

EXAMINING FEMA'S READINESS TO MEET ITS MISSION

HEARING BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS FIRST SESSION

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EXAMINING FEMA'S READINESS TO MEET ITS MISSION

Tuesday, June 29, 2021

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:30 a.m., via Webex, Hon. Bennie G. Thompson [Chairman of the committee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Thompson, Jackson Lee, Langevin, Correa, Slotkin, Cleaver, Green, Clarke, Swalwell, Titus, Demings, Barragán, Gottheimer, Luria, Malinowski, Torres, Katko, Higgins, Bishop, Van Drew, Miller-Meeks, Harshbarger, Clyde, Gimenez, LaTurner, Meijer, Cammack, and Pfluger.

Chairman THOMPSON. The Committee on Homeland Security will come to order. The committee is meeting today to receive testimony on examining FEMA's readiness to meet its mission. Without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare the committee in recess at any point. The gentlewoman from Florida, Mrs. Demings, shall assume the duties of the Chair in the event that I run into technical difficulties.

Good morning. The committee is meeting today to discuss FEMA's readiness to meet its mission. We are pleased to be joined by the Administrator Deanne Criswell who was confirmed just 2 months ago. Administrator Criswell brings to the job a wealth of experience from her roles as a New York City Emergency Management Commissioner, leader of one of FEMA's National Incident Management Assistance teams, and over 2 decades of service as a firefighter in the Colorado Air National Guard. I would also note that she is the first woman to be confirmed by the Senate to lead FEMA. I applaud the Biden administration for selecting highly-qualified individuals who reflect the diversity of our great Nation.

Administrator Criswell steps into the role at a critical juncture as FEMA contends with on-going responses to previous disasters, including western wildfires and 2017 hurricanes, while also continuing to manage the COVID response, the current disaster season, and other emergencies.

For example, in Mississippi we have suffered terrible losses from recent flooding and I know many other communities have dealt with similar disasters this spring and summer. Over the weekend, we also watched in horror as a tragic building collapsed in the Miami area. Last night, Tropical Storm Danny made landfall in South Carolina amid what is predicted to be a busy hurricane season.

FEMA is playing a key role in the response to all of these incidents. The agency also continues to contend with long-standing challenges like addressing a disaster assistance backlog, recruiting and retaining a qualified disaster workforce, and addressing incidents of harassment and discrimination, and bolstering employee morale. The men and women of FEMA have been doing yeoman's work during this extraordinary time, and we must do everything possible to support them in their efforts. Administrator Criswell will need to play catch-up to address all of these issues, as FEMA's mission was hampered by the prior administration's failure to listen to competent leadership, its politicization of disaster response, and its denial of the science on COVID and climate change.

Under the Biden administration, things are already changing for the better. On February 2, President Biden announced that FEMA would provide 100 percent Federal funding for States and local governments for their COVID-19 response and vaccination efforts. Additionally, the Biden administration has provided funeral assistance to families who lost loved ones to the pandemic, mobilized mass vaccination efforts, and deployed mobile vaccination units to help serve hard-to-reach and underserved communities.

The Biden administration is also investing in resilient critical infrastructure by providing \$1 billion to communities through FEMA's pre-disaster Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Program, commonly called BRIC. With this funding, FEMA would also be able to help prepare communities for more frequent and damaging storms resulting from climate change. FEMA's budget requests full funding for the Non-profit Security Grant Program and Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention Program. These programs are essential to helping institutions at higher risk of targeted violence like State and local governments, higher education, and non-profits.

That being said, Congress must restore the proposed \$15.3 million reduction in both the Urban Area Security Initiative, UASI, and the State Homeland Security Grant Program. Such a reduction could hinder our ability to effectively prepare for, respond to, recover from, and mitigate against all hazards. Today, FEMA faces historic challenges as it seeks to carry out its mission to support citizens and first responders as we prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards. I look forward to hearing from Administrator Criswell about FEMA's readiness to meet its mission and what Congress can do to assist. I thank her for being here and the Members for their participation.

[The statement of Chairman Thompson follows:]

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN BENNIE G. THOMPSON

JUNE 29, 2021

The committee is meeting today to discuss FEMA's readiness to meet its mission. We are pleased to be joined by Administrator Deanne Criswell, who was confirmed just 2 months ago. Administrator Criswell brings to the job a wealth of experience from her roles as New York City Emergency Management Commissioner, leader of one of FEMA's National Incident Management Assistance Teams, and over 2 decades of service as a firefighter in the Colorado Air National Guard. I would also note that she is the first woman to be confirmed by the Senate to lead FEMA, and I applaud the Biden administration for selecting highly-qualified individuals who reflect the diversity of our great Nation.

Administrator Criswell steps into the role at a critical juncture, as FEMA contends with on-going responses to previous disasters including western wildfires and 2017 hurricanes, while also continuing to manage the COVID response, the current disaster season, and other emergencies. For example, in Mississippi we have suffered terrible losses from recent flooding, and I know many other communities have dealt with similar disasters this spring and summer. Over the weekend we all watched in horror at the tragic building collapse in the Miami area. And last night, Tropical Storm Danny made landfall in South Carolina, amid what is predicted to be a busy hurricane season. FEMA is playing a key role in the response to all of these incidents.

The agency also continues to contend with long-standing challenges like addressing a disaster assistance backlog, recruiting and retaining a qualified disaster workforce, and addressing incidents of harassment and discrimination and bolstering employee morale. The men and women of FEMA have been doing yeoman's work during this extraordinary time, and we must do everything possible to support them and their efforts.

Administrator Criswell will need to play catch-up to address all of these issues, as FEMA's mission was hampered by the prior administration's failure to listen to competent leadership, its politicization of disaster response, and its denial of the science on COVID and climate change. Under the Biden administration, things are already changing for the better.

On February 2, President Biden announced that FEMA would provide 100 percent Federal funding for States and local governments for their COVID-19 response and vaccination efforts. Additionally, the Biden administration has provided funeral assistance to families who lost loved ones to the pandemic, mobilized mass vaccination efforts, and deployed mobile vaccination units to help serve hard-to-reach and underserved communities.

The Biden administration is also investing in resilient critical infrastructure by providing \$1 billion to communities through FEMA's Pre-Disaster Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program. With this funding, FEMA would be able to help prepare communities for more frequent and damaging storms resulting from climate change. FEMA's budget requests full funding for the Nonprofit Security Grant Program (NSGP) and Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention (TVTP) program. These programs are essential to helping institutions at higher risk of targeted violence, like State and local governments, higher education, and non-profits.

That being said, Congress must restore the proposed \$15.3 million reduction to both the Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) and the State Homeland Security Grant Program (SHSGP). Such a reduction could hinder our ability to effectively prepare for, respond to, recover from, and mitigate against all hazards.

Today, FEMA faces historic challenges as it seeks to carry out its mission to support citizens and first responders as we prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards.

I look forward to hearing from Administrator Criswell about FEMA's readiness to meet its mission, and what Congress can do to assist.

Chairman THOMPSON. With that, I recognize the Ranking Member, the gentleman from New York, Mr. Katko, for an opening statement.

Mr. KATKO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for holding this hearing today. I want to welcome the witness, Ms. Criswell. I appreciate your time we spent last week together. I found it very helpful and very informative and I am confident we are going to have a good working relationship going forward.

Before I start my opening, I want to just acknowledge the recent tragedy in Surfside, Florida. I know that Ms. Criswell recently returned from there and my thoughts and prayers go out to all those involved in the tragedy and those working the rescue operation, including FEMA.

I would like congratulate Ms. Criswell on her confirmation. In a field that has traditionally been dominated by men, Ms. Criswell is the first woman to lead FEMA as a confirmed director or B. For an agency that was formed in 1979, I would say that is a long, long overdue achievement. Ms. Criswell, I congratulate you on being a

trailblazer and thank you for being a role model for the thousands of women that are already in the field of emergency management, and for those that are thinking about a career in the field. I hope that you are the first of many.

FEMA has had its hands full for the past several years. After having not been hit by a major hurricane in over a decade—Hurricane Wilma in 2005—2017 devastated the United States with 3 major hurricanes, Harvey, Irma, and Maria. It doesn't seem like things have slowed down since. In 2018, Hurricane Michael made landfall in the Florida panhandle, becoming the first Category 5 storm to hit the United States since Hurricane Andrew in 1992. Two-thousand nineteen also saw an above-average hurricane season with 18 named storms. And 2020, although it was somewhat overshadowed by COVID-19, was the most active and the fifth-costliest Atlantic hurricane season on record. Not to mention record-breaking fire seasons over the past several years. In 2020 alone, more than 4 million acres were burned in the State of California.

Then came COVID. On March 13, 2020, President Trump declared a Nation-wide emergency. Eventually every State, commonwealth, territory, and the District of Columbia received a major disaster declaration. That triggers FEMA, of course. During the pandemic, FEMA with the help of HHS and the private sector, coordinated the delivery of more than 600 million N95 respirators, 2.5 billion surgical masks, 131 million face shields, 1.1 billion surgical gowns and coveralls, and more than 56 billion gloves to State, local, Tribal, and territory partners. Well done. Well done, indeed.

Additionally, FEMA has distributed more than \$80 billion in COVID relief and vaccine-related expenses. They have helped to support 2,100 community vaccination centers and assisted in the delivery of more than 371 million vaccines. I applaud the work of FEMA—all the work FEMA has done over the past several years and during the pandemic. These are certainly unprecedented times for our country and for FEMA.

Despite the many successes of FEMA during 2020 and before, I think that FEMA is facing multiple challenges today and will in the years to come. With the many varying undertakings that FEMA has been given, including now a mission at the border, we must ensure that we have an adequately-staffed, well-trained, and forward-thinking FEMA that is not only prepared for hurricanes, but for whatever challenges lie ahead.

So, think about it for a moment, if you will. It is the first time in FEMA's history that it had a Nation-wide emergency disaster declaration and that I am sure changed the matrix of things quite a bit for FEMA. I have concerns with FEMA's readiness as well as approach to dealing with State and local, territorial, and Tribal entities, and will highlight one of my experiences later in my opening statement. But first, I would like to note what I hope to hear in your testimony today, among other things, I would like to hear your vision for the following: How will you ensure that FEMA is adequately staffed for future disasters due to staff burnout and massive workload as I detailed earlier in my testimony? How will FEMA revamp the recovery process, which is outdated, frustrating for applicants, too bureaucratic, and simply takes too long? How

does FEMA plan to view grants moving forward? Does FEMA think any changes should be made as we approach the 20th anniversary of 9/11? What role can FEMA grants play in shoring up the security of communities who have defunded law enforcement critical to the homeland security mission? How does FEMA view its role in future pandemics? Should FEMA be the lead or should FEMA play a support role? How does FEMA plan to modernize the Flood Insurance Program? What are the future plans for FEMA's BRIC Program? How will you ensure that this program is truly the transformational program that Congress envisioned?

I am also interested in how FEMA will do more to work with small and rural communities. Not all of us represent large metropolitan areas and I have seen FEMA fall flat when it comes to working with smaller communities in central New York. I know that my experience is not unique. As I am sure you are aware, President Trump signed a major disaster declaration for multiple counties in New York due to flooding along Lake Ontario in 2017. Unfortunately, assistance for individuals was denied under this declaration. Similar flooding occurred in 2019, and FEMA Administrator Gaynor visited the region with me to survey the devastating damage, which amounted to hundreds of millions of dollars of shoreline damage at a minimum.

I disagree with the decision by FEMA on how these requests for assistance were handled. My constituents were left frustrated by the length of time it took for a decision and the overall lack of transparency in the process. Additionally, I take issue with the process of FEMA's preliminary damage assessments.

To improve this process for my constituents and others, I introduced a bill that will improve the efficiency and consistency of the PDA process. My bill establishes an advisory panel of State and local emergency personnel from all 10 FEMA regions to work with FEMA to enhance the PDA process. In 2020, a previous version of this legislation was passed by the House of Representatives with overwhelming bipartisan support. Ms. Criswell, on behalf of my constituents, I would ask that you look at this legislation and provide any meaningful feedback that you think is helpful.

FEMA plays an important role in the Department of Homeland Security. Indeed, it plays a critical role. It has a zero-fail mission. It needs to be able to respond to disasters at any hour of any day and across the entire United States from Puerto Rico to Samoa. Ms. Criswell, in my 2 hearings with the Secretary, I have told him that I want to be constructive Member of Congress, not just throw bombs without offering solutions. I would like to make the same offer to you and be forward-looking. I look forward to working with you and I know, based on my conversations with you already, we will be able to work together. I look forward to hearing your testimony today and your vision for FEMA. Now, I did have some criticisms, but, of course, there are many things about FEMA that are doing well.

The last thing I want to say is, I want to salute the men and women of FEMA who have gone above and beyond the duty during this pandemic and have done yeoman's work to help us get through this pandemic. So, I salute all of them and I think on behalf of the

entire committee, they will agree with me that they did a fantastic job. So, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.

[The statement of Ranking Member Katko follows:]

STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER JOHN KATKO

Thank you for holding his hearing today, Mr. Chairman. I want to welcome the witness, Ms. Criswell. I appreciate the time we spent last week together. I found it very helpful and very informative and I'm confident we're going to have a good working relationship going forward. Before I start my opening, I just want to acknowledge the recent tragedy in Surfside, Florida. I know that Ms. Criswell recently returned from there, and my thoughts and prayers go out to all those involved in the tragedy and those working the rescue operation, including FEMA.

I would like to congratulate Ms. Criswell on her confirmation. In a field that has traditionally been dominated by men, Ms. Criswell is the first woman to lead FEMA as a confirmed director or administrator. For an agency that was formed in 1979, I would say that this is long overdue. Ms. Criswell, I congratulate you on being a trailblazer, and thank you for being a role model for the thousands of women that are already in the field of emergency management, and for those that are thinking about a career in the field. I hope that you are the first of many.

FEMA has had its hands full for the past several years. After having not been hit by a major hurricane in over a decade (Hurricane Wilma in 2005), 2017 devastated the United States with three major hurricanes—Harvey, Irma, and Maria. It doesn't seem like things have slowed down since.

In 2018, Hurricane Michael made landfall in the Florida panhandle, becoming the first category 5 storm to hit the United States since Hurricane Andrew in 1992. 2019 also saw an above-average hurricane season with 18 named storms, and 2020, although it was somewhat overshadowed by COVID-19, was the most active and the fifth-costliest Atlantic hurricane season on record. Not to mention record-breaking fire seasons over the past several years—in 2020 alone, more than 4 million acres were burned in California.

And then came COVID—on March 13, 2020, President Trump declared a Nation-wide emergency, and eventually every State, commonwealth, territory, and the District of Columbia received a major disaster declaration. During the pandemic, FEMA, with the help of HHS and the private sector coordinated the delivery of more than 600 million N95 respirators, 2.5 billion surgical masks, 131 million face shields, 1.1 billion surgical gowns/coveralls, and more than 56 billion gloves to State, local, Tribal, and territorial partners. Well done.

Additionally, FEMA has distributed more than \$80 billion dollars in COVID relief and vaccine-related expenses, helped to support 2,100 community vaccination centers and assisted in the delivery of more than 371 million vaccines.

I applaud all the work FEMA has done over the past several years and during the pandemic. These are certainly unprecedented times.

Despite the many successes of FEMA during 2020 and before, I think that FEMA is facing multiple challenges today, and will in the years to come.

With the many varying undertakings that FEMA has been given, including now a mission at the border, we must ensure that we have an adequately staffed, well-trained, and forward-thinking FEMA that is not only prepared for hurricane season, but for whatever challenges lie ahead.

And yet, I have concerns with FEMA's readiness as well as approach to dealing with State, local, territorial, and Tribal entities, and will highlight one of my experiences later in my opening statement. But first, I would like to note what I hope to hear in your testimony today. Among others, I would like to hear your vision for the following:

- How will you ensure that FEMA is adequately staffed for future disasters due to staff burnout and massive workload as I detailed earlier in my testimony?
- How will FEMA revamp the recovery process, which is outdated, frustrating for applicants, too bureaucratic, and simply takes too long?
- How does FEMA plan to view grants moving forward—and does FEMA think any changes should be made as we approach the 20th anniversary of 9/11?
- What role can FEMA grants play in shoring up the security of communities who have defunded law enforcement critical to the homeland security mission?
- How does FEMA view its role in future pandemics—should FEMA be the lead, or should FEMA play a support role?
- How does FEMA plan to modernize the flood insurance program?

- What are the future plans for FEMA's BRIC program, and how will you ensure that this program is truly the transformational program that Congress envisioned?

I am also interested in how FEMA will do more to work with small and rural communities. Not all of us represent large metropolitan areas and I have seen FEMA fall flat when it comes to working with smaller communities in Central New York. I know that my experience is not unique.

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Additionally, I take issue with the process of FEMA's Preliminary Damage Assessments.

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FEMA plays an important role in the Department of Homeland Security. FEMA has a zero-fail mission, needs to be able to respond to disasters at any hour of any day, and across the entire United States, from Puerto Rico to American Samoa. Ms. Criswell, in my two hearings with the Secretary, I have told him that I want to be a constructive Member of Congress and not just throw bombs without offering solutions. I would like to make that same offer to you and be forward-looking. I look forward to working with you, and look forward to hearing your testimony and vision for FEMA.

Now I did have some criticisms, but of course there's many things about FEMA they're doing well. Last, I want to salute the men and women of FEMA who have gone above and beyond their duties during this pandemic and have done yeoman's work to help us get through this pandemic. I think the entire committee will agree with me that they did a fantastic job.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you very much. All the Members of the committee are reminded that under the committee rules, opening statements may be submitted for the record. Members are also reminded that the committee will operate according to the guidelines laid out by the Chairman and Ranking Member in our February 3 colloquy regarding remote proceedings.

I welcome our witness and I am going to try to get your first name right. Deanne, Deanne.

Ms. CRISWELL. Deanne.

Chairman THOMPSON. Deanne Criswell, the administrator for the Federal Emergency Management Agency, who is making her first appearance before the committee today. Without objection, the administrator's full statement will be inserted in the record. I now ask Administrator Criswell to summarize her statement for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF DEANNE B. CRISWELL, ADMINISTRATOR, FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

Ms. CRISWELL. Thank you, Chair Thompson, Ranking Member Katko, and Members of the committee. I am delighted to be appear before you today to discuss the President's budget request for

FEMA in fiscal year 2022, and to describe how the President's vision guides my priorities for the agency.

This past Sunday, I visited Surfside, Florida and the scene of the Champlain Towers collapse. It is difficult to put into words the devastation that this community is experiencing and our hearts go out to all the families and loved ones that have been impacted by this event.

I am very grateful for the heroic efforts of the local first responders. Seen first-hand the around-the-clock rescue efforts and how the community has come together in their time of greatest need. FEMA is on the ground. We have a recovery center that is working directly with families and loved ones impacted by this tragic event to get them the assistance that they need. We will continue to bring resources to support the on-going response and recovery efforts.

FEMA's mission of supporting people before, during, and after disasters has never been more critical. Our role supporting incidents such as the Champlain Towers collapse, our support of the COVID-19 pandemic response, and numerous other active disasters attests to the vital importance and responsibility of this agency to our Nation.

Given FEMA's unprecedented mission requirements, the President's budget increases the FEMA budget to \$28.4 billion, which is \$1.9 billion more than the fiscal year 2021 enactment. The President's budget, if enacted, will allow FEMA to meet the challenges ahead.

In my first months as FEMA administrator, I am focused on 3 key priorities: Supporting the FEMA workforce and our readiness, integrating equity into everything we do, and addressing climate change through risk reduction. I will describe these priorities in turn.

First, we must support the FEMA workforce and our readiness. To protect the well-being of our workforce and the communities we serve in the COVID-19 environment, we continue to rely on virtual operations where appropriate. We are evaluating how to enhance our operational capacity, promote an agile and expeditionary culture, and support the safe return to the office. Workforce readiness begins with the right staffing levels. The fiscal year 2022 budget supports increased hiring and among other things, would result in a 14 percent increase in the number of our Stafford Act employees.

Readiness also means ensuring the workforce has the training, tools, and resources they need to do their job. I am committed to providing that to the workforce. Next, we must integrate equity into everything we do. The Nation deserves to have our programs and services delivered fairly and equitably. To meet this expectation, diversity, equity, and inclusion must be core components of how we conduct ourselves and execute our mission. FEMA is currently soliciting feedback from the public and our partners to ensure we understand how our programs impact survivors of different demographics and where needed, we are committed to making changes. This includes changes to our policies, procedures, and how we deploy and execute our mission.

Internally, this means building a diverse and inclusive workforce which resembles the communities we serve. Externally, it means

we must proactively identify and reach out to underserved communities and populations most in need of our help. We are analyzing our operational programs through the lens of equity and we are doing that for a reason. We know that disasters exasperate existing inequalities. We need to ensure FEMA assistance reaches everyone who needs it. We must also identify the root causes of differing recovery outcomes for survivors and work aggressively and collectively to ensure access for all to disaster response and recovery assistance.

FEMA's commitment to equity is evident in our efforts to advance the accessibility of the COVID-19 vaccine. At the President's direction, FEMA coordinated with Federal, State, local, Tribal, and territorial partners to support the establishment and expansion of over 2,100 community vaccination centers. This included 39 Federally-led CVC pilot sites and the deployment of 18 mobile vaccination units to help reach traditionally underserved populations. Nearly 60 percent of all doses administered at these Federally-led sites, went to communities of color. As we execute our response to COVID-19 and other disasters, FEMA will continue to prioritize equity across all of our operations.

