636(b));

(B) any assistance provided by the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development for—

(i) activities authorized under title I of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 (42 U.S.C. 5301 et seq.) related to disaster relief, long-term recovery, restoration of infrastructure and housing, and economic revitalization in the most impacted and distressed areas resulting from a major disaster declared pursuant to the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5121 et seq.); and

(ii) flood insurance coverage provided under the National Flood Insurance Program pursuant to the National Flood Insurance Act of 1968 (42 U.S.C. 4001 et seq.); and

(C) any assistance provided under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5121 et seq.).

(3) ELIGIBLE RECIPIENT.—The term "eligible recipient"—

(A) means any entity that receives disaster assistance directly from the Federal Government (including disaster assistance received through grant, loan, or contract) other than an individual; and

(B) includes a State that receives disaster assistance.

(4) SPECIFIED NATURAL DISASTER.—The term "specified natural disaster" means—

(A) a fire on public or private forest land or grassland described in section 420 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5187);

(B) a major disaster declared by the President under section 401 of such Act (42 U.S.C. 5170);

(C) an emergency declared by the President under section 501 of such Act (42 U.S.C. 5191); and

(D) any other natural disaster for which a disaster declaration is made by the Federal Government.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. GRAVES) and the gentleman from Washington (Mr. LARSEN) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Missouri.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. GRAVES of Missouri. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and insert extraneous material into the RECORD on H.R. 259.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Missouri?

There was no objection.

Mr. GRAVES of Missouri. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 259, the Post-Disaster Assistance Online Accountability Act, introduced by our Republican colleague from Puerto Rico (Mrs. GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN), will increase transparency for post-disaster Federal assistance.

H.R. 259 requires agencies that provide Federal disaster assistance to update a central website quarterly with information on their disaster assistance programs. This increased transparency is going to allow the American taxpayers to see where their hard-earned dollars are going and which areas are receiving the most Federal assistance for post-disaster recovery.

The Post-Disaster Assistance Online Accountability Act passed the House last Congress overwhelmingly by a vote of 412 yeas to 2 nays. I hope we can repeat this very strong showing this Congress.

Mr. Speaker, I urge support of this legislation, and I reserve the balance of my time.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS,
Washington, DC, January 19, 2023.

Hon. SAM GRAVES,
Chairman, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN GRAVES: I write concerning H.R. 259, the Post Disaster-Assistance Online Accountability Act. The bill was referred primarily to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, with additional referrals to the Committee on Financial Services and the Committee on Small Business. Specifically, provisions of H.R. 259 fall within the Rule X jurisdiction of the Committee on Small Business.

I recognize and appreciate your desire to bring this legislation before the House of Representatives in an expeditious manner, and accordingly, the Committee on Small Business will forgo action on the bill. However, this is conditional on our mutual understanding that doing so will not prejudice the Committee on Small Business with respect to the appointment of conferees or to any future jurisdictional claim over the subject matter contained in the bill or similar legislation that falls within the Committee on Small Business's Rule X jurisdiction. Further, should a conference on the bill be necessary, I appreciate your agreement to support my request to have the Committee represented on the conference committee.

Finally, I would ask that a copy of this letter and your response acknowledging our jurisdictional interest in the bill be included in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD during consideration of H.R. 259 on the House floor.

Sincerely,

ROGER WILLIAMS,
Chairman,
House Committee on Small Business.

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE,
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, DC, January 19, 2023.

Hon. ROGER WILLIAMS CHAIRMAN,
Chairman, Committee on Small Business,
House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN WILLIAMS: Thank you for your letter regarding H.R. 259, the Post Disaster Assistance Online Accountability Act. I appreciate your willingness to work cooperatively to ensure that H.R. 259 is considered expeditiously before the House of Representatives.

In response to your letter, I recognize that this bill contains provisions that fall within the jurisdiction of the Committee on Small Business. I also acknowledge that your Committee's decision to forgo consideration would not prejudice your Committee regarding the appointment of conferees, to any future jurisdictional claim over the subject matters contained in the bill, or to similar legislation falling under your Committee's Rule X jurisdiction. In addition, should a conference on this bill become necessary, I would support your request to have members of the Committee on Small Business represented on the conference committee.

I will ensure that our exchange of letters is included in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD during consideration on the House floor. Thank you again, I appreciate your cooperation regarding this legislation and look forward to continuing to work with you as this measure moves through the legislative process.

