

6-2012

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The Nixon Years:

Examining the Evolution of Federal Disaster Relief Policy, 1969-1974

By
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Senior Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment
Of the requirements for
Honors in the Department of History
Union College
March 2012

ABSTRACT

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The Nixon Years: Examining the Evolution
of Federal Disaster Relief Policy, 1969-1974

This thesis examines the evolution of federal disaster relief policy under President Richard Nixon from 1969-1974. The findings show that even under a conservative president in Nixon, the federal disaster relief program expanded both in federal resources and funding consistently during this period. Both Hurricane Camille (1969), and Hurricane Agnes (1972), served as significant catalysts for this, but also, the liberal political context of this period coming just after the implementation of the Great Society program by Lyndon Johnson, and Nixon's own ambitions to be seen as a proactive leader despite the ideological contentions it spawned throughout his presidency, played into the expansion of the federal disaster relief program as well.

To best analyze how and why federal disaster relief policy evolved as it did between 1969 and 1974, the following examination is organized chronologically; sections have been devoted to the political background and context of federal disaster relief policy before Hurricane Camille; the disaster relief effort in the aftermath of Hurricane Camille, and the discussions to amend the current federal disaster relief legislation from the Disaster Relief Act of 1969 to the Disaster Assistance Act of 1970; the political effects of increasing partisanship between the Democratic Congress and the Republicans who supported Nixon's administration between 1970-1971, the years leading to Hurricane Agnes, as well as the federal disaster relief effort in its aftermath under the Agnes

Recovery Act of 1972; and finally, federal disaster relief hearings in the years following Agnes leading to the Disaster Relief Act of 1974. Throughout each of these sections there is an emphasized analysis on how partisanship and polarity among the federal government immediately following Hurricane Camille and Hurricane Agnes differs from this in the interim of these major catastrophes.

This study relies primarily on the testimony surrounding disaster relief legislation between 1969-1974 to discern how federal disaster relief policy provisions have changed, and how the overall scope of federal disaster relief has evolved. As was mentioned, it especially focuses on the two most catastrophic natural disasters in these years, Hurricane Camille and Hurricane Agnes, as the two events that were especially influential in the development of federal disaster relief policy during this time. Furthermore, this thesis considers the social and political context of this period, drawing on media accounts of disasters and disaster victims to highlight the heightened sense of entitlement for federal relief during that emerged during this phase of liberalism.

Lastly, this paper also examines Nixon's broader domestic policy and seeks to connect how his influence in the evolution of federal disaster relief policy correlates with his initiatives in his domestic policy agenda. Upon investigating this, it is clear that the conservative strains in Nixon's through were trumped by his personal ambitions and desires. Ultimately, this influenced his initiative in both federal disaster relief policy and domestic policy in general during his presidency.

Chapter 1

For historians and political scientists alike, Ronald Reagan's ascension to the presidency in 1981 marked the end of an era of postwar liberalism in Washington. In *The Conservative Century*, Gregory Schneider writes, "Ronald Reagan's election signified that conservatives had grown up. Barry Goldwater's defeat in 1964 had inspired conservatives to take control of the GOP and move it in a conservative direction."¹ Once in power, Reagan and his administration prompted the "Reagan Revolution", challenging the dominance of the New Deal Democratic regime with a vast series of conservative reforms to decentralize government and support a *laissez-faire* economy. After 16 years, Reagan's ability to appease the American public with staunch conservative policy put an end to the era of postwar liberalism that had dominated domestic policy in the U.S. since Lyndon Johnson's election in 1964. As Steven Hayward asserts, "He (Reagan) brought the Republican Party to the cusp of realignment".²

The most poignant liberal shift in Washington came in 1964 when Lyndon Johnson won the presidency by the biggest margin since FDR's landslide victory in 1936. Additionally, the Democratic Party acquired 37 seats in the House of Representatives, achieving a 295 to 140 advantage over Republicans there, two more seats in the Senate raising their number to 68 in total, and 530 seats in state legislatures throughout the U.S. As Hayward writes "It was the kind of victory from which dreams, and ambitious legislative programs, are made."³ Accordingly, not more than two months into office,

¹ Gregory Schneider, *The Conservative Century from Reaction to Revolution* (Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 155.

² Steven F. Hayward, *The Age of Reagan: the Fall of the Old Liberal Order, 1964-1980* (New York: Three Rivers, 2009), 677.

³ Hayward, *The Age of Reagan*, 3.

Johnson embarked on one of the greatest periods of reform in U.S. history, the “Great Society” program. The Great Society centered on a vast expansion of domestic federal support towards funding for education, healthcare, domestic poverty, gun control, and the space program, among other initiatives. Despite its radical platform, the program passed and as the liberal activism became embedded further into congressional discussions from both the Republican and Democratic parties, the liberal “push” gained momentum. In fact, post-war liberalism became so integrated into the mentality of those in Washington that even some Republicans endorsed the Great Society initiatives. Hayward writes on this, “When Reagan first arrived on the scene, the liberal Ripon Society was still a major force in the Republican Party, just as the liberal Americans for Democratic Action was a significant force in the Democratic Party.”⁴

This activism even prompted an unprecedented foray into disaster relief by the federal government. This was marked by federal disaster relief efforts in 1964, when Johnson was faced with a catastrophe in Alaska when an earthquake occurred, and 1965 when Hurricane Betsy tore through the Southern U.S. killing 76 people, flooding 160,000 homes, and reaping nearly \$1.5 billion in damages. Traditionally, disaster relief had been the responsibility of the individuals affected and their state or local governments; as well as volunteer organizations, which often lent their services to the effort. However, Johnson used the resources of the federal government to provide assistance for victims in Alaska, and in the areas affected by Hurricane Betsy. While Johnson’s disaster relief effort calmed victims in Alaska and set a new precedent for federal disaster relief in 1964, Hurricane Betsy proved to be a far greater catastrophe both in damages and loss of life than the earthquake in Alaska had and ultimately, the President contributed minuscule

⁴ Hayward, *The Age of Reagan*, xxxiv.

and inconsistent funding for the relief effort a year later.⁵ In turn, despite his ambitious agenda, he failed to sufficiently aid to Betsy's victims.⁶

By 1967, popular support for the Great Society program began to dissolve. Nonetheless, in his time as president Johnson had not only generated a powerful material shift in the size of the federal government, but moreover, he had helped alter the American public's ideology on the level of domestic support and funding that Washington was expected to contribute to both state governments and individual citizens; arguably, this shift represented the culmination of a long-term process rooted in FDR's New Deal. This ideology redefined the role of the federal government on domestic issues and forced politicians in Washington to modify their mentality towards the wants and expectations of the people they elected to serve.

Coming to power the heels of Lyndon Johnson in 1969 as part of a conservative backlash to LBJ's unpopular presidency, Richard Nixon exhibited a particularly effective adaptation to this post-Great Society mentality and used it to connect with the American public and achieve his greatest political success. Even as a leader of the conservative party, Nixon understood the ideological shift the Great Society program had precipitated and could appreciate the benefits of promoting a liberal domestic agenda at this time. Nixon declared that in domestic issues, his stance would be guided by "New Federalism", the devolution of power from the federal government back to the state.

In a conversation with the President, John Whitaker, a former aid to President Nixon, reveals that Nixon at one point stated, "There is only one thing as bad as a far left

⁵ "The Most Intense Hurricanes in the United States 1851-2004," last modified July 27, 2005, <http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/pastint.shtml>.

⁶ National Research Council Committee on the Alaska Earthquake, "The Great Alaska Earthquake of 1964 Vol 1. Part 2." 1970, xi.

liberal and that's a damn right wing conservative."⁷ Nonetheless, he also understood that he was elected to lead for the most part by conservatives, and needed to uphold his promise to honor their interests as well. Thus, as Whitaker asserts, "Throughout his career, Nixon's liberal instincts were held on a tight leash by his conservative constituency and this political reality constantly led to seemingly contradictory actions throughout his presidency."⁸

Despite the weight that Nixon's conservative backers possessed, in his first term Nixon saw fit to endorse and in some cases, even augment government support on most of the domestic programs the Great Society had introduced.⁹ This was exemplified by his initiatives on the development of health maintenance organizations (HMOs), and his proposed Family Assistance Plan (FAP) for welfare reform in the U.S. Nixon's domestic prerogatives suggest that he did not combat the liberal force the Great Society program had instituted for domestic policy but rather sought to frame it in a more conservative light, and in his time as president, Nixon also pushed for federal support on environmental issues, racial equality, help for minority businesses, and large-scale initiatives for Native Americans, who up to that point had been largely forgotten in American society.

Nixon also threw his support into the federal disaster relief program. His investment in federal disaster relief were highlighted in 1969, when Hurricane Camille inflicted over \$1.4 billion in damage spread throughout the southern United States; and 1972 when Hurricane Agnes ravaged the East Coast inflicting more damage on the U.S.

⁷ John C. Whitaker, "Nixon's Domestic Policy: Both Liberal and Bold in Retrospect," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 26. 1 (Winter, 1996): 131.

⁸ John Whitaker, "Nixon's Domestic Policy," 131.

⁹ John Whitaker, "Nixon's Domestic Policy," 132-138.

than any natural disaster in history had up to that point and breaking the record for the most costly storm with approximately 2.1 billion in damages, mostly from flooding. In the aftermath of Hurricane Camille, Mississippi in particular, was in a complete state of crisis. Like Johnson, Nixon chose to embrace what was a previously unprecedented extension of the federal government into disaster relief. Nixon understood the massive and complex undertaking disaster relief had historically been, but saw an opportunity to promote himself as a man of action to the American people, a proactive leader that rose above the bureaucratic “red tape” in a time of crisis, and could enact a swift production and implementation of beneficial legislation for victims. Thus, he committed himself and his government to the relief effort, soliciting the Office of Emergency Preparedness (OEP) along with numerous other federal and state agencies, churches, and volunteer relief organizations to contribute food, clothing, shelter, and necessary medical supplies for victims.

Overall, this network of relief organizations produced an estimated \$488 million for disaster relief, with over \$225 million worth of funding stemming directly from the federal government the largest investment in federal disaster relief of any president up to that point.¹⁰ In a special message to the Congress on Federal Disaster Assistance on April 22, 1970, Nixon stated a number of legislative proposals and administrative actions for he encouraged Congress to approve for improved federal disaster relief legislation.¹¹ Congress too, especially leaders in federal disaster relief policy legislation like Birch Bayh, supported the expanded role of the federal government in disaster relief and

¹⁰ Philip D. Hearn, *Hurricane Camille: Monster Storm of the Gulf Coast* (Mississippi: Mississippi University Press, 2004), 143-146.

¹¹ Richard Nixon: "Special Message to the Congress on Federal Disaster Assistance.," April 22, 1970. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2479>.

worked with extreme passion to consider the victims' requests for aid, and contemplate their criticisms. Ultimately, this led to the production of a significantly more effective blueprint for the federal disaster relief program deemed the Disaster Assistance Act of 1970. Though never without criticism, the majority of which was directed at local and state governments as well as the non-profit organizations who had offered their services, Nixon's bid paid off and the federal government's role in the relief effort was considered a success. Crediting Nixon in this, Hearn writes, "President Richard Nixon's prediction that the Gulf Coast would rebuild better than ever was fundamentally fulfilled."¹²

Two years later, President Nixon was confronted once again by Hurricane Agnes, an overwhelming catastrophe that would require a mammoth relief effort from the federal government. To make matters more complicated, 1972 marked an election year for Nixon, and with the race against Senator George McGovern marked the pinnacle of a partisanship that had emerged between Democrats and Republicans in the period following Hurricane Camille. Attempting one again to rise to the occasion and promote himself as a man of action, Nixon responded to the damage and destruction wrought by Hurricane Agnes just as he had to Hurricane Camille; together he and the OEP initiated a massive recovery effort, coordinating with all volunteer and local organizations that wished to help in the effort. Despite Nixon's increased conservatism during this time, the scope of Hurricane Agnes prompted the President to propose the Agnes Recovery Act of 1972, an expansion of the 1970 Disaster relief act that among other amendments entailing increased funding and Federal resources called for supplemental disaster appropriations totaling \$1,569,800,000 for this emergency, the largest single request of its kind in U.S. history and two years later, a series of congressional hearings assessing the effectiveness

¹² Hearn, *Hurricane Camille*, 183.

of federal disaster relief in the aftermath of Hurricane Agnes led to the Disaster Relief Act of 1974, an even greater expansion of federal disaster relief policy.¹³

Beginning in 1964, Johnson's Great Society opened the public's eyes to view their government as an expansive force in domestic affairs. As a result, politicians were encouraged to adapt more liberal-oriented domestic policies to appease the majority of the American people. While in office, Nixon understood this dynamic well and with his desire to be framed as a proactive leader, he made it a priority for his administration to continue and actively support many of the programs the Great Society program had initiated. Furthermore, Nixon invested an enormous amount of the federal government's resources into the disaster relief campaign following Hurricane Camille. The success of the federal relief program in 1969 prompted Nixon and Congress to expand upon Federal disaster relief legislation in 1970. However, between 1970 and 1972 hostility between the Republicans and Democrats alienated the Nixon administration from liberals in Washington and prompted him to transition to become more conservative on some of his domestic policies.

In 1972, Hurricane Agnes once again presented the need for a massive assistance effort from the Federal government in disaster relief. Though Nixon did undertake a massive campaign in disaster relief, especially in Pennsylvania, political "red tape" in Washington hindered the Federal government's effectiveness and the disaster relief effort was considered painfully slow and relatively unsuccessful. We must keep Nixon's conservative political shift in mind as a contributing factor for why the federal

¹³ James T. Bradley, Horace C. Carter, Crockett C. W. Crockett, Albert V. Hardy, Landers H. Landers, W. J. Moyer, A. Boyd Pack, James J. Rahn, Robert O. Weedfall, "Hurricane Agnes: The Most Costly Storm," 175.

government left the majority of Agnes victims unhappy, but also look at this phenomenon in terms of how it affected the evolution and design of disaster relief policy for the future.

The liberal current throughout the 60's and 70's that generated a significant consideration during Nixon's time in office has attracted both historians and political scientists alike. Consequently, much has been written on this period and its significance in the realm of 20th century politics. Three of the most notable of these works are Gregory Schneider's *The Conservative Century: From Reaction to Revolution*, Mackenzie and Weisbrot's *The Liberal Hour: Washington and the Politics of Change in the 1960's*, and Allen Matusow's *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960's*, each of which comprehensively tracks the liberal undercurrents in Washington throughout the 60's and 70's from their beginnings to their end.¹⁴

Mackenzie and Weisbrot, professors of government and history respectively, at Colby College, examine the political liberalism of the 1960's and 70's as a period of immense social and political change. *The Liberal Hour* approaches its' study of post-war liberalism by exploring what allowed liberalism in the 1960's and 70's to take such a firm grasp on the Washington and the American public, citing a postwar movement of political power from urban centers to suburbs as well as a decline in southern conservative influence in the Democratic Party as quintessential catalysts to its development. Additionally, McKenzie and Weisbrot write on the greatest liberal domestic policies to emerge from this period including those in welfare reform, environmental policy, healthcare, civil rights and military consignment policy, and argue

¹⁴ Schneider, *The Conservative Century: From Reaction to Revolution*; Calvin G. Mackenzie and Robert Weisbrot, *The Liberal Hour: Washington and the Politics of Change in the 1960s* (New York: Penguin, 2009); Allen J. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960's* (Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2009).

that their institution among American domestic policy would not have been possible without the liberal momentum of the period supporting them.

Matusow's *The Unraveling of America* similarly examines the societal effects that the rise and fall of post-war liberalism had on the U.S. throughout the 60's and 70's. Throughout the book Matusow covers the same major topics as *The Liberal Hour* does including anticommunism, civil rights, Great Society programs and the counterculture, while stressing his own narrative perspective on each. In his newly revised preface to the book, Matusow explains his sometime critical narrative of the issues explaining, "The book I wrote was intended as a cautionary tale for liberals in the hope that when their hour struck again, they might perhaps be fortified against past error. Now that they have another chance, a look back at the 1960's might serve them well."¹⁵ As such, *The Unraveling of America* is less concerned with exploring the effects that postwar liberalism had on the evolution of Nixon's domestic policy during this time, and is more focused on critically examining policies that precipitated the return to conservatism in the 1980's.

Greg Schneider's *The Conservative Century: from Reaction to Revolution*, also explored the liberalism in Washington during this period. In fact, Schneider cites Nixon's presidency focusing especially his domestic initiatives as an important representation of the liberalism that dominated even Republican politicians during the 60's and 70's. He writes, "On the domestic front, the Nixon presidency contributed to the growth of government and to the growing tax burden the middle class bore to pay for it. Nixon, in this regard may have been the last liberal president."¹⁶ However, *The Conservative*

¹⁵ Matusow, *The Unraveling of America*, ix.

¹⁶ Schneider, *The Conservative Century*, 123.

Century is a far more expansive exploration of conservatism, and Schneider only touches upon the Great Society program and the politics during the subsequent fifteen years including Nixon's presidency, as one of many liberal "pushes" throughout the 20th century that temporarily dwindled the influence of conservatism in Washington.

Each of the aforementioned publications explores "Great Society Liberalism" and its lasting effects throughout the 20th century. Schneider examines this period through a conservative lens, focusing on the reemergence of conservative influence in Washington upon the decline of liberalism throughout the 60's and 70's. While his work does provide valuable insight on the transitioning political climate throughout this period, his focus is on the significance of this 16-year period to the Republican Party during this time. As such, his book does not put a strong focus on Nixon's liberal mentality as a result of this. Calvin and Weisbrot, as well as Matusow, approach this topic differently.

Overall, these publications provide a good overview of the political climate that Nixon presided over during his time in office. However, while both of these books do cite Nixon in their coverage of this period in history, they are not especially focused on the Nixon administration and they do not comment on how Nixon's own aspirations as president aligned with, or combatted against the political forces surrounding him.

Both *The Unraveling of American* and *The Liberal Hour* do in fact, deal with domestic policy that was influenced by Great Society liberalism and cite the Nixon administration as a prime subject of this force. In this respect, these two publications are the most relevant when looking at the influencing factors that shaped Nixon's disaster relief campaigns for Hurricane Camille and Hurricane Agnes. Notably, however, each writer's focus is on the inconsistency Nixon exhibited in his actions between perpetuating

the Great Society programs and appealing to the conservatives who elected him. As such, they do not particularly delve into Nixon's own ideology towards framing liberal initiatives in a conservative light for domestic policy, nor do they provided an analysis for his disaster relief efforts in 1969 and 1972. Thus, when trying to answer the question of how much post-war liberalism influenced Nixon's domestic strategy and agenda, these works only contribute by exploring the liberal forces present during the Nixon presidency.

While Calvin and Weisbrot along with Matusow do give the most comprehensive examination of Nixon's liberal policy in their investigation of liberalism throughout the 60's and 70's, both *The Liberal Hour* and *The Unraveling of America* are simply at the perimeter of this subject. To supplement these works, both historians of the Nixon presidency and political scientists interested in his domestic agenda have researched Nixon's domestic policies in depth and how he utilized his liberal initiatives. As Carl Lieberman writes, "Nixon believed some of these domestic issues were potent political medicine".¹⁷ These scholars have particularly interested themselves in Nixon's initiatives on welfare reform and Martin Anderson's *Welfare: The Political Economy of Welfare Reform In the United States* as well as Lieberman's *Richard M. Nixon: Politician, President, Administrator* both have provided well-researched studies on the political dynamics involved in Nixon's domestic strategy, as a conservative president pushing to reform the welfare system during his time in office.¹⁸ Additionally, Herbert Stein's

¹⁷ Carl Lieberman, *Richard M. Nixon: Politician, President, Administrator* (New York: Greenwood, 1991), 61.

¹⁸ Martin Anderson, *Welfare: the Political Economy of Welfare Reform in the United States* (Stanford: Hoover Institution, 1980); Lieberman, *Richard M. Nixon: Politician, President, Administrator*.

Presidential Economics: the Making of Economic Policy from Roosevelt to Reagan and Beyond contributes insight on the liberalism engrained in Nixon's economic policies.¹⁹

Many scholarly publications have also focused themselves from the perspective of the liberal foundation of most of President Nixon's domestic policies. These include Paul Light's *The President's Agenda: Domestic Policy Choice from Kennedy to Clinton*, and two essays on the subject entitled "A Retrospective on Richard M. Nixon's Domestic Policies", by Richard Nathan, and "Nixon's Domestic Policy: Both Liberal and Bold in Retrospect" by John Whitaker.²⁰ Each of these works expands on Nixon's endorsement of many of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs, and while they acknowledge the existence of a liberal force that influenced politics in Washington, these authors argue that Nixon's domestic agenda was not all based upon the cynical calculation of liberal versus conservative constituents, but that the President was far more liberal minded in domestic issues than those before him; and that this was the predominate characteristic in the assumption of a liberal domestic agenda.

