



A memorial honors some of the victims of the recent Texas flooding disaster. ([World Central Kitchen](#), July 13, 2025, [CC BY 4.0](#))

Trump's Homicidal Hurricane Policy

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Introduction

The United States dodged a bullet when Hurricane Erin veered away from its coastline. Put differently, we were lucky enough to survive another round in the [game](#) of Russian roulette that President Donald Trump is [playing](#) with our lives. But the next hurricane could be the loaded chamber. Or the one after that, and so on. On August 25, more than 180 Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) workers [sounded the alarm](#), writing in an [open letter](#) that the Trump administration's actions are putting us at risk of a Katrina-scale disaster. On August 26, dozens of those FEMA whistleblowers were [placed on administrative leave](#).

When a major hurricane kills hundreds or thousands of people made vulnerable by the Trump administration's [unprecedented assault](#) on weather forecasting and disaster planning, Democrats [shouldn't hesitate to blame](#) those casualties on Trump, Elon Musk, and other Republican figures who are making [preventable deaths inevitable](#). If they fail to hold Trump and his MAGA regime accountable, the president's 2016 [quip](#) that he could "shoot somebody" and not "lose any voters" will sound even more prophetic than it already does. It sounded absurd when Trump first uttered it, and yet he keeps getting away with murder, in part due to Democrats' self-defeating reluctance to punch fast, hard, and often.

Erin's arrival served as a potent reminder, following a quiet June and July, that we've entered the peak of the Atlantic hurricane season. Meteorologists still [expect](#) a "slightly above-average probability" for major storms making landfall along the U.S. coastline and in the Caribbean for the remainder of the season, which lasts until the end of November. Just before Erin became this year's first Atlantic hurricane, forecasters [predicted](#) 12 more named storms—including eight hurricanes, three of which were projected to be "major," i.e., category 3 or higher—over the next few months. Historically, hurricane activity in the Atlantic basin picks up from August through mid-October. That's the time frame when Hurricanes Katrina, Sandy, Harvey, Irma, Maria, Ida, Ian, Helene, and Milton—and many more besides—struck.

Thankfully, Erin didn't hit the U.S. mainland, though its passage through the Caribbean [knocked out electricity](#) for nearly 150,000 people in Puerto Rico. Even as Erin remained offshore, the powerful and remarkably wide hurricane generated life-threatening surf and rip currents along the entire Eastern Seaboard, [prompting](#) storm alerts of various kinds in 15 states, from Florida to Maine. [Coastal flooding](#) was particularly severe in North Carolina and New Jersey.

Erin [transformed](#) from a tropical storm into a Category 5 hurricane in roughly 24 hours—making it one of the most rapidly intensifying cyclones ever—before eventually weakening as it moved north and east. Erin exemplifies an increasingly common kind of storm—one [turbocharged](#) by two centuries of unmitigated planet-heating pollution driven primarily by the burning of fossil fuels. The hurricane's [rapid intensification](#) was [propelled](#) by unusually warm ocean waters, which are a consequence of rising global greenhouse gas emissions. Through their ongoing war on [climate research](#) and [clean energy](#), Trump and congressional Republicans—[bankrolled](#) by the fossil fuel industry—have [ensured](#) that more heat-trapping gasses will be pushed into the atmosphere while fewer scientists and regulators will be around to monitor, let alone mitigate, the impacts.

We're due for seven more hurricanes, including two big ones, over the next dozen weeks or so. That means Trump's FEMA, which [admitted](#) internally in May that it was unprepared for hurricane season, is beefing up its disaster response capacities, right? No. Instead, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has been [forcibly reassigning](#) FEMA employees to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in a bid to bolster Trump's cruel push to terrorize, detain, and deport as many migrants as possible.

A federal judge recently [ordered](#) the closure of Trump's sadistic immigration jail in the Everglades within 60 days (two cheers for environmental review!), but if a hurricane hits Florida before then, it would likely be a mass casualty event; one suspects that this is what Trump, DHS Secretary Kristi Noem, White House adviser Stephen Miller, and other fascists want. Noem's [efforts](#) to prevent disaster aid from reaching undocumented

immigrants underscores why disaster experts have [long advocated](#) for reestablishing FEMA as an independent, Cabinet-level agency [free from DHS interference](#).

Meanwhile, the National Weather Service (NWS) has been [scrambling to hire back](#) hundreds of workers pushed out months ago by Musk's so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). These developments—really just the tip of the iceberg—epitomize the Trump administration's utter [disregard](#) for the lives of people who will be harmed by severe weather, which is destined to [grow](#) in frequency and intensity thanks to the GOP megabill signed into law by Trump, and [other](#) reactionary White House [moves](#).