Sincerely,

SAM GRAVES,
Chairman.

COMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL SERVICES,
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, DC, January 20, 2023.

Hon. SAM GRAVES,
Chairman, Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure, House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN GRAVES: I am writing concerning H.R. 259, the "Post-Disaster Assistance Online Accountability Act." Per your request, I agree that the Committee on Financial Services shall be discharged from further consideration of the bill so that it may proceed expeditiously to the House Floor. The Committee takes this action with the mutual understanding that, by foregoing consideration of H.R. 259 at this time, we do not waive any jurisdiction over the subject matter contained in this or similar legislation, and that the Committee will be appropriately consulted and involved on this or similar legislation as it moves forward. The Committee also reserves the right to see appointment of an appropriate number of conferees to any conference with the Senate involving this or similar legislation, and we request your support for any such request.

Finally, as you mentioned in your letter, I ask that a copy of our exchange of letters on this bill be included in your committee's report to accompany the legislation, as well as in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD during floor consideration thereof.

Sincerely,

PATRICK MCHENRY,
Chairman, Committee on Financial Services.

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

Washington, DC, January 17, 2023.

Hon. PATRICK MCHENRY,
Chairman, Committee on Financial Services,
Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN MCHENRY: I am writing to you concerning H.R. 259, the "Post-Disaster Assistance Online Accountability Act." The bill was referred primarily to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, with additional referrals to the Committee on Financial Services and the Committee on Small Business.

I ask that you allow the Committee on Financial Services to be discharged from further consideration of the bill so that it may be scheduled by the Majority Leader. This discharge in no way affects your jurisdiction over the subject matter of the bill, and it will not serve as precedent for future referrals. In addition, should a conference on the bill be necessary, I would support your request to have the Committee on Financial Services represented on the conference committee. Finally, I would be pleased to include this letter and any response in the Congressional Record during floor consideration, to memorialize our understanding.

Thank you for your consideration of my request.

Sincerely,

SAM GRAVES,
Chairman.

Mr. LARSEN of Washington. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 259. This bill, introduced by Resident Commissioner Gonzalez-Colon and Delegate Plaskett would create a new online system for tracking Federal disaster projects and assistance.

People should know how and where their disaster funds are being spent without wading through reams of governmental paperwork. This legislation simplifies the data collection process for Federal disaster recovery projects.

To increase transparency, the bill also creates a page on USASpending.gov where everyone can track agency disaster recovery activities and the amount of assistance expended by an agency on a quarterly basis.

Federal agencies need to be accountable to the victims of disasters and allow them peace of mind when they are at their most vulnerable.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues on both sides to join with me and support this legislation, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. GRAVES of Missouri. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as she may consume to the gentlewoman from Puerto Rico (Mrs. GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN).

Mrs. GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 259, the Post-Disaster Assistance Online Accountability Act.

Again, I thank Chairman GRAVES for moving forward with this bipartisan initiative, for making it possible so early in this Congress, and for it to be considered today.

I also thank my sister from the Virgin Islands, STACEY PLASKETT, as well as Representatives Malliotakis and Cleaver for their support and as co-sponsors on this legislation.

H.R. 259 would provide an innovative and comprehensive approach to tracking Federal disaster projects and assistance, as well as the funds.

It establishes a single online repository to report information about Federal disaster assistance to provide transparency to the American taxpayer.

This proposal, developed in collaboration with the Project of Government Oversight, would establish a subpage for transparency of disaster assistance on the USASpending.gov website to better inform the public about the status of the use of disaster funding. And believe me, Mr. Speaker, every time I go back to the district every weekend this is the first question I receive from my constituents: What happened with the funds to the bridge?

What happened with the funds to the school?

What happened to the funds to the roads that are still damaged 5 years after a hurricane?

Many people ask themselves these questions: Where is the Federal funding that has been approved by Congress?

Where is the money that has been allocated to the Federal agencies?

Does a contractor have it?

Did the local government spend the money well?

Those are general questions that everybody, at least in Puerto Rico, are asking.

So this bill would require agencies that offered disaster assistance, including the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Small Business Administration, the Department of Agriculture, and many others, to regularly submit updated information to the Office of Management and Budget to ensure that the best possible data is available in an easily accessible format.