With their studies on the liberal foundations of Nixon's domestic policies, Light, Nathan, and Whitaker's publications contribute more on the amount that postwar liberalism that affected Nixon's policies than the straight analysis of domestic policy that Anderson, Lieberman, and Stein provide. Yet, while each of these works do credit Nixon with some of his own liberal initiatives in action towards domestic policy, they do not comprehensively explore the politics behind these initiatives taking into account

¹⁹ Herbert Stein, *Presidential Economics: the Making of Economic Policy from Roosevelt to Reagan and Beyond* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984).

²⁰ Paul Charles Light, *The President's Agenda: Domestic Policy Choice from Kennedy to Clinton* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1999); Richard Nathan, "A Retrospective on Richard M. Nixon's Domestic Policies: Both Liberal and Bold in Retrospect," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 26.1 (Winter, 1996); Whitaker, "Nixon's Domestic Policy".

Congress and the public's influence on this; a concern which certainly influenced the evolution of Nixon's domestic agenda and his proposals towards disaster relief.

However, Joan Hoff's *Nixon Reconsidered* does focus on Nixon's own domestic initiatives stemming from the liberal momentum that influenced Washington during his terms in office. In *Nixon Reconsidered*, Hoff, a professor of history at Montana State University advocates that Nixon was one of most innovative modern presidents on the matter of domestic policy.²¹ While her research on Nixon's own initiatives in domestic policy contribute a different perspective on the overall forces behind his domestic agenda, Hoff also acknowledges Nixon's desire to be a man of action and comments on how that factored into his domestic agenda. As such, *Nixon Reconsidered* is the most valuable publication to this study when considering how Nixon's own personality and ambitions factored into the evolution of disaster relief policy and his domestic agenda in general.

Nonetheless, it is important to consider that *Nixon Reconsidered* in large part is written to shed light on the many successes of Nixon, whose impeachment after Watergate marred much of the positivity and credit his legacy may have otherwise held. In a review of the book by Karl Helicher, he comments, "Unlike most Nixon revisionists, Hoff believes that Nixon's obstruction of justice during Watergate warranted impeachment but that his overall accomplishments and his numerous books will insure his rehabilitation."²²

While there has been an impressive scope of literature covering both postwar liberalism during the 60's and 70's, and how Nixon's domestic agenda was influenced by

²¹ Joan Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered* (New York: Basic, 1994).

²² While I tried to find a scholarly review of *Nixon Reconsidered*, I was unable to and therefore had to resort to editorial reviews; Karl Helicher, "Review: *Nixon Reconsidered*," *Library Journal* 1994.

this movement, almost nothing has been written on how this “Great Society Liberalism” may have factored into Nixon’s vast investment in federal disaster relief for Hurricane Camille in 1969 and Hurricane Agnes in 1972.²³ Disaster relief policy has been addressed by prominent political scientists, most significantly in Peter May’s *Recovering from Catastrophes: Federal Disaster Relief Policy and Politics*, and by other scholars, including national security expert James Miskel’s book entitled *Disaster Response and Homeland Security: What Works, What Doesn’t*.²⁴ However, these books are written largely to educate today’s policy makers on past mistakes, and as such, each of these books use historical examples of disaster relief as evidence to support a particular policy position.²⁵

Furthermore, while these authors do acknowledge an expansion of federal disaster relief between 1950-1980 and explore the political effects of expanded disaster relief, Miskel writing does not greatly expand on the influence of the political context in which these policy decisions were made or inquire into Nixon’s disaster relief policy as an example of this. Nonetheless, May, in *Recovering from Catastrophes*, does briefly comment postwar government growth and discusses more in depth how the Nixon administration utilized federal disaster relief for political gain.

In one instance of this, May uses Nixon as example to show the effect that election years have on the number of presidential disaster declarations made. In his findings, May shows that Nixon utilized his discretionary power to grant major disaster

²³ For Hoff, and most other Historians and Political Scientists studying Nixon. Disasters like Hurricane Camille and Hurricane Agnes are not usually used as a measure of Nixon’s liberalism in domestic affairs.

²⁴ Peter J. May, *Recovering from Catastrophes: Federal Disaster Relief Policy and Politics* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1985); James F. Miskel, *Disaster Response and Homeland Security: What Works, What Doesn’t* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006).

declarations by increasing the amount of state requests for federal disaster relief he granted in election years. Moreover, May's research also reinforces the theory that Nixon's desired to promote himself as a man of action; by exhibiting that Nixon's approval rate for major disaster declaration requests was significantly higher both in election and non election years than both President Ford or President Carter's approval rates were.²⁶

May also analyzes the way in which major disasters and federal disaster relief efforts affect politics of disaster relief a macro scale, and influences the evolution of future disaster relief programs. Writing on this, May asserts:

With respect to the analysis of the history of disaster relief policy, it is important to remember that many of the legislated changes in disaster relief provisions have taken place in the aftermath of catastrophic disasters. This has two influences upon overall policy, perhaps characterized together as a "ratchet-like effect. First, the policy at any point in time is likely to be defined in terms of the most recent extreme event, thereby skewing disaster policy more generally toward extreme events. Second, the recurrence of catastrophic disasters has become occasion for further expanding the scope of and opportunities for future disaster assistance.²⁷

With this in mind, May's insights into the politics of disaster relief will be useful when analyzing the effects of Hurricane Camille and Hurricane Agnes to the evolution of disaster relief policy. As such, *Recovering from Catastrophes* is quintessential to this study.

In 1969, Nixon, a well know conservative who served in the White House under General Dwight Eisenhower for eight years, made history as president making the largest investment in federal flood relief up to that point. In 1972, Nixon once again met the

²⁶ May, *Recovering from Catastrophes*, 113.

²⁷ May, *Recovering from Catastrophes*, 9.

destruction of Hurricane Agnes with an even greater investment in the Federal relief effort. Prior to the Great Alaska earthquake in 1964, natural disaster relief had been consigned to state government and the individuals affected. However, the enormity of the destruction caused by Hurricane Camille and Hurricane Agnes augmented the concerns for disaster relief to be felt on a national scope. Furthermore, as Hoff argues, Nixon wished to be viewed as a man of action and with the emergence of the Great Society program and the liberal current it produced throughout the 1960's and 1970's, in order to create this legacy the President had to appease a greater expectation by the American public for federal assistance in a variety of areas, including disaster relief.

Given this, there is evidence to suggest that in accordance with the liberal mentality that dominated Washington throughout his time as president, Nixon adapted a far more liberal domestic policy and concerned his administration far more with the relief efforts for both Hurricane Camille and Hurricane Agnes than he would have given his own political inclinations. Nonetheless, despite these forces, Nixon's shift to conservatism after Hurricane Camille led his domestic policy to become increasingly focused on promoting himself as an effective leader while framing Congress as incompetent. This caused dissension between the President and Congress in Washington, and in turn, the Nixon administration was forced to deal with more direct criticism for their part in the disaster relief effort following Hurricane Agnes than they had following Hurricane Camille.

This thesis will look in detail at the disaster relief efforts following both Hurricane Camille and Hurricane Agnes, as well as following the evolution of Federal disaster relief policy through the amendments to disaster relief legislation, all while

considering Nixon's political strategy and his greater domestic agenda in the context of postwar liberalism. By doing so we can examine the effects of Hurricane Camille, Hurricane Agnes, President Nixon's political strategy, his overall domestic agenda, and the liberal political context this was all set in, and establish how each of these variables affected the evolution of disaster relief policy for the future.

Chapter 2

In 1955, the Democratic Party narrowly won the Senate by just a single seat and a House majority of 29 Democrats in the 84th U.S. Congress. With the support of charismatic leaders like Sam Rayburn, who served as the Speaker of the House for eight consecutive years beginning in 1955, the Democrats were not only able to keep possession of the majorities of both houses in Congress, they were able to consistently increase it throughout the years. By 1964, when the Great Society legislation was being voted on in the 18th Congress, the Democrats held a 36 seat advantage in the Senate and a 155 seat majority in the House; an increase of 15% and 6% respectively in just 10 years.

Expanding on policies from Kennedy's "New Frontier" program, nine years later Johnson and other top Democratic leaders in Congress passed proposals in an attempt to eliminate poverty and lend more support in welfare, education, Medicare, Medicaid, transportation, the environment, and federal labor regulations among other domestic programs.¹ The complaints and criticisms of the Great Society by conservatives in Washington proved powerless against the liberal political climate and Democratic majorities there and bill by bill, Johnson implemented his massive overhaul of federal domestic policy.

However, these vast changes to the status quo, combined with the racial unrest in U.S. cities at this time, signified a weakening of law and order to many in the American public, many of whom were already unsettled by the changes that postwar liberalism had

¹ Marshall Kaplan, Peggy L. Cuciti, *The Great Society and its Legacy: Twenty Years of U.S. Social Policy* (New York: Duke University Press, 1986), 101.

already imposed on their lives. Perhaps the most important of these was the spread of civil rights movement. In his book on 1960's liberalism, Allen Matusow and claims:

Black protest, northern-style, gathered force for two years before white liberals fully grasped its significance. First there had been the 1963 school boycotts in New York, Chicago, and Boston, then the 1964 summer riots in a handful of East Coast ghettos, and now in the spring of 1965 angry demands by local black leaders for control of antipoverty programs. It did not take long to locate the sources of this discontent –de facto segregation, poverty, and social decay. Fresh from their southern successes, liberals were initially eager to redress northern grievances too. The question – on which the national tranquility seemed to increasingly to hinge – was, what to do? Among liberals seeking answer that spring was Lyndon Johnson.²

The Great Society sprung a drastic restructuring of federal domestic policy onto the U.S, public whose societal foundation had already been shaken with the effects that post-war liberalism had precipitated. Thus, the continuation of these riots in the U.S. shed light on the “backlash” against Great Society policies that began to become increasingly more apparent.³

This backlash worked to combat the Democratic dynasty that had occupied Washington since 1955, and allowed the Republicans to make significant gains in the mid-term elections in 1966. In his book *The Sixties in America: History, Politics, and Protest*, M.J. Heale explains that as a result of this backlash Republicans did well in the 1966 mid-term elections and won two-thirds of the races for state governor. Thus, majorities that Johnson had helped to produce in Congress during his 1964 landslide election were reduced from 155 to 60 in the House and from 36 to 28 in the Senate.⁴ Nonetheless, this small increase in conservative influence in Congress did little to hinder the overall liberalism in Washington during this period, and even with his attention

² Matusow, *The Unraveling of America*, 194.

³ M.J. Heale, *The Sixties in America: History, Politics and Protest* (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), 40.

⁴ Heale, *The Sixties in America: History, Politics and Protest*, 40.

shifted toward the Vietnam War, Johnson was still able to complete the Great Society agenda, passing several programs in his final years in office.

Despite the backlash against the changes the Great Society had made in domestic policy Congress remained solidly Democratic, and there is no doubt that a “postwar liberalism” had established itself in Washington and continued to wield its influence on federal policy throughout the Johnson administration. Moreover, the mindset of American citizens towards their government once again shifted further to the left, and so did their politics during this time period throughout the late 1950’s and 1960’s as a result of the phenomena.

With the vast changes being made to domestic policy in America, voters garnered a mentality that encompassed a sense of entitlement from the federal government. Thus, they began to expect more support and aid in their everyday lives from Washington. The acuteness of this transition was reminiscent of the shift that FDR’s “New Deal” ideology had brought on thirty years earlier. Commenting on the political shifts during this period, Gerald Pomper asserts that this context shaped political distractions in Washington and writes, “The events and campaigns of the 1960s, I suggest, made politics more relevant and more dramatic to the mass electorate. In the process, party differences were developed and perceived. Democrats divided from Republicans, Democrats became more liberal, and voters became more aware.”⁵ With voters becoming more aware of the liberal political change that was taking place in Washington, they also reawakened to the sentiments on federal support that the New Deal had generated thirty years earlier, when this type of liberalism last occurred among the Federal government. Consequently, this

⁵ Gerald M. Pomper, “From Confusion to Clarity: Issues and American Voters, 1956-1968,” *The American Political Science Review*, 66 (1972): 421.

revived awareness reinforced the sense of entitlement among Americans for aid and support from the federal government.

In Washington, this period not only push Democrats further left, it also exacerbated divisions in the Republican Party, pitting supporters of an expanded federal agenda in domestic affairs against more traditionally conservative Republicans. This proved to be an important factor in the 1968 elections. Upon beginning his campaign for president in 1968, Nixon adapted the “southern strategy” to win the presidency. Citing riots in Detroit and Washington D.C. that arose from the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in April of that year, Nixon promised a return of law and order and promoted implementing greater civil rights for African-Americans while continuing segregation in some cases including bussing.⁶ Nixon also advocated for New Federalism, which appealed to southerners who had begun to fear the increased hand in social and economic matters that the federal government had taken.

With this campaign strategy, Nixon was able to walk a fine line, promoting the rising conservative sentiment that had recently emerged, while continuing to support many of Johnson’s federal programs. This secured many votes from conservative white southerners who had traditionally voted Democrat, but had become frustrated with the Johnson administration’s domestic reforms and whole-hearted support for the civil rights movement. However, Nixon knew he must also win the majority of votes in Republican states, and with conservative and liberal Republicans growing more divided, doing this became an increasingly more complicated task.

In *Richard M. Nixon: Politician, President, Administrator*, Friedman and Levantrosser write, “At the beginning of the 1968 presidential campaign, one of the brash

⁶ Friedman and Levotrosser, *Richard M. Nixon: Politician, President, Administrator*, 148.

young founders of the Ripon Society advised Nixon that the only issues over which liberal and conservative Republicans might unite were a negative income tax and a volunteer army. Nonetheless, Nixon managed to become president without having clarified either issue. Nixon's views on welfare, in particular, remained highly unfocused."⁷ During the 1968 election, Nixon did very well to be sensitive of the intricate political climate the Johnson administration had produced and not alienate any Republican sect or conservative Democrats whose support he hoped to gain. As such, he was extremely careful and somewhat ambiguous in his comments on federal expansion in domestic affairs.

Upon entering office in 1969, Nixon looked to unify an especially partisan Congress and gain the trust and approval of Democrats throughout the U.S., who had been disappointed by his election. To do this, he drew on Johnson's liberal activism to promote optimism in change and a bright future for America and its people. On January 20, 1969 President Nixon gave his first Inaugural Address. Speaking on the future of the U.S. he proclaimed:

As we reach toward our hopes, our task is to build on what has gone before – not turning away from the old, but turning toward the new. In this past third of a century, government has passed more laws, spent more money, and initiated more programs, than in all our previous history. In pursuing our goals of full employment, better housing, excellence in education; in rebuilding our cities and improving our rural areas; in protecting our environment and enhancing the quality of life – in all these and more, we will and must press urgently forward. We shall plan now for the day when our wealth can be transferred from the destruction of war abroad to the urgent needs of our people at home.⁸

⁷ Friedman, Levantrosser, *Richard M. Nixon: Politician, President, Administrator*, 87.

⁸ Richard Nixon: "Inaugural Address," January 20, 1969. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=1941>.

From the start of his time in power, Nixon made clear that he was more focused on following a course of action to secure his legacy in U.S. history than yielding to the influence of those that elected him. Nixon's stance in office ran perpendicular traditional Republican sentiment and what he had toted in his election campaign. As Bartlett writes, "Conservatives were infuriated by Nixon's betrayal, but lacking control of Congress were stuck with him".⁹

Joan Hoff, who argues that Nixon was in fact a "closet liberal" on domestic issues while in office in her book *Nixon Reconsidered*, draws heavily Nixon's unanticipated course of action during his first term as evidence for her thesis. In an excerpt of her publication she writes:

Few listened when he said in 1969 that he intended "to begin a decade of government reforms such as this nation has not witnessed in half a century." And most of us scoffed when in 1971 his speech writers came up with the grandiose phrase "the New American Revolution" to describe his domestic programs. Yet during his first term in office, Nixon acted as an agent for change in five areas of domestic reform: welfare, civil rights, economic policy, environmental policy, and reorganization of the federal bureaucracy.¹⁰

It's clear that once he had attained the presidency Nixon exhibited no loyalty to those who had brought him to power, and focused solely on his own political strategy and agenda. As Hoff contends, Nixon did in fact nearly nothing to clamp down on the Great Society initiatives Johnson's administration had established. Furthermore, citing Nixon's stance on the environment, Native Americans, and his relations with the Supreme Court, she asserts that when his more liberal advisors were strongly engaged in these issues, "he (Nixon) could go beyond the New Deal and the Great Society plans as an agent for

⁹ Bruce Bartlett, "Barack Obama: The Democrats' Richard Nixon?" *The Fiscal Times* July 22, 2011, 1.

¹⁰Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered*, 17.

change”.¹¹ Nonetheless, Hoff explains that during his first year in office Nixon was clearly much more interested and invested in foreign affairs and the ongoing war in Vietnam than restructuring domestic affairs.

Yet in the summer of that year, Nixon’s focus was demanded at home when Hurricane Camille ravaged the South-Eastern U.S. and wrought one of the most devastating natural disasters America had ever known. Camille first formed several miles south of Cuba on August 14, 1969, and continued to grow in strength as it headed North through Cuba and towards the continental U.S. By August 16, Camille had reached the intensity of a Category 5 hurricane and the following day, the storm hit shore just east of Bay St. Louis, Mississippi. Over the next 72 hours, Camille ravaged the Gulf Coast, tearing through Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, West Virginia, and Virginia before continuing back into the Atlantic Ocean.¹² With winds exceeding 190 mph, on top of a powerful driving rain, Camille reaped unprecedented destruction throughout the Southern and East-Central U.S., causing 248 fatalities and leaving behind an estimated 1.5 billion in damages. Additionally, a report on the hurricane confirmed that seventy-five thousand families had suffered losses during Camille and over 20,000 homes were heavily damaged or destroyed in the disaster.¹³

The catastrophe that Hurricane Camille presented was immediately picked up by major newswires and became quickly known across the nation. As such Camille differed from previous catastrophes as a disaster that was recognized on a national scope, not just in the affected areas. In an article immediately following the disaster, the *Milwaukee*

¹¹Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered*, 49.

¹²“Hurricane Camille – August 16-21, 1969” <http://www.hpc.ncep.noaa.gov/tropical/rain/camille1969.html>.

¹³ Senate Committee on Public Works, Special Subcommittee on Disaster Relief, *Federal Response to Hurricane Camille*, 91st Cong., 2nd sess., Jan. 7-9, 1970, parts 1,2,3,4, and 5 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970), 15.

Journal reporting on Gulfport Mississippi wrote, “In at least two towns, Bay St. Louis, Miss., and nearby Waveland, fires burned out of control in the downtown area and threatened to level the business districts.”¹⁴ The article continued on to quote Danny Guice, the mayor of Gulfport, who claimed “We have at least 10 dead in Biloxi and we haven’t even begun to check.”¹⁵ In their book on Hurricane Camille, Ernest Zebrowski and Judith A. Howard write on the destruction following the catastrophe and assert:

As those sad images and reports began to appear in the media, readers and viewers got the impression that the destruction had been confined to the beachfront strip along the Mississippi coast. The devastation was much broader, however, and it extended into places most folks knew nothing about or, if they did, seldom thought of. When the Mobile District of the Army Corps of Engineers conducted a study of the inundated areas within its jurisdiction, it discovered that the massive flood had circled behind the coastal towns and cities to sow havoc as far as twenty miles inland.¹⁶

The chart shown below, documents the impact of Hurricane Camille in Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama, and more comprehensively shows the scope of its destruction:¹⁷

TABLE I.—IMPACT OF HURRICANE CAMILLE

	Mississippi	Louisiana	Alabama
Persons dead.....	135	9	(1)
Persons missing.....	27	0	(1)
Families suffering loss.....	63,665	9,442	750
Dwellings destroyed.....	3,881	1,771	10
Dwellings with major damage.....	12,112	1,753	50
Dwellings with minor damage.....	29,736	3,697	500
Trailers destroyed.....	406	664	12
Trailers with major damage.....	325	290	6
Farm buildings destroyed.....	645	114	5
Farm buildings with major damage.....	2,002	97	5
Small businesses destroyed or with major damage.....	569	110	14
Damage to public property.....	\$200,000,000	\$10,000,000	\$500,000
Damage to private property.....	\$750,000,000	\$312,000,000	\$7,500,000

1 Not known.

Note: Further devastation was caused by the remnants of Camille in Virginia from flooding following torrential local rains.