Finally, we must address climate change through risk reduction. As emergency managers, we must face the challenges that climate change poses to our mission head-on and make generational-level investments to reduce the impacts. Developing resilient communities ahead of an incident reduces both the loss of life and economic disruption. Every dollar invested in mitigation saves the American taxpayer \$6 in future spending. To provide local partners with the financial support for mitigation projects, FEMA is expanding resources and technical assistance for the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Program, which establishes a reliable stream of funding for larger mitigation projects through a Nation-wide grant program. Recently, the President visited FEMA and announced that he was doubling the funding available for the BRIC Program to \$1 billion for the fiscal year 2021 application.

Mitigating the increasing flood risk is particularly important as flooding is the most common and costly natural disaster in the United States. Among other initiatives, the President's fiscal year 2022 budget requests more than \$428 million for the Flood Hazard Mapping and Risk Analysis Program to allow for climate change data to be incorporated into flood risk analysis. FEMA is also working to ensure that communities are protected financially from flooding. FEMA is updating the National Flood Insurance Program pricing methodology to fix long-standing inequities by more closely aligning insurance premiums to the specific flood risk of each home. The fiscal year 2022 budget also includes a means-tested affordability proposal to ensure that everyone who needs flood insurance can afford it.

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic is an important turning point for our country and challenges us to rethink our systems, decisions, and investments. This past year has not been easy and I would like to recognize the professionalism and perseverance demonstrated by the FEMA workforce. I look forward to working with the Members of this committee as we build a more ready and resilient Nation. I am happy to answer any questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Criswell follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DEANNE B. CRISWELL

JUNE 29, 2021

Chair Thompson, Ranking Member Katko, and Members of the committee. My name is Deanne Criswell, and I am the administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). I am delighted to appear before you to discuss the President's budget request for FEMA in fiscal year 2022, and to describe how the President's vision guides my priorities for FEMA as the agency's new administrator.

FEMA's mission of supporting people before, during, and after disasters has never been more critical. Our role during the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the numerous other disasters we are actively supporting, attests to the vital importance and responsibility of this agency to our Nation. Given FEMA's unprecedented mission requirements, the President's budget increases the overall FEMA budget to \$28.4 billion, which is \$1.9 billion more than the fiscal year 2021 enactment. I believe that the President's budget, if enacted, will put FEMA on sound footing to meet the challenges ahead.

Climate change is making natural disasters more frequent, more intense, and more destructive, and we must be prepared for another challenging series of disaster events this summer and fall. Last year, FEMA faced record-setting hurricane and wildfire seasons. Response and recovery operations from many of these past disasters continue even as FEMA pivots to prepare for what lies ahead. The fiscal year 2022 President's budget would increase the major disaster allocation in the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF) from \$17.1 billion to \$18.8 billion to address on-going Stafford Act disasters. This includes \$9.3 billion for COVID-19; \$4.1 billion for Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria; \$2.2 billion for non-catastrophic disasters; \$1.2 billion for catastrophic disasters; and \$2.0 billion in reserve in anticipation of additional COVID-19 costs.

In my first months as the FEMA administrator, I am focused on three key priorities, which are guided by the President's vision: (1) Supporting the FEMA workforce and our readiness; (2) integrating equity into everything we do, and (3) addressing climate change through risk reduction. In today's testimony, I will describe these priorities in turn.

Supporting the FEMA workforce and our readiness.—FEMA's workforce of more than 21,700 emergency managers does exceptional work every day to deliver our mission and as FEMA's administrator, their readiness and well-being is my first priority.

Prioritizing the health and safety of FEMA's workforce enables us to best ensure that our personnel are ready to deploy or re-deploy to any disaster at a moment's notice. FEMA will continue to take all necessary measures to prioritize workforce health and safety within the COVID-19 environment. FEMA's workforce became eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine through the Department of Homeland Security's Operation Vaccinate our Workforce, which was launched in late January. Where appropriate, we continue to rely on virtual operations and inspections, as well as no-contact service methods, to protect both our workforce and the communities they serve. As we prepare for a post-COVID-19 environment, we are evaluating how to enhance operational capacity, and promote an agile and expeditionary culture, while we support remote work where appropriate and return to the workplace safely.

Workforce readiness means that our people are ready to respond. This starts with having the right staffing levels. The fiscal year 2022 budget supports increased hiring, and among other things would result in a 14 percent increase in the number of FEMA's Stafford Act employees.

Readiness also means the workforce has the training, tools, and resources they need to do their job, and I am committed to providing them. For instance, FEMA's Incident Management (IM) workforce is currently comprised of nearly 11,000 personnel. The fiscal year 2022 budget includes \$32.3 million to not only recruit additional staff for the Incident Management Workforce, but to also train and equip them.

As we enter the 2021 hurricane and wildfire seasons and continue to prepare for no-notice events, our workforce has never been more experienced or tested. However, I recognize that many of our staff have been activated in support of COVID-19 response operations and numerous other disaster declarations for over a year, and we will ensure that our deployed workforce gets the rest and training to be ready for what comes next.

Longer term, we also need to continue to professionalize the field of emergency management by better defining what it means to be an emergency manager and building career paths for the Nation's emergency management workforce.

Integrating equity into everything we do.—The Nation deserves to have our programs and services delivered fairly and equitably. To meet this expectation, diversity, equity, and inclusion are not optional and must be core components of how we conduct ourselves and execute our mission. They are not empty buzzwords. FEMA is actively working to meet this expectation and reduce unnecessary barriers to program participation for disaster survivors, grant recipients, and other key stakeholders. That includes low-income households and other traditionally vulnerable populations. We know we have work to do and we are committed to doing it. FEMA is currently soliciting feedback from the public and our partners to ensure we understand how our programs impact survivors of different demographics, and we are committed to making changes where needed. This includes changes to our policies, procedures, or how we deploy and execute our mission.

Internally, this means understanding that to help individuals we must create safe and welcoming environments and that we do this by building a diverse and inclusive workforce which resembles the communities we serve. Externally, it means we cannot be satisfied only with assisting those who seek us out—we must also proactively identify and reach out to underserved communities and populations most in need of our help. We are analyzing our operational programs through the lens of equity for a reason. We know that disasters exacerbate existing inequalities, and we need to ensure that FEMA assistance reaches everyone who needs it. We must also come together across all disaster recovery stakeholders to identify the root causes of differing recovery outcomes for survivors and work aggressively and collectively to ensure equity in disaster response and recovery.

FEMA's commitment to equity is further evident in our efforts to advance the accessibility of COVID-19 vaccines. At the President's direction, FEMA coordinated with Federal and State, local, Tribal, and territorial (SLTT) partners to support the establishment and expansion of over 2,100 Community Vaccination Centers (CVCs) to achieve the administration's goal of administering 200 million shots in 100 days. This included 39 Federally-led CVC pilot sites and the deployment of 18 mobile vaccination units to help reach traditionally underserved and more remote communities. As part of these efforts, FEMA established a Civil Rights Advisory Group (CRAG) in January with our Federal partners to support the administration's priority of making equity a cornerstone of the COVID-19 response. The CRAG supported the development of the methodology used to determine Federally-led CVC pilot site selections and has worked in all 10 FEMA regions to collect and analyze demographic data, identify underserved communities, and collaborate with community-based organizations. Nearly 60 percent of all doses administered at Federally-led pilot CVCs went to communities of color, and interpretation services have been provided to non-English speakers in over 180 languages.

As we execute our response to COVID-19 and other disasters, FEMA will continue to prioritize equity across all operations, both internally and externally. In support of this priority, the fiscal year 2022 President's budget includes an additional 54 employees at Headquarters and in the Regions, who will focus on equity issues. Among other things, these staff will analyze the extent to which FEMA is delivering programs and services fairly and equitably, as well as make data-informed recommendations for how FEMA can improve the delivery of its programs and services Nation-wide.

Addressing climate change through risk reduction.—As emergency managers, we must face the challenges that climate change poses to our mission head-on and make generational-level investments to reduce the impacts we are experiencing as a result. Disasters are more frequent and more costly. While we will always be ready to respond when disasters occur, we recognize that true success rests in mitigating the worst impacts of disasters before they occur. As a former firefighter in Colorado, I understand the impact mitigation has. Developing resilient communities ahead of an incident reduces both the loss of life and economic disruption, and, according to an independent study by the National Institute of Building Sciences in 2019, every dollar in Federal hazard mitigation grants invested in mitigation is estimated to save the American taxpayer \$6 in future spending.

To provide local partners with financial support for mitigation projects, FEMA will expand the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program. I would like to thank Congress for providing the legislative tools to create BRIC, per Section 1234 of the Disaster Recovery Reform Act of 2018 (DRRA). By establishing a reliable stream of funding for larger mitigation projects through a Nation-wide grant program, the BRIC program provides a critical opportunity for governments to invest in a more resilient Nation, reduce disaster suffering, and avoid fu-

ture disaster costs. Recently, the President visited FEMA to announce that he was increasing the funding available for the BRIC program to \$1 billion for the fiscal year 2021 Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) application period. FEMA will set funding levels for the fiscal year 2022 BRIC program consistent with the President's priorities.

Mitigating the increasing risk of flooding will be an important component of FEMA's efforts to increase our Nation's resilience to climate change. As millions of American families have unfortunately experienced first-hand, flooding is the most common and costly natural disaster in the United States. Furthermore, direct average annual flood losses have quadrupled from approximately \$4 billion per year in the 1980's to roughly \$17 billion per year between 2010 and 2018. Over the past decade, flooding and coastal storms have accounted for roughly 70 percent of all Presidential Disaster Declarations.

We must drive the kind of system-based mitigation this Nation needs to make our communities more resilient to flooding. The President's fiscal year 2022 budget requests more than \$428 million for the Flood Hazard Mapping and Risk Analysis Program (Risk MAP) to allow for climate change data to be incorporated into flood risk analysis. The fiscal year 2022 budget also requests \$5 million to help other Federal agencies put flood resilience measures into effect. A further \$5 million is requested in fiscal year 2022 for climate research and nature-based solutions, to provide funding for actionable climate research that can be used by SLTT partners to design and build innovative mitigation projects which address the impacts of climate change. By investing in mitigation, our Federal and SLTT partners will be better prepared for future extreme weather events and be able to recover faster at the individual and community level.

FEMA is also working to ensure that communities are protected financially as well as physically from flooding. Flood insurance policies through the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) can help households fill a financial void when a disaster occurs and better rebuild their lives in its aftermath. For the first time in nearly 50 years, FEMA will update the NFIP pricing methodology to communicate flood risk more clearly so households can make more informed decisions on risk, insurance, and mitigation actions to protect against the perils of flooding and climate change. These changes will also fix long-standing inequities in flood insurance pricing by more closely aligning insurance premiums to the specific flood risk of each home. The fiscal year 2022 budget also proposes a means-tested affordability proposal.

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has represented an important turning point for our country, and challenges us to rethink our systems, decisions, and investments. This past year has not been easy, and I would like to recognize the professionalism, resilience, and perseverance demonstrated by the FEMA workforce and our partners. As we look to the challenges ahead, I look forward to working with the Members of this committee as we build a more ready and resilient Nation. Thank you for this opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions.

Chairman THOMPSON. I thank the administrator for her testimony. I will remind each Member that he or she will have 5 minutes to question the witness. I will now recognize myself for questions.

Madam Administrator, you talked about the workforce and what you are looking to do to enhance it. Obviously, you have a number of working disasters on-going right now. Can you just explain to the committee what things you are doing to address worker exhaustion and other things that come with being overtaxed in disasters?

Ms. CRISWELL. Chair Thompson, our FEMA workforce are some of the best public servants that I believe the U.S. Government has and they have been working tirelessly over the last several years in supporting multiple events going back to the hurricanes of Harvey, Irma, and Maria in 2017. What we are seeing is that we no longer have a cycle of—normal seasonal cycle. Our ops tempo, our operational tempo is really consistent around the year. So, the

things that we are doing to address that right now is we are encouraging everybody to make sure that they are taking time for themselves right now, demobilizing staff from some of the current operations supporting COVID-19 and other long-standing recovery disasters so we can make sure that they are ready for the peak of hurricane season and what is expected to also be a very busy wildfire season.

This rotation of readiness to make sure that our staff have the time to take for themselves and reset is a critical part of how we make sure that they are prepared and that we have a workforce that is ready to respond when needed.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you very much. The Ranking Member alluded to some experiences he had in his area, and I talked about one I am currently undergoing in my district in Mississippi. That part of my district, primarily rural, low- to medium-income individuals. Have you looked at FEMA's structure for declaring and approving natural disasters and weighed it based on the population and income of the area? What happens is if a high-income area gets hit, the disaster is covered. But a sparsely-populated rural working-class community that is devastated, somehow doesn't meet the criteria, the dollar amount. Have you looked at that as to what we can do to make sure that those people are not being left out because of their current economic conditions?

Ms. CRISWELL. You know, I have seen first-hand the disproportionate impact that our communities experience and our underserved communities across this country where they struggle day to day struggle even more exponentially when a disaster does strike. You know, one of the things that we did during COVID-19 for the first time was take social vulnerability index, social vulnerability data into our decision making for how we are going to anticipate or provide assistance. I have directed my team to continue this process in how do we now take this equity data that is out there into the decision-making process that we use for future disasters? That is something that we are working right now to figure out how we can institutionalize that so we can really understand the needs of the community as we are making our assessments.

Chairman THOMPSON. I appreciate it. As soon as you can push that information down to State and local so that they understand it too, because they are still operating on the current thinking and not the new way of thinking for addressing disasters. I think it would be very helpful.

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes, sir. Again, our team and our regional administrators work very closely with our State directors. As we continue to mature this process of including this equity data into our analysis, we will make sure that we are getting that information out to our stakeholders and our customers.

Chairman THOMPSON. All right. I have a couple of other questions I will follow up after the hearing with you. The Chair recognizes the Ranking Member for questions.

Mr. KATKO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thanks for asking that question. I just want to follow up with that and illustrate a few examples to help you understand the gravity of the problem. I have a small town called Moravia, New York in my district, and it is at the bottom. It is kind-of surrounded by hills. They had a horren-

dous rain over a long period of time, 8 or 9 inches in a relatively brief period of time, and literally destroyed a good section of the town and destroyed their sewer systems and there are dikes on the roads and everything. It didn't qualify for disaster relief despite the fact that to repair everything it would cost many times more than the town's annual budget. So, that is what I think Mr. Thompson's talking about.

Another example, Lake Ontario. They have had 2 catastrophic floods in the last 4 years. I think you know this because you were a regional administrator up there. Those catastrophic floods caused hundreds of millions of damage to lakefront properties and lakefront communities, yet, it didn't qualify for a disaster declaration. So, I would very much like to spend more time on this perhaps in another setting with the Chairman, and maybe you can sit down with us because this is a very serious problem. You know, obviously the big communities, expensive communities, the beachfront communities, when a hurricane hits, obviously that is a disaster. But when it happens to these small towns from an economic standpoint, the disasters are stunning and they can't recover from them. So, I really would like to talk some more about that going forward because I think FEMA should have some flexibility with respect to that.

Ms. CRISWELL. Ranking Member Katko, we really have an opportunity right now, you know, as we have learned so much in our response to COVID-19 and seeing the impacts that our underserved communities have. We do have an opportunity right now to reflect on that see what we can do to incorporate better assessment methodologies into the way we determine disasters going forward. So, I would appreciate the opportunity to continue to have that discussion. I recognize that from my time in Colorado as well where these rural communities have a harder time meeting thresholds. So, I am happy to continue that conversation and learn from what we have experienced over the last few years.

Mr. KATKO. Yeah, let's do that and let us know if it is something that can be done through your internal rulemaking or just internal procedures or whether it is something that needs a legislative fix. Because if it is a legislative fix, I am sure Mr. Thompson and I can craft something together. So, thank you.

I am going to switch gears for a bit and talk about, you know, this Nation-wide disaster declaration. Because now that it has happened, I think it is going to happen again, right, at some point. You know, when they start using FEMA for stuff like this, they may use it again more. So, I think it is really important that the initial assessment report that was done in September 2020 about COVID, has it been updated? If it hasn't, I think it is really important that it should be. So, can you tell me if the initial assessment report from September 2020 about COVID-19 has been updated at all or do you plan to update it?

Ms. CRISWELL. So, FEMA did an initial assessment report prior to me getting here that really started to capture what I would call, you know, the initial lessons learned from our response. We are undergoing a more thorough assessment of the overall response as far as FEMA's role is concerned. So, we will be releasing something when that is completed.

Mr. KATKO. Do you have an idea what a time line is for that?

Ms. CRISWELL. I do not have a time line for that, but I am happy to get back to you with where we are at in the progress.

Mr. KATKO. I think it is going to be important because it was a sea change in how FEMA was implemented Nation-wide and I want to make sure that we are giving you the resources and the tools you need. We can't have that unless we see a candid internal assessment and I hope that is what we see.

So, last in a hearing with this committee on the COVID-19 pandemic in February, one of the witnesses was from my county, Onondaga County Executive Brian McMahon. He testified to the struggles that many officials faced. He specifically testified to the challenge that he faced given the fact that resource allocations pursuant to the disaster declaration in many cases are dictated by the State. New York State was kind-of like the Governor's office called all the shots. I think a disproportionate share went to some communities. Again, to reinforce Mr. Thompson's point, rural communities and up-State communities that were less affluent really struggled to get a proportionate share of the FEMA resources, the vaccinations, the personal protective equipment, and what have you. So, I don't know if you experience that elsewhere, but can FEMA engage more with local officials? How can FEMA engage more with local officials on the front lines for future crises? I would ask you maybe take that into consideration when you are doing your assessment report because some States did a very good job of proportionally handing out things. Other States were just left to their devices and Governors and politics. The distribution was not proportional. So, if you could maybe comment on that if you comment. If not, take a look at that in your initial assessment report follow-up?

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes. I have been a local emergency manager in New York City as well as in a Aurora, Colorado. You know, I understand the struggles of working through the State to obtain FEMA assistance. So, I appreciate your comment and understand your concerns. As we continue our process of evaluating how we deliver programs we will certainly take that into consideration.

Mr. KATKO. I would appreciate that. Thank you very much. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you. The Chair now recognizes other Members for questions they may wish to ask the witness. I will recognize Members in order of seniority, alternating between Majority and Minority. Members are reminded to unmute themselves when recognized for questioning and to then mute themselves once they have finished speaking, and to leave their cameras on so they are visible to the Chair. The Chair recognizes for 5 minutes the gentlewoman from Texas, Ms. Jackson Lee.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Good morning to our new administrator and congratulations for the historic moment that we find ourselves in with you as leading one of the most outstanding emergency disaster organizations in the world. I am delighted to have the opportunity to work with you having served on the Homeland Security Committee since 9/11 and having a great respect for the men and women of FEMA.

Before I start, let me offer my deepest sympathy and concern to our friends and neighbors in Surfside, Florida in the Miami-Dade area. Thank you for being present in that area. Obviously, the Members of Congress from that area will also be raising areas of concern. But we certainly hope FEMA is at its maximum in helping that community.

FEMA's responsibility is to prepare for, prevent, respond, and recover from disasters with a vision of a Nation prepared. As you well know, I live in the Gulf, and I have experienced my neighbors with Katrina taking a quarter of a million people from Louisiana into Texas, and as well, Hurricane Harvey. My first question would be about how much would the fiscal year 2022 budget's 14 percent increase in the number of FEMA's Stafford Act employees close the gap between the agency's workforce and the employees the Agency needs in order to competently meet the challenges ahead?

Ms. CRISWELL. Thank you for that question. You know, the 14 percent increase is going to begin to close the gap. What we are doing right now is really assessing what is the FEMA that the Nation needs and deserves? Then trying to determine, you know, what would that structure look like to support that? You know, as I mentioned earlier, we are seeing a year-round cycle of disasters and the tempo that we are deploying to is much more consistent. So, I have directed my team to conduct this assessment so we can evaluate, you know, what is the appropriate level of staffing to make sure that we can meet these incidents that are now happening much more frequently?

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Thank you for that. Let me acknowledge the region that I am in, Region 6, and the leadership that is there. I appreciate Tony. I appreciate your leadership in headquarters and Jason Nelson who have been consistent and a very wonderful liaison to all of us.

I want to ask the question. Will State and local governments that have a history of dealing with climate emergencies and are projected to continue to experience the brunt of climate change impact be prioritized for competitive grants? As we lost 151 people in the freeze, I would be interested in that.

I just want to give my last two questions. I would like you to comment on the work that FEMA is doing with the unaccompanied children that are at the border since I know that we were engaged with them and some of the issues of site selection. Then I would like to have the response, a 2019 University of Colorado report found that in wake of Hurricane Harvey, homeowners who lived on blocks with the greatest share of non-White residents as well as lower incomes and credit scores had a lower chance of getting approved for FEMA grants. Many of those are my constituents. They still are desperate with blue tarps. I just recently visited Louisiana in their storms. So, I would be interested in the answers to those questions as quickly as possible. I look forward to following up with you.

