

Obama's Malign Neglect Is the Worst Disaster

by Marcia Merry Baker and Carl Osgood

Sept. 6—Within 36 hours after the first stateside land-fall of Hurricane Irene, the Obama Administration announced that it would suspend Federal recovery aid for selected prior disasters around the nation—even going back to Katrina in 2005—in order to conduct immediate disaster relief in the Eastern states. This was rationalized in administrative jargon, by Rachel Racusen, spokesman for the Federal Emergency Management Agency, who told reporters on Aug. 28, that some FEMA funding in Joplin, Missouri for tornado-damage and similar rebuilding in other states, will be “temporarily” suspended until the FEMA Disaster Relief Fund (DRF) is replenished. Racusen asserted there is a FEMA precedent for such suspensions, from last year, and in prior years. Never mind that the day before, FEMA Director Craig Fugate stated that the DRF’s balance of \$900 million was sufficient.

In fact, there is no precedent for the number and severity of weather disasters at present, which are increasing daily, and in the face of that, for the outstanding inaction by the Obama Administration. As individuals, FEMA staffers, along with local and state officials, volunteers, and non-profits such as the Red Cross and the Salvation Army, among others, are responding heroically to multiple crises.

But FEMA, as a Federal agency, is being deployed by the White House, to play a deadly shell game with its resources—inadequate to begin with—in order to back up Obama’s appearance to be doing, as he proclaimed Aug. 28 at a photo-op at Hurricane Central, “all in my power” to provide Federal help. What he is doing, in reality, is all in his power to serve London-centered po-

litical interests, by such means as bailing out worthless Wall Street and international banksters, while destroying the United States.

Disastrous Dilly-Dallying

Obama’s policy for disasters is malign neglect. He is non-funding FEMA, issuing denials to state requests for Federal aid, presiding over the takedown of first responders (police, firefighter, EMTs, and others) in localities and states nationwide, and undercutting the systems needed to monitor and research weather patterns, now in hyperactivity as the Earth experiences solar and galactic shifts.

Moreover, the other relevant Federal agencies—e.g., the Departments of Agriculture and Transportation, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers—are likewise conspicuously not being funded and mobilized, given the dire consequences of the combined effects of the multiple-disasters to date.

Look just at the food supply chain: The livestock inventory and meat sector are being decimated by the drought and wildfire crisis in Texas, Oklahoma, and elsewhere. The U.S. corn harvest, and other crops are hurt in the grainbelts by the huge flooding in the Missouri/Mississippi River region. In the East, Hurricane Irene strafed the Carolinas just at harvest time, and slammed the New England dairy region.

Dozens of thousands of Americans are now newly homeless, because of the sequence of severe storms, floods, and fires to date. Most of the thousands of people still in shelters from Hurricane Irene have nowhere to turn, because they were already poor, lacked means and

opportunity for work, and now their homes are destroyed.

Gen. (ret.) Russel Honore, a response-commander during Hurricane Katrina, said on Aug. 27, the day Hurricane Irene made landfall, that the plight of the poor should be our major worry.

*The most urgent disaster-response policy we can undertake right now, is to get Obama out of office, and set about to conduct real emergency measures, on the scale needed, to rescue and build up the nation. The essential gateway to this, is to reinstate the Glass-Steagall law, as is now before Congress in H.R. 1489 (The Return to Prudent Banking Act of 2011), to stop the financial cancer and create a credit regime for doing what is required. The newly released “Seven Points of Action” by the LaRouche Political Action Committee, summarizes the orientation now required. (See *Feature* for “Step One.”)*

FEMA’s Deadly Shell Game

Local and state leaders in disaster zones in Alabama, Missouri, Louisiana, Iowa, and elsewhere have been speaking out against Obama’s “screw-you” outlook—in the form of FEMA’s announced suspensions of disaster rebuilding projects, announced Aug. 28.

Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon wrote to FEMA’s Fugate that week, asking to know which rebuilding projects in his state will be delayed as a result of the shift of funding to the East Coast recovery effort. Nixon wrote that Joplin, and the Missouri River communities suffering from flooding, are counting on “significant support from the federal government, and need certainty and clarity about the federal resources that will be available.”

In Alabama, 32 counties out of the 65 hit by the April tornado wave, will be affected by the FEMA suspension of funding for rebuilding. This includes schools, roads, and other basics. In Arkansas, aid to counties slammed by both flooding and tornadoes, will be suspended for repairing infrastructure.