The data to be published would include: the amount of disaster assistance provided by the agencies; the amount of disaster assistance that has been obligated or expended to projects or activities; and a detailed list of all projects or activities for which disaster assistance dispersed by the agency was expended, obligated, or used, including a description of the project or activity, as well as an evaluation of the completion status of that project.

I think this will help not just the general public, not just American taxpayers, but also the government agencies to know where the funding is and when those projects are going to be completed.

During the last few years, my district, like many others represented here in the House, has faced multiple hardships due to disasters. In Puerto Rico, we are still working through the aftermath of Hurricanes Irma and Maria, the earthquakes of 2020, and last year's Hurricane Fiona. Much of the support has been approved for rebuilding—this Congress passed legislation allocating billions of Federal funding not just to Puerto Rico, but to Texas,

to California, and to many other States—and, of course, we need better accountability and oversight to ensure this funding is being used as intended by Congress.

H.R. 259 will foster accessibility and transparency of information to track Federal funding and its status. It will also enable local mayors and legislators, nongovernmental organizations, and individual constituents to know what funding has been used for, where the funding will go, and how much funding is left to be spent, among other information.

In Puerto Rico we have put money here for hospitals, for piers, and for bridges, and people don't even know where the money is because the projects have not even begun yet. This kind of information will not only help Federal and local agencies but mostly the American taxpayers.

This will allow better awareness of progress and utilization of resources and to ensure that streams of available funding are not overlooked or underutilized.

The transparency provided with this bill will be essential for better congressional oversight of disaster recovery in all the States and communities where it has been received so agencies can account for how effectively it is being used, and if it is getting to the hands of the individuals and communities that need it and that it was intended to go to.

Mr. Speaker, passing this legislation will assist efforts to improve Federal disaster response and make it more accountable and effective. I urge my colleagues to vote for passage of H.R. 259, the Post-Disaster Assistance Online Accountability Act.

Mr. LARSEN of Washington. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I am prepared to close.

Mr. Speaker, the House passed this bipartisan bill on suspension as well in the past two Congresses. I look forward to passing this commonsense transparency measure again today.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support it, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. GRAVES of Missouri. Mr. Speaker, in closing, this commonsense accountability measure is going to enable taxpayers to get a greater sense of where their money is going and allow agencies to see where they can coordinate post-disaster recovery efforts.

Mr. Speaker, I urge support of this legislation, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. GRAVES) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 259.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION REAL ESTATE LEASING AUTHORITY REVOCATION ACT

Mr. GRAVES of Missouri. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 388) to eliminate the leasing authority of the Securities and Exchange Commission, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 388

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Securities and Exchange Commission Real Estate Leasing Authority Revocation Act".

SEC. 2. LEASING OF SPACE FOR SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 3304 of title 40, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following:

“(e) LEASING OF SPACE FOR SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION.—Notwithstanding any other provision of law, on and after the date of enactment of this subsection, the Securities and Exchange Commission may not lease general purpose office space. The Administrator may lease such space for the Securities and Exchange Commission under section 585 and this chapter.”.

(b) LIMITATION ON STATUTORY CONSTRUCTION.—The amendment made by subsection (a) may not be construed to invalidate or otherwise affect a lease entered into by the Securities and Exchange Commission before the date of enactment of this Act.

SEC. 3. INDEPENDENT LEASING AUTHORITIES.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Comptroller General of the United States shall submit to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure of the House of Representatives, the Committee on Environment and Public Works of the Senate, and the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs of the Senate a report on the review described in subsection (b).

(b) REVIEW.—The Comptroller General shall complete a review under which the Comptroller General shall update the 2016 report of the Comptroller General (GAO-16-648) with a specific focus on the following:

(1) Updating the information included in Appendix II: Federal Entities That Reported Having Independent Leasing Authority for Domestic Offices and Warehouses of such report.

(2) Determining to what extent Federal entities with independent leasing authorities have had such authorities rescinded or amended and the number and amount of office and warehouse space such entities lease.

(3) Determining to what extent have agencies with independent leasing authority utilized the General Services Administration for leasing, including utilization of delegation of authority.

(4) Identifying progress made on implementing the recommendations in such report.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. GRAVES) and the gentleman from Washington (Mr. LARSEN) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Missouri.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. GRAVES of Missouri. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all