

United States history. Yet, out of that destruction, our communities came together. Neighbors took each other in, people looked after each other, families started over, small businesses slowly started to rebuild, and there was hope again in New Jersey. My heart goes out still to the many friends and neighbors who are still trying to put their lives back together again.

Mr. Speaker, the Federal Government has had a vital role in our recovery. Disaster assistance came through the Federal Emergency Management Agency, FEMA. Nearly 183,000 disaster victims were awarded \$1.3 billion in disaster assistance—money to rebuild homes or to find new ones, money to help people get their lives back again. That is why it is so upsetting for these victims to now, 2 years later, be receiving letters from FEMA demanding the repayment of those aid grants. I am referring to a process called “recoupment,” and it goes like this:

FEMA receives an application for aid. It makes a determination, it gives a grant, and it later changes its mind. It could be for fraud or applicant error, in which case FEMA has my full support, but sometimes FEMA just changes its mind. The application is correct. An examiner evaluates the claim, makes the payment, and then, later, a supervisor can change his mind and say: “We don’t think you got this one right,” and a letter goes out months—even years—later, demanding repayment.

Mr. Speaker, I worked for 30 years in the insurance industry. I started as a claims adjuster. I had the privilege at the end of my career of running a large insurance service company, and sometimes errors did get made. Sometimes a supervisor disagreed because there was just a difference of opinion. I might have even made a few errors myself. But in the private sector, companies can’t just reach out and demand those funds back again and, in the case of the Federal Government, demand with an “or else.” An “or else” from the long arm of the Federal Government is a serious matter, indeed—wage garnishment or worse.

Mr. Speaker, by October 31 of 2014—2 years after Sandy—1,200 of my fellow New Jerseyans had received letters demanding that \$8 million be returned to the Federal Government. These are people who used these funds to rebuild their homes, to find new places to live, to repair what was broken, to replace the clothes on their backs, and begin again. Now the government wants to take it back. It is a terrible blow to these dear people, our fellow citizens, whose lives were overwhelmed in just a few short hours. It is something that could happen to every one of us.

That is why I have introduced the Disaster Assistance Fairness and Accountability Act of 2015. Like it says in the title, it is about bringing fairness and accountability back to this process, and it does it, Mr. Speaker, in a few simple ways.

First, fairness. It allows FEMA to recoup funds if there is an applicant error or if there is fraud, but not if FEMA just changes its determination on an application that was accurate and later just subjects itself to a change of opinion.

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It applies the same standard to FEMA that applies to the private sector, and it is fundamentally fair.

Accountability. My proposed act requires FEMA to prove that the applicant was guilty of error or fraud instead of the other way around. It shifts the burden of proof from the individual to the government, which is where it should be. Only at FEMA are you guilty until proven innocent. That is fundamentally un-American and something my bill will change. Where there is fraud or applicant error, FEMA has full authority to recover funds so that the hardworking taxpayers of our country are getting a fair shake as well.

Lastly, the bill is reasonable. It imposes a 3-year statute of limitations on FEMA for these recoupment actions. Now there is no limit. They can reach in many years after if they choose to. Nearly every other law in the United States is subject to a statute of limitations, and this should be no different.

Mr. Speaker, there are many ways that we can help the survivors of Superstorm Sandy, and they need and deserve our help. This bill is just a start, but this bill will also help victims of future disasters.

I think one of our most important responsibilities as legislators is to listen to our constituents and to find ways that we can improve this government on their behalf. This is an important step in that direction. I am hopeful that we can work together, Republicans and Democrats, and bring this bill to a successful vote to bring some fairness and accountability back to this one small part of the Federal Government.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

By unanimous consent, leave of absence was granted to:

Mr. COLLINS of Georgia (at the request of Mr. MCCARTHY) for today on account of a death in the family.

PUBLICATION OF COMMITTEE RULES

RULES OF THE COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY FOR THE 114TH CONGRESS

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY,

Washington, DC, February 5, 2015.

Hon. JOHN BOEHNER,

Speaker, House of Representatives, The Capitol, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. SPEAKER: Pursuant to House Rule XI, the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology adopted its rules for the

114th Congress on January 27, 2015, and I submit them now for publication in the Congressional Record.

Sincerely,

LAMAR SMITH,
Chairman.

RULE I. GENERAL

(a) Application of Rules.

(1) The Rules of the House of Representatives (“House Rules”) are the rules of the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology and its Subcommittees with the specific additions thereto contained in these rules.

(2) Except where the term “Subcommittee” is specifically referred to, the following rules shall apply to the Committee and its Subcommittees as well as to the respective Chairs and Ranking Minority Members.

(b) Other Procedures. The Chair may establish such other procedures and take such actions as may be necessary to carry out these rules or to facilitate the effective operation of the Committee.

(c) Use of Hearing Rooms. In consultation with the Ranking Minority Member, the Chair of the Committee shall establish guidelines for the use of Committee hearing rooms.

RULE II. REGULAR, ADDITIONAL, AND SPECIAL MEETINGS

(a) Regular Meetings. The regular meeting day of the Committee for the conduct of its business shall be on the first Thursday of each month, if the House is in session. If the House is not in session on that day, then the Committee shall meet on the next Thursday of such month on which the House is in session, or at another practicable time as determined by the Chair.

(1) A regular meeting of the Committee may be dispensed with if, in the judgment of the Chair, there is no need for the meeting.

(2) The Chair may call and convene, as he considers necessary and in accordance with the notice requirements contained in these rules, additional meetings of the Committee for the consideration of any bill or resolution pending before the Committee or for the conduct of other Committee business.

(b) Bills and Subjects to be Considered.

(1) The Chair shall announce the date, place, and subject matter of any Committee meeting, which may not commence earlier than the third day on which Members have notice thereof, unless the Chair, with the concurrence of the Ranking Minority Member, or the Committee by majority vote with a quorum present for the transaction of business, determines there is good cause to begin the meeting sooner, in which case the Chair shall make the announcement at the earliest possible date.

(2) At least 48 hours prior to the commencement of a meeting for the markup of legislation, the Chair shall cause the text of such legislation to be made publicly available in electronic form.

(3) To the maximum extent practicable, amendments to a measure or matter shall be submitted in writing or electronically to the designee of both the Chair and Ranking Minority Member at least 24 hours prior to the consideration of the measure or matter, and the Chair may oppose any amendment not so submitted.

(c) Open Meetings.

(1) Meetings for the transaction of business and hearings of the Committee shall be open to the public or closed in accordance with the House Rules.

(2) Any Member who is not a Member of the Committee (or any Committee Member who is not a Member of the Subcommittee) may have the privilege of nonparticipatory attendance at Committee or Subcommittee