It's incredibly fortunate that no hurricanes have made landfall in the U.S. so far this year. That's because the Trump administration's [wide-ranging attacks](#) on federal and state officials' capacity to [understand](#), [prepare for](#), [withstand](#), and [recover](#) from extreme weather events have dramatically increased the likelihood of mass harm. But this serendipity is all but guaranteed to end soon, and when it does, many people will die needlessly. When that happens, will Democrats have the guts to [blame](#) Trump and his Republican accomplices?

Congressional Progressive Chair Greg Casar (D-TX) probably will. Last month, he [secured](#) an independent investigation into how Trump's gutting of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) may have [undermined](#) the response to [deadly floods in central Texas](#) that began on July 4. Last week, Casar and Rep. Joe Neguse (D-CO) [introduced](#) bills to reverse Trump's gutting of FEMA and NOAA, respectively. Given that Republicans control both chambers of Congress and the White House, this legislation has a near-zero chance of being enacted. However, it does offer good messaging opportunities *if* a critical mass of Democrats consistently raise hell about Trump's myopic cuts—before, during, and after potential calamities.

Casar is an exception. The Democratic Party's generalized timidity in the wake of the Trump administration's [abysmal response](#) to the Texas flooding disaster does not inspire confidence. Democratic leaders' hesitancy to [politicize](#) disasters—that is, to hold

relevant decision-makers accountable for creating the conditions for catastrophe—was also evident last fall in Kamala Harris and Tim Walz’s [refusal to connect the dots](#) between right-wing policymaking and the [devastation](#) of Helene and Milton. This is a dynamic that has to change; for the sake of our collective future, Trump’s critics must make Republicans loyal to Trump [pay a political price](#) for routinely putting Americans in harm’s way—and prematurely ending some of our lives.

Trump’s Pre-Disaster Recklessness: The Storm Before the Storm

It’s impossible to overstate how much damage Trump has done in just seven months. If a Martian compared the United States of August 2025 with the United States a year earlier, they might hypothesize that the country had been the victim of a bombing campaign aimed at its world-class scientific institutions. The MAGA regime’s [anti-knowledge inquisition](#) has undone decades of progress on [climate](#) and [public health research](#), [weather forecasting](#), and [more](#).

Sabotaging NOAA’s Staff and Money Flow...

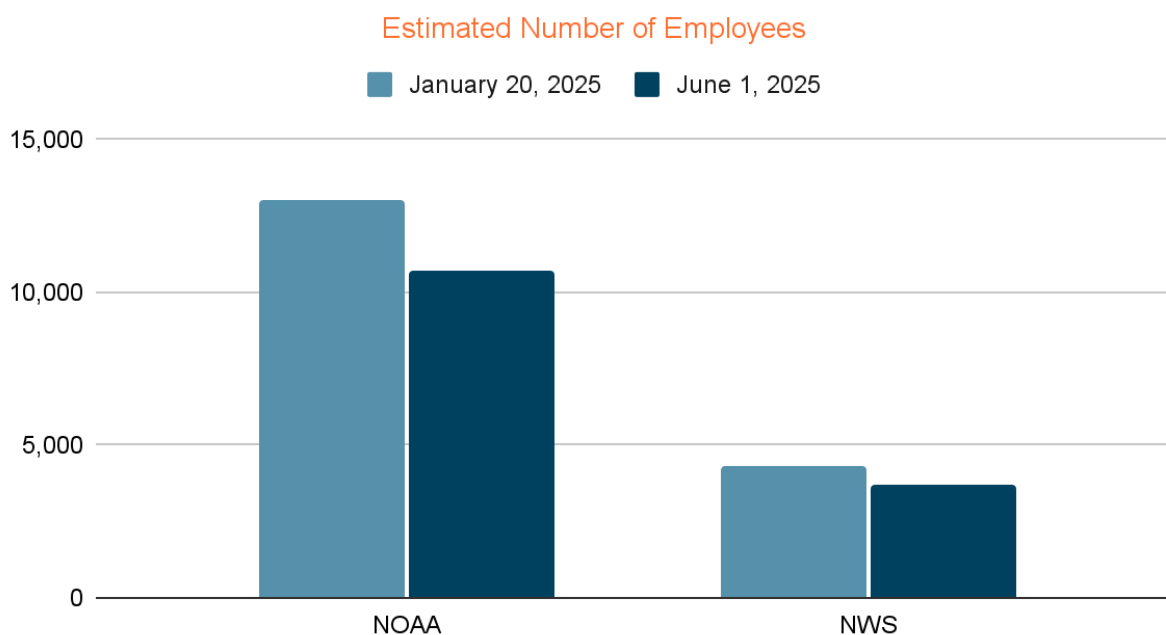
Let’s start with the [decimation](#) of NOAA, which was [already understaffed](#) before Trump sicced the chainsaw-wielding Musk on government personnel. The Trump administration pushed out around 1,300 of the agency’s workers by the first week of March. More than 800 so-called probationary employees (a category that includes recently promoted career staff) were [fired](#) on February 27, [including](#) over 100 NWS staffers. Amid the chaos, roughly 500 additional NOAA workers [accepted](#) DOGE’s “deferred resignation” offer, [about](#) 170 of whom worked at NWS.

