

State needs plan to pay disaster aid

BY World's Editorials Writers
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For a relatively paltry \$4 million a year, the Legislature could build up an emergency fund to reimburse local agencies that help their communities during disasters.

The fund would prevent agencies such as small fire departments from going years without reimbursement from the state, which is exactly what's happened.

After a disaster declaration, the federal government pays 75 percent of the costs of relief and the state picks up the balance. But the poor economy caused the state to fall behind on reimbursement.

To her credit, Gov. Mary Fallin put the arm on the Legislature to approve a \$34.1 million supplemental appropriation earlier this year, which was enough to pay off all the bills, some which dated back to 2007.

Since 2007, no state has had as many presidentially declared disasters as Oklahoma. That should tell leaders that they must prepare for the next disaster.

Bixby City Manager Doug Enevoldsen says it would be prudent to prepare in advance for future disasters. He suggests a dedicated state funding source for the emergency fund or a routine annual appropriation to keep the fund sound.

That makes so much sense. It would allow the state to pay its share of recovery costs as fast as the federal government determines what those costs are.

Collinsville had to borrow money from a bank to pay off bills for ice storm recovery five years ago. Disaster-prone Oklahoma should be prepared to reimburse such agencies. Otherwise one disaster - natural - can quickly become another disaster - man-made.

Fund the fund.