¹⁴ “Camille Mauls Mississippi with Winds, Floods, Fires,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, August 18, 1969, 1.

¹⁵ “Camille Mauls Mississippi,” 1.

¹⁶ Ernest Zebrowski, Judith A. Howard, *Category 5: The Story of Camille, Lessons Unlearned from America’s Most Violent Hurricane* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2005) 148.

¹⁷ Chart courtesy of: *Federal Response to Hurricane Camille*, 4.

Despite their early reluctance to act in cases of major natural catastrophe, throughout the previous fifteen years, the federal government had taken steps to map out a blueprint a federal disaster relief plan, complete with task-oriented committees and departments to utilize for disaster aid. Nonetheless, as was mentioned, both liberal and conservative presidents alike had shied away from confronting major natural disasters with federal disaster relief. The costs were extremely high, the logistical workings were unpolished, and no president had yet succeeded in fully appeasing disaster victims with their federal relief effort. Overall, adequately investing in federal disaster relief was seen as too much of a risk for any president to endeavor.

Nonetheless, promptly following the catastrophe, Nixon leapt into action, granting major disaster declarations in Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Virginia and West Virginia. Within a week, the President had also begun to generate a massive organized effort within Washington involving over 35 federal departments and agencies.¹⁸ To fund this program, the President committed \$75 million from his disaster to fund to the federal relief effort and assigned George Lincoln, the head of the Office of Emergency Preparedness to manage the assistance and correspond with him on its progress.

The Office of Emergency Preparedness was created in 1961, shortly after President Kennedy took office. According to Peter May, its creation came as a result of a change of thinking towards the relationships in civil defense and federal disaster assistance.¹⁹ May writes,

After a review of civil defense activities, the president concluded that civil defense capabilities needed to be strengthened and that a new organizational structure was necessary to achieve that goal. The new structure transferred civil defense operational activities to the Department

¹⁸ *Federal Response to Hurricane Camille (Part 1)*, 15.

¹⁹ May, *Recovering from Catastrophes*, 53.

of Defense and established in the Executive Office of the President a small office initially named the Office of Emergency Planning, charged with coordinating federal civil defense including natural disaster efforts.²⁰

Facing the destruction and chaos that Hurricane Camille had wrought, Nixon relied heavily on Lincoln and the OEP to coordinate the relief effort, a massive undertaking, in order to effectively aid victims and utilize federal resources behind the scenes while he served as the face of the Federal assistance effort.

In an especially empathetic gesture, on September 8th Nixon flew over the affected areas in Mississippi and took an areal survey of the damages. In a speech following his flight in Gulfport Mississippi, Nixon proclaimed to the primarily Democratic state, “On the part of your Federal Government, I can certainly pledge to you a continuation of the interest that we have already shown, an interest that is not partisan – it represents all the people of this country; an interest in terms of all the departments of Government, all the agencies in Government; an interest which is shared by the Members of the House and the Senate, led by your own House and Senate delegation.”²¹ Nixon’s message was founded and writing on this in *Recovering from Catastrophes* May asserts that the political reality of the nature of disaster relief is that congressmen are compelled to become involved in the relief activities because it is a clear and direct service to their constituents.²² May expands this notion writing:

These realities of politics are such that it is naïve to suggest that politics can be completely taken out of the formulation of relief packages for particular disasters or the delivery of relief assistance. The challenge for those concerned with disaster policy is to design relief programs and

²⁰ May, *Recovering from Catastrophes*, 53.

²¹ Richard Nixon: “Remarks Following Aerial Inspection of Damage Caused by Hurricane Camille in Mississippi,” September 8, 1969. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2228>.

²² May, *Recovering from Catastrophes*, 124.

policies that recognize elected officials' desire to help constituents and their need to be visible, while minimizing the negative consequences of such involvement.²³

Moreover, Nixon's statement not only comforted the victims he was speaking to, but also secured the greater level of bipartisan support for his federal disaster relief initiatives the enormity of this catastrophe facilitated.

Nixon's pledge to exert federal resources as much as necessary in disaster relief came as an enormous relief to the thousands whose lives had been uprooted by Hurricane Camille. Despite having plenty of advance notice of Hurricane Camille's strength and the ability to track the storm's progress and movement, it was officially estimated that only 81,000 out of 150,000 in the evacuation area moved themselves to safety.²⁴ Furthermore the aftermath of the catastrophe proved that the Gulf Coast was still utterly underprepared for her arrival. Despite this, promptly after the damage had been surveyed Vice President Agnew criticized the U.S. Weather Bureau claiming that its' forecasting for Hurricane Camille "may have been inadequate."²⁵ Nixon legitimized Agnew's charges capitalized on the opportunity to take action, directing government agencies to investigate better methods of forecasting storms such as Hurricane Camille.²⁶ On August 29 the *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* confirmed this writing, "After a report from Vice President Spiro T. Agnew on the Gulf Coast disaster, the President was said to have expressed concern at the inability of Government weather agencies to predict the

²³ May, *Recovering from Catastrophes*, 124.

²⁴ Roger A. Pielke, Jr., Chantal Simonpietry, and Jennifer Oxelson, "Thirty Years After Hurricane Camille: Lessons Learned, Lessons Lost," *Hurricane Camille Project Report*, July 12, 1999.

²⁵ Pielke, et al, "Thirty Years After Hurricane Camille".

²⁶ "Storm Warning System," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 27, August 29, 1969, 1606.

intensity and direction of storms.”²⁷ Though they did not receive the official criticisms that the U.S. Weather Bureau did, in retrospect it is clear that those that did not heed the evacuation warnings are to blame for the huge number of those killed and injured in the storm.

Nonetheless, the damage had been done and the thousands of disaster victims Camille had generated presented an overwhelming problem that needed to be dealt with. In the immediate aftermath of the storm, State and local officials offered their resources, joining forces with the federal workforce to provide food, shelter, and provisions for disaster victims. However, relief at the lower local and state level proved to be much for ineffective than that at the federal level, and more than anything, it only added to the confusion and chaos of the total relief effort. Simultaneously, on the federal level Nixon ordered 1450 regular troops and 800 of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to transport and provide tons of food, vehicles and other supplies to the affected areas in the days following the disaster.²⁸ Along with U.S. Army soldiers, Nixon also utilized the Coast Guard, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps to help with search and rescue missions, evacuations, debris removal and the distribution of food and other supplies to victims. Overall, the Department of Defense provided 16,500 troops and \$34 million to the federal relief effort.²⁹

As they had been instructed to do by the President, in the initial days following Hurricane Camille the OEP also began to implement and coordinate their disaster relief

²⁷ “Storm Warning System,” *Congressional Quarterly*, 1606.

²⁸ Charles L. Sullivan, *Hurricanes of the Mississippi Gulf Coast: Three Centuries of Destruction*, (Mississippi: Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College Foundation, 2009) 98.

²⁹ Pielke, et al, “Thirty Years After Hurricane Camille”.

programs among different departments of the federal government.³⁰ The U.S. Department of Defense, the U.S. Army, the USACOE, the U.S. Department of the Treasury, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and even the Federal Bureau of Investigation all contributed to the federal disaster relief effort after Camille. Lincoln quickly organized a network of federal departments and offices to focus on specialized tasks and services in the recovery effort. These included the Federal Power Commission, which devoted their engineers to returning power to the area, the Department of Health, which contributed their services as well as \$4 million towards medical aid for victims, the Department of Commerce, who, along with the Economic Development Administration and the Small Business Administration, worked to restore economic conditions in affected areas and reduce unemployment after the storm, the Department of Agriculture, and the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which provided 5,000 mobile homes for victims whose homes had been destroyed or badly damaged, and worked to have the homeless moving into the homes just a week after Camille hit, all worked in coordination with the OEP in the federal response to Hurricane Camille.³¹

Certainly the sheer enormity of the range of federal agencies involved in the relief effort for Hurricane Camille conveyed a genuine commitment from the federal government to match the scope of the catastrophe with their relief effort. Moreover, Nixon's actions in the aftermath of the disaster, directing 35 different government agencies to lend their services to the relief effort, are also consistent with his aim to be proactive and his desire to be seen as such. However, unforeseen to the architects of this relief effort, the number of federal agencies involved was also one of the key hindrances

³⁰ *Federal Response to Hurricane Camille*, 15.

³¹ Pielke, et al, "Thirty Years After Hurricane Camille".

to its' effectiveness. In 1999, the authors of a report on Hurricane Camille, which was sponsored by the NOAA Coastal Services Center, concluded that despite the effort to enhanced coordination between government agencies, coordination from the top down was lacking throughout the federal relief effort in the aftermath of Hurricane Camille and was the source of many of its deficiencies.³²

Additionally, non-government organizations also played a large role in the relief effort, working closely with state officials following Hurricane Camille. At the forefront of these NGO's was the Red Cross, which assisted in setting up and running shelters designed to provide for up to 85,000 disaster victims. To do so, the Red Cross devoted 850 of its employees and 913 volunteer rescuers to their disaster relief effort.³³ Another substantial contribution was made by the Salvation Army, which also committed itself to serving disaster victims by providing them with food and other essentials. A federal analysis of Hurricane Camille later reported that the total cost of the services rendered by Salvation Army amounted to \$689,000, and the value of the food and supplies furnished to disaster victims in the aftermath of the disaster exceeded \$5,000,000.”³⁴

These two charities were accompanied by a slew of smaller, local organizations, and volunteers that also contributed their time, services and skills to the relief effort, helping to implement and manage these resources. One example of this which received a particularly large amount of praise, were lawyers in affected areas who volunteered their services to victims seeking claims and relief from state and federal relief offices including the SBA and EDA departments and who could otherwise not have afforded

³² Pielke, et al, “Thirty Years After Hurricane Camille”.

³³ Pielke, et al, “Thirty Years After Hurricane Camille”.

³⁴ U.S. Army Engineer District, Mobile Corps of Engineers, *Hurricane Camille 14-22 August 1969*, (Mobile, Alabama: May, 1970).

legal representation. Describing their cause, Boyce Holleman, a spokesman for the volunteer lawyers stated, “The aim of the project is to provide legal services to hurricane victims who are poor and would not otherwise receive such aid.”³⁵

In *Category 5*, Zebrowski and Howard also comment on local activists and highlight the story of Jackson Balch, a space center manager in Mississippi for NASA who became a leading local relief activist in the wake of Hurricane Camille.³⁶ Five months after the catastrophe occurred, Balch testified before a U.S. Senate subcommittee investigating the efficiency of the disaster relief following the Hurricane. After being recognized thanked for his patience by Senator Birch Bayh of Indiana, the chair of the subcommittee, Jackson stated for the record: “Mr. Chairman, I can do one of two things. I can read a sanitized statement which has been approved for me to read, or I can give you a picture from being a participant of [my own] experience about what the story is.”³⁷

Following the sanitized version of Balch’s statement for the record, Bayh asked for Balch’s true opinion. In response, Balch began by explaining how his work for NASA had generated an interest in Hurricane Camille for him, and when his home was “nearly totally destroyed” by the storm he became immersed in the relief effort. Balch then continued to speak about his experiences as a volunteer worker calling attention to the disorganization he witnessed and dealt with throughout from the relief effort. He recalled being given orders to report to a site and then upon arriving being told to go elsewhere by the National Guard already there.³⁸

³⁵ Paul Delaney, “Volunteer Lawyers Are Helping Hurricane Victims in Mississippi”, *New York Times*, Oct 12, 1969, 74.

³⁶ Zebrowski, Howard, *Category 5*, 146.

³⁷ *Federal Response to Hurricane Camille*, 379.

³⁸ *Federal Response to Hurricane Camille*, 395.

Balch also testified to the apathy he faced by state and local organizations as a volunteer worker. Highlighted in their book, Zebrowski and Howard write:

To the embarrassment of some of those present, he told the story of how Dr. Werner von Braun (a former Nazi who had since worked for NASA with Balch in Mississippi) had been more responsive than many regional and state organizations, and he admitted with full candor that he suspected that his comments were likely to get him into trouble.³⁹

Overall, Balch's testimony highlighted the inefficiency that the lack of coordination between the forces involved—federal, state, local, and volunteer—had created. More specifically, Balch's testimony honed in on key criticisms of the state and local relief effort, including some discrimination and mistreatment he had personally viewed from the American Red Cross, and framed it as a porous and uninspiring effort.

Nonetheless, victims who sought federal relief services also submitted complaints directed specifically at the federal government on its shortcomings in the relief effort. At the top of their list were criticisms of the federal government's disorganization and lack of efficiency in the relief effort, and before long, with the help of national media services and newswires; these criticisms became a national concern. Writing on the frustration and inconvenience that the disorganization among federal relief departments was causing so many in the aftermath of the storm, an article in the North Carolina based *Times-News* reported, "For four months after Hurricane Camille, Carl Perdue says he was shuttled from the Small Business Administration (SBA) to the Red Cross and back again attempting to obtain money for repairs. The 73-year-old Mississippi coast resident said the SBA finally told his home he was too old for a loan to fix his home and vegetable business. 'Why did they take four months to tell me I'm too old?' he asked the Senate

³⁹ Zebrowski, Howard, *Category 5*, 146.

subcommittee on disaster relief Friday. 'I'm older now than I was when I first asked for the money.'"⁴⁰

Unfortunately, Purdue was not an exception; many of the disaster victims seeking relief from the federal government had experienced similar problems with disorganization and inadequacy in the months after the relief effort began while working with the various federal organizations. However, organizational problems, especially for HUD and the SBA, were insult to injury that came on top of Camille victims accusing relief organizations at the federal level, and much more frequently at the state, and non-government level of racism in their relief efforts.

Unfortunately, many had experienced racial discrimination when working with disaster relief organizations. The same article quoting Purdue makes this evident reporting, "His testimony came on the final day of the three-day hearing filled with charges that disaster relief agencies discriminated against blacks and the poor in dispensing aid after the Aug. 17 Hurricane."⁴¹ On November 24, the American Friends Service Committee and the Southern Regional Council, two private organizations, published one of the first public reports on the racial discrimination present in disaster relief effort for Hurricane Camille. Quoting a statement by these two organizations, *New York Times* records, "Federal officials have taken little or no action to combat racial discrimination in Mississippi in this disaster, and in some significant instances have contributed to the problem."⁴²

⁴⁰ Barry Parker, "Charges Made Camille Relief Is Mishandled", *Times News*, Henderson N.C., January 10, 1970, 2.

⁴¹ Parker, "Charges Made Camille Relief Is Mishandled", 2.

⁴² "Study Assails U.S. On Hurricane Aid" Neglect of Poor and Racial Discrimination Are Found", *New York Times*, November 25, 1969, 47.

Months later, in a congressional hearing on the federal relief effort for Hurricane Camille, both the SBA and HUD were accused of administering relief “in a discriminatory manner”.⁴³ Citing the findings by the American Friends Service Committee and the Southern Regional Council, the hearing quotes their report stating, “In the month following the hurricane (September) SBA approved 617 disaster loans. All but 21 (3%) went to whites. In addition, the average white loan was \$8,919 and the average black loan was \$3797. Finally, 99% of the total dollars in loans approved by SBA have been for whites.”⁴⁴ Speaking on the discrimination found in HUD relief, the document states, “The federal fair housing statute states that ‘all executive departments and agencies shall administer their programs and activities relating to housing and urban development in a manner affirmatively to further the purposes of the law.’ HUD has principal responsibility for administering this act for its own activities and for other agencies. It has taken virtually no action under this language since its passage. This will directly affect the future development of the Gulf Coast.”⁴⁵ Yet despite the claims and citations on discrimination that occurred in the federal relief effort, criticisms of discrimination in federal aid were significantly less widespread than those of racial discrimination in the state and NGO’s relief effort. In particular, the Red Cross was repeatedly accused of racism and giving priority treatment to white victims over black ones; an issue that became infamous in the relief period after Camille once it came to light.

Dr. Gilbert Mason, a Biloxi Mississippi physician and the president of the local chapter of the NAACP, had been involved in the Civil Rights Movement since the late

⁴³ *Federal Response to Hurricane Camille*, 701.

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Ibid

1950's. He had already registered several complaints with the state and local government in Mississippi for racial discrimination prior to Hurricane Camille, and throughout the relief effort served as the leading voice of criticism towards the racial discrimination that, as he saw it, was inherent in the state and local relief effort. Mason particularly focused on the wrongdoings of the American Red Cross (ARC), who extended their aid extensively, throughout numerous various relief efforts. After being denied at an ARC clothing distribution center on the basis that, "if he was indeed a doctor, then he didn't need any help," Mason declared, "Red Cross workers in Biloxi developed a reputation for needlessly humiliating those seeking relief, especially black folks, whom they often seemed to make beg cajole, or grovel for assistance."⁴⁶

Zebrowski and Howard assert that while he was one of the most outspoken critics of the outrageous racism that the Red Cross exhibited, Mason was not alone. They write, "After Camille, however, numerous survivors testified that they were grossly displeased by the performance of the Red Cross."⁴⁷ Following the relief effort, Mason testified to Birch Bayh and the Special Subcommittee on Disaster Relief, the same congressional subcommittee that Jack Balch had testified before. In his testimony, Mason made sure to make his criticisms of the Red Cross as pointed as possible and stated, "Held out to be the official reclamation agency, historically held out to be the 'Good Samaritan,' cloaked in the deluding, scintillating raiments of golden, brotherly love, ensconced in the arms of a national charter, the American Red Cross, as it has operated on the Gulf Coast and certainly in Biloxi, has betrayed its trust".⁴⁸ In another Senate subcommittee hearing,

⁴⁶ Zebrowski, Howard, *Category 5*, 218.

⁴⁷ Zebrowski, Howard, *Category 5*, 215.

⁴⁸ Jon Nordheimer, "Red Cross Actions After Storm Called 'Dehumanizing' by Negro", *New York Times*, Jan 10, 1970, 54.

specifically aimed at investigating Hurricane Camille relief operations, and formed in response to the American Friends Service Committee and the Southern Regional Council's reports, Mason further denounced the Red Cross describing it as, "The most dehumanizing, denigrating, humiliating and bureaucratic demon to appear on the Gulf Coast after Camille is the American Red Cross".⁴⁹ Mason also claimed discrimination in the state of Mississippi's relief efforts, specifically citing that blacks were being excluded in the state's redevelopment efforts.

Though his statements reflected his pessimism that any type of fair resolution or retribution would be repaid to black victims, Mason's complaints were not entirely in vain. Mark Smith asserts, "Thanks to the efforts of Mason, state NAACP president Aaron Henry, the CCODC, and Robert Clark – the only black representative in the state legislature and Chairman of the CCODC – Mason, and a handful of other African Americans, were given a voice on Governor John Bell Williams's formerly all white Hurricane Emergency Relief Council." Nonetheless, Smith concedes, "But these additions to the Council were not made until January 1970, and the bulk of the emergency relief still went to business."⁵⁰

Following Hurricane Camille, Birch Bayh and Quentin Burdick, specialists in disaster relief policy in Washington, and dedicated their focus to documenting the problems that arose in the relief effort following Camille and using these criticisms to improve disaster relief policy. Their passion for creating effective federal disaster relief legislation precipitated the intensive hearings and both Jack Balch and Gilbert Mason testified in following the catastrophe. In large part, these hearings served to shed light on

⁴⁹ Pielke, et al, "Thirty Years After Hurricane Camille".

⁵⁰ Mark M. Smith, *Camille, 1969: Histories of a Hurricane* (Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2011) 46.

the vast inefficiencies and discrimination that was present and exhibited in the state and local relief efforts, but these criticisms were also taken into consideration for federal disaster relief policy, and thus were quintessential to its' evolution in these years.