One immediate consequence was that NWS had to reduce [weather balloon launches](#) used to [collect](#) essential data. In addition, experts [warned](#) in early March that due to understaffing, NOAA’s [“hurricane hunters”](#) may not be able to conduct 24/7 flight

operations this year, which could lead to less accurate forecasts and delayed evacuation warnings.

The warnings didn't matter. Days later, NOAA [announced](#) that another 1,029 civil servants would be laid off due to the Trump administration's "reduction in force" [mandate](#). Employees had until April 17 to decide whether to take early retirements or buyouts. NOAA [approved](#) more than 1,000 exit requests from eligible workers, [including](#) roughly 300 from NWS. As a result, roughly 18 percent of NOAA's 13,000-person staff, including approximately 13 percent of the 4,300-strong workforce at NWS, were gone before the start of hurricane season.

Trump-Induced Staff Reductions at NOAA and NWS



As of May 1, 30 of NWS's 122 weather forecast offices were [missing](#) a meteorologist-in-charge, compromising timely communications between forecasters, the media, and local emergency managers. At the Houston-Galveston forecast office—covering an area prone to hurricanes, flooding, and extreme heat—every management position was [vacant](#) on May 1.

Due to Trump and Musk’s purge of NOAA, at least eight NWS forecast offices have been forced to [cease](#) overnight operations, jeopardizing their ability to monitor hazards and issue warnings around the clock. By the time hurricane season started on June 1, 15 NWS forecast offices along the hurricane-prone Gulf of Mexico were [understaffed](#). A 30 percent reduction in staff at NOAA’s Hurricane Research Division is expected to cut in half the “crewing of the Doppler radar and dropsonde stations on the NOAA Hurricane Hunter aircraft,” [according to](#) former hurricane hunter Jeff Masters.

The Trump administration’s unlawful effort to [prevent or stall](#) the disbursement of congressionally appropriated funds—a key priority for Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Director Russell Vought—has been a major source of disruption at NOAA and beyond. Due to Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick’s insistence on personally reviewing any contract over \$100,000, more than 200 NOAA contracts remained [unsigned](#) as of May 20. In the words of one NOAA official, the agency’s work had “ground to a halt” as a result. In early June, NOAA [lost access](#) to a fleet of Salidrones, a key hurricane forecasting tool, because Lutnick was delinquent in sending out a request for contract proposals.

...Leads to Predictably Bad Outcomes

The Trump administration’s attacks on NOAA have already led to tangible harms. For example, meteorologists [said](#) in April that had weather balloon launches not been [restricted](#), NWS would have been able to identify tornado threats sooner.

Trump and Musk’s purge of NOAA staff has been keenly felt throughout Kentucky. The NWS forecast office in eastern Kentucky was among those that had to [halt](#) overnight work, forcing it to [scramble](#) for outside staff just before a tornado [killed](#) more than two dozen people on May 16. What’s more, as Kentucky was pummeled by several rounds of extreme weather this spring, almost the entire state was [covered](#) by NWS forecast offices lacking a chief meteorologist.

Ahead of the deadly Texas floods, NWS [provided](#) accurate forecasts and warnings *despite* everything that the Trump administration has done to hamper the agency. Still, local NWS offices were [missing](#) key officials, which [likely hindered](#) coordination between forecasters and local emergency managers.