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes, ma'am. In response to the competitive nature of the grants. We have such an opportunity right now to invest in the reduction of risks that we are starting to see from climate change. One of the parts of our grant process is to be able to discuss the risks that communities face. So, that is part of the consid-

eration for the competitive grant process. But incredibly important that we work with our communities to help them understand what their risks are so they can communicate that when they do apply for assistance or for the grants. I mean, we are doing targeted technical assistance to help with that and make sure communities can think bigger about how they can improve and reduce the impacts that they are facing.

On the unaccompanied children, FEMA's role is to coordinate. Our specialty and our expertise is to coordinate across the Federal Government and bring appropriate stakeholders together and that is what we were asked to do in support of that mission for HHS. We currently have less than 7 people on the ground supporting that mission. Our role was really designed to give additional assistance to HHS as they were standing up their operation. We have scaled back appropriately as they were able to take on some of that responsibility.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Then what about not getting fair distribution for poor neighborhoods?

Ms. CRISWELL. Oh, yes, ma'am. Again, as I talked about earlier, you know, our underserved communities across the country when they get hit by a disaster it is even more devastating for them. One of the things that I have realized through my time both at the local level and then coming back to FEMA is that I believe one of the problems is ensuring people have equal access to our programs as well. That they understand how to get the assistance that they need. So, I have directed my team here to look at some of the barriers to the access so we can make sure that individuals that are eligible for assistance get all of the assistance that they are eligible for. The fact that it takes them longer or they don't understand the process is not OK. We need to make sure that we are bringing our services to the communities and helping them get the assistance that they need.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Thank you. I want to specifically work with you on that. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Louisiana for 5 minutes, Mr. Higgins.

Mr. HIGGINS. I thank the Chairman and the Ranking Member for holding this hearing, and to Administrator Criswell for being here today. After a year of devastating natural disasters, southwest Louisiana, I am honored to represent, continues to face dire recovery needs. Almost a year after Hurricane Laura's landfall, my constituents are still deep in the rebuilding process and facing new uncertainty as another hurricane season has already begun.

The Federal Government is largely responsible for that uncertainty. Let me explain. Louisiana's Governor issued a formal request to the Biden administration in January for supplemental disaster relief. My office has pushed this request in every way through every channel. However, President Biden and Speaker Pelosi respectfully have been somewhat of an obstacle to the swift approval of supplemental disaster funding for Louisiana. The Speaker's office took some responsibility for this delay recently in a media interview stating that the Democratic Congress and the Biden administration are going to "consider the need for supplemental disaster funding for Louisiana."

May I say that we are beyond the time for consideration. It has been 10 months. President Biden visited Lake Charles and we thank him for that. He was not there to survey damages, but it would have been impossible to miss those damages. We have repeatedly communicated Louisiana's extreme needs to the Biden White House and to Madam Speaker Pelosi. Yet, no effort from Democratic leadership has been made to move forward with the supplemental disaster bill. Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent to submit for the record, several letters from stakeholders in southwest Louisiana and the Lake Charles area, the city of Lake Charles, McNeese State University, New Orleans International Airport, West Calcasieu Airport, and others. I ask unanimous consent.

Chairman THOMPSON. Without objection, so ordered.
[The information follows:]

LETTERS SUBMITTED BY HONORABLE CLAY HIGGINS

LETTER FROM SOUTHLAND FIELD—WEST CALCASIEU AIRPORT

June 17, 2021.

Rep. CLAY HIGGINS,
LA-03, Lake Charles, LA 70601.

RE: West Calcasieu Parish Airport (Southland Field Airport), Tim LaFleur, Manager, 7000 Southland Field Rd. Sulphur, LA 70665.

DEAR REPRESENTATIVE HIGGINS: As you well know, we along with others in the southwest Louisiana area were devastated by Hurricane Laura in 2020. Our damages were so severe we had to ask FEMA to assist us in rebuilding our airport. To date we have worked tirelessly to get and keep our airport running. The FEMA process is so taxing we hired a consultant company (CSRS) to assist with the process. They too have worked tirelessly to submit the necessary and required paperwork to our FEMA representative, Timothy Bolt. This process has been futile. We have not received any funding because none of the required forms filed have been forwarded to the appropriate offices. Our last conference call on Tuesday, 06/15/2021, was so bad. Timothy Bolt was rude and talked very bad about the paperwork we submitted and was very disrespectful to one of the CSRS representatives. Finally, Ms. Darla Dickerson (FEMA) joined the conference call and explained some of the process to us. We are very disappointed in the FEMA representatives and are disappointed in the process. We have several project numbers that FEMA has assigned, and I will list them below.

These are the project numbers and a description of what they entail.

Project 158828—Debris Removal.—We have had debris removed from the airport and the 3 large hangars that were destroyed removed.

Project 158830—Generator Costs.—We worked on generators for approximately 2 months and personnel had to be paid to fuel and service the generators.

Project 158887—Temporary Facility No. 1 & Generator.—Our main terminal office building was destroyed, and we had a temporary building brought in for us to operate out of. We had no power and had to operate from generator till Entergy could run permanent power. We will be using the temporary building till the new terminal is built.

Project 184707—Temporary Facility No. 2.—Our terminal was approximately 6,000 square feet. The first building we leased is approximately 600 square feet. We need additional room to operate out of.

Project 185529—Airport Lights Generator.—The storm destroyed the lighting power grid. The airport has a back-up generator for the runway lighting. The generator ran till the main power grid came back on-line.

Project 182668—Airport Road.—Flying debris hit the road and damaged it.

Project 158833—Hangar A.—This hangar was a 12,000-square-foot hangar that was destroyed.

Project 170055—Hangar B.—This hangar was approximately 6,500-square-foot hangar and was destroyed.

Project 170056—Hangar C.—This hangar was a 12,000-square-foot hangar that was destroyed.

Project 158836—Electrical Vault Building.—The roof was ripped off this building and it houses numerous electrical components that power the runway lighting. We had this repaired as an emergency.

Project 158835—T-Hangars E, F, H, I, and maintenance barn.—All the T-hangars sustained damage and are currently occupied by tenants. The rent has been reduced to the damaged hangars, which is costing the airport income.

Project 158837—Contents and Equipment.—Due to the severity of the damage, the airport lost almost all the contents of the terminal building and main hangars.

Project 158832—Terminal.—This is the main building that the main offices of the airport operate from. We are currently using small temporary trailers.

Project 158838—Runway Lighting.—We lost numerous lighting equipment from flying debris. This has all been replaced or repaired.

Project 158862—Airport Fencing.—Over 8,000 feet of fencing has been destroyed because of the hurricane. This poses a security issue and a wildlife management problem. Our main entry gate was an electronic pass gate, since the storm, we had to remove the chain and it is not locked. The person entering the airport must open the gate then latch it back in place each time. Other areas of the airport have no fencing at all, we had to stack items in the way to keep people from just driving onto the airfield.

Thank you for your concern and if you need any additional information, please feel free to contact me.

TIM LAFLEUR,
Airport Manager, Southland Field Airport.

LETTER FROM CHENNAULT INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

April 16, 2021.

RHA.Help@la.gov, State of Louisiana, Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness.

RE: Late Entry for Public Assistance

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN: Chennault International Airport Authority has just been informed that our insurance carrier is separating damages from Hurricane Laura over to Hurricane Delta. We originally thought additional drying in after Hurricane Delta would be charged to Hurricane Laura.

Chennault is requesting permission to submit a late entry for Public Assistance for Hurricane Delta due to the changes with our insurance carrier. Your assistance with this matter will be greatly appreciated.

Respectfully,

W. KEVIN MELTON,
Executive Director.

cc: Jeanne Savoy, Applicant Liaison.
Loretta Hanks, CIAA.

6/24/2021

Projects | Grants Portal

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Chernault International Airport
Authority (019-URY7A-00)

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	Project #	Category	Type	# Damages	Best Available C
🔍	179206	E - Buildings and Equipment	Standard	11	\$2,460,078.00
🔍	179205	E - Buildings and Equipment	Standard	10	\$4,946,265.00
🔍	164202	B - Emergency Protective Measures	Work Completed / Fully Documented	1	\$350,000.00
🔍	176890	A - Debris Removal	Work Completed / Fully Documented	1	\$4,000,000.00
🔍	179073	E - Buildings and Equipment	Standard	6	\$15,352,192.00

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https://grantee.fema.gov/projects

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6/24/2021		Projects Grants Portal				
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Dashboard My Organization Chenault International Airport Authority (019-UR77A-00) Profile Personnel Applicant Event Profiles Exploratory Calls Recovery Scoping Meetings Damages Work Order Requests Work Orders Projects My Post-Award Ops My Tasks Calendar Utilities Intelligence «		179034	E - Buildings and Equipment	Standard	1	\$10,000.00
		179207	E - Buildings and Equipment	Standard	10	\$4,359,193.00
		179058	E - Buildings and Equipment	Standard	10	\$5,353,708.00
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https://grants.fema.gov/projects		2/2				

LETTER FROM THE CITY OF LAKE CHARLES

June 17, 2021.

DIRECTOR CRISWELL: The city of Lake Charles asks for your consideration of the following:

1. 90 days (instead of 30 days) at 100 percent.—Category A (Debris) and B (Emergency Protective Measures) for the city of Lake Charles Southwest Louisiana has experienced four disasters in 9 months, five in 12 months if you include COVID-19. The unusual series of events has had an extraordinary financial impact that would be lessened by a decision to extend the 100 percent reimbursement period to a full 90 days. The city will incur over \$140 million in Category A & B costs and is faced with at least \$12 million in local match costs. The current approval periods are as follows for the State:

- Category B: continuous 30-day period of Aug 28, 2020–Sept 26, 2020.
- Category A: continuous 30-day period of Oct 14, 2020–Nov 12, 2020.

Lake Charles respectfully requests Aug 28, 2020–Nov 26, 2020 for both A & B, considering at a minimum the impact of multiple disasters, and localized impacts (see 44 CFR § 206.48).

2. *Request for dedicated support.*—The City has built a productive working relationship with our PDMG (Lisa McDonald), but she currently is assigned to multiple applicants. The size and complexity of the Lake Charles disasters warrants a full time dedicated PDMG, and we respectfully request Ms. McDonald.

3. *Private Property Debris Program.*—Need assistance with eligibility interpretations.

Lake Charles has received authorization from FEMA for the program to reimburse eligible demolition of residential and commercial structures (May 27, 2021). Lake Charles, as a routine action, uses its authority to condemn and demolish unsafe residential and commercial property. This program averages at most 25 properties a year. The city has identified over 750 properties as a result of Laura damage, and more are expected from the recent May floods. The initial opinion of FEMA was that only properties with “ . . . imminent threat of collapse” are allowed for reimbursement. The city disagrees with this policy interpretation and needs assistance as this “ . . . disaster is of such severity and magnitude that effective response is beyond the capabilities of United for Progress and Prosperity [the city of Lake Charles] and that Federal assistance is necessary.” Furthermore, although properties identified may not be in a state of “imminent danger of collapse,” the identified structures are in need of demolition for the “public interest.” These properties have been determined as a threat to public health and safety, and, at a minimum, are predominately located in historically disadvantaged neighborhoods and these damaged structures threaten the economic recovery of the community at large. They will fester and affect property values and morale within the community.

4. *Eligibility and Urgent Drainage Repairs.*—Request senior guidance and policy positions for efficient consideration of eligibility for drainage cleaning and repair.

A significant contributing factor of the recent May 2021 flooding and anticipated flooding from summer rains and future storms this year is the capacity impacts caused by debris and sedimentation to our drainage system arising from the multiple disasters. The recent flooding is a warning sign and has caused the city and the Parish to take immediate action including a bond issuance to fund the work. Over the coming weeks we are working out the eligibility of certain work with FEMA but expect many disputes over which storm caused which debris, the imminent threat posed by each element when a more appropriate consideration should be the combined impact of multiple occurrences collectively disrupting the capacity and effectiveness of our drainage.

5. *Public Buildings damaged over 50 percent.*—Recommendation to re-evaluate and streamline policy and guidance that causes inordinate delay.

The city has many buildings that were destroyed by Laura that have yet to obtain final approval from FEMA for demolition (see attached photos as examples). Despite the very cooperative and strong FEMA team working with the city, the steps required to obtain approval from FEMA to demolish buildings has taken an inordinately long time to complete. We would not suggest that our current plan be disrupted by change at this point but we find this process unnecessarily cumbersome and worthy of revision.

6. *FEMA should open an appeals center in Lake Charles, LA.*—And help any/all registrants appeal their awards where appropriate.

Recent reporting in the NYT show LA survivors are receiving less assistance than they should.

- <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/07/climate/FEMA-race-climate.htm>.*—SBP has helped 29 families submit appeals, 11 have been approved and 18 are still in process. None have been denied. We think this is due to the interim/phone call inspection method. FEMA phone-call inspections were a natural response to COVID-19, but the policy is driving worse outcomes/less assistance for survivors vs their actual needs.
- We are not asking for anything outside FEMA’s authority. We simply ask FEMA to help more survivors receive all the assistance they are eligible for by openly endorsing the appeals process and assisting survivors in a more dedicated way for the city/region.
- CDBG-DR funds won’t come for a long time, and people need help immediately. We are heading into the depths of Hurricane Season and accessing

proper assistance from FEMA is the only option for many of the most vulnerable survivors.
Respectfully,

NICHOLAS E. HUNTER,
Mayor, City of Lake Charles.

MCNEESE STATE UNIVERSITY DECLARATION NO. DR-4559

Damaged Facility	Project No.	Complete Project Total
President's Residence	164666—(DI No. 418292)	\$774,664.00
University Police	165730—(DI No. 418317)	\$903,774.00
Miller Building	164666—(DI No.—418289)	\$1,084,990.00
Student Union Annex Pavillion	164666—(DI No.—444071)	\$80,894.00
Observatory	164666—(DI No.—418217)	\$240,680.00
Baseball Fieldhouse	170837—(DI No.—418220)	\$679,566.00
Holbrook Student Union	164666—(DI No.—418277)	\$3,546,991.00
Farrar Hall	164189—(DI No.—418257)	\$17,917,754.00
Bookstore	164666—(DI No.—418223)	\$1,107,670.00
Memorial Gym	164666—(DI No.—418288)	\$2,703,424.00
Post Office	164666—(DI No.—418318)	\$455,481.00
Sale St. Apartments No. 1	164666—(DI No.—418297)	\$1,196,024.00
Sale St. Apartments No. 2	164666—(DI No.—418298)	\$868,959.00
Student Services	164666—(DI No.—418312)	\$959,286.00
Baseball Canopy	175030—(DI No.—418238)	\$383,477.00
TOTAL		\$32,903,634.00

WEST CALCASIEU PORT		FEMA PROJECTS	
Project #	Category	Title	Type
188157	D - Water Control Facilities	Water line damaged	Work Completed / Fully Documented
160575	E - Buildings and Equipment	VLS Office Building (1	Standard
161819	E - Buildings and Equipment	Two Office Buildings	Standard
160567	D - Water Control Facilities	Port Silt Removal	Standard
160576	E - Buildings and Equipment	Port Equipment	Standard
164573	E - Buildings and Equipment	Orion Building	Standard
160568	A - Debris Removal	OPER90 - Debris Ren	Work Completed / Fully Documented
160573	E - Buildings and Equipment	Gates Fuel Services	Standard
160577	E - Buildings and Equipment	Fencing, Gate, Signa	Standard
Best Available			
Federal Share Cost			
		\$3,178	
		\$525,000	
		\$56,625	
		\$1,203,750	
		\$9,000	
		\$112,500	
		\$112,500	
		\$112,500	
		\$7,500	
		\$2,142,553	

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. These letters are regarding major concerns with FEMA following last year's natural disasters, as well as I have several letters sent to Congressional leadership out of my office and the White House on the issue. I ask unanimous consent to submit those letters for the record, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman THOMPSON. Without objection so ordered.
[The information follows:]

LETTERS SUBMITTED BY HON. CLAY HIGGINS

May 18, 2021.

The Honorable JOSEPH BIDEN,
President of the United States, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20500.

PRESIDENT BIDEN: Nearly 9 months have passed since Hurricanes Laura and Delta devastated Southwest Louisiana. Two major hurricanes hitting the same parishes a month apart presented significant challenges and requires an extended, large-scale recovery effort. On May 17, 2021, the area again experienced torrential rainfall that resulted in significant flooding for homes and businesses. These new floods present new challenges to families that have still not recovered or been made whole from the 2020 hurricanes. As these communities continue to rebuild and recover, they will need continued assistance from the Federal Government.

Congress and the Federal Government have worked together to provide resources to support housing and rental assistance, utility repairs, debris removal, hazard mitigation, and many other disaster response costs. You delivered increased Federal assistance in the form of a 100 percent Federal cost-share for 30 days and a 90 percent Federal cost-share for remaining Hurricane Laura public assistance program expenses. These Federal commitments have greatly eased the financial burden for local governments.

While these efforts help address Southwest Louisiana's immediate needs, there is a need for long-term recovery resources for the region, especially in light of this major rain flooding event. Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards wrote to you in January 2021 with a request for additional funding for hurricane recovery and mitigation efforts, which my office supports.

For 9 months, the Louisiana delegation has been working to build support in Congress for supplemental disaster relief. As you know, supplemental disaster relief programs greatly streamline direct access to recovery monies for local governments, small businesses, and individuals. I respectfully urge you to expedite a request to Congress for a disaster supplemental to provide the region with specific funding for the CDBG Disaster Recovery Grants, as well as additional funds for mitigation efforts.

I respectfully urge you to swiftly implement a supplemental disaster relief plan that provides for the many thousands of severely impacted Americans in Southwest Louisiana.

Respectfully,

CLAY HIGGINS,
Member of Congress.

August 28, 2020.

President DONALD J. TRUMP,
The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20500.

PRESIDENT TRUMP: We write to you today in support of a major disaster declaration for the State of Louisiana in the wake of Hurricanes Laura and Marco. The damage caused by these storms will have long-lasting effects on the people of Louisiana and its economy.

As you know, during the early morning hours of August 27, 2020, Hurricane Laura made landfall in Cameron Parish, Louisiana near the Louisiana-Texas State line. The storm continued moving north bringing over 100 mph winds into populated areas, which caused devastating property losses. State and local capabilities are overwhelmed not only by the current emergency, which occurred against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, but from existing damage from Tropical Storm Cristobal and Hurricane Marco that impacted the same region this hurricane season. These events have placed tremendous stress on precious emergency response

resources, and we ask that you consider these extenuating circumstances when allocating Public and Individual Assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

The Governor of the State of Louisiana, John Bel Edwards, has made a formal request for a declaration to include the Louisiana Parishes of Allen, Beauregard, Calcasieu, Cameron, Jefferson Davis, Acadia, Vermilion, Catahoula, Grant, La Salle, Natchitoches, Rapides, Sabine, Vernon, Winn, Bienville, Claiborne, Red River, Caldwell, Jackson, Lincoln, Ouachita, and Union. With the issuance of a major disaster declaration, and the authorization of public and individual assistance, the full weight of the Federal Government can be deployed into the affected areas to assist those in need and begin rebuilding.

Again, we respectfully request that the Federal Government issue a major disaster declaration for the State of Louisiana. As elected officials, we must do all we can to assist affected Americans in their time of need. These resources must be quickly made available to equip our State and local governments to respond rapidly and effectively to Hurricanes Laura and Marco.

Sincerely,

BILL CASSIDY, M.D.,
U.S. Senate.

JOHN KENNEDY,
U.S. Senate.

CLAY HIGGINS,
United States Congressman.

STEVE SCALISE,
United States Congressman.

GARRET GRAVES,
United States Congressman.

RALPH ABRAHAM,
United States Congressman.

CEDRIC RICHMOND,
United States Congressman.

MIKE JOHNSON,
United States Congressman.

September 08, 2020.

President DONALD J. TRUMP,
The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20500.

PRESIDENT TRUMP: Thank you for your recent visit to Louisiana to view the devastation left in the wake of Hurricane Laura and for your quick issuance and subsequent amendments to the Major Disaster Declaration for the State of Louisiana (FEMA-4559-DR-LA.) I am writing today to ask that you use your authority to proactively grant a cost share adjustment for the Public Assistance portion of the Declaration to help communities already experiencing a significant decrease in revenue due to COVID-19.

As you know, during the early morning hours of August 27, 2020, Hurricane Laura made landfall in Cameron Parish, Louisiana near the Louisiana-Texas State line. The storm continued moving north bringing over 100 mph winds into populated areas well into northern portions of the State, which caused devastating property losses. State and local capabilities were already stretched to the limits by the extreme economic impact triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 impact has placed tremendous stress on precious emergency response resources and have diminished local and State revenue sources, issues that have been exacerbated by Hurricane Laura.

I have complete faith that our Governor will navigate Louisiana through the recovery effort and ultimately he deserves our full support in that daunting task. This request reflects my personal support for our local and State government entities as we struggle through recovery from unprecedented storm damage. Granting a cost share adjustment for Public Assistance funds recognizes that the scale of the current declared disaster, added to the extreme negative economic effects of COVID-19, leave our State and local governments unable to absorb 25 percent of the recovery costs. Therefore, I ask that you take into account the devastating impact of hurricane Laura, in conjunction with the economic damage caused by COVID-19 shutdowns and consider a cost share adjustment to 90 percent Federal share.

Thank you again your commitment to making Louisiana whole. I look forward to continuing to work with you and your Administration to ensure that Louisiana has the resources it needs to recover from the devastation caused by Hurricane Laura.

Respectfully,

CLAY HIGGINS,
Member of Congress.