Crediting these two senators' influence in disaster relief legislation May writes:

Bayh and later Burdick, had considerable success in securing passage of these (disaster relief) bills in part because they were able to accommodate many of the demands they heard during their disaster relief hearings. Typically such hearings consisted of various local officials' berating the governmental relief effort for the disaster that was being investigated along with demands for new relief provisions as part of the general relief act.⁵¹

Additionally, consistent with his claim that major disasters serve as the primary catalyst for the expansion of disaster relief programs, May asserts that these hearings also highlighted the expanded sense of entitlement that disaster victims felt towards many aspects of federal disaster relief. In turn, May concludes, "Over time, each of these aspects of the general relief act were expanded considerably, evidencing the changing congressional attitude about what constitutes and appropriate level of disaster relief."⁵²

These effects were certainly represented in the legislation towards disaster relief that was generated during this period. Following California mudslides in May of 1969, the President and Congress approved the Disaster Relief Act of 1969. A provisional expansion of the 1966 legislation, the 1969 Act required that the federal government match state funds for disaster relief, and that a Federal coordinating officer be appointed for each major disaster.⁵³ In addition to these new amendments, the Disaster Relief Act of

⁵¹ May, *Recovering from Catastrophes*, 26.

⁵² May, *Recovering from Catastrophes*, 26.

⁵³ Executive Office of the President, Office of Emergency Preparedness *Annual Report 1969 – Disaster Relief* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, April 23, 1970), 19.

1969 also implemented temporary provisions to disaster relief that were to be terminated on December 31, 1970, unless they were permanently passed into law prior to the date. These provisions included 50-50 funding of permanent highway construction between the state and Federal government, timber sales contracts and damaged timber removal by the Federal government, larger SBA and FHA loans, and more funding and support in temporary housing food coupons, disaster unemployment compensation, and debris removal from private property.⁵⁴

When the 1969 Annual Report on Disaster Relief was published, it reported that in keeping with the amendments of the Disaster Relief Act of 1969, President Nixon had invested a huge amount of the Federal government's funding and resources into federal disaster assistance in 1969, especially after Hurricane Camille. The OEP reported that in 1969, Hurricane Camille alone precipitated five natural disaster declarations from the President in five different areas, mostly from flooding. The OEP asserted that in these crises disaster relief funds comprised only a fraction of the aid provided; the SBA and Farmers Home Administration (FHA) had subsidized this funding with major assistance in 1969 to homeowners, businessmen, and farmers. Additionally, the Department of Agriculture had contributed food to disaster victims; the Department of Justice had played a large role in facilitating Community Relations, and the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) provided legal assistance grants for victims. The OEP also pointed out that in 1968, \$20 million was requested for disaster relief in 1970, but due to the recovery effort for Hurricane Camille, that number increased tremendously in later amendments and already \$170 million had been appropriated for 1970.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ *Annual Report 1969 – Disaster Relief.*

⁵⁵ *Annual Report 1969 – Disaster Relief, 2-5.*

Citing the 1969 Annual Report on Disaster Relief, the report disclosed that in the wake of Hurricane Camille, public and private property losses were estimated at \$1.5 billion. In response to this, the President had allocated just \$12 million, a relative drop in the bucket, from his disaster fund to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to remove 850,000 tons of debris from private property. By December 31, 1969 \$13,570,000 had been allocated from the President's Disaster Fund and the total cost federal aid was estimated to be at \$90 million.⁵⁶

Following these first relief initiatives, in 1970 Birch Bayh and the Senate Special Subcommittee on Disaster Relief of the Committee of Public Works began their hearings assessing the relief effort following Hurricane Camille. Despite the aforementioned criticisms that federal relief had in some cases been discriminatory, Nixon and the OEP received a generally positive response from congressmen and state officials of the affected areas, who came to voice their opinions. Among those who complimented the President's efforts was Robert Dole, a U.S. Senator from Kansas and a minority member of the Special Subcommittee who claimed, "On September 8, President Nixon visited Mississippi to express his concern for the people affected by Camille. I can tell you very candidly that the President is deeply interested in the subject of these hearings and particularly the effectiveness of our disaster relief."⁵⁷

Though the Republican Senator's comments may have been a partisan defense of Nixon's initiatives, Rep. William Colmer, a conservative Democrat whose district had been hit by Camille and who was representing the state of Mississippi in this hearing, also voiced his approval stating to the Congress, "I would have to say that, in general I

⁵⁶ *Annual Report 1969 – Disaster Relief*, 7.

⁵⁷ *Federal Response to Hurricane Camille*, 108.

have been pleased with the cooperation that we have received from all the agencies of the Federal Government and from the President himself who has been very much interested in this matter.”⁵⁸ Nonetheless, those present at the hearing stressed that more organization and coordination between federal department was necessary to better aid those who were still suffering from Hurricane Camille and for natural disasters in the future.

As such, three months after hearings on the Federal response to Hurricane Camille had concluded, President Nixon spoke to Congress on Federal Disaster Assistance. In his message, Nixon stated, “To extend and to improve the assistance, which the Federal Government can provide in times of major disasters, I am asking the Congress to enact the Disaster Assistance Act of 1970.”⁵⁹ Additionally, Nixon made a number of specific proposals for the extension of existing programs to be considered in the Disaster Assistance Act of 1970, the most important of which included a property tax revenue maintenance plan, permanent repair of public facilities damaged by disasters, staff support, technical advice and financial assistance by the Economic Development Administration for affected communities, improved disaster loan programs, an expansion of unemployment compensation for disaster victims, an improvement of the temporary housing program, speedier debris removal, Federal assistance with disaster prevention, and Federal disaster planning assistance for State governments.⁶⁰

In addition to these considerations, Nixon also encouraged improving several administrative actions including, better coordination between the offices involved in federal disaster assistance efforts, better communication to individuals as to what disaster

⁵⁸ *Federal Response to Hurricane Camille*, 108.

⁵⁹ Richard Nixon: "Special Message to the Congress on Federal Disaster Assistance.," April 22, 1970. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2479>.

⁶⁰ Nixon: "Special Message to the Congress on Federal Disaster Assistance."

assistance was available and where it could be found, better institution of a Federal Disaster Assistance Coordinator who would oversee teams to help local communities coordinate the overall assistance effort, an expanded Federal disaster insurance program, and a closer relationship between the Federal government's disaster assistance and civil defense activities.⁶¹

Simply put, the Disaster Assistance Act of 1970 served as a revision for the Disaster Relief Act of 1969, which outlined the legislation for any federal disaster assistance that was enacted, and more importantly, made the provisions new to the 1969 act a more permanent part of the disaster relief program. In large part, the revision was shaped from the problems that arose in the relief effort after Hurricane Camille. Reinforcing Nixon's prerogative, the OEP's Annual Disaster Relief Report for 1969 conveyed the same concerns and aims as Nixon had for the continued assistance in the wake of Hurricane Camille, and the future of federal disaster relief.

A chief criticism of the federal response to Camille was that while the Disaster Relief Act of 1969 was passed prior to Hurricane Camille, many victims were not able to take advantage of the expanded provisions that the new legislation provided them because of the time it took for the President to sign and implement the legislation. A statement by Senator Bob Dole in January of 1970, highlighted this concern and claims:

The new Disaster Relief Act of 1969, signed by the President on October 1 added new types of assistance, which had to be programmed into relief efforts. Unfortunately, this took time and generated frustration and continued hardship for Camille victims. Of course, there will always be problems in the administration of disaster relief, because by definition a disaster involves losses and unusual hardship, not all of which is either predictable or restorable. Recompense can never be made for the suffering and shock of sudden calamity. Despite this fact, however, it is our responsibility to make Federal programs more responsive to people's

⁶¹ Nixon, "Special Message to the Congress on Federal Disaster Assistance."

needs. We must continue to seek better legislative solution and upgrade our administrative procedures. During emergencies red tape and delay in action should never be allowed to compound existing hardship.⁶²

The OEP reported that among those beneficial provisions, were matching funds to state planning and coordinating aid for State and local victims and appointing a Federal Coordinating Officer for each major disaster. The OEP also pointed out those several provisions of the Disaster Relief Act of 1969 that were to be terminated on December 31, 1970, including 50-50 federal-state funding of permanent highway reconstruction, Federal timber sales contracts, damaged timber removal, larger SBA and FHA loans, and several other provisions concerning temporary housing, food coupons, disaster unemployment compensation, and debris removal from private property.⁶³ The Disaster Assistance Act of 1970 would make many of these temporary provisions permanent, and in doing so, get through the “red tape” that hindered the process of implementing new amendments to the disaster act before the next disaster struck.

Three months after both President Nixon and the executives of the OEP outlined their proposals for the improved Disaster Assistance Act of 1970, the Subcommittee on Flood Control of the Congressional Committee on Public Works met from July 28-30 for hearings on Disaster Assistance Legislation for 1970. The primary proposal being discussed at these hearings was H.R. 1758, a bill proposed by Congressman George Fallon of Maryland comprising of several amendments, “to amend existing Federal disaster assistance legislation, and for other purposes”.⁶⁴

⁶²*Federal Response to Hurricane Camille*, 19.

⁶³*Annual Report 1969 – Disaster Relief*, 5-7.

⁶⁴House Subcommittee on Flood Control of the Committee of Public Works, *Hearings on H.R. 17518 and Related Bills to Amend Existing Federal Disaster Assistance Legislation, and for Other Purposes*, 91st Cong., 2nd Sess., July 28-30, 1970, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970), 3.

In his statement to the Subcommittee, George Lincoln, the director of the OEP endorsed H.R. 17518 as well. Lincoln also commented, “Generally, I believe new legislation should grant broad and flexible authority to the President and any changes should be limited to those points which have not worked well in the past. The position of OEP is that H.R. 17518 adequately meets this objective.”⁶⁵ Lincoln’s endorsement of H.R. 17518 was founded on his conservative idea of what the federal role should be in disaster relief. His testimony conveys that he was wary of too much expansion for the federal disaster relief program, a belief that contested many Democrats’ vision of the future of the federal role in disaster relief. Stating his belief on this issue in the hearing, Lincoln proclaimed, “In responding to these ravages, the States and their local governments must and do, assume the primary responsibilities for any successful disaster relief effort. Private humanitarian agencies have always come to the forefront in times of disaster. The Federal role is a supplementary effort but an exceedingly important one when the resources and capabilities of the State, local, and private organizations and individuals are unable to cope with the suffering, hardships, and losses.”⁶⁶

All in attendance shared Lincoln’s sentiment on the new amendment. H.R. 17518 stood up to questioning by John Eachon Jr., of the SBA, Jim Proctor, Associate General Council, and Bryan Shoemaker of the Office of Disaster Relief, and pleased the specific concerns brought to light by each. After their questions on past deficiencies with SBA loan regulations for disaster victims had been answered, the three jointly endorsed the bill, which lowered the interest rate for disaster loans and introduced \$2,500 forgiveness on disaster loans stating, “We urge favorable consideration of the administration bill,

⁶⁵ *Hearings on H.R. 17518 and Related Bills*, 23.

⁶⁶ *Hearings on H.R. 17518 and Related Bills*, 105.

H.R. 17518 and H.R. 17824, which extends and improves upon the provision of the Disaster Relief Act of 1969, and of the SBA disaster program in general.”⁶⁷

H.R. 17518 also impressed Norman Watson of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Kenneth Cavanaugh, Chairman of the HUD Task Force on Disaster Housing, who wanted more organization in the temporary housing program and the ability to effectively expand temporary housing aid if need be. Despite some minor concerns on the rent program for temporary housing and housing availability for disaster relief volunteers to travel to the affected areas, Watson submitted a positive recommendation to the Subcommittee. In his final statement to the Subcommittee, Watson urged favorable action on the bill. Specifically, Watson cited the provisions that specifically affected HUD and claimed, “(the bill) would improve upon the provisions in existing law directed toward temporary emergency housing by amending the provisions for temporary housing in the basic federal disaster assistance statute...It would do so however, in a way that assures necessary administrative flexibility.”⁶⁸

Similarly, representatives of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, major government contractors, the Salvation Army, the Economic Development Administration, the American National Red Cross and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, while stressing the need for added funding in disaster relief, each stated their support for H.R. 17518 and its supplemental amendments including H.R. 17824, introduced by George H.W. Bush of Texas, to improve the Disaster Relief Act of 1969 and implement the Disaster Assistance Act of 1970.

⁶⁷ *Hearings on H.R. 17518 and Related Bills*, 105.

⁶⁸ *Hearings on H.R. 17518 and Related Bills*, 112.

Nixon too, was pleased with Congress's legislation and upon signing the bill on December 31, 1970, he released a public statement conveying his approval for the action Congress had taken to produce S. 3619, the Disaster Assistance Act of 1970. Nixon stated that while they had adjusted the particulars of his proposals, Congress had acted boldly and responded to all of his requests and incorporated all of the necessary features of an effective disaster relief program in their bill. Nixon ended his statement claiming, "I am pleased with this bill which responds to a vital need of the American people. The bill demonstrates that the Federal Government in cooperation with State and local authorities is capable of providing compassionate assistance to the innocent victims of natural disasters."⁶⁹

The Disaster Assistance Act of 1970 served as more than just a revision of previous disaster relief legislation. It marked a change in the structure and design of federal aid. In his essay entitled "Hurricane Camille and the Politics of Federal Disaster Relief, 1965-1970", Andrew Morris writes on the Disaster Assistance Act of 1970 asserting, "Most significantly, it considerably widened the scope of federal assistance to individual disaster victims, moving beyond the longstanding federal role in reconstruction of public facilities."⁷⁰ This evolution in federal disaster relief from simply funding the reconstruction of public facilities, and designating all other intricacies of relief assistance for victims to state and local government, as well as the individuals themselves, at its foundation certainly can be attributed to the immense destruction afflicted by Hurricane Camille and the enormous scope of the catastrophe. In total, 8931

⁶⁹ Richard Nixon: "Statement on Signing the Disaster Relief Act of 1970.," December 31, 1970. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2875>.

⁷⁰ Andrew Morris, "Hurricane Camille and the Politics of Federal Disaster Relief, 1965-1970", (paper presented at the Policy History Conference, Columbus, Ohio, June, 2010) 2.

people were left injured, 13,915 homes experience major damage and 5,662 homes were destroyed all together. This was all on top of the \$1.42 billion in damage Camille precipitated. Looking at these numbers, it is obvious that a greater power than the individual states affected would be needed to adequately remedy the destruction and suffering in the Bay Area. Moreover, enthusiasts of the federal disaster relief program like Birch Bayh and Quentin Burdick were successful in using the bipartisanship present after Hurricane Camille and the expansive scope of the disaster to pass a similarly expansive revision to what was the current disaster relief legislation.

Nixon's initiative to heavily invest in federal disaster relief after Hurricane Camille proved beneficial to his administration's standing within Washington. The President not only took advantage of the opportunity to promote himself as a man of action, but he also received immediate bipartisan support for the prerogative. This not only garnered more respect and weight in his proposals for Nixon, but also improved the legislative production efficiency in Washington, exemplified by the expansive revision of the Disaster Relief Act of 1969, as "everybody was on board" so to speak. However, despite a high amount of motivation to implement effective federal disaster relief and the cooperation among those in power to do so, the overall disorganization and the complaints against individual departments of the federal relief effort marred what had been ideally envisioned in Washington.

Nonetheless, criticisms of the federal government in the disaster relief effort following Hurricane Camille dwarfed in comparison to the well-publicized charges of racial discrimination brought against the state and local organizations, especially including the Red Cross, by Gilford Mason, Jack Balch, and others. Given the offensive

content and the extent of the racial discrimination charges, despite their inadequacies, the federal government escaped the brunt of widespread public criticism by victims and the media during and following the aftermath of Hurricane Camille. Nonetheless, individuals did testify to the deficiencies in the federal program in the congressional hearings following Camille and these criticisms, along with those against the state and local relief efforts, combined to prompt the expansion of the federal disaster relief program after Camille that the Disaster Assistance Act of 1970 represented. The rationale being that it was done in order to become more properly suited to deal with the next major disaster to strike the U.S.

Finally, we must also note that with the harsh criticisms against state and local organizations brought to light by the media as well as Bayh's hearings, the federal government came out of Camille looking like the most reputable and relief agency in the disaster relief effort. In turn, the U.S. public began to look more immediately towards Washington to fully invest themselves in future disasters. The federal relief effort following Hurricane Camille undoubtedly marked an exceptional effort by the federal government to remedy an extraordinary situation. However, an article for *New York Times* on their action by Jason Nathan, who had just left his position as a City Housing and Development Administrator, represented the growing sense of entitlement that the U.S. held towards federal aid, and the expanding scope of what that encompassed. Honing in on the housing crisis Camille had precipitated, Nathan was asked for his commentary on the housing crisis in disaster areas. On this, Nathan claimed, "Crisis is an

understatement' ...Disaster may be more appropriate.'"⁷¹ When asked further about his comments on the federal response to the housing crisis Nathan commented:

“When a Hurricane Camille strikes and leaves 4,000 or 5,000 families without homes, the nation’s attention is galvanized. The Federal Government responds with crisis aid, declaration of emergency are issued, the National Guard is thrown into action. The calamity called forth emergency responses of all sorts. Yet in our cities a thousand times that number of families are ill-housed, virtually homeless. But because they are the victims of a slow, creeping process rather than a sudden catastrophe, we as a nation are neither excited nor galvanized into action, even though the emergency, the crisis, the disaster is more real than 10 Camilles.”⁷²

Not only had Nixon indicated his administration’s willingness to indulge the entitlement sentiments that postwar liberalism had regenerated with expanded federal intervention in domestic affairs, but the comparative incompetency of the state and local governments, as well as non-profit organizations like the ARC signified the future need for the federal government to fully intervene in disaster relief in the future. The message coming out of the relief effort for Hurricane Camille was that while no player was great, the federal government at least were more trustworthy and reliable than the discriminatory state government and non-profits like the Red Cross. Ultimately this served to raise the stakes for the federal and administrative efforts in future catastrophes.

⁷¹ David Shipler, “Sense of Crisis Over Housing Grips Officials: Sense of Crisis Is Growing”, *New York Times*, November 16, 1969, R1.

⁷² Shipler, “Sense of Crisis Over Housing Grips Officials: Sense of Crisis Is Growing”, R1.

Chapter 3

Following the hearings establishing the legislation for the Disaster Assistance Act of 1970, Nixon's complete focus turned towards the 1970 U.S. Senate midterm elections and the President once again utilized the "southern strategy" to campaign for Republican candidates. Notably, the Nixon administration abruptly dropped their bipartisan sentiment that had characterized the legislative aftermath of the Hurricane Camille disaster relief effort, and completely aligned themselves with their conservative constituents. As such, Nixon, along with Vice President Spiro Agnew, began vigorously campaigning for Republican votes across the country.

As an announcer commenting on the partisanship that the election had precipitated claimed, "Both Vice President Agnew and the President campaigned vigorously for Republican candidates. Nixon spoke to the silent majority and asked them to show their displeasure with violent dissenters by voting the Republican ticket on election day."¹ Following his comments, the announcer highlighted part of the speech by Nixon to Republican supporters. In it Nixon proclaimed:

The most powerful four letter word is a clean word, it's the most powerful four letter word in the history of men, it's called vote. V-O-T-E. My friends, I say that the answer to those that engage in disruption, to those that shout their filthy slogans, to those that try to shoot down speakers, it's not to answer in kind, but to go to the polls in election day, and in the quiet of that ballot box, stand up and be counted, the great silent majority of America.²

¹ "1970 Election: 1970 Year in Review," UPI.com, accessed February 2, 2012, http://www.upi.com/Audio/Year_in_Review/Events-of-1970/1970-Election,-Nixon%27s-Nominations/12303235577467-5/.

² "1970 Election: 1970 Year in Review"

Nixon's rhetoric escalated when the President directly attacked Democrats in Congress for supporting this type of "radical-liberalism" that those involved in the anti-war movements showcased. In an 1970 article covering the election, *New York Times* writes, "Lawrence F. O'Brien, the Democratic National Chairman, charged, 'The Republicans have found a new low in campaign activities and campaign tactics spearheaded by Mr. Agnew.' He said that the Vice President had been 'totally under the guidance and direction of President Nixon, that every word phrase and sentence he's uttered has been orchestrated from the White House.'"³ Political rhetoric just like this alienated the Nixon administration from Democrats in Washington and led the President to take a hardened conservative stance and become less accommodating of liberal ideology towards domestic policy than he previously had.