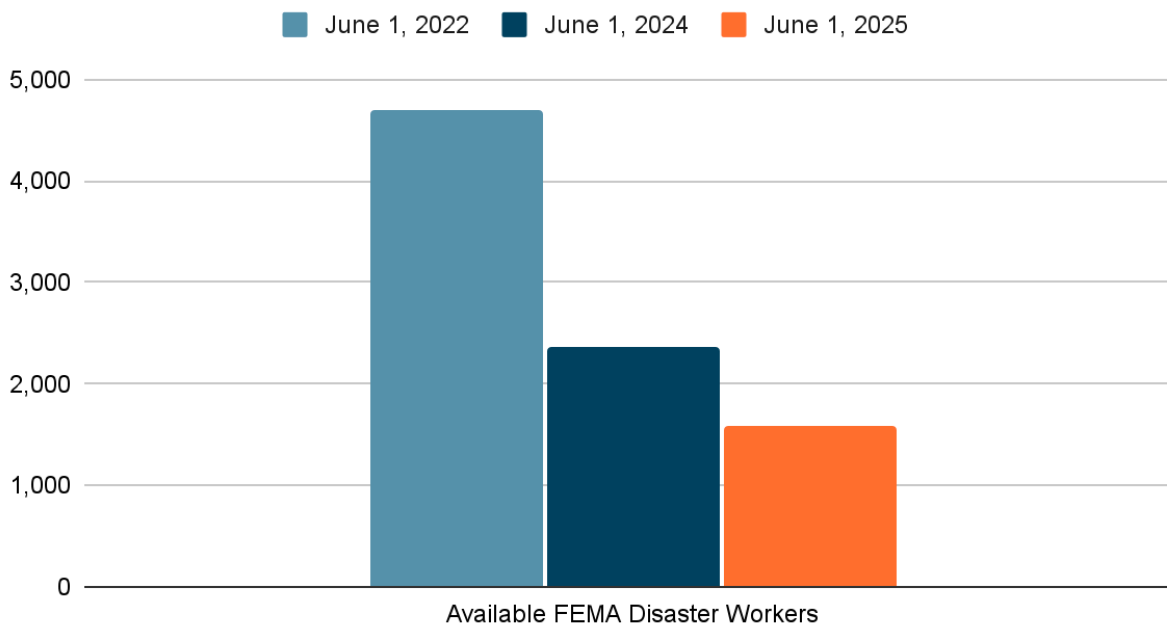
As hurricane season kicks into full gear, the adverse impacts of the Trump administration's [mutilation](#) of NOAA are still coming into view, but we know they will be cumulative and devastating.

Gutting FEMA's Workforce

Let's move on to FEMA, which was also [already understaffed](#) before 2025. [Trump](#) and [DHS Secretary Noem](#) have [called](#) multiple [times](#) for [eliminating](#) the agency, and their demolition plan is well underway. Following Trump's mass layoffs and the resignation of top officials, all of the agency's most senior positions are [held](#) by DHS personnel with little to no disaster management expertise. The Trump administration pushed out roughly 2,000 workers, or nearly one-third of the agency's full-time staff, by early May. Trump [fired](#) some 200 "probationary employees" in late February, and another 1,800 workers have [retired early or accepted deferred resignation offers](#) amid [interference](#) from Musk's DOGE wrecking crew, routine [lie detector tests](#), and other indignities.

Disaster response training was [derailed](#) in the spring. [According to](#) *The New York Times*, FEMA had roughly half as many staff members trained to respond to disasters in May 2025 as it did in May 2024. Furthermore, E&E News [reported](#) that at the start of hurricane season on June 1, FEMA had less than 1,600 disaster workers available, since many in the dwindling ranks were already assigned to ongoing response or recovery efforts. On the same day one year prior, FEMA had 2,365 disaster workers available, and in 2022, almost 4,700 were ready to deploy. Trump's hiring freeze, which he opted to [extend](#) for three more months on July 7 as families reeled in the aftermath of the Texas floods, precludes adequate restaffing.

Number of Available FEMA Disaster Workers



In addition to rank-and-file workers, many highly qualified leaders are [among](#) those who have been pushed out. As of May 21, FEMA was missing an [estimated](#) one-fifth of coordinating officers, a position tasked with managing responses to major disasters. That same day, FEMA [announced](#) the exit of 16 senior executives. Among them was the agency’s acting deputy administrator, MaryAnn Tierney, who [cited](#) the Trump administration’s attacks on FEMA in her resignation letter.

An internal memo sent to remaining FEMA senior leadership on May 22 [warned](#), presciently, that the agency is at “high risk” of having “critical functions” fail due to “significant personnel losses.” In a *Times* opinion piece published on July 7, Tierney reflected on the Texas floods and [lamented](#) that “with each passing day, the federal government is becoming less prepared to face the next big disaster.”

Forcing States to Do the Impossible

As the Trump administration has incapacitated FEMA, it has tried to [foist](#) the burden of disaster preparedness and response onto [ill-equipped](#) state and local authorities. On

March 19, Trump [signed](#) an executive order [directing](#) state and local governments to “play a more active and significant role” in disaster preparedness even though they [lack](#) the financial resources and staff to do so. In an era of worsening fossil fuel-driven weather extremes, states and municipalities require greater support, and yet the Trump administration is [gumming up](#) needed funding.

Less than a week later, then-Acting FEMA Administrator Charles Hamilton (whose “acting” title [exempted](#) him from a statutory requirement that FEMA’s chief have disaster management experience) sent Noem and other top DHS officials an [internal memo](#) titled “Abolishing FEMA.” Although it didn’t become public knowledge until June, by which time Hamilton had been [fired](#) a day after testifying that FEMA should not be eliminated, the document proposed ways to minimize the federal government’s role in disaster response.

