



Summary of CBC Disaster Principles

The Congressional Black Caucus represents 78 million people in communities of all kinds across the nation. We represent people that have suffered through Katrina, Sandy, floods, earthquakes, wildfires, tornados, and lived through the recoveries that followed. We have seen what happens when government policies and decisions help people rebuild and recover and, more often, we have seen what happens when they don't.

The progress of community recovery depends much less on the degree of damage than on the resources the residents have and the support they get from the government. A successful recovery depends on getting those resources and that support to every resident and community. No one can be left out, no community can be forgotten. When those conditions don't happen communities remain vulnerable to future disasters and neighborhoods languish.

We won't let that happen again. We need a new, better approach to recovery; and we have some ideas on how to make that happen.

- Congress needs a centralized, comprehensive view of disaster response policymaking and oversight.
- Disaster assistance should be streamlined to reduce red tape.
- More disaster assistance programs and funding should be triggered automatically, without having to wait for Congressional appropriations each time.
- Disaster assistance should be matched dollar for dollar with mitigation funding to better protect communities and reduce future disaster losses.
- Response and recovery decisions need to account for vulnerabilities that existed before the disaster.

CBC Disaster Recovery Agenda

A community left out of the recovery is a community destroyed twice. We can't let that happen anymore. The people of who have suffered from these hurricanes, and people in all communities across the country in the future, deserve a better recovery.

- Someone has to be in charge and see the full picture.
 - Congress should form a Joint or Select Committee on Disaster Response, Recovery, and Resilience.
 - The current set-up of committee jurisdictions makes comprehensive recovery policymaking and oversight impossible. For example, Homeland Security has jurisdiction over FEMA but Transportation and Infrastructure has jurisdiction over Stafford Act issues. We need a Committee with input and oversight that crosses traditional lines of jurisdiction because the needs communities face after a disaster transcend jurisdictions.
 - Within the Administration, people in charge of Harvey, Irma, and Maria recovery efforts, there should have broad, cross-agency authority. The scope and scale of these efforts demand an equally broad response that avoids inter-agency turf wars.

- Recovery has to be done *by* the communities who suffered the damage, not “in spite of” them.
 - At all stages of the recovery, people need to participate in their own recovery.
 - After a major disaster, lots of funds flow in spurring a lot of economic activity. There has to be an effort made to give those contracts to small local companies and local residents.
 - Having local companies receive debris removal contracts or local residents hired by contractors or by government agencies primes the local economy to grow and ultimately decreases the amount of government assistance communities need.
 - It helps regrow the bonds of a community that the disaster weakened, it gives people purpose and helps their mental and physical health, and it speeds up the recovery process
 - This includes making sure that vulnerable communities have real representation within and involvement with the governments and NGOs helping with relief and recovery efforts.
 - This also includes creating tax credits that encourages the creation and growth of businesses in communities that suffered damage.

- Resources and certainty need to come faster.
 - In the days and weeks after a disaster, homeowners and businesses often have to make huge financial and life decisions without knowing how much disaster assistance they will receive or when they will finally get it.
 - FEMA Individual Assistance and Disaster SBA loans should have their processes simplified and their eligibility expanded.

- CDBG funding should be triggered automatically like FEMA/SBA after a disaster.
 - Disaster SNAP and Disaster Unemployment should begin enrolling people earlier after a disaster.
 - Currently, only FEMA Individual Assistance and SBA loans are automatic after a major disaster. CDBG funding, which states often provide as a grant to those who need more assistance, is dependent on Congressional action. The level and timing of that funding varies widely and makes it hard for people to make decisions in the aftermath of a disaster.
 - Registering for FEMA and SBA assistance should be sped up by allowing the programs to automatically use previous IRS filings so that people don't have to hunt down paperwork with information the government already has in the days after a disaster.
 - Information should be shared between disaster assistance programs so that people can have a single application instead of having to apply separately to different programs.
 - Homeowners and renters should be protected from foreclosures and evictions in the immediate aftermath of a disaster.
- Recovery has to include preventing future disasters.
 - A state or territory should receive a dollar in mitigation for every dollar of disaster assistance.
 - As the US population grows, especially in cities, disaster response gets more expensive. The only way to reduce the cost of future disasters is to better protect communities. Many states have plans for this but lack the funding. Providing them with the funding to mitigate and prevent future disasters would better protect people, businesses, and all the resources the federal government is providing to help them repair damage from the current disaster.
 - Flood insurance should be designed to provide additional incentive for protection and mitigation efforts that benefit communities.
- A flexible response can be more efficient.
 - Each disaster and community are different, some of the rigid program restrictions actually create duplicative spending and slow recovery time.
 - FEMA should have the flexibility to provide assistance for permanent repairs or provide more Individual Assistance than they are currently limited to.
- Do right by the people hurt now, not by Monday morning quarterbacks a decade from now.
 - The FEMA Inspector General should focus more on reviewing the design of a program or a decision-making process more than on particular, specific decisions made.
 - Shorten the time frame that the FEMA IG is allowed to review specific assistance awards.

- Allow neutral arbitration as an option for settling disputes between FEMA and applicants.
- Learn from the past.
 - FEMA should be encouraged to work with state and local governments to try out new ways of delivering assistance. Programs that work well should be adapted to allow them to be pre-approved for use in other disasters so that they don't have to be recreated each time.
- More work has to be done to protect the most vulnerable groups of people.
 - There should be plans for evacuating the most vulnerable groups (including prisoners) or people living in specific, vulnerable areas even if a general evacuation is not ordered.
 - Federal facilities, including VA hospitals and prisons should coordinate with their counterpart state and local agencies on evacuation and disaster response plans.
 - There should be particular focus on getting schools re-open quickly.
 - Mental health services need to be provided immediately, greatly expanded, and continued long-term.