In their publication on the 1970 midterm elections, Andrew King and Floyd Anderson also explore the partisanship and alienation the Nixon administration demonstrated against liberals while campaigning and write:

Nixon used the interest generated by the battering of his motorcade to deliver a strong endorsement for Republican tickets across the country. '[W]hat we need,' he said, 'are men in the House and the Senate of the United States who...work and talk and vote for those measures that are necessary to stop the criminal element all year round.' Then, implying that Democratic candidates did not so 'work and talk and vote,' Nixon added: 'I urge you to vote for those men who would stand with the President rather than against the President.'⁴

Both Nixon and Agnew's aggressive criticisms of the left were well covered and denounced by Democratic spokesmen and representatives, alienating the Nixon

³ Richard Halloran, "Three Top Democrats Criticize The Nixon and Agnew Tactics," *New York Times*, Nov. 1, 1970, 68.

⁴ Andrew A. King and Floyd Douglas Anderson, "Nixon, Agnew, and the 'Silent Majority': A Case Study in the Rhetoric of Polarization," *Western Speech* 35 (1971): 253.

administration from the Democratic party and precipitating a strong partisan sentiment between Republicans and Democrats in Washington. On November 1, 1970, *A New York Times* article reported on the previous day's campaign happenings writing, "Three Democratic party leaders snapped at President Nixon and Vice President Agnew today with a combination of fiery accusation, solemn statement and Halloween humor."⁵ The article continued on to quote Lawrence F. O'Brian, the Democratic National Chairman, who stated, "The Republicans have found a new low in campaign activities and campaign tactics, spearheaded by Mr. Agnew."⁶

The combativeness that ensued between Democrats and Republicans in the 1970 midterm election stuck with Nixon throughout the rest of his time in office. For Nixon, the partisan tension that escalated leading up to the 1970 Senate elections not only conveyed that Democrats in Washington supported the anti-war protests and student-created "New Left" movement, but more importantly, that the Democratic party was looking for a reason to criticize Nixon's job as president and his administration. In *Nixon Reconsidered*, Joan Hoff writes that following the 1970 elections, "Nixon continued his 'war' against Capitol Hill in the spring of 1971 by deciding it was time to 'break the back of the establishment and Democratic leadership...[and] then build a strong defense in [our] second term.'"⁷

The aforementioned development would become a crucial factor in aftermath of Hurricane Agnes when Nixon was once again confronted with a massive natural catastrophe to provide relief for and a revision of federal disaster relief legislation would once again be needed. Following the Hurricane Camille catastrophe in 1969, there was a

⁵ Halloran, "Three Top Democrats Criticize The Nixon and Agnew Tactics," 68.

⁶ Halloran, "Three Top Democrats Criticize The Nixon and Agnew Tactics," 68.

⁷ Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered*, 190.

bipartisan support for Nixon and his initiatives for federal disaster relief. However, following Nixon's actions in the 1970 midterm elections, and his response to anti-war protests in Washington, Democrats in Congress became distrusting of the Nixon administration and became more critical of the legislation it proposed to them demanding changes and compromises in the proposals before endorsing them. Similarly, Nixon looked for ways to gain discretionary power that would supersede congressional approval so that they could not hinder his ability to lead swiftly and proactively. This shift in cooperation and trust between the Nixon administration and Democrats in Congress is important to keep in mind, as in June of 1972 Nixon once again faced a natural catastrophe that forced him to appeal to Democrats in Congress for bipartisan support.

Just as Hurricane Camille had, Hurricane Agnes approached the U.S. from the South, passing just west of Cuba on June 17, 1972. Two days later on June 19, Hurricane Agnes hit the U.S. coast near Panama City Florida. Upon entering the country the storm weakened to a tropical depression while traveling north through Georgia. However, Agnes re-strengthened to become a tropical storm by the time it had reached South Carolina on June 21, and inflicted damage, especially from flooding, in both South and North Carolina. Following her destruction on the southeastern coast, Agnes disappeared into the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of North Carolina before reemerging near New York City on June 22. The storm then followed a westward arc over southern New York into Northern Pennsylvania where it settled on June 23.⁸ Following its second collision with the U.S. mainland, Hurricane Agnes devastated New York and Pennsylvania over the next four days with heavy rains and wind that caused immense flooding in the region.

⁸ "Hurricane Agnes," National Weather Service: Middle Atlantic River Forecast Center, accessed February 4, 2012, www.erh.noaa.gov/marfc/Flood/agnes.html.

At the time, Hurricane Agnes had become the most costly storm in U.S. history. In the aftermath of Hurricane Agnes, the General Adjustment Bureau and the Federal Insurance Administration calculated that the total flood damage Agnes had inflicted upon U.S. towns and cities from June 15-27 exceeded \$3 billion.⁹ That damage was coupled with 128 fatalities that were directly connected to the storm. Though 12 U.S. states claimed damages by the disaster including, Virginia, Maryland, New Jersey, West Virginia, Ohio and Delaware, along with the aforementioned states, ultimately compiling a collective total of \$3,102,571,380, no other state came close in either damages or deaths caused by the storm than Pennsylvania, which incurred \$2,119,269,000 in damages and 48 deaths.¹⁰

In Pennsylvania alone, the hardest hit state, Agnes had reaped nearly \$1 billion in damage. Though only categorized as a tropical storm by the time it hit Pennsylvania, Agnes flooded the state and its major cities including Wilkes-Barre and Harrisburg to an unprecedented degree. Commenting on this, historian James Miskel explains, that Agnes dropped enough rain to create flood that exceeded the ‘one-hundred-year-flood’ levels in some areas. This meant that the flood waters from Agnes were greater than the level of the worst flood experts had predicted might occur over a one hundred year span, or that had actually occurred within the past one hundred years.¹¹

On July 3, *Beaver County Times* out of Beaver, Pennsylvania, published that the American National Red Cross reported that an estimated 63,000 homes in Pennsylvania

⁹ Bradley, et al, “Hurricane Agnes: The Most Costly Storm,” 175.

¹⁰ “Hurricane Agnes,” National Weather Service: Middle Atlantic River Forecast Center.

¹¹ Miskel, *Disaster Response and Homeland Security*, 58.

were damaged or destroyed by flooding from Hurricane Agnes.¹² That number was in large part comprised by damages in the city of Wilkes-Barre in the Wyoming Valley, the worst affected area in the state. On June 28, 1972, *New York Times* reported that the devastating effects of Hurricane Agnes led to a 1.13% dip in the Dow Jones market and a new 1972 low for American Telephone Company stock.¹³ In August, *The Palm Beach Post* reported that every single restaurant in Wilkes-Barre Pennsylvania was still closed more than a month after Hurricane Agnes flooded the entire city in June. The article alluded that this did little to comfort 1,200 Wilkes-Barre residents who were still sleeping in churches and schools after their homes were destroyed by the storm.¹⁴

Like hundreds of news publications across the country, *Beaver County Time* and *The Palm Beach Post* relied on national newswires including the United Press International (UPI) to report on the destruction caused by Hurricane Agnes in Pennsylvania and throughout the East coast. Just as had been the case during the period following Hurricane Camille, utilizing UPI and other newswires ensured that citizens across the U.S. gained an awareness of the destruction caused by Hurricane Agnes, and in turn, that fostered a national compassion for disaster victims and residents of the affected areas. Combined with the nation-wide financial consequences Agnes induced, as *New York Times* had reported, Hurricane Agnes had solicited a national scale of impact that had never before been felt by a natural disaster. The destruction was cataclysmic, and as soon as the rains stopped it was clear that local resources could not mend the damages

¹² David A. Milne, "Flood Insurance Limited: Most Losses Not Covered." *Beaver County Times*, July 13, 1972, A-12.

¹³ Vartanig V. Vartan, "Prices of Stocks Turn Steadier," *New York Times*, June 28, 1972, 63.

¹⁴ Homer Bigart, "Flood Area Still Suffering," *The Palm Beach Post*, August 3, 1972, 65.

this catastrophe had caused alone; victims immediately looked to the state and federal government for support.

The first step for state and federal workers was to survey the damages in Pennsylvania and other affected areas in order to form a more accurate picture of these regions' condition after the storm. After surveying the damage in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, Richard Sanderson, a senior member of Nixon's OEP compared the city's flooding, "to the effect that would have been achieved if the Mississippi River had been forcibly rerouted through a tributary of the Susquehanna."¹⁵ Furthermore, in an account by Pennsylvania Congressman Dan Flood who met with two surveyors, he states:

Two men walked in and stated to me that they were from Washington and would begin a survey of the Wyoming Valley to determine temporary housing needs. These were experienced personnel. They had seen disaster before. I did not see them for three days, and when they returned, covered with mud from head to toe, they were in a complete state of shock. The shock which I saw in their eyes was as great as that of the victims themselves. Granted Agnes was unprecedented; however, this reaction was characteristic of many of those whose mission it was to provide assistance.¹⁶

The immensity of the destruction was immediately clear to Nixon, and forced him to act quickly to procure enough funding for the massive relief effort it would take to properly aid victims and repair the affected areas. Thus as *Congressional Quarterly* reported, "President Nixon June 27 asked Congress to provide an additional \$100-million to supplement the \$18-million left in the fiscal 1972 disaster relief fund and the requested \$92.5-million for fiscal budget of the Office of Emergency Preparedness."¹⁷

¹⁵ Richard Sanderson of the OEP is quoted in Mioichael T. Kaufman, "Vignettes of Tragedy –and Quiet Courage," *New York Times*, June 28, 1972, 5.

¹⁶ Robert P. Wolensky, *Better Than Ever! The Flood Recovery Task Force and The 1972 Agnes Disaster*, (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point Foundation Press, 1993), 9.

¹⁷ "Flood Relief," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 30, July 8, 1972, 1699.

As Peter May asserts, “A study of the local Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, election that followed Hurricane Agnes shows that local elected officials did not fulfill citizen expectations, but there was no retribution at the ballot box.”¹⁸ Despite this, the 1972 election undoubtedly played a large part in Nixon’s strong effort to project himself over Congress as the face of everything right with the federal government’s relief support. However, given his frustration with the liberals in Washington at this time, his motivation to invest so heavily in the Agnes relief effort also stemmed from the public’s expectation that their government would extend its funding and support towards domestic affairs on a higher scale than it had ever had before.

Accordingly, upon learning of the immense destruction to Pennsylvania Nixon advisors saw an opportunity for the President to bolster himself with the same bipartisan support from Congress his relief actions had received in the wake of Hurricane Camille. In his biography of Pennsylvania congressman Dan Flood, William Kashatus writes:

John Ehrlichman, Nixon’s chief domestic policy adviser, urged the president to take a very generous and humanistic approach toward the Agnes victims. By doing so, Nixon, a Republican, would improve his standing in a heavily Democratic state in his bid for reelection. It would be a clever way to “out-McGovern” Senator George McGovern, his liberal Democratic challenger from South Dakota. Nixon seized the moment and offered an extremely liberal recovery package. ‘Confronted with so massive a disaster emergency, our response as a nation must also be massive,’ he reasoned. ‘Conscience commands it; humanity impels it.’¹⁹

Nixon also looked to utilize the massive national scope of Hurricane Agnes to his advantage by casting the Hurricane as a catastrophe that had affected all Americans either directly or indirectly, and as such, would require a federal relief effort of a similar

¹⁸ May, *Recovering From Catastrophes*, 117.

¹⁹ William C. Kashatus, *Dapper Dan Flood: The Controversial Life of a Congressional Power Broker*, (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2010), 218.

national scope. As a result of this, on July 17, 1972, President Nixon addressed Congress in a message presenting Hurricane Agnes as a national disaster and proposing additional disaster relief measures following the catastrophe. Beginning his speech, Nixon stated:

Tropical Storm Agnes has caused unparalleled destruction in many areas of the eastern United States. More than 128,000 homes and businesses have been damaged or destroyed, and whole communities have been dealt a heavy blow. The losses to so many individuals cannot be measured only in terms of destruction of property and belongings; they must also be counted in terms of loss of jobs, disruption of families, personal privation, and anxiety about the future. In the whole history of our Nation, we have not before encountered such massive destruction over so wide-spread an area as a result of natural disaster.²⁰

Nixon continued to proclaim that due to the enormity of the catastrophe, even the recently amended 1970 Disaster Relief Act was inadequate to deal with this situation and an expansion of federal disaster relief legislation was needed to cope with the extraordinary circumstances. The President first proposed the Agnes Recovery Act of 1972 to which he remarked, "This measure deals with disaster loans for homeowners, farmers and businessmen."²¹ The Agnes Recovery Act of 1972 proposed special legislation that would raise the amount of principal which could be cancelled or forgiven from the current \$2,500 to \$5,000 on loans made by the SBA or Farmers Home Administration. Additionally, it would also make this forgiveness feature applicable to the first dollar of a loan rather than after the repayment of the first \$500 and the lower the interest rate to 1% from the current 5 1/8%.²² Following his proposal Nixon stated, "I call

²⁰ Richard Nixon: "Message to the Congress Proposing Additional Disaster Relief Measures Following Tropical Storm Agnes," July 17, 1972. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsba.edu/ws/?pid=3498>.

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid

on the Congress to respond to this emergency by acting on the Agnes Recovery Act so that it can become law within one week.”²³

Following his proposal for the Agnes Recovery Act of 1972, Nixon continued his speech, proposing a second recommendation for supplemental appropriations totaling \$1,569,800,000 for the immense emergency, the largest single request of its kind in U.S. history.²⁴ Nixon explained that the majority of this money would be allocated to disaster loans for victims with \$1.3 billion going to the SBA and \$1.8 million going to the FHA. The President also called for a supplemental request for an additional \$200 million for his disaster relief fund, “to speed repair and reconstruction of public facilities and to provide temporary housing, food and unemployment compensation;” \$40 million for the Economic Development Administration, \$16 million for the Appalachian Regional Commission and \$12 million for the Corps of Engineers.²⁵ He then stated his third and final request that the existing authorization for appropriations for highway emergency relief be increased by \$200 million stating that the current authorization of \$50 million was nowhere near enough to deal with this type of catastrophe.²⁶ Nixon ended his speech by urging that Congress act quickly on his proposals stating, “The Federal Government must act quickly and decisively to do its part in providing relief and aiding recovery in a cooperative effort with the states and communities struck by Agnes. We can do no less. I am confident that the Congress will share this view.”²⁷

Nixon’s message to Congress in the wake of Hurricane Agnes conveyed that the President expected bipartisan support and cooperation for his disaster relief initiatives, as

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Ibid

had been the case after Hurricane Camille. However, the fierce partisanship that had emerged leading up to the 1970 midterm elections, and Nixon's ever-growing hostility towards the radical leftist movements and anti-war protestors had certainly not gone unnoticed in Washington. Though only a few Democrats stood in support of the radical left movements, Nixon's rhetoric and stance against all leftists had alienated his administration from Democrats in Congress. Thus, it became the case where independent of their feelings on his legislation, these Senators and House Representatives had become uneasy and distrusted the President's leadership.

Three days after Nixon presented his message to Congress, the House Committee on Banking and Currency, a bipartisan group, met to discuss the President's legislative propositions. Beginning the hearing, Wright Patman, a Democrat from Texas who served as the chairman of the committee, emphasized the need for rapid action stating, "It is my intention to hold these hearings in a continuous basis until we have finished with all of the witnesses and then move into executive session for a markup of the bill."²⁸ Patman continued, "When President Nixon sent this legislation to Congress, he asked that it be acted upon so that it could be law within 1 week. As chairman of the Banking and Currency Committee, I want to do everything possible to meet that time table since this legislation affects the futures of thousands of people who suffered great losses as a result of the disasters."²⁹

²⁸ House Committee on Banking and Currency, *To Provide Additional Relief to the Victims of Hurricane and Tropical Storm Agnes, and to the Victims of the South Dakota Flood Disaster*, 92nd Cong., 2nd sess, July 20, 1972, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973), 11.) 1.

²⁹ *To Provide Additional Relief to the Victims of Hurricane and Tropical Storm Agnes*, 1.

However, Patman also expressed his confusion in the President's actions and claimed that the President had reversed his own initiatives following his initial statement by admitting:

While I support the principles of this legislation, I must confess that I am confused about the method the administration has used to provide relief for disaster victims. The bill before us today provides for disaster loans to be made at a 1-percent interest rate and a forgiveness of the first \$5,000 of any loan.

Yet last March President Nixon sent legislation to the Congress through the Office of Emergency Preparedness that would completely remove the existing \$2,500 forgiveness feature and make all loans at rates far in excess of the 1-percent rate now advocated. Thus, in the space of 5 months we have seen a complete reversal of the administration's position.

Even more confusing has been the role of the administration and certain members of the President's party in connection with legislation dealing with disasters that was recently passed by the House by an overwhelming vote of 325 to 9. President Nixon has set a 1-week timetable for the enactment of his bill. Yet when we attempted to take the disaster bill to the floor of the House under unanimous consent before the last recess, we were twice blocked in our attempts to do so by a member of the President's party. These two delays meant that the bill was not passed in enough time to allow the Senate to act on the bill prior to adjournment and caused an unnecessary delay in providing financial help to disaster victims.³⁰

While Patman's comments shed light on the fact that he supported the changed course of action Nixon had taken in the weeks following Hurricane Agnes, they also hinted that Nixon's expectation for bipartisanship and cooperation from Congress would not be filled as it had been immediately following the storm in 1969. Instead, Congress broke the paradigm that bipartisanship surged in the wake of a major catastrophe before breaking in the interim and conveyed that Republican-Democrat partisanship in Washington and the distrust between the Nixon administration and Congress would not be swayed by the circumstance. As was mentioned, this was a dynamic that did not exist

³⁰ *To Provide Additional Relief to the Victims of Hurricane and Tropical Storm Agnes*, 2.

the last time the federal government needed to make an immense investment in disaster relief and revise the legislative policy following Hurricane Camille in 1969.

Moreover, the hearing suggested a hardening of the partisanship and distrust of the Nixon administration in Congress between 1971 and 1972. Just 15 months earlier, on March 30, 1971, the House Subcommittees of the Committee on Appropriations met to discuss a proposal by George Lincoln of the President's Office of Emergency Preparedness for urgent supplemental disaster funding totaling \$25 million dollars. This money was to go towards the relief effort for a major earthquake in California that had struck a month earlier.³¹ Following some routine questioning by the Subcommittees, Congress appropriated the funds. There was no mention of criticisms towards the President or the OEP throughout the entire hearing.

However, as the 1972 hearing continued it was clear that the increase in partisanship over the past two years had prompted Democrats in Washington to become more vocal in their complaints of the Nixon administration. Yet, this new political dynamic proved to precipitate greater effects to federal disaster relief legislation than simple criticisms of the Nixon administration's actions throughout the hearing. In fact, a partisan struggle on the provisions of federal disaster relief policy following Hurricane Agnes had already emerged between leaders in Congress and the Nixon administration.

As the *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* claimed, "In the wake of tropical storm Agnes, which triggered devastating floods on the eastern seaboard, a push began in Washington to liberalize disaster relief programs already available from some 20 federal

³¹ House Subcommittees of the Committee on Appropriations, *Urgent Supplemental Appropriation Bill, 1971*, 92nd Cong., 1st sess. March 30, 1971 (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971).

departments and agencies.”³² Specifically, the House Banking and Currency Committee approved legislation on June 27, to reduce interest rates on government disaster relief loans for both homeowners and commercial interests. This bill cut interest rates from what was 5.12 percent to 1 percent if the loan was fully repaid or 3 percent if the recipient chose to be awarded a forgiveness of \$2,500.³³

The Committees’ bill was trumped by Nixon’s proposal to raise the amount of forgiveness on disaster loans to \$5,000 in his message to the Congress to July. However, this initiative only escalated the partisan tension between Congress and the Nixon administration and the frustration from leaders in Congress was evident in the hearings to determine the provisions of the Agnes Recovery Act of 1972.

In particular, Democrats in the Committee were reluctant to give Nixon a pass on reversing his legislative action from a couple weeks earlier, and following the statement of Frank Carlucci, a member of the Governor’s Emergency Council who attended the committee hearing as the spokesman for the President’s Office of Emergency Preparedness, William Barrett, a Democrat representative from Pennsylvania, attacked Carlucci and demanded answers for the President’s course of action. Questioning Carlucci on H.R. 15692, the bill on disaster loans Congress had passed on June 27, Bartlett stated that the Committee had contemplated proposing \$5,000 forgiveness at that time, but that they had kept \$2,500 forgiveness because they had been warned that the administration probably would recommend vetoing the bill.³⁴ Bartlett concluded his question by asking, “What kinds of games are we playing here today, 2 weeks later?...I

³² “Floods: Relief Measures by Congress, White House,” *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 30, July 1, 1972, 1579.

³³ “Floods: Relief Measures by Congress, White House,” 1579.

