



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on January 16, 2013

House Passes \$50.7 Billion Storm Relief Bill

On the night of January 15, the House of Representatives [passed a bill](#) appropriating \$50.5 billion in emergency relief funds for victims of last October's Hurricane Sandy. The legislation, H.R. 152, "Disaster Relief Appropriations Act, 2013," sponsored by Rep. Harold Rogers (R-Ky.) passed by a [vote of 241-180](#). A total of 192 Democrats and 49 Republicans voted in support of the measure, with 179 Republicans and one Democrat opposed.



Republicans from the Northeastern states impacted by Sandy tended to join Democrats in supporting the measure, including Rep. Chris Smith (R-N.J.) who pleaded emphatically, "We are not crying wolf here."

Another Republican strongly backing the bill was Peter T. King of Long Island, an area hit hard by Sandy, who was quoted by the [New York Times](#): "It is unfortunate that we had to fight so hard to be treated the same as every other state has been treated."

An AP report quoted Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-N.Y.) who made an equally emotional appeal for support:

I just plead with my colleagues not to have a double standard. Not to vote tornado relief to Alabama, to Louisiana, to Mississippi, Missouri, to — with Ike, Gustav, Katrina, Rita — but when it comes to the Northeast, with the second worst storm in the history of our country, to delay, delay, delay."

During debate prior to the vote, Maloney criticized the delay in getting the legislation passed, stating: "Residents have been suffering for two-and-a-half months. We need the aid. We need it now."

The governors of the tri-state area most impacted by Sandy — New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut — cited a damage figure stemming from the storm of \$82 billion, so H.R. 152 covers about 62 percent of the total damage. The amount of aid received by these states seems like less of a "bargain," however, when one considers the low amount of tax dollars they receive for every dollar they send to Washington. A study compiled by Taxfoundation.org published online by [Visualeconomics](#) indicates that New Jersey receives back only 61 cents for each tax dollar it sends to Washington; Connecticut, only 69 cents; and New York, only 79 cents per dollar paid. It would be more economical, therefore, for residents of those states to pay for disaster relief out of their own funds, than to be charged as much as \$1.64 in federal taxes for each dollar they receive from Washington.

The *New York Times* reported that the vote on disaster relief pitted Northeast Republicans pressured by their constituents to obtain aid against their more fiscally conservative GOP colleagues. Republican House Speaker John A. Boehner of Ohio scheduled the vote over a week ago, the *Times* noted, "after he came under intense criticism for concluding the business of the previous Congress without taking up a \$60.4 billion hurricane-aid bill that the Senate had approved."

In addition to Rep. King of New York, Boehner was also criticized for delay on the vote by the usually conservative New Jersey Governor, Chris Christie, whose state was among the hardest hit by Sandy.



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Christie joined in a statement with New York Governor Andrew Cuomo and Connecticut Governor Dannel Malloy expressing gratitude to Congress for passing the hurricane relief measure.

Christie came under fire from fellow Republicans when he [joined President Obama](#) in a helicopter ride over the storm-damaged New Jersey Shore last October 31. Coming just days before the November presidential election, some Republicans feared that Christie's appearance with Obama after previously endorsing GOP nominee Mitt Romney would damage Romney's efforts. In response, Christie, who faces reelection this November, said during an interview on *Fox & Friends*: "I have a job in New Jersey that is much bigger than presidential politics. I couldn't care less about that."

Representative Mick Mulvaney, (R-S.C.), a member of the House Tea Party Caucus, authored an amendment to H.R. 152 supported by a group of fiscal conservatives who wanted to make other cuts to the 2013 federal budget to pay for the disaster relief. Opponents of the amendment called it a "poison pill," stating that it would render the legislation unacceptable to the Democrat-controlled Senate.

In defense, Mulvaney said: "This amendment is not about offering a poison pill. I want the money to go where it needs to go."

The Mulvaney amendment was defeated by a vote of [258-162](#).

H.R. 152 came [under fire from some fiscal conservatives](#) in the House, including Rep. Tom McClintock (R-Calif.), who said: "A tragedy like Hurricane Sandy shouldn't be used for a grab-bag of spending."

The debate between those supporting the storm-relief measure and those opposing it focused largely on "need" versus the cost of the measure, but there was no indication that any member of the House opposed the bill on constitutional grounds. Among the powers delegated to Congress, federal aid to the states for disaster relief is not listed.



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