April 15, 2021.

Honorable NANCY PELOSI,
Speaker of the House of Representatives, U.S. Capitol, Washington, DC 20515.

SPEAKER PELOSI: Nearly 8 months have passed since Hurricanes Laura and Delta devastated Southwest Louisiana. Two major hurricanes hitting the same parishes a month apart presented significant challenges and requires an extended, large-scale recovery effort. As these communities continue to rebuild and recover, they will need continued assistance from the Federal Government.

Congress and the Federal Government have worked together to provide resources to support housing and rental assistance, utility repairs, debris removal, hazard mitigation, and other disaster response costs. Both President Trump and President Biden delivered increased Federal assistance in the form of 100 percent Federal cost-share for 30 days and 90 percent Federal cost-share for remaining Hurricane Laura public assistance program expenses. These Federal commitments have greatly eased the financial burden for local governments.

While the above efforts help Southwest Louisiana's immediate needs, we also recognize the importance of long-term recovery resources for the region. Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards and Louisiana local officials have asked Congress to appropriate additional funding for hurricane recovery and mitigation efforts. We support this recent request, and Louisiana's congressional delegation continues to stand united behind Southwest Louisiana's long-term recovery needs.

For months, the Louisiana delegation has been working to build support in Congress for supplemental disaster relief. Though our disaster recovery amendments to the most recent COVID-19 spending bill were blocked, I remain hopeful that we can advance additional support through Congress in a bipartisan manner. This is needed to provide relief for Southwest Louisiana and other communities hit by major disasters in 2020, including those damaged in the California wildfires.

As a community, we will continue working with all our local, State, and Federal partners to prioritize the needs of Southwest Louisiana. I respectfully urge you to swiftly implement a supplemental disaster relief plan that provides for the thousands of severely impacted Americans in Southwest Louisiana.

Respectfully,

CLAY HIGGINS,
Member of Congress.

October 9, 2020.

President DONALD J. TRUMP,
The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20500.

PRESIDENT TRUMP: Thank you for your visit to Louisiana to view the devastation left in the wake of Hurricane Laura and for your quick issuance of the Major Disaster Declaration for the State of Louisiana (FEMA-4559-DR-LA) and its subsequent amendments. We are writing today to ask that you use your authority under Section 1232 of the Disaster Recovery Reform Act to adjust the Public Assistance cost share portion of the Declaration. This will ensure that communities already experiencing a decrease in revenue due to COVID-19 and the compounding impact of a particularly harsh storm season along the Gulf Coast will have the resources to participate in FEMA's disaster recovery programs.

As you know, during the early morning hours of August 27, 2020, Hurricane Laura made landfall in Cameron Parish, Louisiana near the Louisiana-Texas State line. As the storm moved inland, it brought greater than 100 mph winds into populated areas well into the northern parishes of Louisiana, which resulted in devastating property losses. Current estimates on the cost of the damage from Hurricane Laura range from \$8 billion to \$12 billion and will undoubtedly continue to grow over the next several years. Further complicating the rebuilding efforts is Hurricane Delta, which is projected to follow a similar path to Hurricane Laura. Hurricane Delta is the sixth tropical storm to affect Louisiana this year and threatens to bring additional turmoil to an already devastated region.

Even prior to Hurricane Laura's landfall, State and local emergency response capabilities were stretched to the limits by the COVID-19 pandemic, Tropical Storm Cristobal, and Hurricane Marco. Section 1232 of the Disaster Recovery Reform Act, which you signed into law in 2018, instructed FEMA to consider the severe local impact created by multiple disasters or emergencies occurring in close geographical and chronological proximity when making recommendations regarding a major disaster declaration. These events have placed tremendous stress on precious emergency response resources and have diminished local and State revenue sources, exacerbating the physical destruction left in the wake of Hurricane Laura.

Granting a cost share adjustment for Public Assistance funds recognizes that the scale of current declared disaster, the negative economic effects of COVID-19, and the damage done by previous storms may be too great for State and local governments to absorb 25 percent of the recovery costs. Therefore, we ask that your administration not consider each impact in a vacuum but instead take into account the cumulative impacts of these storms, in conjunction with the economic damage caused by COVID-19 and grant the State of Louisiana a larger share of Federal funding.

Thank you again your commitment to getting Louisiana back on its feet. We look forward to continuing to work with you and your Administration to ensure that Louisiana has the resources it needs to recover from the devastation caused by Hurricane Laura.

Respectfully,

BILL CASSIDY, M.D.
United States Senator.

JOHN KENNEDY,
United States Senator.

CLAY HIGGINS,
United States Congressman.

STEVE SCALISE,
United States Congressman.

RALPH ABRAHAM, M.D.,
United States Congressman.

GARRET GRAVES,
United States Congressman.

MIKE JOHNSON,
United States Congressman.

CEDRIC RICHMOND,
United States Congressman.

October 14, 2020.

President DONALD J. TRUMP,
The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20500.

PRESIDENT TRUMP: I write to you today in support of a major disaster declaration for the State of Louisiana in the wake of Hurricane Delta. The damage caused by this storm, as well as the already existing devastation in the region caused by Hurricane Laura, will have long-lasting effects on the people of Louisiana and its economy.

As you know, on October 9, 2020, Hurricane Delta made landfall at Creole, Louisiana, just east of where Hurricane Laura first touched the State. The storm continued moving north bringing high winds and heavy rains into populated areas, which caused devastating property losses. State and local capabilities are overwhelmed not only by the current emergency, which occurred against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, but also from existing damage from Tropical Storm Cristobal and Hurricanes Marco and Laura that impacted the same region this hurricane season. These events have placed tremendous stress on precious emergency response resources, and we ask that you consider these extenuating circumstances when allocating Public and Individual Assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

The Governor of the State of Louisiana, John Bel Edwards, has made a formal request for an expedited declaration to include Individual Assistance; and debris removal and emergency protective measures, including direct Federal assistance under the Public Assistance program for Acadia, Calcasieu, Cameron, Jefferson Davis, and Vermilion Parishes; and Hazard Mitigation Statewide. With the Governor's prompt request, the issuance of a major disaster declaration and the author-

ization of public and individual assistance, the full weight of the Federal Government can be deployed into the impacted areas to assist those in need and begin rebuilding.

Again, I respectfully request that the Federal Government issue a major disaster declaration for the State of Louisiana. As elected officials, we must do all we can to assist affected Americans in their time of need. These resources must be quickly made available to equip our State and local governments to respond rapidly and effectively to Hurricanes Laura and Delta.

Respectfully,

CLAY HIGGINS,
United States Congressman.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ms. Criswell, you are familiar with Madison. In Federalist 62, he wrote that it will be of little avail to the people that the laws are made by men of their own choice if the laws be so voluminous and that they cannot be read or so incoherent that they cannot be understood. That is largely reflective of these letters that I just submitted. The people that I represent are begging for help from FEMA to navigate through FEMA's own complexities to access existing funds through existing programs for recovery relief. I ask for your commitment to work with the people of southwest Louisiana to help them navigate through these complexities and to ease their pain. Can I have your commitment from you and agency, Madam, on that?

Ms. CRISWELL. Representative Higgins, absolutely you have my commitment. I recently visited Louisiana and met with the political leadership in southwest Louisiana that were impacted by those storms. We have recently opened up a recovery center that is providing not just assistance to the current storm that was experienced in recent weeks, but also to help them navigate the process for the previous storms as well. So, you have my—

Mr. HIGGINS. I ask—yes, ma'am, and I ask for your commitment there. In the interest of time, in closing I would like to ask for your commitment and assistance to accomplish two things. First, Louisiana delegation has been pushing for the supplemental disaster funding for some time now, many months. I respectfully ask that you amplify that request to President Biden. Second, again, I ask for your assistance with helping local government in my district fully understand the pre-disaster mitigation grant process and other resources that are available to them. I thank you, ma'am, for being here today. I have several questions that I will submit in writing and I very much look forward to working with you. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I yield.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you very much. The Chair yields back. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Rhode Island, Mr. Langevin, for 5 minutes.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good morning, Administrator. I want to thank you for being here today and for making integrated equity into everything FEMA does one of your first priorities. Before, during, and after disasters, people with disabilities as well as older adults, have unique needs, many of which differ substantially from those of the general public. How do you view the incorporation of these vulnerable populations in disaster management of making them a forethought not an afterthought, particularly in terms of your commitment to equity?

Ms. CRISWELL. Representative Langevin, I really appreciate and thank you for your continued advocacy for people with disabilities.

As I have stated, equity is one of my priorities and that includes people with disabilities. And have seen first-hand in the disasters that I have responded to the struggles that this community faces when trying to respond to or recover themselves from disasters.

FEMA has made a lot of strides in that area. In 2009, FEMA established the Office of Disability Integration and Coordination. Through that office, they have done a lot of work to increase our own agency's understanding of how to make sure our programs are accessible and that we are meeting the needs of the people that have specific needs. We continue to deploy disability integration specialists to all of our disasters, specifically to make sure that we are understanding the needs of the community and addressing them. So, you have my commitment to continue forward with that process and I would be happy to work with you and your staff if there are areas where you think we can improve in that effort.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Very good. Thank you, Administrator. I am glad that you recognize the importance of considering the needs of older adults and people with disabilities. I take you up on that offer. I look forward to working with you on that and many other issues.

I do want to call your attention to one other thing, though. There was a 2019 GAO report entitled, and I quote, the title of it was, "FEMA Action Needed to Better Support Individuals Who Are Older or Have Disabilities." It revealed that FEMA partners, including States, territories, localities, and non-profits have experienced challenges assisting these populations. So, are you aware that FEMA has historically struggled to support older adults and people with disabilities during and after disasters in part due to the lack of planning for these populations?

Ms. CRISWELL. Again, Representative, I think that FEMA has done a lot since the development of that program in 2009 in bringing on the disability, Office of Disability Integration and Coordination. I will go back and look at that report more specifically so I better understand some of the challenges that were identified in that report. I apologize, I am not familiar with it. But I think that we all have work that we can do to improve our approach in how we deliver services to make sure that we are planning appropriately for everybody.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Very good. Thank you for your commitment to that and to looking at the report. I appreciate it and I know that FEMA will be doing a much better job under your leadership and I thank you for that.

So, you know, I am currently working with Senator Casey to introduce what we call the READI for Disasters Act. So, this bill will support the development of disaster preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation plans that are inclusive of older adults and people with disabilities by creating a network of centers to provide relevant trainings and technical assistance to State and local governments. It would also expand the National Advisory Committee on Individuals with Disabilities and Disasters so that its membership accurately reflects the diverse characteristics of the disability communities and direct the Department of Justice to review the extent to which civil rights of people with disabilities and older adults are upheld during and after disasters. Do you believe that our bill would help ensure that older adults and people with disabilities are

supported in disaster management? Do you think it would be helpful?

Ms. CRISWELL. I don't have the specifics of the bill, but I know that our staff are working together on the development of this. We are happy to continue to provide technical drafting assistance to help this bill through the legislative process.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you. I would welcome your help on that. I guess last, I wanted to get into, does FEMA have any consideration of cyber-based disasters that would require an IT-focused assistance?

Ms. CRISWELL. FEMA coordinates really closely with CISA at DHS and other members of the emergency management community to increase our preparedness and our understanding of the cyber-related threats. We do also have available \$4 million in fiscal year 2021 grants to support increasing the preparedness for cybersecurity. I know that the fiscal year 2022 budget is going to add 10 additional employees to the FEMA staff to specifically address and strengthen our own cybersecurity posture.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Very good. I know my time has expired but thank you for those answers. I think, you know, if fire and police databases were hijacked by ransomware in some State or region, you know, this would allow FEMA to be able to help supplement IT functions such as communications, planning, and operations until they were back on their feet. So, I think that is important to look at. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.

Chairman THOMPSON. The gentleman yields back. The Chair recognizes North Carolina for 5 minutes, Mr. Bishop.

Mr. BISHOP. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you Administrator Criswell for being with us. You may be aware that North Carolina has been hit repeatedly by damaging hurricanes in recent years, Matthew in 2016, Florence in 2018, Dorian in 2019. FEMA's timely assistance is critical for the recovery efforts from these disasters. However, we continue to see very long wait times in delivery of benefits in the public assistance program. I represent—one of my counties in my district in Robeson County in North Carolina, one of the most economically challenged in North Carolina. It is home, by the way, to most of the members of the Lumbee Indian Tribe, which perhaps coincidentally remains unjustly without fully Federal recognition despite commitments of many to supporting that.

An elementary school and other buildings owned by the Robeson County Public School System there were destroyed in late September 2016 in the first of these 3 storms, Matthew. The school system's public assistance claim remains unresolved and in about 90 days it will be more than—it will be 5 years spanning 3 administrations without even final decision about the amount of public assistance to be provided. FEMA persists in attempting, at least from my perspective, to apply its rule concerning repair versus replacement in a manner contrary to the plain language of that rule.

Like the stature in this saga appeared, I guess, under this administration in just the last several weeks, the Chairman and Ranking Member referred to the disaster declaration processes for rural Americans, but the reference also was made to the public assistance backlog. The public has sort-of become, I guess, even numb

maybe to these stories by now. But this one seems to be an egregious example of this problem. Your testimony, ma'am, said that FEMA intends to integrate equity into everything we do, but that seems to be an empty promise if FEMA is diverting resources, for example, to facilitating the entry of illegal migrants at the Southwest Border despite leaving unaddressed the replacement of a destroyed elementary school and the challenge of an American county for 5 years. What is FEMA's most current assessment of the aging of unresolved public assistance claims from past disasters? How are those being addressed?

Ms. CRISWELL. Thank you, Representative Bishop. It is a really timely conversation. There are, you know, several disasters that are currently open across the country dating back many years. The recovery process as we continue to see more frequent and more severe disasters becomes even more complicated in bringing in multiple different recovery sources to assist with that process. One of the things that we are focused on is trying to make sure that we are helping to increase the capacity of our State and local jurisdictions so they can better manage their recovery processes well, and we can work together to facilitate getting these projects through.

I don't have the specific numbers in front of me to address your question specifically. We can certainly get that to you. But I understand that it is a challenge and under my leadership, we are going to work on how we can start to improve and expedite that process and streamline it so it does not take as long.

Mr. BISHOP. Thank you, ma'am. As long as I am on the subject about your commitment to integrating equity into everything we do, you made reference to FEMA's internal diversity equity and inclusion programming and using the length of equity. Does FEMA use critical race theory concepts and doctrine in internal training of its workforce?

Ms. CRISWELL. Diversity, equity, and inclusion is such an important part of our internal workforce. Being able to have people in leadership positions that they can relate to and they can understand just seeing myself in this position really allows women across the country to see what is possible for them. We will continue to provide anti-harassment training to support our leadership team and also work on ways that we can increase the diversity pool of applicants so we can get more diversity within our leadership.

Mr. BISHOP. Do you know whether you are using critical race theory concepts in that training?

Ms. CRISWELL. We are not using critical race theory concepts. We are using established anti-harassment-type training that has been around for decades.

Mr. BISHOP. Thank you, ma'am. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman THOMPSON. The gentleman yields back. The Chair recognizes the gentlelady from Michigan for 5 minutes, Ms. Slotkin.

Ms. SLOTKIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Administrator, you are welcome here. Congratulations on your confirmation and thanks for taking on this really critical job. I am from Michigan and we have just experienced really extreme flooding and it is still raining there. By some measures, we got 6 months' worth of rain in a day. We got 6 inches of rain in less than 5 hours, and places like Detroit and Dearborn are literally under water. Flooded highways, cars

floating down the highways, flooded basements across the country. Can you just confirm for me if Governor Whitmer submits a proposal to FEMA to declare a National emergency, that you all will move swiftly to confirm it?

Ms. CRISWELL. Representative, I am familiar with the flooding that is currently on-going in Michigan, and Michigan is my home State. It is where I grew up. So, I have a lot of attachment there and all my family still lives there. As they are going through the assessment process right now and they submit a request, I will commit to swiftly assessing that and determining if it meets eligibility.

Ms. SLOTKIN. Great. Well, it makes me feel much better that you are a Michigander. You won't leave us hanging. The second thing is, you know, a lot of the residents who have been hardest hit, a lot of them are seniors. A lot of them do not have access to the internet. I am concerned the claims that they are going to file that you are requiring people to file are going to require facility with the internet. Can you also help us understand your plan if we do have a declaration of an emergency to get boots on the ground, people who can help us go door to door. Time is of the essence. Can you talk to us about that given that not everyone is, you know, fluent in the internet?

Ms. CRISWELL. Absolutely. You know, again, the one thing that we have learned from COVID-19 is that we need to meet people where they are at. We have seen that in other disasters as well. FEMA does have a process here, a team of our workforce that is the Disaster Survivor Assistance teams that, you know, if the disaster is declared, they can go out and help with that in-person approach. You know, I think as we have discussed already, access to the assistance that is available is one of the big barriers that we face and we have to make sure that we are leaning forward into that to eliminate the barrier access and help meet people where they are at to get them the assistance that they are eligible for.

Ms. SLOTKIN. Thank you for that. Then on just the bigger picture, you know, I think everyone who has already asked a question has had to deal with some sort of disaster in their home State, in their home community. We have all experienced them over the past, you know, 5, 10 years. My question, just as someone who used to work at the Pentagon, is really about how FEMA plans. I mean, we know that we are likely to see just separate from politics, an increase in the number of storms, an increase in severity of those storms. We are going to have more historic droughts like we are seeing in the West Coast. So, if we just take that as a National security and homeland security issue, tell me how FEMA is changing your plans for budgets, for staffing. What more can we be helping you with since all of us need FEMA from time to time and that need is going to go up and not down over the next decade.

Ms. CRISWELL. I think the first piece to that question is the fact that we are seeing more severe, more frequent storms that are impacting communities across this country. We have an opportunity right now to make generational-level investments in trying to reduce that risk, reduce the impact that they are feeling from these disasters. That is one of the first steps that I think we need to do as far as the planning piece of this is making sure that we are

working with our communities to help them apply for the mitigation programs that we have to reduce their own impacts so there is not going to be a need to respond.

But as we do respond and until we can get mitigation projects in place, we do want to make sure that we have the appropriate staffing. As I mentioned earlier on this year-round cycle of response now instead of the more traditional peak in the summer, while it still peaks in the summer, our teams are deploying out around the clock now, year-round. So, we are assessing what that looks like for us so we can make a determination on what the right posture is for our workforce, and I am happy to be able to come back to you once we understand better what our needs are and seeking your assistance in helping us get to that level of staffing and support.

Ms. SLOTKIN. Yeah, I think this committee would welcome a really sort-of forward-looking, bold, interesting concept that is appropriate for the disasters that are ahead of us. So, thanks very much. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman THOMPSON. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey, Mr. Van Drew, for 5 minutes.

Mr. VAN DREW. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Ranking Member for holding this hearing today. Administrator Criswell, thank you for being here testifying before the committee. As we all know, FEMA is a critical agency to the Department of Homeland Security. I am grateful for the work that you do and the work that the agency does.

New Jersey, as I am sure you know, is in consistent, constant peril from natural disasters. Superstorm Sandy, for example, caused nearly \$30 billion in economic damages to the State. Obviously, that number does not account for the impact of the storm and the impact the storm had on families who lost loved ones and the countless other tragic implications the storm imposed. Governor Christie stated that at the time, that the damages were going to be almost incalculable. That the devastation on the Jersey Shore is probably going to be the worst we have ever seen. Unfortunately, he was correct.

Natural disasters have life-altering consequences, which is why Members of this committee must ensure that FEMA has the tools and is prepared as it possibly can be to respond. Administrator Criswell, I understand that FEMA—and this is very important to me—is updating the National Flood Insurance Program risk rating methodology through its latest system called Risk Rating 2.0. While the program states that one of its goals is to deliver sound and accurate rates, I am concerned that for many of my constituents they will be forced to either pay much higher rates or move as a result of not being able to pay. Neither of these are viable options, especially because the cost of living in New Jersey, as I think you all know, is just about the highest in the Nation.

Is there a strategy in place to assist residents who will not be able to afford flood insurance as a result of the updated risk rating methodology? As part of this methodology, are we going to try to control the cost as much as we possibly can because flood insurance is so important to so many, yet so very expensive?

Ms. CRISWELL. Representative Van Drew, thank you for that question. You know, under the current pricing system, NFIP policy

holders share the burden to the cost of the insurance premium. Under Risk Rating 2.0, that burden now is going to be shifted to those and based on an individual homeowner's risk. So, under the current system, all policy holders would see an increase in their insurance premiums going forward. Under the new system, those that don't have as high of risk will actually see a decrease in their policies. But there will be some that will have an increase. On your point of are we going to control the cost and make sure that we have an affordable way to do this, this is a new methodology and we are committed to an affordability framework and we have put that in our fiscal year 2022 budget to help homeowners who can't afford this new increase do that.

But we are also doing this in a phased approach. Homeowners that are going to have an increase in their flood insurance rates will not experience an increase until next year, until April of next year, and it is capped at 18 percent per year. Then there is also going to be a maximum cap once they reach the maximum amount of the insurance policy, it will not go up any further after that. But would welcome the opportunity to continue to work with Congress on the affordability framework so we can make sure that everybody can afford the insurance.