On June 10, Trump [publicly declared](#) that his administration plans to “wean” states off FEMA assistance after the 2025 hurricane season despite federal aid being a [proven necessity](#). The next day, Jeremy Greenberg, a career staffer who coordinated the agency’s responses to major disasters, [resigned](#).

Hamilton’s replacement, David Richardson (another “acting” administrator who [lacks](#) the requisite experience), embodies the incompetence and callousness at the top of the Trump-damaged FEMA. On May 9, the day he was appointed interim FEMA director, Richardson [vowed](#) to “push things down to the states” and threatened to “run right over” anyone who gets in his way. Less than a week later, Richardson [privately acknowledged](#) that the agency didn’t yet have a fully formed disaster response plan, though he vowed to have a new plan, including tabletop exercises, ready for review the following week. A few days after that, he [rescinded](#) the agency’s strategic plan for 2022-2026, arguing that it “contains goals and objectives that bear no connection to FEMA accomplishing its mission.” On June 2, the same day that Richardson [supposedly “joked”](#) that he didn’t know the U.S. has a hurricane season, he announced that the new disaster response

plan he promised would not be coming after all because he didn't want to implement changes that might contradict proposals from Trump's [FEMA review council](#).

Scrapping Disaster Prevention

Trump has made clear his desire to curtail FEMA's mission. To wit, his administration has [stymied](#) work related to hazard mitigation and climate adaptation, along with efforts to alleviate the unequal impacts of disasters. This began just days after inauguration, when the Trump administration [disbanded](#) three FEMA advisory councils: the [National Advisory Council](#), established after Hurricane Katrina to help improve the agency's operations; the [Technical Mapping Advisory Council](#), established after Hurricane Sandy to help improve the agency's national flood mapping efforts; and the [National Dam Safety Review Board](#), whose work updating federal standards and ensuring state compliance [helped avert](#) hundreds of potential dam failures.

In February, Trump's FEMA [announced](#) that it would halt enforcement of the Federal Flood Risk Management Standard. This rule specifies that damaged public buildings in flood zones must be rebuilt in a way that prevents future flood damage to qualify for FEMA funding. The same month, the White House [ordered](#) FEMA to cease work related to strengthening building codes.

Taking its ill-conceived attack on forward-thinking construction one step further, the Trump administration in April [eliminated](#) the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) grant program and [clawed back](#) more than \$3 billion for hazard mitigation and adaptation projects that had been approved but not finished. The agency also [took down](#) a notice announcing \$600 million in Flood Mitigation Assistance funding for 2025. In mid-July, 20 states [sued](#) the Trump administration for shutting down BRIC. Richardson [claimed](#) in a court filing that "FEMA has not ended the BRIC program," though the judge was [not persuaded](#) by his [baseless assertion](#).

An April 12 [internal memo](#) from then-FEMA chief Hamilton to a White House official advocated for ending the practice of automatically approving governors' post-disaster

requests for hazard mitigation funding. Since then, Trump has [routinely denied](#) those [requests](#), dealing [yet another blow](#) to investments in climate-ready infrastructure.

Making matters worse, Trump's FEMA removed mentions of equity, income, social vulnerability, and climate change from its [Local Mitigation Planning Policy Guide](#) and its [State Mitigation Planning Policy Guide](#). This makes it more likely that low-income and other vulnerable populations will be [overlooked](#) when disasters strike and when jurisdictions create their next five-year mitigation plans.

Trump's FEMA even proceeded to [end](#) door-to-door canvassing in disaster zones, an indefensible policy choice that will likely be a death sentence for elderly and disabled individuals unable to reach recovery centers on their own.

Revisiting Last Month's Debacle in Texas

In its first big test, Trump's hollowed-out FEMA [failed miserably](#). I'm referring, of course, to the administration's [inept response](#) to the early July floods in Central Texas, which killed more than 130 people and provided tragic [confirmation](#) that dismantling the agency is a grave mistake.

One of the biggest culprits behind FEMA's delayed response to the Texas flooding disaster was DHS chief Noem's [requirement](#) that she personally approve every contract or grant valued over \$100,000. Current and former FEMA officials [warned](#) that the June 11 directive would paralyze the agency's work. That's precisely what happened in Texas.



A flash flood that began on July 4 in Central Texas killed more than 130 people. ([World Central Kitchen, July 7, 2025, CC BY 4.0](#))

As FEMA was preparing to deploy search and rescue teams and other lifesaving resources, it immediately “ran into bureaucratic obstacles” due to Noem’s grant approval rule, four agency officials [told](#) CNN. Under normal circumstances, FEMA would have quickly staged its Urban Search and Rescue Teams “closer to a disaster zone in anticipation of urgent requests,” the sources said. But Noem waited until July 7 to authorize their deployment, more than 72 hours after flooding began. In addition, Texas state officials’ request for aerial imagery, which FEMA provides to aid search and rescue operations, was also stalled while awaiting Noem’s sign-off.

