

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

Mr. BARLETTA. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to vote “yes” on H.R. 1665, as amended, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. BARLETTA) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1665, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. BARLETTA. Mr. Speaker, I object to the vote on the ground that a quorum is not present and make the point of order that a quorum is not present.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

The point of no quorum is considered withdrawn.

FEMA ACCOUNTABILITY, MODERNIZATION AND TRANSPARENCY ACT OF 2017

Mr. BARLETTA. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1679) to ensure that the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s current efforts to modernize its grant management system includes applicant accessibility and transparency, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 1679

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 “FEMA Accountability, Modernization and Transparency Act of 2017”.

SEC. 2. REQUIREMENTS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency shall ensure the ongoing modernization of the grant systems for the administration of assistance under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5121 et seq.) includes the following:

(1) An online interface, including online assistance, for applicants to complete application forms, submit materials, and access the status of applications.

(2) Mechanisms to eliminate duplication of benefits.

(3) If appropriate, enable the sharing of information among agencies and with State, local, and tribal governments, to eliminate the need to file multiple applications and speed disaster recovery.

(4) Any additional tools the Administrator determines will improve the implementation of this section.

(b) IMPLEMENTATION.—To the extent practicable, the Administrator shall deliver the system capabilities described in subsection (a) in increments or iterations as working components for applicant use.

SEC. 3. NO ADDITIONAL FUNDS AUTHORIZED.

No additional funds are authorized to carry out the requirements of this Act. Such requirements shall be carried out using amounts otherwise authorized.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. BARLETTA) and the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. JOHNSON) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

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GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BARLETTA. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include any extraneous material on H.R. 1679.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. BARLETTA. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

The purpose of H.R. 1679, the FEMA Accountability, Modernization and Transparency Act of 2017, is to enhance FEMA grant applicants’ access to information.

I commend my colleague from Louisiana for working so hard for the people of his State to tackle the challenges those communities and individuals have been facing in the wake of last August’s floods and other disasters.

On average, FEMA distributes almost \$6 billion a year in assistance to individuals, communities, and organizations impacted by disasters. That taxpayer money must be managed in an efficient and transparent way to prevent duplication and provide disaster survivors with needed access and visibility.

More efficient and transparent delivery of disaster assistance will help speed disaster recovery and reduce the administrative burden on applicants. This legislation requires the FEMA Administrator to include online access and information sharing as the agency modernizes its disaster grant delivery system.

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

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise in support of H.R. 1679, the FEMA Accountability, Modernization and Transparency Act of 2017. Our State and local partners are the first responders to any emergency disaster or terrorist attack. They do an outstanding job, given their limited resources and irregular nature of the events to which they respond.

We need to make sure that our partners, States, local governments, first responders, and nonprofits have access to the latest equipment, technology, training, and other resources needed to address any gaps in preparedness and to ensure that they remain as responsive as possible in an emergency. To assist them in their efforts, the Department of Homeland Security provides several discrete types of preparedness

grants to help our partners meet the core capabilities needed to prepare our Nation for any hazard.

FEMA’s 2016 National Preparedness Report found that much more work is needed in areas such as cybersecurity, economic recovery, housing, infrastructure systems, and supply chain integrity and security in order to meet our goal of being prepared and resilient.

Despite the valuable benefits these grants provide, President Trump proposed to cut funding for these grants in his so-called skinny budget. President Trump has proposed prioritizing a border wall over the lives and safety of our residents. I am pleased to note that this week Congress will be voting on an omnibus fiscal year 2017 appropriations bill that funds these programs at sufficient levels.

Since 2015, FEMA has been modernizing its management of these grant programs by making information technology platforms more user friendly. As FEMA continues to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its grants management, this bill will ensure that FEMA ensures that the system is more accessible and transparent to applicants.

The bill requires FEMA to include mechanisms to eliminate duplication of benefits and enable the sharing of information among agencies and with State, local, and tribal governments, where appropriate, while FEMA continues its modernization efforts.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this measure, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BARLETTA. Mr. Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. GRAVES).

Mr. GRAVES of Louisiana. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the subcommittee chairman and ranking member for their assistance, and I also want to thank our lead cosponsor, Mr. SIREs of New Jersey.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation is an unfortunate situation, that Congress actually has to step in. I want to give you a little bit of background.

In August of last year, we had once again what was known as the fourth most costly flood disaster in U.S. history. We had areas of south Louisiana that actually experienced over 32 inches of rain within about a 36-hour period. By comparison, the average American, as I recall, receives somewhere between 26 and 28 inches of rain in a year, and we received that in approximately 36 hours—an extraordinary rainfall event.

As you can imagine, in a 1,000-year flood event, you had thousands and thousands of people that were flooded, people living well outside of the floodplain. So, yes, there were thousands of people that were seeking assistance, trying to do everything from buy clothes to buy food, essential needs.

We assisted thousands of constituents trying to get information and answers from FEMA, but the way that

the process worked is that you had to call an 800 number. If someone answered, they would log on a computer system and update the constituent on what their status is: if they received the application, if additional information was needed, if they were approved or denied.