In Tennessee, a \$30 million program for buyout packages in Nashville, stemming from the May 2010 floods, is suspended. On Sept. 1, Mayor Karl Dean issued a statement, expressing impatience, and appealing to Congress. “I urge Congress to give FEMA the funds it needs so that flood victims in Nashville can get the money they have rightfully been anticipating for months now. . . . I understand homeowners’ deep frustrations, and I call on Congress to act quickly. Nashvillians have already been victims of the flood. They should not also have to be victims of Congressional delay.”

In Illinois, even if FEMA does certify as Federal di-

saster areas the northwestern counties of Stephenson, Jo Daviess, and Carroll, their flood victims will face delays in getting aid.

In Iowa, where rebuilding is still continuing from the 2008 floods, projects in line for suspension include the Cedar Rapids sewer system and public works building. There are also projects in the capital Des Moines and other towns, rising out of the 2010 floods. which are in line for suspension.

In western Iowa, on Aug. 4, FEMA denied aid to the five flooded counties along the Missouri River, which had appealed for the FEMA Individual Assistance Program (IAP, for households and businesses to get grants and low-interest loans, for repairs and disaster-related expenses, not covered by insurance). On Sept. 2, Iowa Gov. Terry Branstad could say only that FEMA has extended the deadline to Oct. 7, during which time period the state can appeal for FEMA’s denial to be overturned.

Iowan Matt Wilber, information officer for Pottowattamie County, one of the five (along with Fremont, Harrison, Monona, and Woodbury) said in August, “Look how long the [flooding] event has gone on; we are at the mercy of the Federal government now. This is not a hurricane blowing in. This is a Federally managed disaster.”

Obama Neglect of FEMA

The Obama February budget request for FEMA’s Disaster Relief Fund for FY 2012, was a miserable \$1.8 billion, far below what is required, given the extreme weather conditions. Moreover, it has been clear for months, that the DRF was running short for even this current budget year, FY 2011. Members of Congress, from both parties have called on Obama to respond. He has not done so.

In May, the House of Representatives machinery began to turn slowly. On May 24, the House Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee reported out its bill to fund the Department of Homeland Security, which includes the FEMA budget; it included \$1 billion in supplemental funding for FY2011 for the DRF, another \$2.65 billion for FY2012, a significant boost over the piddling \$1.8 billion in the White House’s budget request. Subcommittee chairman Robert Aderholt (R-Ala.) said, at the time, “Under the best-case scenario, the disaster relief fund will essentially run dry before the end of the year. That means sometime in mid- to late Summer . . . recovery, rebuilding, and general assistance will stop.” With the advent of Hurricane Irene, that has now occurred.

On the Senate side, no action was taken over the



Texas National Guard

Texas wildfires are spreading faster than state and local firefighting agencies can handle them, in large part, because of the cutbacks imposed under the combined budget-slashing insanity of Gov. Rick Perry (R) and President Obama. Here, two Texas National Guard CH-46 Blackhawks dump their water on flames near Bastrop, Texas Sept. 6.

course of the Summer, so that now, the DRF has barely \$600 million. By October, the actual shortfall in the Fund could be in the range of \$5-6 billion according to a staff member for Sen. Mary Landrieu (D-La.), who chairs the Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee. The staffer told the Aug. 31 *Financial Times* that the DRF might need to be increased by \$10 billion.

Landrieu's Subcommittee held a session today on its Homeland Security Appropriations bill for FY2012, including a proposed \$6 billion for the Disaster Relief Fund, which Landrieu and other Senators called, "just a down payment" on what will be required. Meantime, there is still no supplemental money for the current, FY2011 shortfall.

Meanwhile, Obama's lying and stonewalling has continued.

Between Feb. 16 and May 2, Landrieu wrote three letters to Obama calling for additional funds for the DRF, because of growing shortfalls in recovery efforts. In her February letter, Landrieu noted that last year, FEMA was forced to stop making recovery payments for over five months, because it ran out of money.

In a May 25 "Dear Colleague" letter, Landrieu wrote that the President had issued 27 disaster declarations in 18 states, as of that time, yet, "he has not sought additional funding to cover these events." She noted that the

estimate of FEMA's shortfall as of May was \$3 billion, but that figure did not even include the more recent disasters, including late-Spring tornadoes, and the flooding of the Mississippi River Basin. "Without this funding," she warned, "FEMA will have to stop recovery efforts in 50 states in the Spring of 2012."