Mr. VAN DREW. Well, 18 percent is a whole lot still to me, and I imagine that you would think it is too. You know, concerns me a great deal. It is easy for all of us, you know, to have these conversations here, but obviously, when you get back in your district and you tell people something is going to go up 18 percent at a regular level until a certain point, they are not going to be happy folks. I also know that you know that it is going to be a real interesting conversation because we have been through this before who is really more at-risk or not, and what methodology is used and what parameters are used.

This is an area of continual agitation and concern and, you know, it is important because the economic growth of certain areas of this country and it is not only oceanfront like I have and bayfront, but it is also rivers and other areas as you know. If these folks with everything else that is happening get hit too hard by FEMA and these costs, it is going to be tragic.

So, it is a really, really big issue. I really appreciate your work. I would love you to come to New Jersey some time. I am sure you have been there. Everybody's been in New Jersey at least once. But just see some of the challenges we have and I would be certainly glad to take you around and really show you what is going on. But if there is a concern level from a 0 to 100 on this issue, I am at 100, just to let you know, and so are other people. You don't hear a lot about it now. Wait until those 18 percent increases come forward. You are going to get so much noise it will be unbelievable. New Jersey people are so loud, believe me. I think I have—

Chairman THOMPSON. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. VAN DREW. I yield back my time. It is a pleasure to talk to you.

Chairman THOMPSON. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Missouri, Mr. Cleaver, for 5 minutes.

Mr. CLEAVER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Madam Administrator, for being with us today. The Chairman and Mr. Katko

raised an issue that I am also very much concerned about, so, I won't go through it. I think you are certainly aware, you know, the Missouri River is the longest river system in the country only by a little short 100 miles from the Mississippi River. It is longer than the Mississippi River. So, we are going to have problems every single year. That \$8.9 million damage threshold is a problem. I represent a farming community all along the Missouri River and it is just devastating. You got a town like, you know, probably Aurora with 800 people, and if you would wipe out all of the downtown area, you may not go to \$8.9 million and yet that is how it is devastated. You have already heard that I am not going to bring that up again.

I do need to say, you know, I am not sure what—I am going to try to find out today. I said I was going to do it earlier, whatever this racial theory is, which I have never heard of. I have a master's but I guess, you know, I will try to find out what it is. It is kind-of confusing to me. I heard of it I think about a month ago. I am not sure if FEMA is in charge of racial stuff. I don't know. I don't know if they changed your job description.

But anyway, what I want to talk about though is the vaccination effort in rural communities. As I said, I represent a large rural community in Missouri and they, you know, my rural area is a hot spot, one of the hottest spots in the Nation for COVID-19, particularly as it relates to this new Delta variant. I am hoping that with this dangerous increase in rural America and in my district in particular where I am talking about, can you give us any kind of update on how FEMA is being involved in the local communities with the vaccine distribution?

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes, sir. FEMA has had a strong role in the roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccine and really played a significant part in getting America vaccinated. We did this by supporting over 2,100 community vaccination centers across the country with either resources, funding, or personnel. We also established 39 Federally-run community vaccination centers. The Federally-run centers that we established, we worked really hard and close with the State and local officials to identify where they needed them, where they wanted them placed so we could reach those underserved communities. It is really a success story. Of all of the vaccines that we delivered to these, nearly 60 percent of our vaccines were administered to underserved populations.

All of those centers currently, the Federally-run centers, have been closed. But we are still supporting local jurisdictions through their established centers, as well as mobile vaccination units that we have in different areas and available to deploy. As we see the changes with the Delta variant, if the need arises, FEMA is ready to reestablish any assistance that we need in case we need to continue to get the vaccinations out there.

Mr. CLEAVER. OK. I think my time is probably running down. So, thank you very much. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you very much. The Chair recognizes the gentlelady from Iowa, Mrs. Miller-Meeks, for 5 minutes.

Mrs. MILLER-MEEKS. Thank you, Mr. Chair, also thank you, Ranking Member Katko and Administrator Criswell for being here today. FEMA uses the phrase, locally-executed, State-managed,

and Federally-supported. This concept requires all of us to have actual capability and depth at every single level. In the past, I have asked FEMA as they set up vaccination clinics, the level of their health personnel and emergency personnel. Given that FEMA is not, you know, does not have expertise or scientists or health personnel as part of your personnel, can you explain to me or discuss with me how the chain of command and how the delegation of responsibilities works? Did you work with the Assistant Secretary of Pandemic Response, the CDC, HHS, local public health? Who should be the head agency when we are dealing with a pandemic? Do we need to rethink how, you know, how to score true readiness at the State, local, Tribal, and territorial levels?

Ms. CRISWELL. The phrase that you mentioned, Federally-supported, State-managed, locally-executed, I think is an important concept for us to bring up. All disasters, I have been a local emergency manager, they start and end with the local jurisdiction. That is the locally-executed part. The State and the Federal Government need to be part of that process to make sure that they are successful. The Federal Government does that in a number of ways by making sure that we are increasing their capacity to be able to perform their mission. When it came to supporting the vaccination effort or supporting the COVID-19 response in general, coming from my own experience in New York City, it truly was a collaborative approach of making sure that the Federal Government, while they are supporting, they understood the needs of the local jurisdiction and letting the local jurisdictions set the planning assumptions for them for the assistance that they were going to provide. I think that is a really critical piece of making sure that, again, that the Federal Government is supporting the actual needs on the ground of what the local communities say that they have.

When it comes to the Federal coordination, that is where FEMA is an expert, right? We can bring in all of the Federal partners. We are very good at coordinating the stakeholders and bringing the appropriate people together to support a response. That is what FEMA did during the response to COVID-19. I think we have an opportunity to see where we need to build capacity across the Federal Government for certain disasters when they don't squarely fall into the disaster response role that FEMA typically does, and I would be happy to work with you as we continue to have that conversation.

Mrs. MILLER-MEEKS. Then given the scientific and medical nature of this particular National emergency, who was responsible for the messaging? So, as a physician and a former director of the Iowa State Department of Public Health, there was confusion in the messaging, so, was that responsibility of CDC? Was that the responsibility of ASPR?

Ms. CRISWELL. The messaging was critically important through all this. As you know very well, you know, the stuff we learned about the COVID-19 virus changed on a regular basis. As part of the leadership role that FEMA ended up playing, we had HHS experts and medical experts embedded with us as part of that operation because as you stated, we don't have that level of expertise. So, it was truly a coordinated approach. I would always defer to the

message to be those that are the experts in that message, and then FEMA can help amplify that message.

Mrs. MILLER-MEEKS. Thank you. Then during disasters, FEMA moves resources from unaffected areas to affected areas. However, the COVID-19 pandemic affected the entire Nation almost simultaneously, which led to significant supply shortages of personal protective equipment and other necessary supplies. A report published by FEMA in January found that in order to mitigate further supply shortages, FEMA should establish a long-term strategy for engaging with the private sector. How has FEMA engaged with the private sector to address resource and supply shortfalls?

Ms. CRISWELL. We learned so much through the COVID-19 pandemic and the critical and often fragile nature of our supply chain and where we depend on things. We were able to put in some new methodologies working really closely with the private sector to make sure that we were meeting the needs of first responders. But it is the first time, as you stated with disasters across the country, that we really faced a resource shortage at this level. We are working closely with the private sector to establish better relationships and understand how we can bring them in better.

We can never replace the resources that the private sector brings to bear to support disaster response. So, we need to understand better what their capabilities are. We are having on-going conversations with different sectors across the private sector to make sure that we understand how to get them back up on-line faster, but also how they can support us in our response. Those conversations are on-going.

Mrs. MILLER-MEEKS. Thank you so much. Mr. Chair, I yield back my time.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you very much. The Chair recognizes the gentlelady from New York for 5 minutes, Ms. Clarke.

Ms. CLARKE. Thank you, Chairman Thompson and Ranking Member Katko for holding this critical hearing on the state of our emergency management preparedness. Thank you as well to Administrator Criswell for joining us today offering testimony and let me also congratulate you on your recent confirmation. I know firsthand the excellent hard work and diligence that you have exhibited as our emergency manager commissioner in New York City. I have full confidence that you will lead FEMA with the same steadfast dedication.

As you are aware, the climate crisis is not only an existential threat to our planet, it also presents a major and immediate danger to our communities. Like so many Americans, I watched in horror last year as wildfires and storms ravaged our Nation. Unfortunately, the weather predictions for this year are equally as alarming. Back home in my Congressional district in Brooklyn, New York, many of my constituents are still struggling to recover from the devastating impacts of Superstorm Sandy that flooded people's homes and inflicted permanent damage to our critical infrastructure.

The plain and simple truth is that climate change has fueled a troubling rise in extreme weather disasters and events over recent decades making FEMA's job of protecting Americans more critical, yet more challenging than ever before. That is why I am astonished

that when the Trump administration in 2018 took unprecedented steps to ignore science and remove the term climate change entirely from FEMA's strategic plan. Not even the term sea-level rise made it into the final document. To me, this isn't just a matter of words. Omitting climate change from the strategic plan represents a broader attempt by the previous administration to play with people's lives in the name of partisan politics. Administrator Criswell, under your leadership, what steps is FEMA taking currently to reincorporate climate change into its strategic plan and throughout the agency more broadly?

Ms. CRISWELL. Thank you for that question. We are seeing an incredible rise in the number of disasters, the severity of disasters, and how rapidly they are intensifying like we have never seen before. This is a direct result of our changing climate. We have to be deliberate and brave about our approaches to reducing the impacts that we are seeing from climate change. As I have mentioned, we have a number of mitigation grant programs that are a first step in helping communities reduce future threats and future impacts from climate change. But we are also taking a look at where do we need to be more proactive in our own efforts here? FEMA has established a Climate Enterprise Steering Group composed of components or members from across our agency to take a look at all of our programs to see where we need to be more deliberate and aggressive in our approach to climate change. This group is also part of the DHS Secretary's climate action group, so we can coordinate our efforts. FEMA has a strong role to play in fighting the climate crisis. This is the first step in us being able to accomplish that.

Ms. CLARKE. Thank you. The previous administration's failure to act on climate change is exactly why it is so important that Congress takes bold action now to tackle greenhouse gas emissions and protecting the American public from future climate impacts. That is why I recently introduced legislation with Senator Markey, H.R. 744, the FEMA Climate Change Preparedness Act, which would help FEMA address the natural disaster implications of climate change. Among other provisions, my legislation would direct FEMA to perform an assessment on the natural disaster risks that climate change poses on our Nation, as well as on our capacity to prepare for and mitigate climate impacts. Administrator, is there something that your agency is currently looking into and is this something that your agency is currently looking into and do you think that such a National assessment could be a useful undertaking?

Ms. CRISWELL. I believe that we have an obligation right now to be looking at the future risks that we are going to face. A lot of our efforts, not just at FEMA, but across the emergency management community have often focused on historical risk. But we really have an opportunity and an obligation, frankly, to look at the future risks that we are facing and make sure we understand them and are investing in mitigation to reduce the impacts from those risks. So, I do believe that it is important for all of us to have that mindset as we go forward.

Ms. CLARKE. Well, Administrator, I look forward to speaking to you in depth about this legislation and look forward to supporting your work in this endeavor. With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman THOMPSON. The gentlelady yields back. The Chair recognizes the gentlelady from Tennessee, Mrs. Harshbarger, for 5 minutes. The gentlelady needs to unmute herself. Still not quite hearing you. It says you are unmuted now, maybe you can. We are having some technical difficulties. We will go to Mr. Clyde for 5 minutes.

Mr. CLYDE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this important hearing and thank you, Administrator Criswell. I appreciate you being here and providing the information that you have.

In March of this year, FEMA was deployed to help address the surge in illegal migrants at our Southwestern Border. Secretary Mayorkas has routinely stated that he would not say we have a crisis at the Southern Border, yet he deployed our Nation's emergency response agency, FEMA. So, ma'am, how would you describe the situation at the Southwest Border?

Ms. CRISWELL. FEMA's role in the Southwest Border is, again, part of what we are really good at. We are good at coordinating across Federal agencies. In this case, we came in to help HHS and CBP with the execution of their mission. We only had a very small number of people that deployed in support of this mission and it was from a coordinating standpoint.

Mr. CLYDE. OK. So, but FEMA is only engaged when you have emergencies or crises. Is that not right? So, they would not have been engaged if we didn't have an emergency at the Southwestern Border?

Ms. CRISWELL. Again, FEMA, they are good at coordinating Federal agencies for any type of an event or an incident. We often do this for planned events, as well as disasters or emergency responses. So, it is that coordinating capacity that FEMA brings in to support agencies in helping them establish their operational capability.

Mr. CLYDE. OK. So, would you or would you not call it an emergency at the Southwest Border?

Ms. CRISWELL. Again, FEMA's role was really just to coordinate the Federal Government and the—

Mr. CLYDE. You are not going to answer my question. All right. So, FEMA's budget is already pretty thin, would you agree that the situation at the border has taken away resources from FEMA that could be better utilized elsewhere?

Ms. CRISWELL. The role that FEMA played in that mission was very limited and we never had more than 100 staff deployed at any given time. Currently, we have less than 7 people, or approximately 7 people that are still supporting the coordination. That is a small number of people compared to what we have available.

Mr. CLYDE. OK. So, would your office be willing to provide us a written statement concerning the extent of your agency's mission at the border so that we in the committee can review how the border crisis has impacted your operations?

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes, I will have my staff get that to your team.

Mr. CLYDE. OK, great. So, what funding from FEMA has been allocated to date to address the housing or the processing of illegal migrants? Has any?

Ms. CRISWELL. FEMA is actually getting reimbursed from HHS for our support. There has been no funding allocated from the disaster recovery fund in support of that mission.

Mr. CLYDE. OK. How much has FEMA spent already though?

Ms. CRISWELL. I don't have those numbers. We certainly can add that to the report that we give you.

Mr. CLYDE. OK. There have been articles in the news that the \$86.9 million non-compete DHS contract to Family Endeavors is under a microscope now to see whether or not it was proper. Is FEMA helping ICE, HHS, or any other Government agency with contracts?

Ms. CRISWELL. Sir, I am not familiar with that contract and our role, again, in supporting that mission is to help coordinate the Federal family that is involved.

Mr. CLYDE. OK. All right, with that, that is all the questions I have. I thank you for your support of the crisis at the Southern Border. We need to get that fixed. With that I yield back.

Chairman THOMPSON. The gentleman yields back. The Chair recognizes the gentlelady from Las Vegas, Ms. Titus, for 5 minutes.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is nice to see the administrator again. We just visited with her in the subcommittee that oversees FEMA. So, thank you for being with us once more. I just want to ask you about something I raised with the Secretary so I won't belabor it, but it is about UASI funding. The President's budget proposed a \$15.3 million decrease in UASI funding. I know that the criteria has been changed to focus on domestic terrorism and that makes this program even more important for communities like I represent, Las Vegas. So, I appreciate a commitment to try to work with me to be sure that we get the full funding or it remains a good resource and an effective one as we move into kind of a new emphasis or a new direction.

Ms. CRISWELL. UASI and the Homeland Security grant funding has done such an amazing job at building the capability and preparedness of our State and local jurisdictions. As we saw in the early days of the program, it was really about building a lot of capability and what we have seen over the past several years is that much of the requests that are coming in are for sustainment. So, the adjustments to the program themselves are minor and we do not feel will impact the ability to sustain the capabilities that have been built.

But as you stated, the Secretary has also asked us to take a look at how we are evaluating risk in jurisdictions. Our team is doing that now so we can make sure that we are addressing the emerging threats that we are facing.

Ms. TITUS. Well, thank you. I appreciate that because it is really important to us in a place like Las Vegas where we have to keep our residents protected, but also 40 million visitors who come very year. They are coming back at a rapid pace.

I would also ask you that whenever the President grants a Governor's request for FEMA's individual and household programs following a disaster, it currently provides very little assistance in the disaster area for people who were without homes before the disaster hit. Now, their situation is even worse. In Las Vegas, we have a rate of 228.6 per 100,000 people who are in this situation.

So, you see it a lot across the Southwest. People go where it is warm where they can survive. Our non-profits do a lot of good work. Our local governments try to. But I wonder if there is some way FEMA in its new emphasis on equity and resilience could have a plan for these folks as well.

Ms. CRISWELL. FEMA's programs and individual households program, you know, is designed to help people that have been impacted by disasters. The programs themselves aren't designed to make them whole. They do provide assistance to help with the temporary repairs. If they are not homeowners and they are renters, with some temporary lodging as they find new assistance. I think if I am understanding your question specifically may be more about the homeless population and these programs are not designed to support that.

However, we do have the Emergency Food and Sheltering Program, which is one that is run by FEMA that can assist local communities. That grant funding is available to help them with the homeless situation. I am happy to get your constituents in touch with the people that run that program to see if there is a way that that can help.

Ms. TITUS. That would great. If we can reach out and get more information to help these folks in Las Vegas, I would really appreciate it. Thank you, Administrator. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman THOMPSON. The gentlelady yields back. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida for 5 minutes, Mr. Gimenez.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I also want to thank the Ranking Member Katko. Ms. Criswell, it is good to talk to a fellow former firefighter and fellow emergency manager. I served as a firefighter with the city of Miami and also the emergency management for the city of Miami. So, it is really good to talk to you.

You stated that storms are getting more frequent and more severe. Do you have—could you submit some data to my office on the number of landfalling hurricanes since the year 1900 and their severity so that I can look at that data and see if, in fact, that is true?

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes, representative. We can certainly get you that information.

Mr. GIMENEZ. OK. Flood insurance, you know, remains a big issue in my district. What—you talk about certain caps for the Flood Insurance Program, what are those caps going to be? Is that by region or is there a hard cap Nation-wide for the Flood Insurance Program? And cost, cost to the homeowner.

Ms. CRISWELL. Yeah, so, the new Risk Rating 2.0 Program is based—their insurance rates are based on their individual risk and with an increase that is not to exceed 18 percent per year. Again, based on the individual homeowner's risk, there is a certain amount of premium that they will pay as a cap. Again, based on their individual risk. That is once they reach that—under the current program, there is no limit, but under the new program, there is.

Mr. GIMENEZ. I mean, so there is not a hard cap Nation-wide. It is based on the individual property? Or how—you said, yeah, there

is a cap. So, what is that? Describe that for me. Really quick because I only have 5 minutes.

Ms. CRISWELL. Yeah, absolutely. So, maybe two sides of this. There is a 18 percent cap per year that their rates can't go up more than 18 percent, which is set by Congress.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Got it.

Ms. CRISWELL. Then there is a maximum amount of what their insurance policy will be and when they reach that, it won't go any higher.

Mr. GIMENEZ. I know, but that—again, the question is, is that on an individual property or is it a Nation-wide cap that no insurance policy can be say more than \$5,000?

Ms. CRISWELL. No, it is based on their individual risk for their home.

Mr. GIMENEZ. So, it could be theoretically that can be \$50,000, \$100,000, \$200,000. It all depends on the home itself.

Ms. CRISWELL. It does depend on the home itself. But we certainly can get you more specifics on that.

Mr. GIMENEZ. OK. All right. By the way, I want to thank FEMA for their response to the Surfside incident. That is a town that I used to be the mayor of that county. So, thank you. How many US&R teams does FEMA have in support right now?

Ms. CRISWELL. Currently, the 2 teams that are located in Miami and Miami-Dade are part of the National system, and they were the first teams that were involved. Again, it is a real good example of how important these teams are to be embedded within the first responder community so they can respond quickly. So, those 2 teams are already activated. We have additional teams that we are working right now with the local incident commander to determine what they would—

Mr. GIMENEZ. Ma'am, I know all that. Ma'am, I know all that. I mean, I actually created the second team, OK? I want to know how many teams you have in the system? That is the question.

Ms. CRISWELL. Oh, in the system.

Mr. GIMENEZ. How many are there in the US&R system, yeah?

Ms. CRISWELL. How many—I believe—I don't have the exact number right in front of me, sir. I am sorry. I can get that to you.

Mr. GIMENEZ. That is fine. OK, that is fine. All right. Now, when it comes to hurricane mitigation, we have more communities, more people living on the coast now than we did say in the year 1900. When you say that there are more, you know, their severity of storms and their frequency, are you talking about the actual number or are you talking about the dollar amount of the damage that they cause?

Ms. CRISWELL. Sir, I think it is both, right? I think that we are seeing more billion-dollar disasters than we have seen in the past. We are seeing more storms brew. More hurricanes in the Atlantic. We are seeing an increasing number of wildfires across the west. So, I think it is a combination of both.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Well, I mean, your being a firefighter, you know that fire needs 3 things. It needs oxygen. It needs an ignition source. It needs fuel. So, how does climate change factor into those 3 things?

Ms. CRISWELL. For the wildfire season, the increase in the number of wildfires that we are seeing is the fact that the vegetation is more dried out than it has been in the past, which increases its ability to have the ignition source more quickly.

Mr. GIMENEZ. But it could also be that there are—there is lax management of those forests in that they are not being cleared the way they should be. Because you and I both know as firefighters that if you take away the fuel, you won't have these kinds of fires, right?

Ms. CRISWELL. Exactly. The mitigation that we talk about in trying to reduce the impact, right? So, the more that you can mitigate the potential impacts that you are going to see, the less that you are going to have to respond.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Right, we can't take away the oxygen and we can't take away the ignition source. You know, that is problematic. I mean, we try to. At the end, it is always about the fuel. The fuel is the vegetation. If we start clearing that out, we may actually start to see lessening of these devastating forest fires. Could you agree with that?