³⁴ *To Provide Additional Relief to the Victims of Hurricane and Tropical Storm Agnes*, 48.

want to get the answers from Mr. Carlucci. Why do they come back here now, when we offered the same thing on June 25, and now ask for the exact same thing that we asked for before?”³⁵

Carlucci was quick to defend the President’s recent proposal on the matter and responded to Bartlett’s question by stating, “We are not asking for exactly the same thing. We are asking for temporary legislation directed at a particular disaster which has cause unparalleled economic damage. We think that in the long...”³⁶ Yet he was not able to finish, in a uncharacteristically rude gesture, especially for a veteran politician like Bartlett, the representative cut Carlucci off and demanded to know why, if the damage was unparalleled, the Nixon administration was not exerting more federal funds to put towards urban renewal and disaster assistance for victims. “Why don’t they ask the House to adopt the Senate’s (proposed) \$1.5 billion for urban renewal?”³⁷

Carlucci, was able to have the last word on the matter before the Committee moved on, yet he squandered any opportunity to discredit Bartlett’s claims and convince those present that the President had acted rationally and consistently in regards to federal disaster loan policy, and could only restate what he had first claimed in his prepared statement. After referring to this, Carlucci once again reasoned:

...we are concerned that if legislation, permanent legislation is enacted, which grants very liberal grants and low, very liberal grants and low, very liberal interest rates, we will destroy the incentives for long range flood prevention programs. That is, we will encourage people to build in the flood plain. We think in the long run we should move in the direction of more emphasis on Federal flood insurance and land-use control.³⁸

Unconvinced, Bartlett and the Committee moved onto mortgage financing in the hearing.

³⁵ *To Provide Additional Relief to the Victims of Hurricane and Tropical Storm Agnes*, 48.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Federal disaster loan policy is undoubtedly one of the most significant pillars of the federal disaster program. As *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* confirms, “Perhaps the most widely used disaster relief program authorized by PL 91-606 (The Disaster Relief Act of 1970) is the low-interest loan program.”³⁹ As such, examining the partisanship that existed between the Nixon administration and Congress, especially liberal members of The House Banking and Currency Committee, on this issue is exceptionally telling of the overall political dynamic concerning federal disaster relief policy following Agnes. It is clear from the argument over federal disaster loans that there is a liberal vs. conservative mentality present during these hearings, whereby those in the Congressional Committee are pushing for a broad and permanent liberalization of disaster relief policy and the Nixon administration is promoting a tentative expansion of federal disaster relief policy to facilitate the relief effort for Hurricane Agnes.

However, there is another variable present in the Nixon administration’s motivation to assure that their proposals were implemented into the disaster legislation and it is evident that this is that they wished to distinguish themselves from Congress as the more productive force in creating effective disaster relief legislation to help victims. This is obviously noticeable in the Nixon administration’s strategy to deliver a grandiose message to the Congress proposing a number of expansive disaster relief provisions, including some that they had previously opposed as was shown in the discussion of federal disaster loans. Nixon also revealed this motive more directly when, in a message to Congress on June 27, the President, “directed federal agencies participating in the relief effort ‘to provide all assistance necessary to cut through red tape and get the job

³⁹ “Floods: Relief Measures by Congress, White House,” 1579.

done.’”⁴⁰ Yet Bartlett’s hostility towards the Nixon administration in his response to their strategy of proposing disaster loan legislation they had previously objected to also showed that those in Congress were not willing to concede all of the glory to Nixon when it came to this.

During this period the Nixon administration also faced partisan criticisms from state and local government officials that had been affected by the Hurricane. In his analysis of the ways the relationship between federal and state government affects a disaster relief effort, May asserts that when the this relationship is turbulent, as was the case in the aftermath of Hurricane Agnes, “state officials perceive that the outcome of the ‘philosophical wrestling match’ in disaster relief—between providing generous amounts of relief and guarding taxpayers’ dollars—has been decided in favor of taxpayers.”⁴¹ May concludes his section on this relationship writing, “When cooperation is lacking, the implementation of federal relief programs is delayed and the burdens of disasters are prolonged.”⁴²

Following Hurricane Agnes, May’s assertions were best exemplified by Milton Shapp, the Democratic Governor of Pennsylvania who led state officials in their criticisms of the Nixon administration. In his testimony to the Congressional Committee Shapp was also critical of some provisions in the President’s proposed Agnes Recovery Act of 1972, and also focused on federal disaster loan policy stating, “The President’s proposal to set aside \$1.3 billion for the new loans for the Small Business Administration to issue long-term loans at 1 percent interest, is a step in the right direction. But it won’t solve the problem. His plan would be improved by adopting the proposals of Senators

⁴⁰ “Floods: Relief Measures by Congress, White House,” 1579.

⁴¹ May, *Recovering from Catastrophes*, 87.

⁴² May, *Recovering from Catastrophes*, 87.

Schweiker and McGovern to raise the forgiveness level to \$15,000, but even this will not handle all the requirements.”⁴³

Donald Barnett, another Democrat who served as the Mayor of Rapid City, South Dakota, which was also faced severe flooding in 1972, voiced complaints with Nixon’s legislative proposals as well and pushed for more generalized relief, stating to the committee, “When you are talking about \$50 million worth of damaged homes and businesses, individual grants of \$2,500 - or even \$5,000, as the President proposes - are just a drop in the bucket. We need legislation to get these people as humanly close as possible to where they were financially before the flood struck.”⁴⁴

Ultimately, the divide that had evolved between Congress and the Nixon administration proved detrimental to efficient policy making. On August 2nd President Nixon made another speech to Congress in which he declared, “As I stated in my transmittal message, the need for prompt enactment of these aid proposals, aimed at short and long-term recovery, is extreme and urgent. I asked the Congress then to consider and enact them within seven days. Sixteen days have passed without final Congressional action on the Agnes Recovery Act of 1972. I again urge the Congress to act immediately because the victims of these disasters desperately need the help these measures would provide. And they need it now.”⁴⁵ It would be another two weeks before the President would finish signing his proposals into law on August 16, 1972. Following his official

⁴³ *To Provide Additional Relief to the Victims of Hurricane and Tropical Storm Agnes*, 14.

⁴⁴ *To Provide Additional Relief to the Victims of Hurricane and Tropical Storm Agnes*, 30.

⁴⁵ Richard Nixon: "Message to the Congress Transmitting a Proposed Amendment to the Disaster Recovery Bill.," August 2, 1972. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3512>.

statement to the Committee during these hearings, Shapp voiced his disapproval of the immediate federal response to Hurricane Agnes and directly criticized Vice President Spiro Agnew stating, “At the beginning of the disaster, I was not satisfied with the federal response. It is, perhaps, understandable that officials in Washington did not quickly realize the dimensions of the tragedy. Vice President Agnew, for example, claimed that I was ‘excitable’ and said that my initial estimate of over \$1 billion in damage and losses was “probably ridiculous.”⁴⁶

Unfortunately for Nixon, signing the Agnes Recovery Act of 1972 into action was only the first of many hurdles for the President’s legislation. Not only was the Nixon administration faced with partisanship in Congress but as the aftermath of Agnes wore on, the President’s administration was confronted by hard criticism and partisan rhetoric, led by Shapp, from victims in Pennsylvania. As complaints on the effectiveness of the federal relief effort from Agnes victims and local politicians had already begun rolling in, Nixon and Carlucci had hoped that their expanded legislation would quell the widespread dissatisfaction that Agnes victims, especially those from the Wyoming Valley, were expressing. However, *New York Times* reported that in response to this emergency legislation by Congress, which would raise Small Business Administration loans from \$2,500 to \$5,000 and lower the interest rate for loans over \$5,000 from 5 ½% to 1%, “Almost everyone in the valley, including many of the bankers and business leaders, feel this is woefully inadequate. They say most flood victims would go hopelessly in debt trying to finance new homes and refinance businesses”⁴⁷

⁴⁶ *To Provide Additional Relief to the Victims of Hurricane and Tropical Storm Agnes*, 14.

⁴⁷ Homer Bigart, “Wilkes-Barre Dazed A Month After Flood.” *New York Times*, July 30, 1972, 1.

As Kashatus writes in *Dapper Dan Flood*, his biography of the congressman who represented the Wilkes-Barre area, “frustrations were running high in the Wyoming Valley. Although work crews had removed 75 percent of the flood debris by mid-July, temporary housing in the form of trailers provided by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development was difficult to secure. Angry residents blamed the HUD bureaucracy for their troubles.”⁴⁸ Reporting on this, a July article in the *Wilkes-Barre Times-Leader* wrote, “The Federal government is ‘agonizingly slow’ in connecting mobile homes and trailers to available sites, State Secretary of Community Affairs William H. Wilcox charged Wednesday.”⁴⁹ The article continued to quote Mr. Wilcox who claimed, “In short... The state of Pennsylvania is at least a month ahead of federal agencies in providing land for trailer sites.”⁵⁰

Fueled by Shapp’s criticisms, Agnes victims’ disapproval of Nixon’s federal relief effort only increased in the weeks following the catastrophe and as a result, they followed their Governor’s lead and their rhetoric towards the Nixon administration grew increasingly harsh. In Pennsylvania, which housed more angry victims than any other state, the public constantly denounced George Romney, a Nixon administration official who served as the secretary for the Senate Housing and Urban Development Committee, especially when he conveyed that it was impractical for the federal government to cover all damages. One newspaper article out of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, appropriately titled, “Romney, Shapp in Shouting Match With Flood Victims” reported, “Trying to outshout more than 25 flood victims, Romney said: ‘It’s going to take a combination of

⁴⁸ Kashatus, *Dapper Dan Flood*, 221.

⁴⁹ “Wilcox Charges HUD ‘Agonizingly Slow,’” *Wilkes-Barre Times-Leader*, July 21, 1972.

⁵⁰ “Wilcox Charges HUD ‘Agonizingly Slow’”.

federal, state, local and private efforts to resolve this entire situation. The principle effort is going to have to be private.”⁵¹

Romney’s comments were only the first of many instances that highlighted the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as one of the primary targets for victims to aim their criticisms against federal disaster relief in the months following the June catastrophe. In fact, upon being constantly berated and antagonized by Agnes victims throughout the months following the catastrophe, Romney became a symbol of the Nixon administration’s failure to properly deliver aid and relief to the affected areas. As a result, HUD’s highly public failure in the eyes of Agnes victims and the media connected the Nixon administration much more directly to the inadequacy in the relief effort for Hurricane Agnes than had been the case for Hurricane Camille.

One of the most trying problems the federal government faced was that Hurricane Agnes had precipitated the need for massive temporary housing throughout Pennsylvania, Maryland, and New York. To address this, Nixon designated the task of transporting and preparing nearly 10,000 mobile homes and trailers for flood victims to the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Assigned to provide the temporary housing for flood victims whose homes had been badly damaged or destroyed, almost all victims who applied for temporary housing through HUD reported negative experiences citing that the department was disorganized and inefficient.

While HUD’s temporary housing program was the most widely criticized facet of federal disaster relief, both the SBA and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers also came under fire by victims following the catastrophe. Many victims complained that the SBA was

⁵¹ Robert K. Warner, “Romney, Shapp in Shouting Match With Flood Victims.” *Observer-Reporter*, August 10, 1972, 31.

handing out loans based on preference as opposed to need. Those who made this complaint felt that victims who were promptly receiving their SBA loans either had connections in Washington or some other form of leverage with the SBA office. Victims in Pennsylvania also voiced complaints against the U.S. Army Corps. Of Engineers, who were responsible for contracting local construction businesses to set up temporary housing sites and well as repair damaged buildings in the aftermath of the hurricane, many criticized that the Corps was also distributing their funding in a biased manner, accepting bribes from certain companies for their contracts.

Following the latest Gallup Pole, published on July 21, that reported a 19 point lead in the presidential election for Nixon, in August 1972, McGovern toured through Wilkes-Barre and gave a speech to Agnes victims there criticizing the President's disaster assistance.⁵² Three weeks later, Nixon visited that same area and personally presented a \$4 million dollar check for a local college. The President also hosted a free picnic for Wilkes-Barre residents, which 1,500 attended.⁵³ As the *New York Times* reported, "President Nixon made a surprise visit to this flood damaged community today with a \$4-million check for a local college, an offer of free picnic hot dogs and a promise that Wilkes-Barre would 'come back better than ever.'"⁵⁴

The article also hints that Nixon had McGovern's visit and the 1972 Presidential election in mind when he visited Wilkes-Barre and reports, "At one point, the President got out and shook hands with Frank Vivian, a railroad employee, who was drinking beer in front of a heavily damaged house. 'I know you don't like his name mentioned,' Mr.

⁵² "Control of Congress: Republicans Need Landslide," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 30, August 19, 1972, 2056.

⁵³ May, *Recovering from Catastrophes*, 115.

⁵⁴ "President Flies to Wilkes-Barre With Funds and Encouragement," *New York Times*, September 10, 1972, 67.

Vivian told the President, ‘but George McGovern was through here and my wife shook his hand.’ Mr. Nixon inspected the house and promised Mr. Vivian that he would receive a house trailer immediately for temporary living quarters.”⁵⁵ The gestures by both McGovern and Nixon conveyed that disaster relief had become a viable topic for partisan dispute and one of the major relevant issues to argue over during their presidential campaigns in 1972. Peter May asserts that while presidents do not often visit disaster sites, Nixon’s visit to Wilkes-Barre was certainly an effect of “election-year politics” by the president to visibly promote himself as an empathetic leader who was working on the front-line as the leader of disaster relief for Agnes victims.⁵⁶

Continuing to promote his proactive leadership back in Washington a month later, on October 30, Nixon once again addressed the Congress with a statement about his decision to sign additional bills that the House and Senate had passed. While many of these bills did not directly stem from, or concern the Agnes relief effort, Nixon did mention the catastrophe in his speech stating, “Among the many other bills receiving my approval are...S.383, which helps restore and replace essential railway facilities and equipment which were damaged during Hurricane Agnes and other natural disasters this past June.”⁵⁷ The President’s message did not offer much insight on his mentality towards the federal disaster relief effort throughout the summer and fall of 1972 or the criticisms it had received. However, his mention of Agnes when speaking of the benefits

⁵⁵ “President Flies to Wilkes-Barre With Funds and Encouragement,” 67.

⁵⁶ May, *Recovering from Catastrophes*, 114.

⁵⁷ Richard Nixon: "Statement About Decision To Sign Additional Bills Passed by the Congress," October 30, 1972. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3675>.

of S.383 conveyed that federal assistance for Hurricane Agnes was still a high priority on the President's agenda at this point.

A better indicator of the Nixon administration's mentality towards the federal disaster relief effort after Agnes came days earlier on October 5, when the Subcommittees of the Committee on Appropriations held hearings to determine supplemental appropriations for the 1973 fiscal year. Following Romney's disappointing inability to gain the trust or respect of Agnes victims in Wilkes-Barre, Nixon had dispatch Frank Carlucci, the deputy director of the Executive Office of Management and Budget, in mid-August to guide the flood aid effort. As *New York Times* reported, the President specifically directed Carlucci to, "cut through the red tape and get the job done."⁵⁸

Nonetheless, among those who spoke on behalf of increasing funding for the Agnes relief effort was George Romney, who served as the Secretary of HUD. Introducing Romney was Rep. Edward Boland, the chairman of the Subcommittee on HUD—Space-Science-Veterans Appropriations who stated, "The Secretary is here today regarding a request in House Document 92-368 for a supplemental appropriation of \$250 million for urban renewal. This will provide a total of \$1.450 billion when combined with the \$1.2 billion previously appropriated for 1973. It is proposed that \$450 million will be used for disaster relief to meet the needs of communities recovering from tropical storm Agnes."⁵⁹

Additionally, Kenneth Grant, an administrator of the Soil Conservation Service (ASCS) within the Department of Agriculture requested appropriations for the Service

⁵⁸ "A Budget Official to Guide Flood Aid," *New York Times*, August 13, 1972, 57.

⁵⁹ House Subcommittees of the Committee on Appropriations, *Supplemental Appropriation Bill, 1973*, 92nd Cong., 2nd sess. October 5, 1972, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972), 953.

totaling \$16,500,000 based on needs for the Agnes recovery effort. In his statement to the Subcommittees Mr. Grant asserted that had appropriated \$10 million in “emergency conservation measures” to be used towards the repair of private, individual farms. Grant specified that \$2.8 million and \$3.5 million of this funding was being used to the recovery efforts in Pennsylvania and New York respectively. Specifically, the money was being used for debris removal on farms, pond repair, and repairs of other conservation structures in the disaster-affected areas.

Moreover, Grant asserted that the ASCA also offered an emergency livestock feed program to nine hurricane-ravaged counties in Pennsylvania. He claimed that approximately \$19 million had been provided by the Farmers Home Administration to go towards rural housing and emergency operating loans. Lastly, grant also expressed that under the Department of Agriculture, the Food and Nutrition Service had furnished surplus foods valued at about \$1.3 million, and \$9.2 million of free food stamps to disaster victims.⁶⁰

Grant continued to convey the massive expenditures that the Agnes federal relief effort had required, claiming that in the wake of Agnes, “the Corps of Engineers, using OEP funds, has let over 8,000 contracts costing about \$85 million, about one-half of which is in the Wilkes-Barre, Pa., area.”⁶¹ Along with Romney’s request for supplemental appropriations for urban renewal, Grant’s requests served as evidence for the massive shift in attitude among congressman towards the much more expansive role the federal government should play in disaster relief in order to appease the heightened sense of entitlement disaster victims had developed.

⁶⁰ *Supplemental Appropriation Bill, 1973*, 1193.

⁶¹ *Supplemental Appropriation Bill, 1973*, 1193.

Finally, Rep. William Scherle of Iowa also brought to the Subcommittees' attention to Hurricane Agnes when he spoke about the lack of flood insurance Agnes victims had subscribed in. In his statement, Scherle declared, "Relatively few lives have been lost but when the flood waters receded survivors often found they had little left but their skins. Almost no one took the precaution of buying flood insurance. In Wilkes-Barre, Pa., for example, one of the region's hardest hit areas by Agnes, only two people had flood insurance when they were struck."⁶² Scherle continued, "The grim lessons of Agnes and her sisters have not been lost on Government planners. The administration has proposed an extensive expansion of the Federal flood insurance program and suggested that homeowners in flood prone areas be required to buy insurance in order to get other forms of Federal aid, such as mortgage insurance or loans from federally insured institutions."⁶³

Following the dialogue in these Congressional hearings on the federal disaster relief effort for Hurricane Agnes, it seems that the partisanship between the Nixon administration and Democrats in Congress that was present at the time of the catastrophe and in the first few weeks following it, up to the implementation of the Agnes Recovery Act of 1972, had subsided. In an examination of the hearings for supplemental appropriations for 1973, the dialogue hints at a unified effort between the Nixon administration and Congressional leaders to expand the funding and effectiveness of Agnes relief while learning from their mistakes and using it to improve disaster relief legislation for the future.

⁶² *Supplemental Appropriation Bill, 1973*, 1195.

⁶³ *Supplemental Appropriation Bill, 1973*, 1195.

However, while criticisms of the Nixon administration coming from Congress slowed, the partisanship between Nixon's administration and politicians in the state of Pennsylvania hardened in the months following Hurricane Agnes. In a Congressional hearing to investigate the adequacy and effectiveness of federal disaster relief legislation nearly a year after Agnes struck, Shapp continued to bash the President and his administration for their relief efforts. In his statement to the Committee Shapp preached:

SBA, FHA, HUD, EDA, OEP – never have so many labored under so much confusion. They came to Wilkes-Barre, to Milton, to Reading, to Lock Haven, and to all the other flood-stricken communities with their own rules and their own priorities, behaving not as if they were coming to a disaster, but to a massive opening of branch offices.

And even these offices were often opened against their will. We pleaded with HUD, OEP, and other Federal agencies to join with the State in opening one-stop service centers in each community, where people could get information on every agency and services from all. The Federal agencies refused at first to cooperate. Each insisted on having its own individual office. The Small Business Administration even went to the extent of refusing to give the State its forms. Not until the State opened first 85, then 130, information offices did they see the need and move in with us.

SBA and the Farmers Home Administration seemed to forget that congress had chosen them to dispense disaster loans simply because they have the manpower and machinery to do the job. Their zeal for protecting public funds would have been admirable if it had not been so excessive. A disaster is no place for the mentality of a small-minded banker...