How many more Americans might be alive today if not for Noem’s inexcusable dilly-dallying in the immediate aftermath of the floods?

That’s not all. [According to](#) the *Times*, Noem allowed the contracts for hundreds of call center workers to expire on July 5 and waited until July 10 to renew them. As a result,

thousands of calls to FEMA’s disaster assistance line went unanswered. On July 5, FEMA’s call center workers, employed by a few different companies, answered 99.7 percent of calls from survivors applying for federal assistance, the *Times* reported. But on July 6, after hundreds of workers had been laid off, FEMA answered only 35.8 percent of calls, and on July 7, just 15.9 percent. One FEMA official told colleagues in a July 8 email that “we still do not have a decision, waiver or signature from the DHS Secretary.”

On July 21, former FEMA search and rescue chief Ken Pagurek [resigned](#) to protest Noem’s lethargic response to the Texas floods. Noem has [refused](#) to accept responsibility for [causing delays](#). Meanwhile, during his July 23 testimony before a House committee, acting FEMA director Richardson, who [waited](#) nine days to visit Central Texas, [called](#) the Trump administration’s response a “model of how disasters should be handled.”

Richardson’s outlandishly positive interpretation of events is diametrically opposed to the candid assessment of an on-the-ground FEMA worker, who [warned](#) that “if this is how they are going to do a major hurricane response, people are fucked.”

Democrats Should Be Ready to Pounce

August 29 marks the 20th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina’s landfall. Experts [warned](#) weeks ago that Trump and Musk’s war on NOAA and FEMA has left the United States ill-prepared for another storm of that magnitude. Scores of FEMA workers [raised the alarm](#) again on August 25 and were [summarily disciplined](#).

Let’s imagine that, sometime in the next few months, the Gulf Coast or the Atlantic Coast is hit by one massive category 5 hurricane, or perhaps the country endures two big storms [back-to-back](#). This isn’t hard to envision; last October, Milton hammered Florida just days after Helene rocked North Carolina. Last time Trump was in the White House, in 2017, Harvey, Irma, and Maria devastated Texas, Florida, and Puerto Rico, respectively, in the span of a few weeks.

Now imagine if, as numerous communities are inundated in the wake of a hurricane, several new wildfires break out across the drought-stricken West, and another deadly heat wave envelops tens of millions of people around the country. Then the [mortal consequences](#) of ripping our already-threadbare disaster preparedness and response infrastructure to shreds will become even more painfully evident. As risks compound and failures cascade (e.g., [hospitals flood](#) and [flames engulf toxic superfund sites](#)), Trump's madness will become even clearer. But this will only matter politically if people make a big deal of everything the Trump administration and Musk's DOGE vandals are doing to [increase the odds](#) of preventable suffering and death.

The question is whether Democrats will [capitalize on Trumpified disasters](#), in a way that echoes how FDR and his allies [made](#) Herbert Hoover infamous for his woefully inadequate response to the Great Depression. Sharp political rhetoric (e.g., Hooverilles) and, more importantly, popular New Deal policies that improved people's lives in sharp contrast to Republicans' destructive market fundamentalist model, discredited the GOP and led to two generations of Keynesian hegemony. The task at hand requires going beyond one-off denunciations; it would entail months- or years-long campaigns to villainize specific officials and policies responsible for causing preventable suffering while offering just alternatives.

It's worth noting that the worst-case scenario might not materialize this year. While the attacks I summarized in the previous section have already unleashed significant damage, the [long-term consequences](#) of Trump's actions will become clearer over time; unfortunately, things are [poised to get even worse](#) moving forward.

Recall that Trump [said](#) he plans to "phase out" FEMA *after* this year's hurricane season. Hamilton's April 12 memo discussed how Trump could make it tougher for communities to qualify for federal disaster assistance. The memo [suggested](#) quadrupling the damage threshold a state would need to meet to qualify for public assistance, and it also recommended keeping the federal cost share for disaster recovery from surpassing 75 percent. An Urban Institute analysis [found](#) that if these proposed

changes had been in effect, 71 percent of major disasters declared from 2008 to 2024 would not have qualified, and state and local governments would have missed out on \$41 billion in aid. Hamilton's "Abolish FEMA" memo, shared on March 25, [outlined](#) other ways to shrink the federal government's role in disaster response.

In the wake of the deadly Texas floods, Noem had the gall to [criticize](#) FEMA for being "slow to respond at the federal level," adding that "this entire agency needs to be eliminated as it exists today, and remade into a responsive agency." But it appears that what the Trump administration has in mind is still a [devolution of responsibility](#) to state and local officials, even though only the federal government is capable of coordinating effective disaster mitigation and response efforts. It will be important to keep a close eye on the forthcoming recommendations from the FEMA review council, which is "doing Trump's bidding" to dismantle the agency, [according to](#) Shana Udvardy, senior climate resilience policy analyst at the Union of Concerned Scientists.