Landrieu also noted to her colleagues in May, that other agencies, including the Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, will also require additional funding for disaster recovery efforts. "In the past, the Senate, on a bipartisan basis, has approved such emergency funding," she wrote. "I encourage you to reach out to the President, urging him to request such funding, and to ask the Senate leadership to consider such legislation in an expedited fashion."

In August, Landrieu's counterparts sounded the alarm. Reps. Aderholt and David Price (D-N.C.), the ranking Democrat on the House Subcommittee, wrote to Obama asking that he address the shortfall. "Despite the fact that the need . . . is well known," they wrote, "it unfortunately appears that no action is being taken by the administration." In a joint statement with Appropriations Committee chairman Hal Rogers (R-Ky.) and Rep. Jo Ann Emerson (R-Mo.), Aderholt noted that even Obama himself said that "we are going to do everything we can to help these communities rebuild," but the problem is that "the rhetoric has not matched reality and the Disaster Relief Fund is running out of money." In the same statement, Rogers added that "Time and time again, the Administration has ignored the obvious funding needs of the Disaster Relief Fund, purposefully and irresponsibly underfunding the account and putting families and communities who have suffered from terrible disasters on the back burner."

Finally, on Sept. 1, the Administration made a backhanded acknowledgment of the shortfall in the Fund, through an action by Jack Lew, director of the Office of Management and Budget. Lew issued a proposal to Congress for FY2012 DRF funding, which, because it involved an increase, had to be done in advance, and with stipulations, in order to comply with the require-

ments of the new Obama dictatorship-deal Budget Control Act. Lew asked for a \$5.2 billion for the DRF next year, a huge increase, but puny compared to real needs. The figure does not even include aid expenses for Hurricane Irene, Tropical Storm Lee, the renewed Texas wildfires; it ignores the fact that hurricane season doesn't end until Nov. 30. Lew further supplied some math, for how a \$5.2 billion DRF next year, will not violate the Budget Control Act spending caps, since the Act has a clause that disaster relief can be increased, as long as it doesn't exceed a certain adjusted average of spending in the past 10 years, which Lew asserts is some magical figure of \$11.3 billion.

Extreme Weather Warnings Cut

The most willful Obama negligence, is the cuts to programs that study, monitor, and warn of extreme weather. Cuts to the NASA and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) budgets will reduce the space-based capabilities for monitoring and forecasting extreme weather events. Last February, the White House eliminated funding for the Climate Absolute Radiance and Refractivity Observatory (CLARREO) and Deformation, Ecosystem Structure and Dynamics of Ice (DESDynI) missions in its 2012 budget request. DESDynI would have important observations regarding land surface changes and hazards, as well as of climatic change, whereas CLARREO was designed for extremely precise data collection on solar radiation's interaction with the Earth.

Another satellite not likely to fly, as long as Obama is President, is the Joint Polar Satellite System, now not expected to launch until at least 2016 because of White House budget cuts. The JPSS is to replace the NPP polar orbiting satellite, the launch of which has been delayed until October 2011. The delay in the JPSS will result in an up-to-two-year gap in polar weather data collection. On April 14, Dr. Jane Lubchenco, the Administrator of NOAA, testified that there will be "very serious consequences to our ability to do severe storm warning, long-term weather forecasting, search and rescue, and good weather forecasts" for the polar regions, if the Joint Polar Satellite System (JPSS) funding is not adequate. In July, Rep. Frank Wolfe's (R-Va.) Appropriations subcommittee sliced and diced both the NASA and NOAA budgets, eliminating yet more critical weather forecasting assets.

The Republican-controlled Congress has followed Obama's lead on cutting crucial satellite monitoring ca-

pabilities by going after NOAA's aviation operations, which, among other things, are used to collect critical storm data. The Commerce, Justice and Science appropriations bill that the House Appropriations Committee passed on July 13 reduces NOAA's budget for its aviation operations by 40%, from \$29 million, this year, to \$17 million in 2012. NOAA's aircraft operations include three specialized aircraft, two Lockheed P-3s and one Gulfstream 4, that are used to fly into hurricanes to both collect vital storm data, and to conduct research on developing better equipment and methods for collecting those data.

Rep. Kathy Castor (D-Fla.) wrote a letter to House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) and the leaders of the House Appropriations Committee, as Hurricane Irene was chugging towards the East Coast, asking them to overturn that cut. "Accurate and timely information can mean the difference between life and death," she wrote.