Vice President Agnew called me "excitable when I predicted in the aftermath of the flood that damage in Pennsylvania would exceed \$1 billion. That was 5 days before President Nixon called this the worst natural disaster in American history. Now that damages in Pennsylvania have been estimated at more than \$3 billion. I'm beginning to wonder if I was not too calm."⁶⁴

Despite Congressional bipartisanship and their cooperation with Nixon in the aftermath of Hurricane Camille, the 1970 U.S. Senate Election thrust a stake between the Nixon administration and the Democratic Party that hindered their relationship for the rest of Nixon's time in office. However, the hearings immediately following hurricane Agnes

⁶⁴ Senate Subcommittee on Disaster Relief of the Committee on Public Works, *To Investigate the Adequacy and Effectiveness of Federal Disaster Relief Legislation*, 93rd Cong. 1st sess., parts 1,2,3,4 and 5, March 23, 1973 – March 6, 1974, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973 and 1974), 881.

convey the development of a softening partisanship in Washington and hardening partisanship between federal and state administrations. This seems to point to May's theory that major disasters solicit bipartisan cooperation in Washington in their immediate aftermath. If this is the case, examining the hearings following Agnes and leading to the the Disaster Relief Act of 1974 should show a revival of partisanship in Congress, and will be telling as to how much the partisanship in Washington was affected by the immediate post-disaster situation, and how much remained engrained.

Chapter 4

After four separate hearings throughout five months during 1973, on the effectiveness of current disaster relief legislation and what could be improved for the future, the Senate Subcommittee on Disaster Relief announced their proposal for the Disaster Relief Act of 1974, a bill to amend and improve upon the current disaster relief legislation under the Disaster Assistance Act of 1970. The Disaster Relief Act of 1974, like nearly all domestic policy bills that had come in the past three years, was at least in part molded by Nixon's desire to procure as much discretionary power as president as he could. This was, of course, a key part of his strategy to accomplish his desire to be seen as a man of action, a leader who could start and finish large tasks swiftly. As such, he crafted much of his domestic policy to facilitate this discretionary power. However, this strategy was the foundation of what had generated much of the partisanship and hostility towards the Nixon administration from members of Congress and liberal state officials that emerged throughout Nixon's time as president. Although the provisions of the Disaster Relief Act of 1974 represented this interest from the President in federal disaster relief policy, it spanned throughout his domestic policy in general.

In *Nixon Reconsidered*, Hoff writes of one particularly transparent instance of Nixon's grasp for executive authority in domestic policy during his time in office involving the abuse of impoundments by the President. Hoff explains that during the summer of 1974, Congress passed the Budget and Impoundment Control Act of 1974, a bill which regulated presidential impoundments and more importantly, created the

Congressional Budget Office, a new data-gathering department whose work allowed Congress to submit its' own draft budgets and thereby control spending ceilings.¹

Explaining this bill further in their essay on presidential unilateral action, Terry Moe and William Howell contribute, "The Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act, passed in 1974 –during the same crisis period as the War Powers Resolution –was intended to address, among other things the president's unilateral power to impound congressionally appropriated funds."² Moe and Howell continue, "While this had never been much of a problem with past presidents, Richard Nixon had begun making overt use of impoundments as a way to influence policy, and Congress reacted with new rules requiring presidents to get legislative approval and specifying exactly how and when this was to be done."³

Hoff provides a background context and more detail on Nixon's abuse of his presidential impoundment privileges in her section of the Impoundment Control Act of 1974, explaining that in 1969 Congress had legitimized Johnson's unilateral action by granting Nixon discretionary power to impound up to \$6 billion from domestic authorizations that had been approved. However, between 1970-1971 Nixon had withheld \$12 billion without congressional approval and by the spring of 1973, he had withheld 18 million. Hoff asserts:

Consequently, partisan congressional opposition to impoundment began to develop among Democrats in Congress even before Watergate, but disagreement between the executive and legislative branches over environmental appropriations reach such hysterical heights by 1974 that

¹ Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered*, 26.

² Terry M. Moe and William G. Howell, "The Presidential Power of Unilateral Action," *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization* 15 (1999): 169.

³ Moe and Howell, "The Presidential Power of Unilateral Action," 169.

the House Judiciary Committee considered making Nixon's impoundments part of the impeachment charges against him.⁴

The revelation that Nixon had secretly withheld \$18 million between 1969 and 1973 certainly contributed to the distrust and partisanship between Congress and the Nixon administration that had influenced disaster policy and the Disaster Relief Act of 1974 so much. Moreover, this action by the President is telling that this hostility and distrust between the Nixon administration and Congress, especially Democrats in Congress, was widespread and affected all of his domestic policy actions, not just disaster relief policy.

In his second State of the Union address in 1971, Nixon had put pressure on Congress and challenged them to help him in achieving several expansions and revisions of the current domestic policy. Addressing this agenda in his speech the President stated, "I shall ask not simply for more new programs in the old framework. I shall ask to change the framework of government itself –to reform the entire structure of American government so we can make it again fully responsive to the needs and wishes of the American people."⁵

Nixon masked his intent to restructure the balance of power between his administration and Congress by optimistically framing his "call to change the framework of government itself," as a chance to evolve the federal government in a country that was constantly evolving. Hoff also notes that much of this ideology for change expressed in the beginning of 1971 stemmed the Nixon administration's growing concern for the lack luster economy that was present during this period and saw an opportunity to use the poor

⁴ Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered*, 26.

⁵ Richard Nixon: "Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union.," January 22, 1971. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3110>.

economic conditions as a means to propose grand changes in domestic policy. Hoff asserts, “Nixon and his secretary of the treasury agreed in the spring of 1971 ‘to deal dramatically and comprehensively with the ill health of the economy’ because ‘it was simply good politics.’”⁶ As such, Nixon spanned the majority of his domestic policy and phrased his initiatives in a way that conveyed that his proposals would not only reinforce the merits of the Great Society programs and make them more efficient by giving executive authority to himself for immediate action, thereby eliminating the “red tape” that had been a hindrance in enacting new legislation in domestic policy, but they would also remedy the economy.

Nixon’s first goal as stated to the 92nd Congress was to complete the unfinished work of the 91st Congress. Using this goal to convey the incompetence of Congress in the past, Nixon applied pressure on the current Congress stating, “Over the next 2 weeks, I will call upon Congress to take action on more than 35 pieces of proposed legislation on which action was not completed last year. The most important is welfare reform. The present welfare system had become a monstrous, consuming outrage –an outrage against the community, against the taxpayer, and particularly against the children it is supposed to help.”⁷

While this goal promoted himself as a “man of action”, a leader who could complete the big tasks necessary to succeed as President, it also referred to Nixon’s controversial ideology and proposals for welfare policy reforms. This was first highlighted by Nixon’s complete overhaul of the welfare system in his first years in office with the establishment of his Family Assistance Program (FAP). Robert Lampman,

⁶ Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered*, 141.

⁷ Richard Nixon: "Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union".

who wrote on FAP immediately after it had been proposed by Nixon in 1969 asserts that the President's new program constituted, "(1) a greatly enlarged role for the federal government in federal-state public assistance or welfare programs; (2) a new federal plan to pay income supplements to all poor families with children, including those headed by able-bodied men."⁸ Nixon's Family Assistance Program marked a momentous gesture by the President which conveyed that not only was he going to be a proactive leader in office who was confident he could successfully revise the entirety of the current welfare system, but also, that his leadership under the New Federalism ideology embraced postwar liberalism.

In *Nixon Reconsidered*, Hoff comments on the Family Security System, the predecessor to the Family Assistance Plan to call attention to the lack of loyalty Nixon had exhibited to his conservative constituents from the very beginning of his presidency. Exploring this initiative, Hoff cites Arthur Burns, a staunch conservative who served as the Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve while Nixon was in office. Highlighting the dissention within Nixon's own administration on his action towards the Family Security System Hoff highlights Burn's complete disapproval of Nixon's actions towards welfare policy. Hoff writes, "Burns was infuriated that Nixon did not reject the Family Security System idea outright. 'It ran counter to everything I knew about Dick Nixon,' he said later. 'It seemed that he might do the unthinkable.'"⁹ She continues to explain that despite Burns' disapproval, Nixon went ahead on this program, and in fact, did so in secret so that he did not have to deal with the backlash of his actions until they had already been implemented. Concluding on this, Hoff asserts, "it

⁸ Robert J. Lampman, "Nixon's Family Assistance Plan," (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, November, 1969), 1.

⁹ Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered*, 124.

demonstrates how early Nixon committed himself to dramatic welfare reform, despite substantive disagreements among his advisers.”¹⁰

Nixon’s prerogatives on the Family Assistance Program and the Family Security System program, serve testament to Nixon’s desire to establish himself as a man of action who completed the tasks he set out to do within domestic policy. As further evidence to this, Hoff expands on this notion and writes on Nixon’s chosen inner circle in relation to it. She asserts, “After Nixon’s election in 1969 the initial momentum for change in most domestic and foreign affairs came from such freethinking outsiders as Roy Ash, Robert Finch, Pay Moynihan, Henry Kissinger, and later John Connally. All of these men appealed to Nixon’s preference for bold action, and grandiose schemes.”¹¹

Following the continuation of Nixon’s proposals, which included goals concerning lowering inflation, preserving the natural environment, and improving healthcare in the U.S.; Nixon’s fifth goal called for expanded cooperation and support between the federal government and state and local government across the country stating, “The time has come for a new partnership between the Federal Government and the States and localities –a partnership in which we entrust the States and localities with a larger share of the nations’ responsibilities, and in which we share our Federal revenues with them so that they can meet those responsibilities.”¹² In order to facilitate this, Nixon proposed to Congress to make a \$16 billion investment towards renewing state and local government. Nixon stipulated that block grants, which would allow states to direct their use of federal money, should be used to allocate the funding, with five billion dollars in new and unrestricted funds to be utilized by states and localities as they saw fit and the

¹⁰ Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered*, 124.

¹¹ Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered*, 54.

¹² Richard Nixon: "Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union".

other \$11 billion to be provided by, “allocating \$1 billion of new funds and converting one-third of the money going to the present narrow-purpose aid programs into Federal revenue sharing funds for six broad purposes for urban development, education, transportation, job training, and law enforcement but with the States and localities making their own decisions on how it should be spent within each category.”¹³

Nixon’s call for Congress to make a large investment in block improving state and local government was perhaps the most applicable of his goals for domestic policy to federal disaster relief. Given the partisanship and criticism Nixon faced from both Congress as well as state and local governments, the President’s initiative sided with state and local governments, and his request for Congress to approve the funding to facilitate the improvement of state and local government across the country not only communicated a significant gesture from the President, but put the pressure on Congress to make this happen as soon as possible. In doing this, Nixon was able to tip the loyalty of state and local governments more towards himself. At the same time, Congress was put in a position only to disappoint state and local governors with a lack of promptness in their appropriation.

Additionally, by distributing the funding in large block grants to the state and local governments, the Nixon administration rid themselves of the accountability to make sure that the appropriated money was properly and effectively used. Hoff also notes that Nixon’s proposal to utilize block grants was motivated by his desire bring about New Federalism and decentralize many aspects of the federal governments domestic affairs while in office.¹⁴ Expanding on this notion, Hoff contends:

¹³ Richard Nixon: "Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union".

¹⁴ Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered*, 67.

Since the objective of Nixon's New Federalism was to circumvent the bureaucracy in Washington by increasing the power of the White House, implementation of this goal naturally alienated a good portion of the federal bureaucracy. The hostility between the White House and the federal bureaucracy had already reached dangerous levels over Nixon's attempts to restructure the executive branch, and his New Federalism simply exacerbated these feelings because certain aspects of it were inextricably involved with organizational reform.¹⁵

Overall, block grants as a key part of the New Federalism program also allowed Nixon to successfully push for more executive power in disaster relief policy following Hurricane Agnes a year later.

While these goals outwardly promoted cooperation between Congress and his administration, just like in his disaster relief policy proposals, the evidence brought to light by Hoff and other convey that Nixon's discretionary actions in going about and realizing these goals suggested that he really wanted Congress's admission to his executive power more than their cooperation. In fact, in nearly all of his domestic policy proposals Nixon looked to ultimately gain leadership over Congress.

The Disaster Relief Act of 1974 was first prompted by the aftermath of Hurricane Agnes, and came after a comprehensive discussion of the state of current federal disaster relief policy and several arguments on the best way to amend it. Throughout the hearings both the President and his administration, as well as leaders in Congress continued to spar over what they believed to be the most effective disaster relief policy. Nixon's initial proposals, however, were effectively taken off the table by those in the Subcommittee for being too conservative, and ultimately, a compromise was made between the two sides.

Beginning the Congressional hearings in 1973 to discern what would ultimately become the Disaster Relief Act of 1974, Thomas Dunne, an administrator for the Federal

¹⁵ Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered*, 67.

Disaster Assistance Administration, stated to the Subcommittee that he had asked the President to fully review the existing disaster relief legislation and offer his suggestions for any improvements that needed to be made based on his experiences declaring and overseeing the relief efforts for 104 “major disasters” throughout his time in office. Dunne continued that based on the President’s recommendations, Congress had established that consolidating the authority and responsibility to allocate funds and benefits, along with standardizing these benefits and removing all inequalities from the handout process, and finally, preventing the misuse of those benefits were the primary objectives of this new legislation.¹⁶ Dunne completed his statement on the President’s recommendations for the Disaster Relief Act of 1974 by stating:

The President added two further areas of concern as objectives of this review: Reduction of future disaster losses through preparedness actions taken before disasters occur: Encouragement of State and local government and individuals to assume a proportionate share of the burden of disaster preparedness and assistance—rather than relying almost exclusively on the Federal Government.¹⁷

After recognizing the president’s concerns, the subcommittee began discussion the issues. One primary issue during the hearings that was brought to light was the inefficiency of having over thirty different federal offices involved in the federal relief effort for Hurricane Agnes. In his statement to the Subcommittee, Hugh Scott, a Senator from Pennsylvania, spoke specifically about this issue in regards to Wilkes-Barre, the hardest hit city by the storm. Promoting a “one stop shop for immediate needs”, Scott declared:

The very fact that thirty Federal agencies were involved in the relief effort is enough to understand the basic deficiency of that effort. There was no one place where individuals could go for help. What was needed was a

¹⁶ *To Investigate the Adequacy*, 56

¹⁷ *To Investigate the Adequacy*, 56.

single location in the disaster area where sufficient personnel were made available to provide local citizens and public officials information concerning Federal disaster assistance in that area.¹⁸

Thus, as Senator Scott's statement served testament to, clearly a more effective disaster coordination office was needed to properly consolidate the federal disaster relief effort under one organizing office. Nixon too was also aware of this issue and proposed remedying it in his suggestions to Congress for the Disaster Relief Act of 1974. This was covered with his objective to amalgamate the authority and responsibility to allocate funds and benefits under which he more specifically proposed the "streamlining of the delivery of benefits through consolidation of authority and responsibility."¹⁹ During the third of these hearings, Nixon's proposal to manage all facets of the federal disaster relief effort under a single agency received widespread support among the Subcommittee and its' visiting representatives. Commenting on this proposal, Pete Domenici a Republican the Senator from New Mexico, advocated Scott's sentiments and praised the President stating, "In a recent message to Congress on the need for a better federal program of disaster assistance, President Nixon noted that the 'responsibility for relief is presently too fragmented among too many authorities. At the federal level, disaster relief should be managed by a single agency.' I couldn't agree more. In fact, I voiced those same sentiments five months earlier on the Senate when I introduced my own bill to streamline Federal disaster assistance."²⁰

However, despite the support this suggestion received, throughout the hearings the differences in vision between the Nixon administration and some leaders in Congress was evident and these two sides soon pitted themselves against each other when disaster

¹⁸ *To Investigate the Adequacy*, 865.

¹⁹ *To Investigate the Adequacy*, 56.

²⁰ *To Investigate the Adequacy*, 868.

relief policy was further discussed. Liberals in Congress pushed to expand the federal disaster relief program even more than had been initially projected. Their stance came as a response to the lack of effectiveness the expansions to disaster relief policy that were made in the Agnes Recovery Act of 1972 had yielded; conversely, the Nixon administration pushed back with a more conservative viewpoint and was reluctant to generally expand disaster relief policy for all major disasters in the future.

On September 10, 1973, during the hearings on disaster relief legislation Congress submitted S 1672, a bill greatly expanding federal loans for disaster victims, to the President. Among other provisions, S 1672 increased SBA lending authority from \$4.3 billion to \$6.6 billion, a relatively massive increase in SBA funding. Four days earlier on September 6, the House had passed the bill with relatively little discussion or argument. However, as the *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* stated, “But William B. Widnall (R N.J.), the ranking Republican on the Banking and Currency Committee Questioned the ‘unbelievably inconsistent approach’ followed by Congress in restoring generous loans after terminating the program only months earlier.”²¹ The report continued, “Warning that the President probably would veto the bill as drawn up by conferees, Widnall argued that its disaster relief provisions ‘may be extremely costly, and action on them should be deferred until we consider a comprehensive disaster relief program.’”²²

Just days later that same month, the Nixon administration delivered a glaring symbol of its opposition to Congress’s liberal vision for a future of expanded disaster relief, which was cited in the hearing from an article in the *Washington Post*. Introducing

²¹ “Federal Disaster Loans,” *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 31 (September 22, 1973): 2541.

²² “Federal Disaster Loans,” 2541.

the publication, Governor Shapp stated to the Subcommittee, “There is one other point, Mr. Chairman, that I would like to touch upon, which disturbs me greatly. This is in today’s paper, the *Washington Post*. We received word of this about 3 days ago. It is a small article.”²³ Shapp continued on to read the article, which described Congress’s recently approved farm disaster credit program. The new program, which was to be administered by the Farmers Home Administration, was now eligible for 447 counties throughout 19 states that had been designated by Agricultural Secretary Butz. The program offered emergency loans to farmers who had been hit by natural disasters including floods and droughts. The article mentioned that notably, Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania were not on the list of states that had been designated by Secretary Butz to receive the benefits of the program.²⁴

However, as Shapp pointed out, what was most important about the newly approved farm disaster credit program was that it was a revision of a previous, more liberal program that had been halted by the Nixon administration because “its generous terms threatened to pile up heavy Federal costs”, as the article reports.²⁵ Upon being halted by Nixon’s people, Congress’s new farm disaster credit program stipulated that loans given to affected farmers carried an interest rate of 5 percent and must be completely repaid. Additionally, recipients of these loans must first prove that they cannot get credit from other sources.²⁶ While Shapp’s article served as a good source of evidence to convey that the Nixon administration’s agenda for future disaster relief policy was apathetic to the victims when compared to Congress’, his was the first mention of the

²³ *To Investigate the Adequacy*, 890.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

farm disaster credit program in the hearings. While farmers who were affected by natural disasters were in the minds of the legislators and state representatives, the focus was on proper policy for disaster insurance for farmers, not loans.

Nonetheless, the dissention between the Nixon administration's conservative perspective and Congress's liberal ideology towards the revision of federal disaster relief legislation continued in other issues, and by the fifth hearing on disaster relief legislation in September, the criticism back and forth had escalated. In a letter to Senator McGovern that was shared with the Subcommittee, Donald Barnett, the Mayor of Rapid City South Dakota, who was in the midst of dealing with one of the most catastrophic and deadly floods in U.S. history after the Rapid City Flood of 1972 occurred in early June, declared that he found every portion of the currently disaster relief bill to be objectionable. Barnett claimed that his community, like every other one in the nation, would be in a terrible situation if they were to face another disaster like the 1972 floods under the current disaster relief legislation.²⁷

The Mayor continued by stating, "The only factor which can be stated about the federal legislation as proposed under President Nixon's law is that it would make disasters much more painful to local units of government." Furthermore, Barnett finished his statement by asserting his belief that he would be "ridiculous" to lower the level of federal funding on public services and facilities to 75% of its current level. He backed up this claim by reminding the Subcommittee that in case of a major disaster, local government did not have the financial assets nor the flexibility needed to subsidized the

²⁷ *To Investigate the Adequacy*, 181.

additional 25% of the federal government's funding for the replacement of public facilities and the re-establishment of public services.²⁸

Senator Birch Bayh of Indiana, who was the architect of the Disaster Assistance Act of 1970 (the revision of the Disaster Relief Act of 1969), also took the opportunity to rip Nixon and his administration. In his statement to the Subcommittee, Bayh claimed that much of the new legislation in his view was retrogressive, and that this was due to the federal government's desire to separate itself from the federal disaster relief program. Furthermore, Bayh claimed that the Nixon administration's actions suggested that they wished to relinquish any accountability involved in federal disaster relief efforts. At one point in his statement Bayh professed, "For if there is any one central thrust to this bill; it is to get the federal government as far as possible out of the disaster relief business, especially where administration of the various programs is concerned."²⁹

Bayh's criticism of the new legislation not only reinforced the protest among Democrats in Congress towards the Nixon administration's conservative stance in these hearings, but also deliberately contained a section on the narrow issue of the federal legal aid program, a federal service designed to provide legal representation for disaster victims, in order to deliver a more stinging jab at the Nixon administration than most were willing to present. Finishing his statement to the Subcommittee, Bayh transitioned from speaking on the broader issue of aid to federal legal aid asserting, "It is hard to escape the conclusion that the real purpose of this section is to express in practical form,

²⁸ *To Investigate the Adequacy*, 181.