The Texas flooding disaster doesn't appear to have changed Trump's mind about gutting NOAA. In May, OMB director Vought [requested](#) a roughly 25 percent cut to NOAA's budget for fiscal year 2026, which begins on October 1. The White House's [proposal](#) would [wipe out](#) nearly all of the agency's earth system science and shutter world-class climate research offices around the country. A more detailed [proposal](#) released at the end of June shed additional light on the catastrophic scale of the Trump administration's plans.

As meteorologist Michael Lowry [explained](#), Trump's budget would eliminate "all federally funded meteorological, oceanographic, and climate [labs](#) and [non-profit cooperative research institutes](#) across America." The proposed cuts would shut down "Miami's Atlantic Oceanographic and Meteorological Laboratory and its Hurricane Research Division, institutions responsible for most of the advancements in hurricane forecasting and science over the past 50 years," Lowry lamented. "With the proposed shuttering of AOML, HRD, and their sister cooperative institutes starting in 2026, forecasters could lose all tools currently available to estimate and forecast hurricane

intensity,” he added. “It’s a seismic blow to the arsenal of tools forecasters rely on to confidently deliver timely and accurate predictions of threatening hurricanes.”

Also on the chopping block is NOAA’s National Severe Storms Laboratory in Norman, Oklahoma. Jeff Masters [pointed out](#) that the closure of this lab, opened in 1964, would “significantly degrade our ability to improve flash flood forecasting,” meaning more calamities of the sort we saw recently in Texas.

To date, congressional appropriations committees have largely rejected the draconian cuts sought by Trump and Vought. The spending bill advanced by House lawmakers would still [reduce](#) NOAA’s budget by 6 percent, a detrimental and unnecessary blow, while the version advanced by the relevant Senate panel would [fund](#) NOAA at nearly the same level as 2025. Nevertheless, the Republican-led rescissions package that Trump signed into law last month included deleterious cuts. About \$60 million in unspent money for atmospheric, climate, and weather research was [rescinded](#) at the request of the Senate Commerce Committee chaired by Ted Cruz (R-TX). In addition, thanks to GOP lawmakers, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting can [no longer administer](#) the \$136 million Next Generation Warning System grant program, which helps public radio and TV stations improve their emergency alert systems to warn people of severe weather.

Moreover, the Trump administration is already achieving significant cuts by refusing to spend money that Congress approved for this fiscal year. As *Science* [reported](#) on August 25, “some \$1 billion in spending for the current year may still be sitting on Lutnick’s desk,” awaiting the Commerce Secretary’s approval. “The agency has no plans to spend all of that money by the fiscal year’s end on 30 September—if ever.” According to *Science*, the Trump administration is set to spend \$100 million less on NOAA’s research arm this year than Congress intended, a 14 percent cut. Other divisions have seen similar cuts, especially those offices doing climate-related work. Meanwhile, the White House has begun [canceling](#) contracts for next-generation weather satellites that were supposed to launch next decade.

Frankly, any extreme weather disasters that happen in the foreseeable future will have Trump's [bloody fingerprints](#) on them, so thorough and devastating has his dismantling of our disaster policy apparatus—from climate research to weather forecasting to emergency planning—been.

We live in an era of climate breakdown. Even if planet-heating pollution ceases tomorrow, the atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gases is so high that increasingly frequent and severe extreme weather is, to a certain extent, already [locked-in](#). That said, every tenth of a degree of warming that we can avoid makes a [positive difference](#), and so too do just adaptation initiatives. But rather than minimize hazards—through rapid decarbonization and robust investments in the social safety net, including green infrastructure—Republicans are actively aggravating an already-grim situation. Democrats aren't talking enough about this. That's a mistake.

This is a longstanding problem. Harris and Walz, for example, missed a [golden opportunity](#) after Helene and Milton, which occurred in the weeks leading up to the 2024 election. Trump, Musk, [Hamilton](#), and other Republicans filled the void with [lies](#) about FEMA, sowing mistrust to gain [buy-in](#) for getting rid of the agency. We [urged](#) Harris to use the hurricanes to tell “a compelling story about the escalating and deeply intertwined climate, housing, and insurance crises that might resonate with voters of all stripes.”

That would necessarily entail denouncing fossil fuel-corrupted Republicans for obstructing a clean energy transition and thwarting investments in disaster risk reduction. It would also mean sketching, and committing to pursue, a [humane agenda](#) that prioritizes public well-being over private profit. Something like directly creating living wage jobs to achieve the universal provision of zero- or low-carbon public goods—including green social housing, clean energy, mass transit, and educational, recreational, and artistic infrastructure. That's the kind of transformative vision that might begin to turn the tide.