Ms. CRISWELL. I could agree with that.

Mr. GIMENEZ. OK. What if we—

Chairman THOMPSON. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. GIMENEZ. My time? Thank you very much and I yield the rest of my time, which is zero. Thank you.

Chairman THOMPSON. The Chair recognizes the gentlelady from Florida for 5 minutes, Mrs. Demings.

Mrs. DEMINGS. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. Administrator, it is great to see you again. As a native Floridian and former first responder, I am no stranger to responding to and living through disasters. But as you know, Administrator, we find ourselves in unfamiliar territory with the tragedy in Surfside, Florida. Certainly, our thoughts are with the victims, the families, our first responders. I would like to thank you and your workforce for immediately deploying to south Florida being there on the ground. I also want to commend you on the strong partnership that FEMA has and has had with State and local emergency responders. We know that it is essential to preserving, protecting a life and it is appreciated, I believe, by all here today.

Administrator, the 2020 Atlantic hurricane season was the most active and the fifth-costliest Atlantic hurricane season on record. The season was so active in fact that we ran out of names and had to use the Greek alphabet. This year, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has predicted another active season, as you well know. In fact, we have already seen up to 3 hurricanes from the Atlantic. With hurricane season in full swing, and I know we talked somewhat about this today, but, you know, COVID-19 was also a curveball with all that you have to juggle as well. So, with the season in full swing, how are you balancing these many times unpredictable National disasters along with still being pretty much involved in the response to COVID-19?

Ms. CRISWELL. It is a great question and our hearts do go out to those that are still suffering in Miami right now. As we see, you know, the threats that we are facing continue to change. Our normal cycle of disaster response isn't just in the summer anymore.

It is really year-round. So, as we prepare for this season, for this peak that we will see over the summertime, we have done a very deliberate effort to reduce the number of staff that we have deployed to some of our on-going operations and make sure that they have the opportunity to rest and get reset so we have the appropriate levels to respond to what we might see over the coming months.

But we are right now taking a big look at what is it going to be for us in the future and how do we want to start to posture ourselves for this more year-round response. We are doing an assessment to see what it would take for us to build a true readiness cycle that can support a continuous rotation of personnel so they have the adequate rest and recovery they need and we always have a number of sufficient personnel to support these emerging threats that we continue to face.

Mrs. DEMINGS. Thank you so much, Administrator. FEMA has historically had challenges with this disaster contracting workforce levels. In its 2017 after-action report, FEMA indicated that its disaster contracting workforce was strained due to the unprecedented number of contracting actions it had to process during the 2017 hurricane season. This is understandable considering FEMA obligated \$4.5 billion for the 2017 disasters. Whereas, in the 3 fiscal years before then, you only had to obligate about \$1.3 billion. To date, as you know, FEMA has obligated nearly \$48 billion in response to COVID-19 alone. This is astronomical compared, of course, to previous years. Where do FEMA's contracting workforce levels stand now? Does FEMA have the workforce it needs during the 2021 disaster season?

Ms. CRISWELL. The contracting workforce is such a critical part of what we do because we need to make sure that we have the right tools and the people to execute those tools to support disaster response. I don't have the specific numbers of our contracting workforce. I am happy to have my team get back to you. But we are looking across all of our cadres where we have seen a reduction in the number of personnel and doing some concerted efforts to make sure we are recruiting quality people to come in and serve what I think is the best agency the Government has.

Mrs. DEMINGS. Finally, Administrator, with the limited time I have, I do realize that human beings are the most precious resource. Sometimes you may not always feel like it, but human beings are the most precious resource that we have. We know that FEMA ranked 322 out of 420 agencies in terms of employee morale. I know the Chairman talked a little bit about the workforce, but could you very quickly explain some of the steps you are planning to take to address specifically, employee morale?

Ms. CRISWELL. The workforce is my No. 1 priority. We have such an important mission that we can't fail at. The way to do that is to make sure that we have a qualified, trained, and supported workforce so they can execute their mission. We have done a number of things to reach out to our employees and I think one of the biggest things that we have done is created these employee resource groups where we get input from our employees and what their needs are and how we can better support them in accomplishing their mission. We are also going to continue to make sure

that we have enough personnel and we provide the right training and resources and support that employees need to conduct their jobs effectively and efficiently. The other piece to add to that is making sure that our workforce is diverse and inclusive and so we can represent the people that we serve.

Mrs. DEMINGS. Imagine that. Thank you so much, Administrator. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman THOMPSON. The gentlelady yields back. The Chair recognizes Mrs. Harshbarger from Tennessee for 5 minutes. We can't hear you still. No. We are going to come back to you again. The Chair recognizes Mr. LaTurner from Kansas for 5 minutes. Can you unmute yourself, Mr. LaTurner? I see you going on and off. Well, we will go back to Florida, Mrs. Cammack, for 5 minutes.

Mrs. CAMMACK. Can you all hear me?

Chairman THOMPSON. Gotcha.

Mrs. CAMMACK. Woo. Val's laughing. Oh, man. Well, I appreciate it, Mr. Chairman. Thank you so much. Good to see you again, Administrator Criswell. I am going to jump right in on questions because I have got a lot and I don't think I will be able to make it through them all.

So, I am going to start with the first question being your FEMA all hands on deck, meaning you identified employee burnout as one of the major issues. We talked about that last week. You had mentioned the importance of workforce readiness in your testimony and then again when we were chatting on Friday.

Now, I had asked this question to Secretary Mayorkas a couple weeks ago and again several months ago. I am just kind-of looking for some clarity on this. When I had asked if FEMA had the resources that it needs to effectively respond to the pandemic, the border crisis, and upcoming storm season at that point, he had stated that FEMA had every resource that it needed in order to do that. Do you agree with the Secretary's assessment that FEMA is not in need of any additional resources?

Ms. CRISWELL. So, as we prepare for this season, we have the resources that we need to support the on-going responses that we are currently running, as well as what we expect. I think as we discussed and we are seeing this year-round response to disasters and new emerging threats, we are doing an assessment to see how we can better prepare and have a stronger readiness cycle that gives our employees more opportunities for rest and reset so they are not deployed so much continuously.

Mrs. CAMMACK. OK. So, just to summarize. Yes, FEMA has all the resources that it needs to do the job, the workforce, everything, personnel, border presence, pandemic, incoming Delta variant, tornados, hurricanes, wildfire season, everything.

Ms. CRISWELL. I believe that we are well-postured to support that. We do have a request for additional resources in our fiscal year 2022 budget as well to help increase that readiness capability.

Mrs. CAMMACK. OK. Now, you guys are seeing the distribution of \$2 billion in COVID-19-related funeral assistance. This is the largest Funeral Assistance Program that FEMA has ever handled. As of June 28, approximately \$447 million has already been distributed to 66,000, almost 67,000 people. Now, what are doing to make sure that the aid gets to those that are truly in need in this

very tough situation and that there aren't bad actors that are working to exploit the system?

Ms. CRISWELL. The Funeral Assistance Program is truly unprecedented. It is on a scale like nothing that we have done before. As we were putting our plan in place for how we were going roll this program out, we knew that there was going to be a lot of opportunities for fraud. So, we did put measures in place to help reduce the potential for fraud and we are seeing very low incidents right now of fraudulent claims. I would say one of the things that we are doing to make sure that everybody gets assistance as well is we are doing—they are registering through the 1-800 number directly. That also helps to reduce fraud by not going on-line. But then we have personnel that are talking to individuals and helping them work through the paperwork requirements to provide the documentation needed to get that assistance.

Mrs. CAMMACK. Is there any follow-up from FEMA once the applicants go through the process to just kind-of a trust but verify?

Ms. CRISWELL. Yeah, I mean, that is part of the process, right? So, as an individual calls the 1-800 number to get assistance, we work with them to get the appropriate paperwork. We verify that paperwork to make sure that it's authentic and then work with them to get any additional resources or any additional paperwork they need until they finally get their claim settled.

Mrs. CAMMACK. OK, excellent. Thank you. Something else that I had asked Secretary Mayorkas a couple weeks ago that he was going to, I think, ask you about was the Emergency Food and Shelter Program that FEMA has. So, I have been to the border a couple of times this year and I have actually been on a plane where I recognized the migrants that we had picked up with Border Patrol in the days leading up to my flight. Now, it is my understanding that the Emergency Food and Shelter Program that FEMA has, has been supporting the travel costs for these migrants. How much of this program has been expended on migrant travel?

Ms. CRISWELL. As you stated, the Emergency Food and Shelter Program is a grant program available through FEMA for non-disaster-related expenses. I don't have the specific information. I am aware of the flight that you mentioned. I don't have the specific information about the costs that were spent, but it is something that is eligible through this program as its administered by the local volunteer agencies.

Mrs. CAMMACK. Could you follow up? Because I know my time has expired. Could you follow up with me on the total number of dollars that have been expended on migrant travel this year?

Ms. CRISWELL. We will certainly follow up on that. I would just add that Congress did appropriate \$110 million for this program to assist.

Mrs. CAMMACK. All right, thank you.

Chairman THOMPSON. The gentlelady's time has expired.

Mrs. CAMMACK. With that, I yield back.

Chairman THOMPSON. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California for 5 minutes, Mr. Swalwell.

Mr. SWALWELL. Thank you, Chairman. Thank you, Administrator. Before I get to my questions, I want to thank FEMA for standing up its Oakland Coliseum vaccination site where thou-

sands of Bay Area residents were vaccinated. It was a real success. I was able to meet with your team on the ground there early on after having the vaccine. I would say it is the second best thing that has happened at the Oakland Coliseum this year other than the third best team in baseball, the Oakland A's. So, thank you to FEMA for that.

But, Administrator, my district in California has suffered from wildfires in the past year as well as yesterday we had a 4.1 earthquake in the city of Castro Valley. So, we face a range of natural hazards and we found that climate change is exasperating many of these disasters and the effects.

I know you understand as a former firefighter the importance of resiliency and pre-disaster mitigation. Congressional action over the past few years has emphasized pre-disaster mitigation. FEMA has put a greater emphasis on pre-disaster mitigation through the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Program, the BRIC program. A total of \$500 million was available in 2020, and President Biden has approved for FEMA to provide \$1 billion for this fiscal year. Now, it has been an effective way to support pre-disaster mitigation, but we were only able to fund \$500 million of the approximately \$3.6 billion requested. So, what do you think is the best way to address the demand for pre-disaster mitigation funding?

Ms. CRISWELL. I am sorry, did you hear what I started there with? OK.

Mr. SWALWELL. I didn't. Go ahead.

Ms. CRISWELL. I think we weren't unmuted. I apologize. Pre-disaster mitigation funding is a critical component to our ability to reduce the impacts that we are seeing from climate change. We were very excited by the authorities that were given to us in the Disaster Recovery Reform Act to be able to implement and execute the BRIC program, the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Program. As we saw with the first year, it was amazing what the amount of need was that was out there as you stated with \$3.6 billion in applications. I think where we are going is now that we have additional funding that was available this year, double what we had last year, \$1 billion. We are going to continue to be able to address these projects to do the system-wide mitigation instead of a more incremental approach that we have done in the past. But BRIC is just one of the programs that we have and so, if there are applications that were not selected during this program, we also have our Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, post-disaster grant, that individual or State and local jurisdictions can apply for as well. That comes after every disaster.

We have recently also created hazard mitigation funding eligibility for fire management assistance grants, which specifically goes to those communities that were impacted by the fires to increase their ability to reduce risk.

Mr. SWALWELL. Now, Administrator, to qualify for BRIC funding, a State must have issued a major disaster declaration in the past 7 years, but as you know, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, every State has been under a major disaster declaration. So, has the anomaly of simultaneous major disaster declarations across all

50 States because of the pandemic affected FEMA's administration of the BRIC funding?

Ms. CRISWELL. No, it hasn't. I think it just gives us greater opportunity now to be able to invest in communities across the country to help them reduce the impacts from these threats that we are facing.

Mr. SWALWELL. Great. Well, we are going into, sadly, another fire season. On top of that a drought. As I said, a reminder yesterday that we are at risk of a, you know, a major earthquake in the Bay Area. So, we need you all more than ever. Welcome aboard on the job. Again, your team on the ground in San Francisco really did an excellent job in getting our community vaccinated. We have over 80 percent of Alameda County has received at least one vaccine and that is a leader in the country, in part because of FEMA's work. So, thank you very much.

Chairman THOMPSON. The gentleman yields back?

Mr. SWALWELL. Yes.

Chairman THOMPSON. The Chair recognizes Mrs. Harshbarger, again. I think we still have a—

Mrs. HARSHBARGER. OK. I have got you on a phone line now.

Chairman THOMPSON. OK.

Mrs. HARSHBARGER. Are you good?

Chairman THOMPSON. Mrs. Harshbarger, I apologize. The gremlins are still with us.

Mrs. HARSHBARGER. OK. Can you hear me on the phone line?

Chairman THOMPSON. We can hear you on the phone line.

Mrs. HARSHBARGER. OK. Let's just do it that way. Who knows what is going on. Hey, if it was as easy to fix, I should call FEMA, maybe they can fix that. So, anyway, thank you, Chairman and Ranking Member and Madam Administrator.

I just wanted to talk a little bit about something some of my colleagues have already talked about and that is the disaster relief, the disaster declaration, for some of these smaller counties. I have a small county in Unicoi, Tennessee and they had a flood event in March 2020 and they just received money as of last month due to that flood that damaged some of the roadways. You know, they weren't able to meet your threshold and they finally did the paperwork.

My concern, even after they were approved, it took 8 months to receive their money and, you know, in a small county when you have maybe 2 employees, it takes one doing this full-time in order to do the paperwork to get the money from those disasters. It's all the documentation, things like that. So, I just want you to be aware of that, Madam Administrator, that sometimes with these smaller counties, it took over a year to get that money to them. They had to figure out how they are going to budget that in order to make those road repairs. So, that is a concern.

I kind-of want to switch gears and talk about our National stockpile problems. COVID-19 made those very, very apparent, you know, as far as supply chains are concerned and these problems with the supply chains severely impacted the ability of the country to respond to the pandemic and it put our economic and National security in jeopardy. I can tell you this as being a pharmacy owner, in 3 weeks I could not get medications. I couldn't get

hydroxychloroquine. I couldn't get the powder to make it. I couldn't get supplements, vitamins. That is just in a 3-week period. That is critical. I consider that critical infrastructure as far as the medicine goes. It is imperative that we have those.

As a Nation we left a clear understanding of the supply chain outside of the Department of Defense environment. The public safety industrial supply chain must be comparable to how the DOD manages the defense industrial base. That includes things like procurement, acquisition, long-term contracting, asset viability, material distribution, and tracking of emergency threats that proactively support the supply chain assurance. I guess my question is, core capabilities like supply chain security and supply chain risk management have habitually been underinvested in and how should our Nation determine in detail and understand the interdependencies of the public safety industrial supply chain and the impacts it will have on operations if interrupted?

Ms. CRISWELL. What we learned through COVID-19 is truly how, as you stated, critical our supply chain is. It is a piece of our critical infrastructure, but really just how fragile it can be as well. You know, as we were working through our ability to maximize and support the supply chain to make sure that we could keep resources moving, we learned a lot of lessons about our role and how we can interact with the private sector.

I think that we have two roles. One is, you know, how do we during disasters make sure we get the supply chain up and running quickly so they can continue to bring supplies in? Because FEMA can never replace what the private sector brings to the table. But also, how can then we integrate the private sector into our operations to better support the initial response needs? FEMA has started a lot of conversations across the private sector in different sectors, health care, housing, and so forth, to see how we can work better together to improve the resiliency of the supply chain to make sure that we don't have—or we are reducing any potential impacts to disrupting the supply chain.

Mrs. HARSHBARGER. OK. Thank you for that. Well, after I have had such microphone troubles, I will just yield back, Chairman. Thank you.

Chairman THOMPSON. The gentlelady is very kind. Thank you much. The Chair recognizes the gentlelady from California for 5 minutes, Ms. Barragán.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for holding this hearing. Thank you, Administrator, for being with us today and all your work.

The Trump administration took unprecedented steps to criticize natural disaster survivors and continuously threatened to deny or withdraw aid to jurisdictions such as Puerto Rico and California, while praising and announcing more money for areas that had a large number of Trump supporters. Their actions threatened the recovery process for disaster survivors. While it is the Executive branch that carries out various response and recovery programs to help communities rebuild after a disaster, it is Congress' responsibility to conduct oversight to ensure the American people are receiving a fair, effective response from the Federal Government.

It is not only important for the disaster survivors currently putting their lives back together, but for the future survivors who will benefit from a response improved by lessons learned. The Trump administration's politicization of disaster assistance stands against everything we, as public servants, stand for. Administrator, what effects does the politicization of disaster relief have on affected communities?

Chairman THOMPSON. Start your answer again. We kind-of had a delay.

Ms. CRISWELL. Understood. Disasters that impact communities, they do not discriminate whether you are Republican or Democrat. FEMA's assistance is not restricted in any way based on that. We provide assistance to communities based on their need and one of the things that we have learned through COVID-19 is our ability to really better understand and identify our underserved populations to make sure that we are getting them the assistance they need, but also making sure that they understand how to access that assistance. That is FEMA's role. We are going to help people before, during, and after disasters making sure that they get what they need to recover from whatever that event was.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Do you agree it would dangerous if we started to politicize who gets disaster relief?

Ms. CRISWELL. It would absolutely be dangerous. We should be basing disaster need—disaster assistance on the needs of the community and the impacts that they experienced.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. OK, well, thank you. How can we assure that never happens again that we aren't politicizing the need, disaster need?

Ms. CRISWELL. You know, the policies that FEMA has and the Stafford Act that guides our ability to provide assistance clearly sets out how we provide assistance and as long as we are following the guidance set forth in there, we will be able to continue to provide assistance to all communities that are impacted.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Well, thank you. Administrator, I also want to thank you for the work that you have done in working across agencies to help at the Southern Border. I have been there first-hand. I have seen what the difference has been in getting children out of, you know, Border Patrol custody and into HHS and the role that you all played and how it has been very helpful. So, I want to thank you for that.

My next question is about, you know, reports that the sites, the FEMA-assisted sites of the mass vaccination centers are winding down. They are coming to a close. What is FEMA's role moving forward in assisting in the vaccination effort? Is there any consideration being given on reopening these mass vaccination centers when maybe say boosters are going to be necessary for, you know, the population?

Ms. CRISWELL. FEMA has supported the vaccination effort in a variety of different ways. We are supporting approximately 2,100 community vaccination centers across the country, 39 of which were Federally-run community vaccination sites. Our on-going support for the 2,100 continues by providing financial assistance, personnel, resources as needed based on what the community needs and how they are doing with their outreach to their populations to

get them vaccinated. We have wound down our 39 sites and primarily that was based on the fact that we saw limited numbers of people coming and more of the population that were going to pharmacies, their doctor's office, and other places to get the vaccine.

You know, as we look to the future, we will be ready to stand up additional sites if needed. If there is a booster that is required, we remain flexible to be able to support this on-going effort to get America vaccinated and whatever that might look like in the coming months.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Well, thank you, Administrator. FEMA has literally helped save lives by undertaking this logistical challenge of getting the vaccine out and we have seen the difference that you and this administration have made. So, thank you. With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman THOMPSON. The gentlelady yields back. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Kansas, Mr. LaTurner, for 5 minutes.

Mr. LATURNER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Apologize for the technical difficulties we had earlier. Thank you to you and Ranking Member Katko for holding this hearing. Administrator, I am very pleased that you are with us today. We like to say in Kansas that you can experience all four seasons in the same day. Along with that weather comes disasters with tornados, flooding in the wet season, wildfires in the dry season. We need FEMA to be ready and able to support those communities in Kansas and across our country that are affected by disasters of all sizes. I also recognize the role FEMA has played in providing resources and relief across the country during the COVID-19 pandemic, which we all hope we are nearing the end of.

I have a couple of questions for you. The first is in the President's fiscal year 2022 budget, he includes just over \$100 million to support, sustain, and develop new IT initiatives. Given the past issues FEMA has had with safeguarding personal information, could you give us the specifics on the IT initiatives that FEMA will be focusing on?

Ms. CRISWELL. I will certainly have my team get back with some specifics for you. But what I will say generally is that some of the IT initiatives we are focusing on is modernizing our IT infrastructure as well as our grant system so we can make it easier for State and local communities to apply for assistance through that. Those are some very general big picture pieces of our IT infrastructure that we are requesting funding for. But I will certainly have my team get back to you with some specifics.

Mr. LATURNER. I appreciate that, Administrator. Since the Nation-wide emergency was declared on March 13, 2020, there was a lot of confusion initially as to who was leading the response, FEMA or HHS. As FEMA took the lead, questions remained as to who should be charged with leading and managing Federal effort during a prolonged pandemic. While FEMA certainly has the capability to coordinate resources and manpower, what should FEMA's and HHS's respective roles be for future similar events?

Ms. CRISWELL. It is a very good question. You know, FEMA is very good. What we excel at is being able to collaborate across the Federal Government to bring the right stakeholders together to solve some of the toughest problems that we have been facing in

recent years. I think that we have some work to do to make sure that we are working with our partners across the Federal Government to better understand what the capabilities are and where the roles and responsibilities need to be delineated. So, I commit to being able to work across the Government helping to better understand capacity and where the roles and responsibilities need to be defined.

