

[By Rosalind Helderman](#)

A new bipartisan coalition has formed in the House to push for additional funds for FEMA to address damage caused by Hurricane Irene.

The group of lawmakers from states impacted by the devastating storm held a meeting with FEMA Director Craig Fugate Thursday morning.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) has said the Senate will vote on a stand-alone measure to replenish FEMA's disaster relief fund, which has dipped below \$550 million as a series of natural disasters has led to increased demand on the fund.

Reid's move is designed to force Republicans to choose whether to support FEMA funding for suffering storm victims or hold out for spending cuts to offset the dollars.

But it's not clear that the choice will be particularly difficult.

House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-Va.) said Wednesday that he wants more details of Reid's proposal but said he appreciated the majority leader's quick action on FEMA funding. And he angrily rejected any suggestion that Republicans are blocking the dollars, indicating that new spending caps imposed under the August debt deal will allow for billions in FEMA emergency spending.

And now comes the new bipartisan working group, which came in for praise from Cantor at a luncheon sponsored by the Christian Science Monitor on Thursday.

The group's members are Rep. Peter Welch (D-Vt.), Chris Gibson (R-N.Y.), Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.), Nan Hayworth (R-N.Y.), G.K. Butterfield (D-N.C.), Tom Marino (R-Penn.), Bill Pascrell (D-N.J.), Walter Jones (R-N.C.), Maurice Hinchey (D-N.Y.), Paul Tonko (D-N.Y.) and Bill Owens (D-N.Y.).

"America has a long and proud tradition of coming to the aid of fellow Americans who, through no fault of their own, find themselves in harm's way," Welch said in a statement. "This bipartisan Coalition will hit the ground running to ensure that our constituents and districts recover from this catastrophe."