Disasters offer untapped opportunities for political education and organizing. Survivors are in dire need of [just responses](#), which includes intervening to *prevent* future harm. Those put off by the idea of politicking in the wake of disasters should consider that when someone like Trump White House spokesperson [Karoline Leavitt](#) or Texas Gov. [Abbott](#) (R) says that assigning blame is inappropriate, they are emulating the NRA, which insists, after dozens of schoolchildren are mowed down by someone wielding an AR-15, that it's not the "right time" to push for gun control. Now *is* the right time to advocate for change. If Democrats at all levels, including state and local officials, don't [connect the dots](#) between fossil fuel expansion, attacks on weather forecasting, and avoidable deaths when a catastrophe is at the front of people's minds, it will fade from view and the fatal insanity will continue.

We're not dealing with strictly "natural disasters." That phrase [obscures](#) all of the decisions that societies make—or don't make—before, during, and after bouts of severe weather. It conveys, in an apolitical manner, that deadly storms are inevitable, or "acts of God." To be clear, certain environmental phenomena are inescapable, though their frequency and intensity is another matter. Still, whether natural hazards generate catastrophic outcomes [depends](#) largely on *political* choices about how society is organized. The Trump administration makes clear the need to *denaturalize* disasters—to convey the political, economic, and social forces that produce them. Today's unnatural disasters are inseparable from planet-heating pollution and the destruction of public good-oriented government. They are [neoliberal climate disasters](#); our future hinges on our ability to politicize them.

As long as our society fails to confront and reverse the reckless policy choices that are increasing the likelihood, scale, and unequal impacts of every hurricane, heat wave, etc., things will only get worse. Today's tragedies—they're really *crimes* [perpetuated](#) by fossil fuel executives and magnified by those who attack public goods and elevate "personal responsibility" over social solidarity—will be repeated tomorrow.

In essence, rather than adapt to our climate-changed present and future, the Trump administration is *choosing* to exacerbate cataclysms. To win back the working class, Democrats could try [explaining how](#) Republican policies are [endangering](#) communities around the country while [making life more expensive](#). Anger at elites is through the roof. If Democrats want to beat back right-wing authoritarianism, which is [at odds](#) with a livable future, they should embrace [green economic populism](#). Green New Deal policies [aimed](#) at simultaneously lowering prices and planet-wrecking emissions (e.g., decommodifying and decarbonizing housing, transportation, and other essentials) [remain popular](#). Trying something genuinely new—not the [false promise](#) of neo-neoliberalism being promoted by corporate-backed abundance advocates—is more than worthwhile; it’s an existential necessity.

Herein lies a big problem. Without equating the two major parties, it’s undeniable that a substantial chunk of contemporary Democrats [remain wedded](#) to an “all-of-the-above” energy strategy that ultimately [privileges fossil fuels](#). And too many of them are committed, like their Republican counterparts, to [advancing the interests of a minority of super-wealthy benefactors](#) rather than the vast majority of working people. Thus, while even corporate Democrats may be willing to condemn attacks on clean energy and cuts to NOAA and FEMA, that doesn’t mean they’ll go to bat for the ambitious [pollution- and inequality-slashing policies](#) we actually need.

One downside to focusing so intently on the culpability of Trump and other Republicans is that it overlooks [systemic sources](#) of our unjust and precarious status quo, namely [five decades](#) of largely [bipartisan neoliberalization](#). Neoliberals from both parties have inflicted [widespread pain](#) by attacking unions, corporate taxes, the welfare state, and myriad regulations—all of which has intensified inequality and left people vulnerable and ecosystems insufficiently protected. At the same time, Trump and DOGE represent the [apotheosis of neoliberalism](#), understood as using state power to facilitate the upward transfer of wealth. Unlike Republicans, a [growing but insufficient](#) number of Democrats are supportive of organized labor and progressive taxation and critical of deregulation, austerity, and privatization. Our call to focus on the [deadly effects](#) of Trump’s

extraordinarily aggressive assault on the federal workers who keep us safe is an invitation for Democrats to abandon the neoliberal project once and for all, and to embrace a pro-labor, pro-environment, and downwardly redistributive alternative.

For more, see our [interactive timeline](#) documenting Trump's attacks on disaster preparedness and response and our [interactive map](#) showing how Trump has delayed or denied disaster aid.

Related work:

- [Heat Kills. Trump Has Ensured There Will Be More Victims](#)
- [We Need the Federal Government to Protect Us from Climate Chaos](#)
- [DOGE Is Going to Kill a Lot of Americans](#)
- [Trump's Attack on Government Capacity Will Fan the Flames of the Home Insurance Crisis](#)