

Hurricane season, with a side of funding cuts

Hurricane season officially started last Sunday. In its annual assessment, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) predicted a 60% chance of "an above-normal season."

NOAA forecasted 13-19 named storms; "of those, 6-10 are forecast to become hurricanes, including 3-5 major hurricanes." Numerous agencies and experts have questioned if the United States is ready to deal with the coming storms and their aftermath, especially given recent developments.

Right as hurricane season was ramping up, "Elon Musk's 'Department of Government Efficiency' fired probationary employees (at NOAA) and impounded funds Congress had appropriated. Now experts in storms and disasters are worried that the NOAA will be unable to function adequately," said Heather Cox Richardson, "Letters from an American."

By the way, only Congress has the power to rescind funding already appropriated. These

impoundments are illegal.

Oliver Milman of The Guardian reported, "There is a lack of meteorologists in 15 of the regional weather service offices along the coastline from Texas to Florida, as well as in Puerto Rico — an area that takes the brunt of almost all hurricanes that hit the U.S. Several offices, including in Miami, Jacksonville, Houston and Puerto Rico, lack at least a third of all the meteorologists required to be fully staffed."

It's not just NOAA bearing the brunt of these illegal cuts.

Also in her June 2 column, Richardson reports, "The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has suffered dramatic cuts as Trump has said he intends to push disaster recovery to the states. The lack of expertise is taking a toll there, too."

"Today," she continued, "staff members there said they were baffled after David Richardson, the head of the agency, said he did not know the United States has a hurricane season."

(David) Richardson had no



experience — not one second — with disaster response before taking charge of FEMA.

FEMA was established in 1978 at the request of states beleaguered and overly burdened by disaster relief. FEMA's mission is to coordinate the response to a disaster that overwhelms the resources of local and state authorities.

Texas has been a major recipient of those funds.

Within a month after Hurricane Harvey in 2017, over a billion dollars in federal funds were provided to Texans to aid in recovery efforts.

Even Republicans are raising the alarm. After a flurry of deadly tornadoes struck Missouri in May, no FEMA assistance was forthcoming. In a Congressional hearing, Republican Sen. Josh

Hawley told Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem, "We are desperate for the assistance in Missouri."

Republican Gov. Sarah Sanders of Arkansas also sought to reverse the administration's previous rejection of federal disaster aid after deadly weather swept across her state in March and April.

An editorial in the Palm Beach Post stated that with recent staff departures and cuts, NOAA is left at "a significant deficit, down more than 10% of its staffing, just as we head into the busiest time for severe storm predictions."

"NWS staff will have an impossible task to continue its current level of services," the Post article stated. "Our worst nightmare is that weather forecast offices will be so understaffed that there will be needless loss of life."

Hurricane forecasts and warnings save lives and inform large swaths of the population. Accurate and prompt tornado warnings are also critical, since these storms spawn quickly. Residents count on these warnings to take

shelter before a storm hits.

After disaster strikes, it's equally important for the federal government to come to the aid of residents of stricken communities. These funding cuts will lead to unnecessary suffering and avoidable loss of life.

I urge you to contact Sen. John Cornyn (210-224-7485), Sen. Ted Cruz (210-340-2885) and Rep. Chip Roy (210-821-5024). Tell them to oppose these illegal cuts and take back the "power of the purse" that the Constitution grants to Congress. Then tell them to oppose these cuts in the upcoming budget bill and support our nation's ability to accurately forecast the weather and respond to weather disasters.

Thank you for reading. To find out more about how to get involved with local Democratic activities and activism, visit www.kedems.us.

Laura Bray is Chair of the Kendall County Democratic Party.