Mr. LATURNER. Administrator, could you get a little more detailed on that? Do you think that that needs to take shape in the form of legislation? Are those conversations that you are currently having now or ones that you plan on having in the future?

Ms. CRISWELL. They are conversations that we are having now as we work with HHS in our continued response to COVID-19. If there is a point in time where I think it needs legislation, I am certainly happy to get back with you on how we would make that happen.

Mr. LATURNER. As you know, a number of State Governors are moving to end their State's incident period for COVID-19 major disaster declaration. Does FEMA currently have a projected time line for when the COVID-19 major disaster declarations might end?

Ms. CRISWELL. We are reviewing that currently on when that might happen. It is not going to happen in the very near future. We will make sure that we are providing ample notice for jurisdictions so they understand what the impacts of that might be.

Mr. LATURNER. I appreciate that. You touched on this a little bit earlier, but if you could go into a little more depth. Ending the States' COVID-19 major disaster declarations affect the resources available to States and what resources will still be available to States under the Nation-wide emergency declaration. After this is over, it would be nice for States to have some idea of what is going to be available to them.

Ms. CRISWELL. Right. We are seeing States end their incident periods or end their emergency declaration. We are having conversations with them through our regional administrators on what that means as it relates to the National disaster, the major disaster declaration in our on-going incident period. So, we will continue to have those conversations. Our regional administrators have been reaching out to our States continuously to help understand some of the guidance and what the future impacts might be as we continue to refine the future of the disaster declaration.

Mr. LATURNER. Are you doing personal outreach to any of the States or comprehensive calls that Governors and their teams are able to participate in, or is it done region by region primarily?

Ms. CRISWELL. So, we like to have our regional administrators do the majority of that outreach, but I have been communicating with the National organizations that bring together the leadership from across the country to answer some of these same questions.

Mr. LATURNER. OK. Administrator, I appreciate your time and I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman THOMPSON. The gentleman yields back. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New York for 5 minutes, Mr. Torres.

Mr. TORRES. Good morning, Administrator. You were the New York City commissioner for emergency management for the cata-

clysmic challenges confronting Health and Hospitals during COVID-19. As you know, they may be no health system in the United States that came under greater strain during COVID than Health and Hospitals. New York State was the epicenter of the first coronavirus wave and Health and Hospitals as a safety net health system was the hardest hit not only by the rapid influx, but also by the sheer intensity and complexity of coronavirus cases.

FEMA provides reimbursements to “expanded medical facilities.” As you know, the Health and Hospitals had to expand their medical facilities and contract out surge staff in order to keep pace with what the *New York Times* infamously described as a “apocalyptic” coronavirus surge. Yet, inexplicably, FEMA refuses to reimburse Health and Hospitals for that capacity expansion. Can you explain to me the inexplicable decision to deny or delay reimbursement for Health and Hospitals?

Ms. CRISWELL. Representative Torres, yes, I was there. It was the most challenging year that I have gone through and I worked closely hand-in-hand with my colleagues at Health and Hospitals as we were expanding that capacity. It was not just in Health and Hospitals, but the alternate care sites that we set up across the city to support the numbers that we were projecting. I don’t have the specifics of the denial that you are talking about, but those types of costs are eligible costs under the disaster declaration. So, let me get more information about the specifics of what you are talking about and I will be happy to get back to you with any information.

Mr. TORRES. Absolutely. I just want to read for you a letter from the CEO of Health and Hospitals, Mitchell Katz, to your agency, to you directly. “FEMA Region 2 asserts that Health and Hospital facilities were not expanded in their entirety and that Health and Hospitals must prove which portions of our systems were expanded versus unexpanded and then the contracted surge staff to only expanded areas in order to be eligible for FEMA funding. As Health and Hospitals has explained previously in writing, and at multiple working sessions with FEMA Region 2, this is neither required by FEMA guidance nor feasible. Moreover, it does not reflect the operation or clinical realities experienced by Health and Hospitals during the height of the pandemic. Given the terrible volume and intensity of the first wave of COVID, all Health and Hospital facilities were expanded in their entirety to battle the virus.”

[The information follows:]

LETTER FROM NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS

June 11, 2021.

Deanne Criswell,
Administrator, Federal Emergency Management Agency, 500 C Street S.W., Washington, DC 20024.

Re: NYC COVID-19 Emergency Response (DR-4480-NY): H+H Contracted Surge Staff Eligibility

DEAR ADMINISTRATOR CRISWELL: On behalf of New York City (NYC) Health + Hospitals (H+H), I am respectfully submitting information to support the existing H+H request for FEMA reimbursement of necessary COVID-19-related expenditures (DR-4480-NY). Specifically, H+H is seeking reimbursement for the temporary staff needed to battle the virus in the first and hardest hit part of the Nation, from March to August 2020. This request is in keeping with FEMA policy as well as general principles of equity.

This letter will summarize the documentation that H+H has already provided to FEMA to demonstrate that contracted surge staff necessitated by COVID-19 is eligible under current policy,¹ which states:

“FEMA may approve work and costs associated with temporary medical facilities or expanded medical facilities when necessary in response to the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. These facilities may be used to treat COVID-19 patients, non-COVID-19 patients, or both, as necessary.”

H+H provided FEMA with justifications showing that its hospitals constituted “expanded medical facilities” from March to August 2020 due to its system being overwhelmed by COVID-19. Unfortunately, FEMA Region II asserts that H+H facilities were not expanded in their entirety and that H+H must prove which portions of our system were expanded versus unexpanded, and then tie contracted surge staff to only expanded areas in order to be eligible for FEMA funding. As H+H has explained previously in writing and at multiple working sessions with FEMA Region II, this is neither required by FEMA guidance nor feasible. Moreover, it does not reflect the operational or clinical realities experienced by H+H during the height of the pandemic. Given the terrible volume and intensity of the first wave of COVID, all H+H facilities were expanded in their entirety to battle the virus. As the President and CEO of H+H and one of the leaders in NYC’s response to COVID-19, I attest to the immutable fact that it is not practically or operationally possible to identify discrete expanded and unexpanded facility parts due to the lack of available, rapid testing and the risk of transmission during the first wave of COVID-19 in NYC.

We request an opportunity to meet and discuss concerns with HQ Office of Response and Recovery (ORR) leadership on this critical matter as it relates to disaster-specific policy created to support COVID-19 emergency work. NYC believes that the applicable policy covers the surge staffing H+H was forced to contract out for due to our facilities being overwhelmed by the pandemic.

H+H has incurred approximately \$2 billion in expenses on our response to COVID-19, and we ask that immediate action be taken to provide critically-needed cashflow to our safety net system. Even as we work with you to pursue the reimbursement to which we are entitled, we request that FEMA obligates the \$1.19 billion version request that H+H has submitted and allow a drawdown of \$354 million based on the \$621 million financial documentation provided. Here is a brief chronology:

October 2020.—H+H submits for preliminary FEMA review ~\$864M of contract costs for clinical surge staff required to meet the need at overwhelmed H+H facilities from March to August 2020.

December 15, 2020.—H+H submits a formal amendment to Project 134894 to FEMA for ~\$864M of this temp staffing contract work, of which ~\$621M was fully reconciled with contracts and invoices.

January 15 and 29, 2021.—H+H met with FEMA Region II and NYS to discuss why this work is eligible since all facilities were expanded and staffing was necessitated by COVID-19.

February 24, 2021.—H+H submits two justifications to FEMA supporting its surge staff claim:

- Justification that H+H facilities were expanded in their entirety; and
- Projected needs analysis to support why expansions were required due to patient load.

March 11, 2021.—FEMA responds saying that only certain parts of H+H facilities were expanded, and surge staff are only eligible if tied to those parts of H+H facilities.

April 6, 2021.—H+H provides another letter to FEMA with additional justification explaining why H+H facilities were considered by its clinical leadership to be expanded in their entirety.

April 13, 2021.—Region II tells H+H that it will not accept the argument that H+H facilities were expanded in their entirety.

April 30, 2021.—Region II meets with H+H to ask additional questions about how it believes H+H might parse its facilities into expanded versus unexpanded parts. H+H reiterates that this is an artificial way to evaluate its facilities March to August 2020.

NYC was the first epicenter of the COVID-19 outbreak in the United States (US), and our H+H facilities soon served as the epicenter of the epicenter, treating all patients without regard to their ability to pay. Recall that NYC was the first American

¹FEMA Policy No. 104-21-0004, Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic: Medical Care Eligible for Public Assistance, Section C.2.

city to experience the rapid and devastating COVID-19 spread, so there was no rulebook or script to follow: We in NYC and at H+H in particular were setting the standards for the Nation. Practically, H+H—as NYC’s safety net public health care provider that accepts anyone that seeks treatment—faced an outbreak of a virus about which there was no existing knowledge, no existing protocols specific to the implications of the COVID-19, wholly insufficient testing capacity, no proven treatments or vaccine for the virus, and limited availability of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) due to the global supply chain collapse.

In the earliest stages of the pandemic, despite requests from NYC to the CDC to deploy COVID-19 testing kits to public health laboratories across the country, all testing capacity existed solely within CDC headquarters. This required shipping all test samples to Atlanta for analysis. When CDC test kits arrived at the NYC Public Health Laboratory on February 8, defective testing reagents rendered the test kits unusable. Weeks passed without any functional testing capacity available outside of the CDC. By early March, both the NYC Public Health Laboratory and the State Department of Public Health Wadsworth Center received FDA Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) for their own COVID tests. However, National shortages of testing supplies, including swabs and reagents, continued to significantly limit testing capacity within the first wave of the pandemic in NYC.

During the period of performance in question, due to the lack of available rapid testing for patients, the high risk of transmission, the shortage of PPE, the number of medical personnel falling ill, and the effort to stem the rapid spread of the virus, H+H facilities worked on the presumption that virtually every individual entering H+H hospitals seeking treatment carried and had the potential to spread COVID-19. This was not just based on theory: A State-wide Executive Order directed the suspension of non-essential elective surgeries and non-urgent procedures State-wide, which resulted in nearly all patients presenting with COVID-19 or suspected COVID-19 symptoms. Indeed, most patients who sought care for non-COVID complaints were found to have COVID-19 via X-rays and CT scans of their lungs, or positive test results if testing was available. Patients who came into the Emergency Department for all chief complaints including trauma ended up being positive for COVID. There were even multiple instances of patients who tested negative for COVID-19 originally and were asymptomatic when they were admitted for a completely unrelated reason who were then found to be COVID-19 positive a few days into their admission because they were incubating COVID-19 upon arrival. In addition, the outbreak was occurring in the most highly-populated city in the United States with a population density of 27,000 people per mile, and with a demographic and socioeconomic make up that made its population particularly vulnerable to the virus. For all of these reasons and to minimize risk to our staff and other patients, H+H operated under the assumption that every patient was a PUI (person under investigation) and took COVID precautions in treating them.

During the summer months of 2020, as the first wave of the pandemic began to subside, H+H adjusted the level of temporary staff, as necessary and consistent with FEMA policy, to align with on-going and projected needs of expanded operations. However, total patient numbers in H+H facilities remained high, due to the long length of stay of high-acuity COVID patients from earlier periods and new COVID admissions. Therefore, H+H facilities remained as Expanded Medical Facilities throughout the entire period in question to provide critical care to both COVID and non-COVID patients when the system remained strained compared to a pre-COVID level.

To contend with this staggering reality, H+H was required to bring in thousands of temporary staff members from March 21 through August 31, 2020, the relevant time period for the reimbursement request. During these horrible months, H+H expanded its system-wide Med/Surg capacity by 84 percent and ICU bed capacity by 360 percent and staffed these expanded spaces accordingly, all to keep New Yorkers safe and alive.

These actions were taken in compliance with FEMA’s Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic: Medical Care Eligible for Public Assistance (Interim) (Version 2) FEMA Policy No. 104-21-0004 (Medical Care Policy). According to FEMA’s Medical Care Policy, contracted staff at Temporary and Expanded Medical Facilities “may be used to treat COVID-19 patients, non-COVID-19 patients, or both, as necessary.” In this articulation, FEMA policy recognizes that once the aggregate clinical capacity needs are overwhelmed by COVID-19, applicants must expand staffing, facilities, equipment and supplies as emergency protective measures. Such necessary actions are eligible for FEMA Public Assistance provided the applicant can show projected or actual need, which H+H did in its February 24, 2021 submission. H+H used operational discretion to utilize contracted surge staff as necessary to meet needs created by COVID-19 that evolved daily, weekly and monthly.

H+H expanded capacity by mobilizing additional beds, conversion of non-medical areas to Med/Surg and ICU's space to treat the rapid influx of patients; no facility operated in isolated parts during this expansion. During these initial, overwhelming months, diagnostic and treatment areas, inpatient wards, registration and reception areas, and in many cases administrative, pediatrics areas, and ambulatory surgical units were co-opted for the purposes of patient treatment areas. Further, H+H had to mobilize tents at the entrances of Emergency Departments to expand facility capacity for safe patient screening and triaging upon entry, which demonstrates that hospitals were expanded both inside and outside the building envelope, as necessary.

Given the extensive nature of the capacity expansion efforts, there was no way to separate or isolate the expansion from the operation of the larger facility. Capacity expansion of the acute hospitals was embedded and integrated physically into the larger operations of the facilities, often on the same floors and side by side the existing units. For the months in question, expansions did not occur in physically distinct areas (e.g. offsite or on separate wings or floors) and were not managed separately. Every facility converted rooms that were not originally set up as negative pressure, isolation, or oxygen capable rooms to ones suitable to safely care for COVID-19 patients with necessary infection control precautions. These rooms were disbursed throughout the hospitals. One of the benefits of expanding within the existing footprint of a facility was to avoid redundancy, to allow for flexibility in staffing, and for rapid response teams, such as cardiac arrest or airway teams, to respond wherever needed throughout the hospital. The distinction being assumed by FEMA between COVID and non-COVID areas is an artificial one not reflective of the real world operational and clinical circumstances and needs faced by H+H hospitals.

For all of these reasons and in accordance with FEMA's own written policies, the 11 hospitals in the H+H system should be deemed eligible Expanded Medical Facilities in their entirety during the eligible time period. I encourage FEMA to re-assess its opinion and authorize reimbursement.

Sincerely,

MITCHELL KATZ, M.D.,
President and CEO.

Mr. TORRES. Everything the CEO said is entirely true. As you know, during the wave, during the early wave of the pandemic, the whole Health and Hospital system became a COVID emergency center. There was virtually no testing. So, everyone entering the system was presumed to have COVID-19. It was a severe shortage of testing, a severe shortage of PPE. There were medical personnel with minimal PPE falling ill to the virus, hence the need for surge staffing. In my view if the 11 hospitals in Health and Hospitals, do not qualify as expanded medical facilities, then no hospitals in America qualify as expanded medical facilities because no health system was as overwhelmed as Health and Hospitals.

Ms. CRISWELL. Thank you for reading me that letter. I have not seen that letter yet. But I will look into this and see what the specifics are and we will get back to your staff.

Mr. TORRES. Quick questions about Puerto Rico. I have concerns about Puerto Rico's electric grid, which was ravaged by Hurricane Maria in recent weeks. Tens of thousands of residents on the island have been left without power. What is the status of the \$10 billion allocated for Puerto Rico's power grid?

Ms. CRISWELL. Again, I don't have the specifics on the status of that. We have a strong extensive team on the ground that is working with the Puerto Rican government to help them as they are going through the recovery process as well as some of the mitigation efforts that they are undergoing. We will certainly get back to you with the status of where we are at with those projects.

Mr. TORRES. And are you aware that Luma Energy, a private firm has taken over the power grid?

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes.

Mr. TORRES. Does FEMA have confidence in Luma?

Ms. CRISWELL. We are working closely with the resiliency group out of the government of Puerto Rico. They took over early in June, they responded to their first event. It seems like that went well. But we are working closely with them and the government to ensure that they have the capacity and capability to support.

Mr. TORRES. What oversight mechanisms are in place to ensure that Luma is held accountable for its spending the billions that they will receive properly and efficiently? That will be my final question.

Ms. CRISWELL. Yeah, again, we have an extensive team that is on the island supporting this on-going process. I recently visited Puerto Rico in my first few weeks here on the job to get a better understanding of where they were at with their recovery. Our team is working hand-in-hand with them to make sure that things are moving and progressing, but also being spent in accordance to the way they are supposed to be.

Chairman THOMPSON. The gentleman's time has expired. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Michigan for 5 minutes, Mr. Meijer.

Mr. MEIJER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Administrator Criswell, for appearing here today. You know, I think during the COVID-19 pandemic, we obviously saw first-hand the importance of emergency preparedness and also having a well-supplied strategic National stockpile for personal protective equipment and other supplies that we need to deal with public health crises. I just want to make sure that we are learning all the lessons that we can from this pandemic and that we put those toward preparing for the crises that may come down the road.

Typically, FEMA can move resources from unaffected areas to affected areas during disasters. You know, when you have one region that is impacted, or one State, we can surge supplies from others. When we have something that impacts us Nationally, as COVID did, during a pandemic, you know, some of the significant supply shortages that arose when we had more of that regional impulse rather than that assumption that we would be having to act on a National level, you know, along with this strategic National stockpile at the Federal level, Michigan maintains its own Michigan strategic National stockpile, which is managed directly by our Department of Community Health.

I just want to drill down on how FEMA works with State programs and if there are any important lessons to be learned from the pandemic or other steps that Congress can take to help facilitate coordination in the future and a flexible rotating stockpile approach. So, I guess, Administrator, to put it directly, how can the Strategic National Stockpile Program and State strategic stockpile programs work most effectively together across the range of disaster scenarios?

Ms. CRISWELL. As you stated, the COVID-19 pandemic was the first time that our resources have been needed across all 50 States and our Tribes and territories. It really stretched our ability to move resources from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. I know that State and local jurisdictions have been building their own stockpiles for

many years. Some of the things that our role is is helping them understand what their needs are, where their gaps exist, and help them fill those gaps through whether it is applying for grant funding that we have or through other resources.

Our focus is really to work with the State and local jurisdictions to better understand where their capabilities are and help them to close those gaps as needed through whatever Federal resource might be part of that.

Mr. MEIJER. You mentioned those Federal resources. Do you believe that FEMA or that Congress or some play between the two should be incentivizing States that don't already have their own stockpiles to create them?

Ms. CRISWELL. I think that having your own capability, that is the first stop, right? Where disasters all start and end at the local level. So, the more capacity that we can build at the local level, the better they are going to be able to respond and not need support from the Federal Government. That level of capacity building is the first step in creating a prepared and resilient Nation. Whatever we can do to help generate that level of capacity building I think is a step in the right direction.

Mr. MEIJER. You know, and I know on the household level, I mean, one of the recommendations that FEMA gives is, you know, to have sufficient food on hand. I think it is a weeks' worth of food is usually that recommendation. But that whole approach of in your pantry, you know, you have the canned goods. You put the newest one in back and then take from the front so that you have that depth, right? You know, we are dealing with a lot of products in our strategic stockpile, whether they are masks or ventilators or, you know, a range of additional equipment that has an expiration date. Does FEMA work with the States to manage that optimal balance where items that may have an expiration date of 5 years' time, you know, or you have a 5-year window of supplies that get drawn down and replenished consecutively, if that makes sense. I mean, do we have that mechanism in place to be able to best optimize the efficiency of those stockpiles?

Ms. CRISWELL. I think where our role comes in with that, again, is working with our States to help them understand where their capacity is at and how they can best maintain that capacity. We provide technical assistance to States that request it to help them work through those level of details. We will be able to continue to provide that assistance through our National Preparedness Division.

Mr. MEIJER. Thank you. Just a final quick question, do you feel in your experience that States without their own stockpiles are at a disadvantage when it comes to Federal assistance?

Ms. CRISWELL. I wouldn't say that they are at a disadvantage when it comes to Federal assistance. I think that, again, we are trying to build capacity at the Federal, State, and local level. If there is—through our process of trying to understand that capacity through some of our established practices, the threat hazard risk assessment process, we have an idea where those gaps may exist. So, we can better prepare as we are seeing storms or other disasters happen so we know where those gaps might be so we can be prepared to respond appropriately.

Mr. MEIJER. Thank you, Administrator. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you very much. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas for 5 minutes, Mr. Green.

Mr. GREEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I have intelligence indicating that a 2020 Rand survey commissioned by FEMA found serious cultural issues at the agency for people of color and minorities. The survey assessed gender bias, sexual harassment, and gender discrimination. This survey found that 29 percent of the employees expressed the views that their civil rights were being violated. Twenty percent reported having experienced civil rights violations based on sex. Eighteen percent reported having experienced civil rights violations based on race or ethnicity. So, this begs the question, what is FEMA doing to address these allegations?

So, Madam Administrator, thank you for being with us today. Sorry, to rush right into this. I have been busy with some other committee assignments as well and if this has already broached—this issue has been brought to your attention, I beg that you would forgive me for asking it twice. But these are things of concern to me.

Ms. CRISWELL. It is a very important issue, absolutely. I am very familiar with the Rand study that the previous administration commissioned as a result of some of the actions that we found were happening across the agency. Harassment at every level, at any level, is not tolerated and I have worked with my team to better understand where we were at in addressing the findings within that Rand report. Prior to my arrival, they had created a Culture Improvement Action Plan to begin that process. We have recently reviewed that plan, added some more metrics to measure our approach to addressing that and have reissued it out to the workforce so they understand that this is a commitment of mine to make sure that we hear our employees, understand what their concerns are, and we are measuring our progress against addressing those concerns.

