



Ron Paul's Comments on FEMA Provoke Passionate Responses

Just days before Hurricane Irene hit American shores, Texas Representative and Republican presidential hopeful Ron Paul declared that FEMA should stay out of the recovery efforts that were inevitable. Paul has been a long-time critic of the agency, and as a general rule, believes that most federal agencies (i.e., those that do not serve a purpose delegated to the federal government in the Constitution) should be done away with as they are unconstitutional and typically inept. However, this particular declaration of Paul's drew some tense ire over the course of the last few days, as well as some support.



Last week, Rep. Paul said that FEMA is far more detrimental to recovery efforts than beneficial because "all they do is come in and tell you what to do and what you can't do," and add billions to the deficit.

On August 30, Paul [appeared](#) on CNN with Anderson Cooper to defend his comments, where he made the following statement:

We've only had [FEMA] since 1979 and they don't have a very good record. These natural disasters are very dangerous, so I don't understand why we would turn it over to a federal bureaucracy. Federal bureaucracies as a whole don't do a very good job, but FEMA has the worst reputation of any of them. And I live on the Gulf Coast and I've had the same position all the time and we've had hurricanes and disasters, and I get so many calls, I've had so many calls from people upset with FEMA than any of the other agencies put together.

Pointing to some of the great examples of FEMA ineptitude, Paul went on:

When we had Katrina in New Orleans, they needed ice, so FEMA ordered ice from the Northeast and they ordered 211 million pounds of ice. It travelled for two weeks, and it finally ended up in Nebraska and they never got it. But that's a typical way of how FEMA works.

Paul contends that there was far greater efficiency prior to the inception of FEMA.

Despite Paul's use of historical evidence and data support, some found the contentions to be wholly offensive. For example, Peter Shumlin, Vermont state governor [said](#) on Thursday, "I would urge Ron Paul and any critics of FEMA to come to Vermont." He declared that FEMA "has an A-team" on the ground in his state, which was hit particularly hard by the hurricane last weekend. Relying heavily on personal emotions, he added, "Look in the eyes of Vermonters who've lost their homes, who've lost their businesses, who've seen their husbands and children killed by the storm and see the kind of response that FEMA is giving us."

Shumlin said he has engaged in discussions with New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie and New York Gov.



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Andrew Cuomo, as well as other governors in New England, and said, “Everyone agrees that FEMA’s doing their job.”

Likewise, Cooper attempted to defend FEMA, though he acknowledged a number of its shortcomings. He indicated that FEMA has “expertise in some areas that some states don’t.” To that, however, Paul asserts that the reason the states are seemingly ill-prepared to handle these types of crises are because of the “more hazards” created by the presence of agencies like FEMA, because people then people that “the government will always be there to save the day.” It is for that reason, according to Paul, that many people opt out of purchasing insurance for their homes, since they are comforted by the notion that FEMA will step in if necessary and foot the bill. What that really means, however, is that the taxpayers are footing the bill.

Connecticut Governor Dannel Malloy went so far as to call Rep. Paul an idiot for his assertions. [Appearing](#) on CNN several minutes after Paul, Malloy told anchor Christine Romans, “I think he’s an idiot.”

Romans appeared noticeably surprised at Malloy’s remark. “That’s blunt. That’s quite blunt,” said Romans.

Malloy responded, “This is a ridiculous conversation. I really don’t understand what he’s talking about, and I’m not sure he does.”

He went on to say that Paul was “playing politics” with natural disasters, something of which Paul has never been accused before. Malloy explained, “It really does rise to idiocy and hypocrisy. What state has benefitted more than Texas over the years from declarations of disaster. Let’s just concentrate. This is pure politics playing out across individuals’ misery.”

Similarly, a columnist in the *Palm Beach Post* [scoffed](#) at Paul, and wrote, “A sensible debate in Congress — if one is possible — about natural disaster preparation and response would not start with Rep. Ron Paul’s loopy idea of abolishing the Federal Emergency Management Agency.” The editorialist went on to mock Paul’s notion of “hazard” by writing “Perhaps he would have all Americans live only in places free of any danger from floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, tsunamis and earthquakes. A country that size might suit the microdot-sized government Rep. Paul favors.”

The *Boston Globe* has [dubbed](#) Paul’s comments as “an unfortunate sound bite.”

NJ.com [called](#) Paul’s philosophy a “pinched view of government’s role” and resorted to fear tactics when it wrote:

Imagine for a moment where we would be today if Paul got his way. Would he let people sink or swim on their own? Or would he just shift more of the burden to state and local governments, a move that would not save money but would ensure a haphazard response.

Not everyone was opposed to Paul’s remarks, however. Andrew Malcolm of the *Los Angeles Times* [praised](#) Paul for his boldness and courage in stating such obvious conclusions:

It is, of course, very American to name storms like pets and pretend that a 400-mile-wide swath of 115-mph winds and rains can somehow be managed. Very foolish, but very American. Leave it to Paul to burst the popular bubble of omnipotent government via CNN Tuesday night.

Malcolm notes that Cooper sensed he was fighting a losing battle against Paul, and “wisely surrendered.”



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Malcolm went on to describe what he perceives to be Paul's rise to glory and the increasing evidence that Paul is feared by the establishment:

In 2008, Paul was inveighing about such ridiculous things as the exploding national debt and the imperative of cutting government spending because the country couldn't afford itself.

Now, it's 2011 and — *look* — Paul's agenda is the nation's political agenda. He's not barred from debates anymore. In fact, [Paul will participate in] the next GOP [debate set for] Sept. 7 at the Reagan Library.

President Obama is so worried about what might come out there, he's trying to schedule a competing address to Congress that same evening as a media distraction....

Paul will be at that debate. So will the new GOP front-runner, Texas Gov. Rick Perry.

Which would you be more likely to watch?

Likewise, Walter Block [posted](#) a blog on LewRockwell.com that cited an article in the *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* entitled "The Economics and Ethics of Hurricane", and used that paper's findings to defend Paul. "FEMA should also be on the list of government departments scheduled to be closed down," Block concluded.

As the debate over Paul's comments rages on, one thing appears certain: No one can accuse Ron Paul of catering to public opinion to acquire greater popularity.



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