

Budgeting for Disasters Act

Congress has for too long failed to build room in the budget for disaster spending. While no one can ever predict when and where any particular storm, earthquake, or wildfire will happen, it is a near certainty that Congress will spend billions of dollars every year on disasters. Only, these billions are borrowed and added to an ever-growing debt. Congress should plan ahead, and build disaster spending into its annual budget, which would ensure the funds will be available and save taxpayers billions of dollars.

Background:

The *Budget Control Act of 2011* placed caps on discretionary spending for 10 years, which many at the time saw as an important way to discipline federal spending. However, the BCA also allowed Congress to use special statutory “adjustments” to increase spending outside the caps for disasters. The three mechanisms by which these caps can be adjusted are for emergency, disaster relief, and wildfire suppression.

In the last five years alone, Congress has spent more than \$173 billion outside the discretionary caps in emergency spending and disaster aid, fueling our growing debt to \$22 trillion. We know that disasters will continue to strike each year – and Congress should plan for it in advance. Bringing disaster and wildfire spending inside the budget caps is a practical first step as Congress explores way to reform its emergency spending.

Summary:

- Removes the disaster relief and wildfire suppression upward adjustments to discretionary spending caps.
- Raises the threshold to waive a point of order that an emergency designation is outside the budget caps from 60 votes to 67 votes.
- Requires a GAO study to review the relationship between emergency and disaster relief spending, including recommendations to reform qualifications for emergency spending.
- Takes effect in 2020, allowing Congress ample time to implement changes.