²⁹ *To Investigate the Adequacy*, 208.

the Nixon Administration's unrelenting hostility to Federal legal aid. But that is a stricture that has no place in a comprehensive Federal program of disaster relief."³⁰

Another topic that proved controversial throughout the hearings was the issue of interest rate levels on disaster loans. This debate had continued to rage on with liberals in Congress arguing that loans with low interest rate and forgiveness on disaster loans were absolutely imperative to the effectiveness of the program while with those who supported Nixon's administration promoted block grants as a valid option for loans that would not be so costly on the federal government. In an exchange with Republican John Dunne, Quentin Burdick, the Democratic Senator and disaster policy specialist from North Dakota argued his party's side claiming that both Houses in Congress had recently passed S. 1672, a bill which proposed that in regards to direct federal loans or guaranteed private loans a borrower could have the option of either having the ability of \$2,500 of their loans cancelled if they were made at a 3 percent interest rate or having the entire loan be made at interest rate of 1 percent with no cancellation.³¹ Senator Burdick exemplified the attacking rhetoric against the Nixon administration that had defined the aftermath of Hurricane Agnes. Finishing his statement by questioning Dunne on title V, the Nixon's administration's proposal for this issue he stated, "Is it the view of the administration that the proposed grant program for needy families under title V would eliminate the need for subsidization and cancellation features of present disaster loans?"³²

In response to Burdick's inquiry Dunne stated to the Subcommittee, "The provisions of title V on grants to the needy give special recognition that there are people in this country who don't have the ability to borrow money...What we are trying to reach

³⁰ *To Investigate the Adequacy*, 209.

³¹ *To Investigate the Adequacy*, 60.

³² *To Investigate the Adequacy*, 60.

through the need program by these grants are people who don't have the ability to borrow.”³³ Dunne continued to explain that in past disasters victims who could afford to repay a loan were taking advantage of the system by claiming forgiveness on their disaster loans and those who took large loans received both \$5,000 that was forgiven and a measly 1 percent interest rate on the remainder.³⁴ “The problem of overall forgiveness and extremely low interest rates” Dunne claimed, “is that it is a disincentive for the purchase of insurance. When you are making a man whole and you are going to refinance his mortgage or his property at an extremely low interest rate such as 1 percent or 3 percent, what incentive is there for him to take an protective measures such as buying insurance?”³⁵

It is particularly notable that Bayh and Burdick, the two disaster relief policy enthusiasts who had devoted themselves so passionately to revising the Disaster Relief Act of 1969 following Hurricane Camille both stood out in these hearings four years later for delivering particularly hostile and partisan attacks against the Nixon administration. This dynamic not only supports the argument that the alienation from Congress Nixon had generated with his strategy to garner more discretionary power in domestic policy permeated into federal disaster relief policy, but also, highlights the conservative transition he had made in his vision of the federal disaster relief program between the aftermath of Hurricane Camille and Hurricane Agnes. In the hearings leading to the Disaster Relief Act of 1974, the Nixon administrations was arguing most turbulently with the very same people they had praised for leading the effort to generate the Disaster Assistance Act of 1970. Moreover, not only was this hardened partisanship evident

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

throughout these hearings confirming May's theory that the brief and acute presence of bipartisanship immediate following Hurricane Agnes was merely an effect of the catastrophe, but the attacks back and forth between Democrats in Congress and the Nixon administration also drew out the proceedings leading to slow productivity in producing new disaster relief legislation.

Ultimately, the Disaster Relief Act of 1974 passed through both the house and the executive branch and was signed by the President on May 22, 1974. As *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* states the final action on S 3062 (the Disaster Relief Act of 1974) came on May 15 when the House passed the bill by a recorded vote of 392-9; the Senate had previously passed the bill on May 9. *Congressional Quarterly* reported that the final version of the bill had generally followed an earlier version, which was approved by the Senate on April 10. The House had passed their family grant program to be included in the bill the next day (April 11) and sent it to the Senate to conference with the broader bill.³⁶

The bill came at a crucial time of need for the federal government as just more than a month earlier a super outbreak of tornadoes, primarily across the South and Midwest U.S. had hit thirteen states. Collectively, the 148 confirmed tornadoes had killed 319 and cause \$3.5 billion in damages.³⁷ Reporting on the newly passed bill, *Congressional Quarterly* commented on this asserting, "Impetus to quick congressional action on S 3062 was given by severe tornadoes which struck section of the South and Midwest on April 4. The urgency for new legislation also was made apparent, however, by natural disasters that preceded the 1974 tornadoes. More than \$1-billion had been

³⁶ "Disaster Relief," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 32 (May 18, 1974): 1277.

³⁷ "Analysis and Reconstruction of the 1974 Tornado Super Outbreak," *Risk Management Solutions Special Report*, (April 2, 2004): 3.

distributed for 111 major U.S. disasters in 41 states since enactment of the Disaster Relief Act of 1970.”³⁸

The article also offered commentary by members of Congress on the Disaster Relief Act of 1974 reporting, “Supporters of S 3062 said it was needed because of deficiencies that had been found in the 1970 law, including bureaucratic snarls and the lack of a program to aid economic recovery in disaster areas. They emphasized that the desirable features of the 1970 act were retained in S 3062.”³⁹ Just as Nixon had attempted to convey that Congress had proven itself to be incompetent and ineffective in enacting helpful disaster relief legislation quickly in his messages to the American public, Congress turned the scrutiny towards Nixon’s administration, specifically the OEP which had been at the helm of the relief efforts for both Camille and Agnes.

The legislation itself represented a significant increase in the President’s discretionary power during instances of natural disaster, which first included the sole power to approve a governor’s declaration of a disaster area or emergency situation and thereby appease their request for federal aid. Moreover, the bill stated that it was the President’s prerogative to direct if, how, and when, the OEP should administer federal disaster assistance. This assistance was concentrated within the following categories: temporary housing, disaster loans, assistance in preparing casualty loss deduction forms for federal income tax returns, legal services, consumer aid, disaster unemployed benefits, crisis counseling, individual and family grants.⁴⁰

³⁸ “Disaster Relief,” 1277.

³⁹ “Disaster Relief,” 1277.

⁴⁰ Oregon State University Extension Service, “Federal Disaster Assistance Program,” (Oregon: Oregon State University Press, August, 2004). As I could not find a copy of the bill itself, this source was used specifically to help outline the provisions of the Disaster Relief Act of 1974. While Peter May also speaks about the 1974 Act in *Recovering Catastrophes* he does not write on the provision of the legislation, rather, he focuses on analyzing the political significance of the bill.

Additionally, May notes that the 1974 bill authorized funding for mental health counseling, and recovery planning councils, two aspect of disaster relief that had not been considered up to that point.⁴¹ Finally, the bill also provided the federal guidelines to provide immediate assistance for “emergency measures necessary to save lives, protect property, and protect public health and safety.”⁴² These provisions encompassed numerous services including debris removal, supplying food and shelter to needy victims, unemployment assistance and special disaster loans with reduced interest rates, as well as tax relief for victims following the disaster.⁴³

In his statement on signing the new legislation, Nixon explained that he had submitted his objectives for the new disaster relief legislation and conveyed bipartisan support for the result. Commending Congress in his message on the 1974 act, Nixon declared, “The Congress, while altering the particulars of some of my proposals, has incorporated in this bill the essential features of a sound disaster assistance program. Combined with the Flood Disaster Protection Act that I signed into law on December 31, 1973, this new disaster relief law truly brings the New Federalism to our disaster preparedness and assistance activities.”⁴⁴ Nixon’s reference to “New Federalism” once again highlighted the central ideology in his domestic politics and within in his vision for disaster relief policy that certain powers should be transferred from the federal government back to state government, thereby reinstating a more traditional autonomy

⁴¹ May, *Recovering from Catastrophes*, 25.

⁴² Oregon State University Extension Service, “Federal Disaster Assistance Program”.

⁴³ Oregon State University Extension Service, “Federal Disaster Assistance Program”.

⁴⁴ Richard Nixon: “Statement About the Disaster Relief Act of 1974,” May 22, 1974. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*.
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=4218>.

and power for state governments than the Great Society Program or FDR's New Deal had designed.

Ultimately, despite the fact that Nixon had promoted "New Federalism" from the beginning of his time in office, Joan Hoff claims that even by 1974 the President was unable to sell this ideology to the American public or garner much support for it. Writing on this Hoff claims:

Designed to end the 'pile on, political approach to domestic legislation,' it (New Federalism) never received the serious attention from the media that the administration hoped for. As a result, reform did not become the 'watchword of this administration,' but it was not lack of coherent domestic programs or a clear legislative agenda, as some scholars continue to assert.

Nonetheless, despite the concessions Nixon had been forced by Congress to make to the 1974 Disaster Relief Act, which included expanding the funding and resources to be dedicated to disaster relief as well as enacting more forgiving interest rates for disaster loans and permitting larger block grants to victims, the Administration was successful in securing more power for the President in federal disaster relief policy. Nixon's proposal to have the President effectively be positioned at the helm of every decision while working with one Federal Assistance Coordinator was well received by the Congress and granted in the 1974 legislation. As we have seen, his success in procuring discretionary power in disaster relief policy from the 1974 Act was one success in a larger effort from the President to distinguish himself as a more effective leader than Congress was.

As the partisanship between his administration and Congress increased, Nixon looked to promote this image of himself as a superior option than Congress, which he framed as a slow and unproductive entity when it came to enacting new legislation and improving U.S. domestic policy. Moreover, Nixon's "New Federalism" ideology aimed

to capture the impulse for liberation while channeling it in a different framework than the Great Society program had. In doing this, Nixon hoped to amass more popular support for himself among the American people and in doing so, garner more discretionary power for himself and away from Congress and other federal bureaucracies.

In an encompassing retrospective analysis of Nixon's time as President before his impeachment in the Watergate Scandal, Joan Hoff reinforces this and contends:

Before Watergate, few of us paid much attention to one reform aspect of the Nixon phenomenon: government reorganization based on his particular administrative style...Nixon exhibited little interest during his prepresidential career in what was to become almost an obsession once he entered the Oval Office, namely, 'to get working control of the Executive Branch of the Federal Government.'⁴⁵

Examining Nixon's proposals and stance on the Disaster Relief Act of 1974 and comparing this more generally to the President's stated goals and discriminatory action in U.S. domestic policy, we can see that there is a clear correlation in his actions and intentions in both. May, who reigns as the top scholar on the evolution and politics behind federal disaster relief policy acknowledges this transitions of power in federal disaster relief policy writing, "The mechanism with which federal assistance for any particular disaster is trigger shifted over time as well. Congress had sole authority to, in effect declare something to be a disaster during the era of disaster-specific legislation. Under the more generalized legislation, the president was given that authority for the disaster act provisions while the administrator of the Small Business Administration and the Secretary of Agriculture were given similar for disaster loan provisions."⁴⁶

Continuing on this trend more specifically in terms of executive power May asserts, "The president has the greatest potential influence upon relief assistance in that

⁴⁵ Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered*, 50.

⁴⁶ May, *Recovering from Catastrophes*, 43.

decisions the president makes about disaster declarations determine whether a given disaster-affected area will receive major categories of federal assistance. Unless special relief legislation is introduced, Congress has considerably less formal influence over provision of disaster assistance for any particular disaster.”⁴⁷ Concluding his section on the discretionary power given to Presidents in federal disaster relief policy, May explains, “The discretionary power of the president to declare whether a given disaster-struck area is eligible for federal assistance is a particularly unique aspect of the federal disaster relief machinery.”⁴⁸ Expanding on this May hypothesizes on the potential abuses of this prerogative and declares, “Given the discretion the president has in such matters, it is reasonable to ask whether presidents have manipulated disaster declarations to serve their political needs. The hypothesis that presidents make disaster assistance more readily available in election years than in other years is specifically examined in this section.”⁴⁹

May contends that given the vagueness of the criteria to declare major disaster declarations charges and concerns of favoritism and mistreatment have surrounded such decisions by the president. May asserts, “A major source of much of this kind of controversy over the declaration process, and one difficulty in making decision about requests for declarations, lies in deciding whether relief needs for a given disaster are beyond state and local capabilities and thus warrant federal assistance.”⁵⁰ May also conveys, “A related source of controversy over disaster declarations has concerned the type of events that are eligible for disaster declarations.”⁵¹

After taking these variables into consideration May explains:

⁴⁷ May, *Recovering from Catastrophes*, 106.

⁴⁸ May, *Recovering from Disasters*, 110.

⁴⁹ May, *Recovering from Disasters*, 110.

⁵⁰ May, *Recovering from Catastrophes*, 111.

⁵¹ May, *Recovering from Catastrophes*, 111.

to test the hypothesis that presidents make disaster assistance more readily available in election years than in other years one needs the actual history of disaster requests and declarations along with “objective” measures of disaster severity for each disaster for which a request for federal assistance is made. Unfortunately, the latter are not available for most disasters; only yearly estimates of the value of disaster losses are compiled. Thus in testing the hypothesis about election-year effects the best one can do is to compared for each president the proportion of declarations in elections years with nonelection year while taking into consideration the aggregate estimates of disaster severity.⁵²

May selects presidents Nixon, Ford, and Carter, and compares the percentage of governors’ requests for major disaster declarations during election years and non-election years test his hypothesis. He claims that the data returned by doing this, “provides empirical examination of the differences by showing the influence of various factors upon approval rates.”⁵³ The analysis shows Nixon’s approval rate being statistically higher than Carter’s as well as an “election-year effect”, as May terms it, for the Nixon presidency, “involving statistically higher approval rates in election years than off-election years.” May asserts, “Similar effects were not found with such statistical modeling of election-year effects for President Ford or Carter.”⁵⁴

Just as the President’s proposed legislation for the Disaster Relief Act of 1974 served to tip the balance of power from Congress and towards the President, deeming him the ultimate overseer of federal disaster relief, Nixon’s secretive abuse of his discretionary power to impound federal funds also highlights this same agenda in other facets of his domestic policy. Moreover, evidence on Nixon’s high approval rate for major disaster declarations, especially during election years found in May’s study also suggests that Nixon used this discretionary power in federal disaster relief policy to once

⁵² May, *Recovering from Catastrophes*, 112.

⁵³ May, *Recovering from Catastrophes*, 112.

⁵⁴ May, *Recovering from Catastrophes*, 112.

again promote himself as a man of action, a leader who worked quickly to help the people without the technical restrictions and bureaucratic red tape that might hinder this aid he charged existed in Congress.

Upon examining the evolution of disaster relief policy between 1969 and 1974, this study has given special focus to Hurricane Camille, Hurricane Agnes, President Nixon's political strategy in domestic policy and the background context of postwar liberalism as the most influential factors to disaster relief policy during this period, which intertwined to determine the course of its' evolution. As was previously discussed, May argues that expansion of the disaster relief program is primarily inspired by the immense damage major natural disasters precipitate. Disaster relief policy consistently expanded between 1969 and 1974 and consistent with May's argument, it is clear that the greatest instances of expansion, marked by the Disaster Assistance Act of 1970 and the Disaster Relief Act of 1974, were directly derived from the relief efforts following Hurricane Camille in 1969, and Hurricane Agnes in 1972. In both cases, the testimony given by disaster victims, state and local officials, congressmen and members of the Nixon administration on the relief efforts in the aftermath of Hurricane Agnes and Hurricane Camille served as both the primary shaper of how the federal disaster relief program expanded during this, as well as the justification for why it needed to expand.

The background context of postwar liberalism reveals its' influence in the evolution of disaster relief policy during these instances as well. With the emergence among Americans of a sense of entitlement for support from the federal government in domestic affairs following the implementation of the Great Society, a mentality which increasingly strengthened throughout Nixon's presidency, victims of Hurricane Camille

and Hurricane Agnes felt comfortable expressing their expectations for disaster relief from the federal government that broke from the traditional role the federal government had played in disaster relief. In turn, politicians from the local level to the congressional level rallied for their constituents wants and as May concludes, “Over time, each of these aspects of the general relief act were expanded considerably, evidencing the changing congressional attitude about what constitutes and appropriate level of disaster relief.”⁵⁵

Keeping this in mind, Nixon’s own political strategy concerning domestic policy was also consistently present, and influential in the course of evolution for the federal disaster relief program. Nixon’s desire to be seen as a man of action, a leader who could get the job done no matter how big the task, likely fueled his grandiose initiatives towards the federal disaster relief effort following Hurricane Camille and his enthusiasm for the Disaster Assistance Act of 1970, which expanded the federal disaster relief program and normalized the protocol for large federal response to major disasters. However, in his endeavor to gain notoriety as a proactive leader, Nixon also adapted a strategy to procure as much discretionary power in domestic affairs as possible.

As Hoff asserts, Nixon enacted this strategy during his considerations for the Family Security System program. Hoff writes that even with members of his own administration advising him to reconsider, Nixon secretly went ahead with his liberal initiative so that he did not have to deal with any opposition until the bill had already been enacted. Reflecting on these two instances, it seems that Nixon’s desire to be a man of action and get things done quickly superseded his loyalties to either the Republican Party or his conservative constituency. Nixon hated any opposition to his proposals and throughout his time in office, as he faced more and more of it from Congress as well as

⁵⁵ May, *Recovering from Catastrophes*, 26.

from state and local governments both in disaster relief policy and domestic policy, he took increasingly brash measures to eliminate it. This is likely why we see a trend of Nixon struggling harder to secure more discretionary power for himself in his later years as president.

While Nixon pursued garnering discretionary power from the beginning of his time in office, partisanship that began to emerge between Democrats and Republicans in 1970, led to direct criticisms of his administration in Congress, and seeming served as catalysts to increase his desire to procure more discretionary power for himself and become less cooperative with Congress in the subsequent years. These personal criticisms, coupled with the partisanship between conservatives and liberals in Congress and the differences in vision for the future of disaster relief policy between himself and liberals, hindered the President's ability to be a man of action and swiftly complete the tasks he set out to do. As such, it appears that Nixon looked to gain as much power for himself so that he did not have the deal with the opposition Congress presented and he could quickly set federal disaster relief into action as he saw fit.

Nixon was able to escape the criticisms of the disaster relief effort following Hurricane Camille relatively untarnished, thanks to the widespread charges of bias and discrimination by non-profit organizations like the American Red Cross, and the inefficiency and disorganization of the state and local level relief efforts. However, throughout the federal relief effort following Hurricane Agnes, disaster victims directed their complaints much more directly towards his administration. As such, Nixon responded to this public criticism by attempting to transfer the blame to Congress, reporting that the partisanship that had emerged in both Houses were hindering effective

disaster legislation such as the Agnes Recovery Act of 1972 from being implemented in time to truly help victims. This strategy once again aimed to promote Nixon as the action-oriented activist who was being hindered from enacting effective federal disaster relief by a Congress that was engaging in trivial partisan politics instead of passing necessary legislation. Nixon's proposals towards the 1974 Act for federal disaster relief funds to be appropriated in block grants to state and local governments so it that may be used at their discretion promoted the decentralizing ideology of New Federalism, a policy platform which Hoff claims facilitated Nixon's gathering of discretionary power while in office. Yet it also served to protect Nixon of much of the accountability that the disaster relief funds be used efficiently; an issue that he had come under fire for in the aftermath of Hurricane Agnes and narrowly avoided in the aftermath of Hurricane Camille. Ultimately, promoting this image stance and in the disaster relief hearings following Hurricane Agnes worked to support Nixon's proposals to procure more discretionary power in disaster relief policy, and this was reflected in the evolution of disaster relief policy by Disaster Relief Act of 1974, which gave the president discretionary power to grant major disaster declarations, and allocate relief money as he saw fit.

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