



POLICY PROPOSAL

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Summary - *The State Unified*

Recommendation Act (SURA) will empower governors to issue a State Legislative Recommendation (SLR) when their state's entire U.S. House delegation votes unanimously on a bill. The SLR must be filed within 48 hours with the Senate and Congressional Record, requiring acknowledgment through a floor statement or committee note. This ensures federal deliberations reflect and respect unified state consensus without altering congressional authority.

Problem Description - Hurricane Helene has recently shed light on the delays and inefficiencies of federal response to unified

Carolina's congressional delegation for disaster relief, delays and a slow federal response led to the state receiving approximately 9% of total damages in federal funding¹. At its core, these delays are caused by a bottleneck in presidential administrations, HUD, and FEMA². While this is not a congressional issue, preemptive measures in Congress could have prevented it. As seen with Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico³, Congress has the authority to pass targeted supplemental bills specifying funds be released within a certain timeframe or directly to the state, bypassing FEMA's usual processes.

While this specific situation is a result of complexities that would not be completely resolved by the State Unified



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Recommendation Act (SURA), added pressure to the Senate could greatly increase response time, preventing administrative delays in extraordinary circumstances such that Western NC is still facing.

Similar cases have emerged in other states. For instance, following wildfires in California and severe flooding in Louisiana, bipartisan delegations expressed frustration at the slow release of federal emergency support despite unified requests. These patterns suggest a broader structural issue rather than isolated incidents.

This, however, is not the only use-case. Currently, states lack any procedural tool to convey bipartisan agreement within their federal delegations. While individual representatives advocate for state interests,

moments of complete unity—such as North Carolina’s delegation rallying together after Helene—receive no official acknowledgement in the Congressional Record. Omissions such as these erode cooperative federalism and weaken a state's ability to influence legislation on issues that transcend party lines, such as disaster recovery, infrastructure, and agriculture. The lack of a formally recognized process to highlight these moments of unanimity creates a risk for states being drowned out by national partisanship, leading to less than optimal collaboration and slowed crisis response time when it is most urgently needed.

Proposed Solution - The State Unified

Recommendation Act (SURA) creates a new



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procedural instrument called a State Legislative Recommendation (SLR). When a state's entire U.S. House delegation unanimously votes for or against a federal bill, the governor may issue an SLR within 48 hours—a safeguard to ensure that such rare bipartisan consensus is documented and relayed while the bill is still active. The SLR would:

- Be formally filed with the U.S. Senate and entered into the Congressional Record.
- Require acknowledgment through a Senate floor statement or committee note before final passage.
- Serve as an advisory expression of unified state will.

This mechanism acknowledges that in the rare moments of bipartisan unity within a

state—such as in response to disasters like Hurricane Helene—federal deliberations should not overlook that consensus. While acting as a structured way to recognize and record state unity within the legislative process, it is important to note that SURA does not alter congressional authority³.

The proposal aligns with scholarship on cooperative federalism and legislative signaling. Research by scholars such as Martha Derthick (2001) and Paul Peterson (1995) has emphasized how formal state-federal mechanisms improve intergovernmental communication and responsiveness. SURA would institutionalize such a mechanism.

Fiscal Impact - SURA would have minimal fiscal impact. Administrative coordination



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between governors' offices, the Clerk of the House, and the Secretary of the Senate would fall within existing operational budgets. Estimated costs would cover documentation and transmission procedures only. In fact, over time greater legislative efficiency and clearer communication between state and federal levels could lead to indirect cost savings, particularly in emergency funding and disaster response coordination.

Enforcement and Administration -

Implementation would rely solely on existing administrative structures:

- State Governors' Offices prepare and transmit the SLR after a unanimous state delegation vote.

- The Clerk of the U.S. House and Secretary of the Senate ensure the SLR is entered into the Congressional Record.
- Relevant Senate Committees acknowledge receipt via a floor statement or committee note.

This approach avoids bureaucratic expansion while improving procedural transparency.

Supporting Arguments - SURA enhances cooperation and trust between both state and federal institutions in numerous ways:

- *Strengthening Federalism* by ensuring state-level unity is visible and respected within the federal process;



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- *Encouraging Bipartisanship* by incentivizing cross-party collaboration within congressional delegations;
- *Improving Accountability* by documenting when and how federal institutions respond to state consensus; and,
- *Boosting Responsiveness* by helping to expedite relief and support for state issues.

These outcomes are also supported by political science literature. For example, Timothy J. Conlan and Paul L. Posner (2011) have noted that mechanisms which increase state input in federal decisions tend to improve responsiveness and mutual trust.

Anticipated Challenges - Some may argue SURA lacks binding effect while adding procedural steps; however, its design deliberately prioritizes symbolic legitimacy and transparency over introducing new powers. It does not interfere with legislative authority—it simply ensures that states’ bipartisan concerns are not overlooked.



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References -

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4. Martha Derthick, Keeping the Compound Republic: Essays on American Federalism (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2001).
5. Paul E. Peterson, The Price of Federalism (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1995).
6. Timothy J. Conlan and Paul L. Posner, “Inflection Point? Federalism and the Obama Administration,” Publius: The Journal of Federalism 41, no. 3 (2011): 421–446..