The Rand study also suggested that we do a follow-on survey, which we have done and we are right now compiling the results from that survey. But we are going to continue to tackle this head-on because this is an incredibly important issue. Our workforce is our No. 1 priority and that level of harassment and discrimination is not going to be tolerated.

Mr. GREEN. I greatly appreciate your answer, but let me just add one additional commentary. The survey reported that 40 percent were told to drop the gender claims, and 42 percent were told to drop their racial claims. I know that you are doing what you can and you are moving into this area as expeditiously as possible. But that does create some concern that people are encouraged to drop their claims. Any comments that you would like to give on the claims that are being dropped?

Ms. CRISWELL. No, it is a very concerning claim. I would say one of the things that we did to address that directly, was we established an Office of Professional Responsibility. So, this is something that we did not have in the past and now it provides a mechanism for employees to reach out and report misconduct and we have an

actual investigative unit that can address those and research them and identify the validity of that claim and then take action as appropriate.

Mr. GREEN. Well, I do thank you very much for looking into this. I am eager to hear what the results are. If at all possible, could you please keep me informed as to how we proceed with it?

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes, sir.

Mr. GREEN. I also can sort-of track it, if I may. By the way, I am going to salute you for a great job that is being done. So, it is just important that I stay on top of this.

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes, sir, absolutely.

Mr. GREEN. I yield back the balance of my time.

Chairman THOMPSON. The gentleman yields back. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Pfluger, for 5 minutes.

Mr. PFLUGER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Administrator, for your time today. I would like to just ask you a couple questions to start with and thanks for your service as a firefighter. I understand that there is a lot of good lessons learned there as somebody who served in the military, you know, I think those types of jobs can really teach us about preparedness. Would you say that COVID-19 is a concern to FEMA?

Ms. CRISWELL. I think COVID-19 is a concern across the country. As we continue to see new variants develop, we want to make sure that we are staying on top of a situation and putting measures in place to protect our workforce.

Mr. PFLUGER. Yeah, and I appreciate your statement saying that FEMA continue to take all necessary measures to prioritize your workforce health and safety within the COVID-19 environment. Also, would you say that FEMA is committed to taking every step toward mitigating any disaster? I mean, you kind-of—you kind-of say that as a firefighter you understand the impact that mitigation has. So, are you committed to taking every single step you can if you know about disasters that FEMA is working on? Are you committed to taking every step possible to mitigating them?

Ms. CRISWELL. Yeah, I think that we have a responsibility and a tremendous opportunity right now to increase our approach to mitigation in reducing impacts from future disasters. So, it is one of my top priorities is to make sure that we are being very proactive and deliberate in our efforts in that.

Mr. PFLUGER. Well, that is good to know. For months, we have seen an unparalleled immigration and humanitarian crisis unfolding at our Southern Border. Each month, U.S. Customs and Border Protection is encountering a record number of migrants that are crossing the border illegally. They are completely overwhelmed. The impact that this crisis has trickled to every corner of the United States. When you look at the vaccination rates in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, the infection rate in Honduras is 3 times per capita that to the United States, yet, their vaccination rate is 5 percent. Vaccination rate in Guatemala is less than 1 percent, yet, 2½ times infection per capita compared to the United States.

So, Administrator, talk to me about Title 42. You are going to mitigate to the best of your ability. I assume you are in favor of

continuing Title 42 for our protection of our own country with regards to COVID-19.

Ms. CRISWELL. Representative, I can't speak specifically on Title 42. What I can tell you is that we are taking the steps and the actions that we need to continue to rollout COVID-19 vaccines to anybody who is eligible as per CDC guidelines. We will continue to support our Federal agencies in coordinating as needed.

Mr. PFLUGER. Administrator, I understand. You are the administrator responsible for being a voice for the emergency and disaster relief and the things that hit our country. So, wouldn't you be a voice to mitigate something and to say if we can prevent further infection, you have just told me in this very short 5 minutes, that you are going to do everything you can to prevent the spread of future variants of COVID-19. So, doesn't that include Title 42 expulsions?

Ms. CRISWELL. Sir, again, I can't speak to the Title 42 aspect of this. FEMA's role is to make sure that we are supporting the COVID-19 vaccine mission, as well as coordinating with our Federal partners to help them establish or to continue their operations.

Mr. PFLUGER. OK. So, FEMA basically has no role in being a voice for mitigating other outside infections and sources of infection to this country.

Ms. CRISWELL. FEMA's role is to support the mitigation of impacts to natural disasters. That is our primary role.

Mr. PFLUGER. Well, I would say an impact to natural disaster that we have is using something like Title 42 to make sure that we don't continue to have increases in a pandemic that are impacting our country, impacting our own population. So, I would expect that with your professional experience as a firefighter and now in your professional role, that you would be a voice for that.

Midland, Texas is the heart of my district. In March, with no—almost no warning from DHS, or zero warning from DHS or HHS, the administration established an emergency intake site to house unaccompanied children. Thankfully, this facility was closed after 3 months this week. In a letter I received from DHS, it said that it was determined by FEMA and referred to HHS Office of Refugee Resettlement that the site was basically to be selected and the criteria was met. Can you please tell me what that selection criteria was from FEMA's perspective?

Ms. CRISWELL. So, our role in supporting this operation was to, No. 1, provide a coordinating mechanism for HHS and CBP and a second role was to help them in the establishment of these emergency intake sites. I can't speak specifically onto the selection criteria. But our role was, again, to support HHS and CBP as they were standing up those operations.

Chairman THOMPSON. The gentleman's time from Texas has expired. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey, Mr. Malinowski, for 5 minutes.

Mr. MALINOWSKI. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Administrator. I want to actually start by thanking you and FEMA for the extraordinary efforts that you have made in New Jersey, which I know are representative of what you did elsewhere in the country to support our vaccination efforts. We have one site in Newark, New Jersey, a FEMA-run site where more than 220,000

people were vaccinated. It is one reason why we are doing very, very well as a State in beating back this terrible disease.

For my questions, I want to turn to the climate risks that you mentioned several times including your testimony. I appreciate that in your testimony you noted in that context that FEMA will, as you said, always be ready to respond when a disaster occurs, but the true success rests in mitigating the worst impacts of disasters before they occur. So, in that spirit, I want to ask you—I want to talk about one word, and that word is resilience. We have in the bipartisan infrastructure deal \$40 billion in this category of resiliency. Don't get me wrong, I support it. This is money we have to spend and I support what FEMA does on resiliency.

But I am concerned that sometimes some of my colleagues treat that resiliency money as if that is our response to climate. As if that is somehow green. I would note one story that I am sure you recently saw that the city of Miami asked the Army Corps recently, what are we going to do about rising sea levels? How are we going to protect ourselves? The Army Corps came back and said, well, here is what you do. You build a 6-mile long, 20-foot-high seawall. It is going to cost you \$6 billion. Obviously, no one in Miami was happy to hear that news. I have seen estimates from organizations like the Center for Climate Integrity that to protect every community in the United States just by building a seawall against the climate change that is already happening would cost around \$300 billion for storm protection. The Army Corps doesn't have that kind of money—amount to appropriate. So, obviously, with the sea cities the wealthier protecting themselves. The communities that are less wealthy probably won't probably do anything.

So, I want to ask just your thoughts on this. I presume obviously FEMA will do what is necessary to protect our communities, and we all agree that it would be better if we made these investments to prevent the catastrophic events of climate change rather than simply investing in the resiliency.

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes, sir. We are really at a pivotal time, right? We are seeing more impacts from disasters, more frequent disasters, and we have an opportunity to really make a generational-level difference in the investments that we make to protect not only our children, but our grandchildren from the impacts from these future threats. FEMA has a small role in that. We do have several mitigation grant funds available, but they don't come to the level of the types of projects that you are talking about. But what we do have is within the programs and in particularly the BRIC program, the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Program, you know, we have increased the amount of the Federal share so we can start to do more community-wide and system-wide projects within the communities. We also as part of that process, really encourage them to partner with other types of mitigation efforts that are on-going to reduce the impact. So, I think it is through this type of a partnership across many different agencies, whether it is Federal agencies, private sector, and the communities themselves that we really work together to better understand what they think their future risks are going to be and we do some long-term visionary planning for how we can reduce the impacts from those risks.

Mr. MALINOWSKI. I think it would be helpful just going forward that the more you can help us estimate the long-term policies because obviously your budget is not nearly what it needs to be. Again, just dealing with the level of climate change we currently are experiencing, Army Corps' budget is not nearly what it needs to be. I mean, honestly, there is nothing to prevent the effects of climate change, within 10 or 20 years, like the entire Federal budget will be resiliency. I just I want to make the point that while I am for doing what is necessary, resiliency is not climate policy. Resiliency is resignation. This is why we got to do some of the bold and ambitious, yes, costly things that President Biden has proposed, but much cheaper than the alternative. Thank you, and I yield back.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you very much. The gentleman yields back. Let me thank the administrator for her testimony and the Members for their questions. Madam Administrator, you have been an excellent witness. You are an excellent example of FEMA and its role here in responding to disasters. Let me assure you that our committee stands ready and willing to continue to engage you in whatever endeavor you have. It is important that as Americans, we do what we do in the interests of protecting our country. But as important, I want to get your commitment to reassess how we look at some of those underserved communities in disaster declarations. It is unfair that one's worth determines the disaster when we are all Americans. I think, you know, there has to be some smart people somewhere who can help us figure this out in a short period of time.

The other thing I would like to get, you are committed to doing something with Puerto Rico. There is a little island called Vieques that has been just devastated to no end. We have been kind-of taking that as a project we want to try to help the people on that island and you might have seen correspondence down through the time raising that issue about how they failed to respond as well as the on-going challenges that that island has. So, I will be talking to you a little more about that.

The Members of the committee as I have already indicated, may have additional questions for you. We ask that you respond expeditiously in writing to those questions. The Chair reminds Members of the committee the record will remain open for 10 business days. Without objection, the committee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:10 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

QUESTIONS FROM CHAIRMAN BENNIE G. THOMPSON FOR DEANNE B. CRISWELL

Question 1. Disasters do not affect everyone the same way—they exacerbate the struggles of already-vulnerable populations. Adding to the challenge, the current system for disaster aid sends more money to high-income areas over low-income, often minority, communities. One of FEMA’s key priorities this year is integrating equity into everything the agency does. Can you please describe or explain which policies or procedures FEMA will implement to ensure more equitable outcomes?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 2. Over the years, I have been concerned about the American Red Cross (ARC) falling short in meeting its mission in mass care operations. In June, ARC was supposed to provide clean-up kits to help Mississippians impacted by flooding clean their damaged homes. Several hundred people in Rosedale, MS gathered to receive these kits, but ARC only had 25, leaving hundreds of people without the needed materials. It concerns me that ARC did not have situational awareness in Rosedale to understand the scope of the need, and it causes me to question ARC’s preparedness to respond to other disasters. Are you concerned about what happened in Mississippi? Are you confident in the Red Cross’s abilities to meet its meeting the mission of administering mass care pursuant to Emergency Support Function #6?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 3. The DHS Office of Inspector General (OIG) recently-issued several troubling reports about FEMA’s execution and oversight of the advance contract that provided short-term hotel lodging for disaster survivors during the 2017 disaster season. Among the many deficiencies cited, the OIG found that FEMA did not ensure that the contractor properly vetted participating hotels to make sure they were suitable for housing survivors or verify the accuracy of charges. The OIG estimated that FEMA paid more than \$55 million in unverified taxes for unoccupied rooms. What actions is FEMA taking to address the OIG’s finding related to the execution and oversight of this contract? The OIG’s reports raise serious concerns over how well FEMA is executing and overseeing its other 88 advanced contracts. Will you commit to reviewing whether FEMA has encountered similar challenges with its other contracts?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 4. In October 2019, FEMA stood up the Office of Professional Responsibility (OPR) to ensure expeditious, fair, and objective investigations of allegations of misconduct and harassment. In addition to serving as the agency’s central clearinghouse for intake and processing of these allegations, OPR manages FEMA’s Anti-Harassment Program (AHP). Given its recent establishment, there is a lot of opportunity for you, as administrator, to shape how OPR’s mission is carried out and how the office promotes better treatment of staff. What is your plan for OPR and how to do you see that office improving FEMA’s workplace culture?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 5. A 2020 Government Accountability Office report (GAO–20–360) found that FEMA “did not provide reliable staffing information to the field during disasters.” Also, the GAO found issues with personnel who were deemed “qualified” but did not have the skills to effectively perform their jobs. This is concerning and during COVID–19 FEMA has modified its staffing and training processes. Where is FEMA with addressing staff training deficiencies? What challenges has FEMA faced in properly training their employees and what new practices has FEMA implemented?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 6. In April, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Office of Inspector General (OIG) released a report detailing the Trump administration’s efforts to deny and delay aid to Puerto Rico. This report confirmed what many

of us had been saying for years—President Trump denied aid to U.S. citizens at their time of greatest need. What is your plan for reviewing the recovery missions taking place in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands to encourage a full recovery?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 7. Disasters do not affect everyone the same way and they exacerbate the struggles of already-vulnerable populations. Adding to the challenge, the current system for disaster aid sends more money to high-income areas over low-income, often minority, communities. One of FEMA's key priorities this year is integrating equity into everything the agency does. Can you please describe or explain which policies or procedures FEMA will implement to ensure more equitable outcomes?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

QUESTIONS FROM HONORABLE ELAINE LURIA FOR DEANNE B. CRISWELL

Question 1. I want to commend FEMA for its efforts in establishing community vaccination centers across the country, to include the Military Circle Mall community vaccination center in Norfolk on the line between my district and Congressman Bobby Scott's district. This center administered more than 80,000 doses of vaccine, 50 percent of which helped vaccinate the underserved and the vulnerable communities of Hampton Roads.¹ This was critical in helping the Nation surpass the President's goal of 100 million vaccinations in 100 days. About a month after FEMA closed the Military Circle Mall community vaccination center, the cities of Norfolk, Virginia Beach, Portsmouth, and Chesapeake teamed up and reopened the clinic to continue serving the community.² As more and more Americans receive vaccine doses, how will FEMA's COVID-19 responsibilities change? What methodology is FEMA using to determine whether to continue or draw-down community vaccination centers?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 2. Flooding is a serious issue in my district. In fact, the First National Flood Risk Assessment, in 2020, found that 344,000 Virginia properties are at risk for flooding, and expect it to increase to nearly 390,000 by 2050. Approximately 20 percent of property in Virginia Beach and 27 percent in Norfolk are at risk for flooding over the next 30 years.³ That is why I will be introducing legislation soon that would help FEMA establish a database of flood history information for properties that buyers under contract can access. And while I am pleased to see an increase in the fiscal year 2022 budget request for the Disaster Relief Fund, as a representative from a district that is highly susceptible to flooding, how will FEMA help coastal communities like mine deal with the issues of continued sea-level rise, sunny-day flooding, and persistent high-water levels? What kind of creative thinking is coming out of the mitigation side of FEMA to address these issues?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 3a. How much money does FEMA estimate the National Public Infrastructure Pre-Disaster Mitigation Fund (funds Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities)⁴ will receive as a result of the COVID disaster declaration?

What is FEMA planning to do with it?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 3b. Will it allocate those funds in 1 year or spread them out over a number of years?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 3c. If not 1 year, will those funds remain set aside for pre-disaster mitigation or used for other disaster-related expenses?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 3d. How will FEMA allow/account for variability in this funding following small and large disaster years?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

¹FEMA Press Release May 20, 2021—<https://www.fema.gov/press-release/20210521/fema-end-its-role-military-circle-mall-community-vaccination-center-norfolk>.

²News article on clinic reopening—<https://www.13newsnow.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/covid-19-vaccine-clinic-at-military-circle-mall-is-now-open-and-accepting-walk-ins/291-217b9946-bc38-4285-8658-8490c04d2b05>.

³News article with link to study—<https://www.wtkr.com/news/virginia-beach-ranks-top-for-cities-at-serious-risk-of-flooding-in-virginia>. Another place to look for stats is here: https://riskfinder.climatecentral.org/place/virginiabeach.va.us?comparisonType=place&forecast-Name=Basic&forecastType=NOAA2017_int_p50&impact=Housing&impactGroup=Buildings-&level=5&unit=ft&zillowPlaceType=place&zillowVarType=Count&zillowYear=2100.

⁴Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) will support States, local communities, Tribes, and territories as they undertake hazard mitigation projects, reducing the risks they face from disasters and natural hazards. BRIC is a new FEMA pre-disaster hazard mitigation program that replaces the existing Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) program.

Question 4. FEMA personnel have been working under an exceptionally high operational tempo, whether responding to the many natural disasters we continue to experience or providing critical assistance in addressing the COVID pandemic. What steps are you taking to retain and replenish your workforce?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 5. The President's budget seeks a \$15.3 million reduction in funding for the State Homeland Security Grant Program (SHSGP)⁵ and a \$15.3 million reduction for the Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) Grant Program.⁶ These grant programs play a critical role in helping to keep citizens and districts like mine safe and secure from terrorist threats. Could you discuss the rationale of the reduction in grant funding?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 6. FEMA has made several failed attempts to upgrade its numerous legacy grant management systems into a consolidated, modernized system. The most recent attempt started in 2016 and ran into trouble within 2 years. Initial deployment was delayed by 6 months, but finally achieved in March 2020. However, I understand that full deployment has been delayed by 3 years—to fiscal year 2023—and the system is now expected to cost more than double its original estimate. Additionally, FEMA has yet to address two GAO recommendations related to planning and executing tests to assess the new system's security controls. This system is needed now more than ever since the CARES Act created hundreds of millions of dollars of additional grant authorizations for FEMA to manage in addition to the several billion it disburses each year. What actions is FEMA taking to ensure the new grant management system will be effective and secure? What can Congress do to help expedite the deployment of this system?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

⁵The State Homeland Security Program (SHSP) provides funds to support the implementation of State homeland security strategies to address identified planning, organization, equipment, training, and exercise needs to prevent, protect against, prepare for, and respond to acts of terrorism and other catastrophic events. In fiscal year 2021, Virginia was allocated \$8.4 million in SHSP funds.

⁶The Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) program provides funds to address the unique planning, organization, equipment, training, and exercise needs of high-risk urban areas, and assists them in building an enhanced and sustainable capacity to prevent, protect against, prepare for and respond to acts of terrorism. In fiscal year 2021, Hampton Roads was allocated \$3.8 million in UASI funds.

APPENDIX II

LETTER FROM EVERBRIDGE

July 8, 2021.

The Honorable BENNIE THOMPSON,
*Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security, U.S. House of Representatives, Wash-
ington, DC 20515.*

DEAR CHAIRMAN THOMPSON: Thank you for convening this important hearing Examining FEMA's Readiness to Meet its Mission on June 29, 2021. As you are aware, the National Warning System (NAWAS) funded and operated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is a communications system originally designed and implemented in the 1950's as a means of notifying and preparing our nation's local emergency managers for a nuclear attack. Fortunately, the system was never used for its intended purpose, but has proven invaluable to our nation's local emergency managers responding to and coping with natural disasters.

The NAWAS supports the nonmilitary actions taken by Federal agencies, by the private sector, and by individual citizens to meet essential human needs; to support the military effort; to ensure continuity of Federal authority at national and regional levels; and to ensure survival as a free and independent nation under all emergency conditions, including a national emergency caused by threatened or actual attack on the United States.

The NAWAS has major terminals at each State's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and Emergency Management Facility. Today, the system consists of what is effectively a 2,200+ hardwired network telephone information lines. Obviously, the NAWAS is more than just a normal telephone system. The phone instruments are designed to provide protection for lightning strikes so they may be used during storms. The interconnecting lines are provided some protection and avoid local telephone switches. This ensures they are available even when the local telephone system is down or overloaded.

Both the National Warning Center (NWC) and the Alternate National Warning Center (ANWC) at Olney, MD are staffed 24 hours per day and serve as the primary control for the NAWAS.

The NAWAS is used by local officials thousands of times a year for emergency management coordination and response. One typical scenario is the use of the NAWAS during tornadoes. As storms are sighted, emergency managers in one town or county can communicate with their colleagues in other counties who are in the path of the storm, advising them as to direction, speed, and intensity. The drawback to this system is it relies on human intervention. If there is no one there to receive the communications, the warning is not received and cannot be further disseminated to others. This has resulted in missed tornado warnings.

Today modernization and automation are planned in most telecommunications systems, however, to date, the NAWAS has not been included in any modernization plan. As new EOCs, dispatch centers, and public safety building are being built across the country, they are being hardened for availability and resiliency against significant threats, both natural and man-made. Unfortunately, the main communication hub, connecting the 2,200+ NAWAS end points has not seen any major efforts to strengthen or build availability and resiliency to the most basic response needed, communications. As our country has progressed significantly since the 1950's, we have endured natural disasters, man-made disasters and most recently a global pandemic that has forced the United States to rethink not only how we work, but where we work from. With the greater adoption of work from home, we've had to update and change our continuity of operations plans to adapt to a more mobile workforce.

By modernizing the NAWAS, we can automate the detection and notifications of severe threats against the country, while ensuring the ability to effectively and securely communicate with a more mobile, device-independent workforce of emergency

responders, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year using multiple modalities. We encourage Members to support funding to allow FEMA to proceed with this critical infrastructure resiliency project of modernizing NAWAS.