I, myself, on many occasions called the 800 number just to see how long it would take to get through. In some cases no one would answer. In other cases, the questions couldn't be answered.

It is a very simple situation here, Mr. Speaker. This bill simply requires that FEMA establish an online database that citizens of this country can access directly. I can go right now and I can look at hotel reservations; I can look at airline reservations, train reservations. You can do virtually anything online. You can pay your utility bills. You can call an Uber. But with FEMA, they had thousands of employees that were there to answer phones to simply log on to the system.

There is no need for that step to be there. It is more efficient to get people direct access. I would rather see those FEMA employees helping us recover.

So I will say it again. I am disappointed that this takes an act of Congress. This is common sense, and you are seeing this type of innovation and utilization of technology happen all across the marketplace. Unfortunately, Congress has to intervene here, albeit in a bipartisan way, to make sure that Americans are getting the service that they deserve and to make sure that our taxpayer dollars are being used in an efficient way.

Once again, I want to thank the subcommittee chairman, Mr. BARLETTA, Ranking Member JOHNSON, and I want to especially thank the lead cosponsor on this legislation, Mr. SIREN of New Jersey, who I know has gone through extraordinary challenges in New Jersey with the 2012 Hurricane Sandy impacts on his State.

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

Mr. BARLETTA. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to vote "yes" on H.R. 1679, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. BARLETTA) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1679.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. BARLETTA. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

ROBERT T. STAFFORD DISASTER RELIEF AND EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE ACT AMENDMENT

Mr. BARLETTA. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1678) to amend the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act concerning the statute of limitations for actions to recover disaster or emergency assistance payments, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 1678

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

SECTION 1. STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 705 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5205) is amended—

(1) in subsection (a)(1)—

(A) by striking "Except" and inserting "Notwithstanding section 3716(e) of title 31, United States Code, and except"; and

(B) by striking "report for the disaster or emergency" and inserting "report for project completion as certified by the grantee"; and

(2) in subsection (b)—

(A) in paragraph (1) by striking "report for the disaster or emergency" and inserting "report for project completion as certified by the grantee"; and

(B) in paragraph (3) by inserting "for project completion as certified by the grantee" after "final expenditure report".

(b) APPLICABILITY.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—With respect to disaster or emergency assistance provided to a State or local government on or after January 1, 2004—

(A) no administrative action may be taken to recover a payment of such assistance after the date of enactment of this Act if the action is prohibited under section 705(a)(1) of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5205(a)(1)), as amended by subsection (a); and

(B) any administrative action to recover a payment of such assistance that is pending on such date of enactment shall be terminated if the action is prohibited under section 705(a)(1) of that Act, as amended by subsection (a).

(2) LIMITATION.—This section, including the amendments made by this section, may not be construed to invalidate or otherwise affect any administration action completed before the date of enactment of this Act.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. BARLETTA) and the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. JOHNSON) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BARLETTA. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 1678, as amended.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. BARLETTA. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

The purpose of H.R. 1678 is to establish a statute of limitations for FEMA

to recover disaster assistance payments. This bill would provide some finality in disaster assistance, and it would minimize administrative costs.

This is a bipartisan issue, and I appreciate my colleagues from Florida for their continued leadership on this issue.

H.R. 1678 reinstates the 3-year statute of limitations on FEMA's ability to reclaim funds when there is no evidence of fraud, waste, or abuse.

In my district, I have seen FEMA tell a community that a project is eligible for funding, allowing the town to move forward to complete a disaster recovery project, only to have FEMA change its mind years later and take the money back. Not only is this devastating to the community and to disaster recovery, but the administrative time and red tape involved in second-guessing is a waste of taxpayer dollars.

Again, my thanks to the gentlewoman from Florida and the gentleman from Florida for their continued work on this issue and for introducing this bill.

The House adopted similar language last year when it passed the FEMA Disaster Assistance Reform Act.

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

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 1678, as amended.

I am pleased and proud to yield such time as she may consume to the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. FRANKEL), the author and sponsor of this legislation.

Ms. FRANKEL of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I thank Mr. JOHNSON for yielding, and I also want to thank Chairmen SHUSTER and BARLETTA and Ranking Members DEFAZIO and JOHNSON for their continued support.

I have had the honor of working on this legislation with my friends from Florida: Congressmen DAN WEBSTER, BRIAN MAST, and FREDERICA WILSON.

I have said this before and I am going to say it again: Florida knows hurricanes. In 2004 and 2005, Charley, Frances, Jeanne, Wilma, and Katrina tore through our State, leaving families stranded and property damaged.

I was the mayor of the city of West Palm Beach when we saw trees crash to the ground, ripping power lines and blocking flooded streets. Water systems were compromised, and our local governments, around the clock, did a miraculous job cleaning debris, fixing broken infrastructure, and getting life back to normal. It takes a lot to get it done.

When hurricanes strike, communities are ravaged, and so are their budgets. So I want to first thank FEMA for the funding assistance it provided Florida in a great time of need. With that said, FEMA is now asking some of our cities and counties to pay back money that was given for disaster relief projects that were approved more than 10 years ago.