

Biden visits Kentucky after devastating floods

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President Biden visited Kentucky this week after devastating floods destroyed several communities last month. The floods were the worst in Kentucky's history, with 8-10.5 inches of rain falling in just 48 hours. At least 37 people were killed and additional flooding may occur as thunderstorms develop this week.

This disaster comes after a tornado struck much of the same area in December of this year, killing 77 people and destroying several homes. Thousands have been displaced and many communities are still inaccessible after the flood damaged critical infrastructure.

Biden's visit was meant to tout the limited federal aid provided to victims of the flooding and to stage photos for him and Kentucky's Democratic Governor Andy Beshear. Posing in front of a destroyed home, Biden declared that the federal government had an obligation to help all its people, saying "We have the capacity to do this—it's not like it's beyond our control. We're staying until everybody's back to where they were."

"I promise you, if it's legal, we'll do it," he continued. "And if it's not legal, we'll figure out how to change the law."

Biden's words ring hollow from a president who has refused to alter the filibuster to pass any legislation that might hinder the Republican assault on democratic rights, including abortion and the right to vote.

The monetary relief the US government has allocated to the communities affected has been pitiful.

Of the thousands of people affected, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has only provided 800 people with a total of \$13 million in relief funds, or around \$16,000 per person. This is just enough funds to cover the cost of debris removal and miscellaneous emergency measures for those who are able to get access to the funds. Those who lost their homes and other property will never be made whole.

The pittance for the victims of the storm is in contrast

to the \$40 billion allocated to send weapons to Ukraine, which alone is twice the FEMA Disaster Relief Fund for the whole country next year.

FEMA's flood insurance program has a long history of providing inadequate resources and discriminatory practices. A recent report by RisQ, a climate change risk assessment company, said communities with the least affordable housing and least disposable income are 1.5 times more likely to be uninsured due to inadequate flood risk mapping by FEMA.

It concluded that "Intentionally or otherwise, the current system for [Special Flood Hazard Assessment] determination and its role in driving flood insurance uptake has resulted in substantial liabilities and risk in U.S. residential real estate at the individual and collective level. This risk systemically and disproportionately impacts less affluent and minority communities. Without an alternate approach, the scale of the risk and the scale of the disparity will only get worse with climate change."

This imbalanced flood assessment modeling has created a situation where working class communities may receive a pittance in relief money after entire neighborhoods are swept away.

Speaking to the press, Beshear said "I wish I could tell you why we keep getting hit here in Kentucky. I wish I could tell you why areas where people may not have much continue to get hit and lose everything. I can't give you the why, but I know what we do in response to it. And the answer is everything we can. These are our people. Let's make sure we help them out."

The "why" is actually quite clear. Decades of policies implemented and promoted by Democrats and Republicans alike, in the pursuit of profit, have accelerated climate change, fueling the increasing severity of extreme weather events, while depriving working class communities of the resources to adapt to

it.

Furthermore, working class communities in eastern Kentucky have been deeply impoverished by the mass closure of coal mines, while mountaintop removal mining operations have had a devastating impact on the environment. The removal of rock and soil to expose coal seams, with the excess dumped in nearby valleys, has facilitated the increase in devastating flooding whenever it rains.

While the Republicans have refused to take any action on climate change, the Democrats have opted to turn it into a gold rush for capitalist investment.

The Inflation Reduction Act, which was approved by the Senate on the weekend and is heading for approval in the House, will do little to combat climate change. Instead, it provides new tax credits and government funding for renewable energy companies. This “green” façade hides a win for the fossil fuel industry by tying the construction of renewable energy projects on federal land to the lease sale of fossil fuel rights on federal land.

This limited and self-defeating action was a significant reduction in what Democrats had originally proposed, with several hundred billion dollars in funding cut to appease the right-wing faction in the Democratic Party. The act was slashed from \$555 billion in climate funding to just \$300 billion over 10 years, less than half of what the United States military receives every year.

Biden described the bill as “far from perfect. It’s a compromise. But it’s often how progress is made.” That “compromise” was not with an opposition party but with themselves, as the party of Wall Street adopted the demands of politicians like Senator Joe Manchin, the millionaire owner of a coal company, and hedge fund shill Senator Kyrsten Sinema.



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