In July, Bill Read, the director of the National Hurricane Center, wrote, in an internal memo obtained by the *Miami Herald*, that the proposed budget cuts risk stalling efforts to significantly improve the computer models used to forecast hurricanes. One of the objectives of those efforts is to reduce the size of the "cone of probability" of approaching storms, that is, the area where the storm is forecast to hit. That cone is already much smaller than it was in 2003, but it can still stretch hundreds of miles across. NOAA's planes have been used to develop all sorts of tools for measuring storm conditions inside hurricanes. "It's a critical link," Read said. "We have no other way to go about doing this."

States and Localities, Stripped

Even if FEMA were fully funded, no adequate disaster relief could be accomplished without adequate local personnel—whose numbers have been decimated during the "non-recovery" over the last three years, thanks to Obama's refusal to follow the FDR policy of putting the general welfare first. Only the Federal government can issue credit—and the only significant money Obama issued was to bail out the banks.

The criminality of allowing state and local government staff and functions to be cut when citizens need protection against ever more violent weather, speaks for itself as a damnation of the Obama Administration. Two cases make the point of what is happening nationwide: Paterson, New Jersey, where Obama paid a look-at-me visit on Sept. 4; and the fires in Texas.

During Hurricane Irene, the high waters of the Pas-

saic River in New Jersey, reached 7 feet above flood level at points along its course, flooding Paterson, and many other towns and rural areas. “The worst” in my lifetime, said Paterson Fire Chief Michael Postorino during the crisis. The town’s mayor had to scramble to open five schools as shelters for displaced townspeople, on an emergency basis. Police and firemen conducted hundreds of boat evacuations, part of thousands of such water rescues across the state.

But, the response teams were all stripped down in advance, by Obama and his fat twin Gov. Chris Christie’s budget-balancing excuse for gutting the economy. In Paterson alone, 30 EMTs (emergency medical technicians) were fired over the last year. This is the pattern all across New Jersey, where now the remaining police, firefighters, and EMTs have been struggling valiantly to cope with the storm, then the aftermath.

- Passaic laid off 17 firefighters earlier this year.
- Camden fired 67 out of 240 firefighters in January.
- Jersey City lost over 100 firefighters, due to unreplaced retirements, in 2010; and lost another 8 this year.
- Bloomfield lost 12 firefighters to budget cuts this year.

- East Orange laid off 22 firefighters this year.
 - West Orange laid off 16 firefighters earlier this year.
 - Atlantic City laid off 30 firefighters last year, and lost 23 more to unreplaced retirements.
 - Newark has lost 125 firefighters since December 2009, although 70 positions were reinstated under a FEMA grant, with no assurance of continuation.
- Is there any wonder New Jersey was faced with an impossible situation?

Then, the Wild Fires

In Texas, the wildfires in the eastern counties at present, are spreading faster than state and local fire agencies can handle, in large part, because of the cut-backs imposed under the combined bipartisan budget-balancing insanity of Gov. Rick Perry (R) and Obama.

As of today, the Texas Forest Service (TFS) said that it is responding to 22 new fires, reported in just the last 24 hours, and burning over an area of 7,544 acres. In the past seven days, the TFS has responded to 181 fires that have burned a total of 118,413 acres. Part of this inferno has forced the evacuation of 5,000 people from near Austin, the state capital.

The volunteer fire departments that are fighting these fires are laboring under the stress of drastically reduced budgets. The current two-year state budget slashes state aid to volunteer fire departments from \$25 million to \$7 million. The TFS’s overall budget, from which the grants also come, was cut by one-third. Many local fire departments were already overstressed in April when the budget was before the state legislature, having been deployed to fight fires in West Texas since November. Equipment is often old, requiring hard-to-get spare parts or replacement, and the cost of fuel and electricity (for fire stations) only increases. The only other two sources of funding for volunteer fire departments are county budgets, which are also shrinking, and donations and fundraising from a population that is economically hard-pressed.

While wildfires have been burning in Texas since November, it wasn’t until July 1 that a major Federal disaster declaration was approved in Washington. Even then, with subsequent updates, the declaration only covers 51 counties, and only 12 of those are eligible for the full range of FEMA assistance.

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Earthquakes & The New Madrid Seismic Zone

The fourth installment in a series of LPAC-TV video presentations on the imminent threat of

earthquakes and like forces facing the United States. Here, we move far from the well-known tectonic faults of the West Coast, to an area of the Mississippi River Basin known as the New Madrid Seismic Zone, where powerful earthquakes have wreaked havoc in the past. Today, the region is dangerously unprepared for such a scenario.

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