

Department of Homeland Security using \$155 million in FEMA disaster relief to fund Trump's immigrant crackdown

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The Trump Administration announced plans this week to transfer at least \$155 million from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) disaster relief fund to pay for its anti-immigrant policies. A total of \$271 million will be reallocated from other agencies that also operate under the umbrella of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to fund Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Border Patrol operations.

The announcement came as Tropical Storm Dorian threatened Puerto Rico, which is still languishing two years after Hurricane Maria devastated the island's infrastructure and killed more than 3,000 people. Officials insist that the reshuffling of disaster money for deportations will not impact emergency efforts.

The DHS also plans to transfer \$23.8 million from the Transportation Security Administration, which operates security screening checkpoints at the nation's airports, towards ICE.

The shuffling of funds comes one week after the Trump White House announced an end to the Flores settlement, which prohibits the government from holding immigrant families longer than 20 days. As a result, the government will be using FEMA funds to imprison immigrant families indefinitely.

On July 26, the DHS informed Congress of its plan to transfer around \$116 million to ICE for beds, transportation, and deportation. In a statement to CNN, FEMA said the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF) would have a remaining balance of \$447 million, a "sufficient" amount "to support operational needs."

The DRF account provides funding for ongoing disaster recovery efforts, including communities impacted by the deadly 2017 hurricane season.

Congressional Democrats, including Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer and others, were quick to criticize the administration's financial maneuver. Many have rightly pointed to the White House efforts to control spending, historically entrusted to Congress, as unconstitutional and authoritarian. Moreover, the administration's efforts to deplete disaster funding while escalating the anti-immigrant repression in the face of ongoing and upcoming natural disasters is especially criminal.

The pro forma criticism from liberal quarters rings hollow considering the Democrats in Congress recently passed the largest Pentagon budget in history, some \$738 billion, and also approved funding for Trump's border wall and the sprawling network of immigrant concentration camps.

The Democrats and the White House have argued not over the fundamentals of immigration policy but the specifics. One current "debate" is over how many beds are required for all imprisoned immigrants. The Democrats argue that allowing ICE to increase the number of beds would lead to unnecessary detentions, including immigrants without criminal records. The Republicans argue that a larger number of beds would limit the amount of immigrants released into the US as they await hearings.

While the administration originally requested 52,000 beds for their efforts, the Democrats agreed to "only" an average 45,274 beds per day, with the understanding of returning to 40,520 by the end of the fiscal year. The current reshuffling of funds allows the White House to increase the number of beds to roughly 50,000.

In recent months, the government has imprisoned immigrants in conditions well beyond capacity with

around 55,530 people detained as of August. In the last fiscal year, more than 760,000 migrants were arrested for crossing the border illegally.

The latest announcement to fund ICE using DHS funds is not the first time the administration has reshuffled money toward Trump's ant-immigrant dragnet. Last year, DHS shifted \$10 million from the FEMA operating budget to fund detentions and deportations and last summer another \$200 million was redirected from multiple parts of DHS to ICE according to congressional documents.



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