HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE
ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS
FIRST SESSION

NOMINATION OF DEANNE B. CRISWELL TO BE ADMINISTRATOR,
FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, U.S DEPARTMENT OF
HOMELAND SECURITY

MARCH 25, 2021

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OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN PETERS

Chairman PETERS. The Committee will come to order. Today we are considering the nomination of Deanne Criswell to be Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), a critical part of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Welcome, Ms. Criswell, and good to see you, and your sons, RJ and Eddie, who I had the opportunity to meet here a few minutes ago. Great to see both of you here as well. Congratulations on your historic nomination and thank you for your willingness to serve your country once again.

FEMA is charged with helping people before, during, and after disasters. The Administrator leads the Agency’s efforts to respond to disasters, from hurricanes to historic flooding and wildfires to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID–19) pandemic. The FEMA Administrator coordinates closely with State and local partners to provide emergency assistance and save lives in time of crisis, and to help communities across the country rebuild and become safer and more prepared for the next disaster.

This is an immensely challenging job, one that demands an experienced and tested leader. Ms. Criswell, you have over 25 years of emergency management and disaster response experience at the Federal, at the State, and local levels, a record that shows you are well prepared to lead this critical agency. You have the support of multiple emergency management and law enforcement groups, as well as former FEMA administrators who served under both Democratic and Republican Presidents.

If confirmed, you will take the helm while the Nation still faces a historic public health crisis, and FEMA is actively engaged in response and relief efforts. You will play a key role in ensuring vaccine distribution is efficient and is effective, and that every commu-
nity has the resources that they need to recover from this pandemic.

As you know, the pandemic is only one of the many emergencies that FEMA is facing, and will face in the months and years ahead. We are in the midst of a spring flooding and heading into hurricane and wildfire seasons, while many communities are still trying to recover from severe winter storms.

From our earlier conversation, I know you understand that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to these disaster responses, and I also know that you understand that we must do more to invest in mitigation to reduce the risk before a disaster strikes. As communities across the Nation continue to experience the impacts of climate change, we must work together to mitigate this growing threat.

Ms. Criswell, I look forward to hearing more about your plans to lead this critical agency, and thank you for your willingness to serve, and for being here with us today.

I think as we are waiting for Senator Portman for his opening remarks we have a virtual introduction by Senator Gillibrand. If that video is available we could play that video.

OPENING STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND, A U.S SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF NEW YORK

Senator GILLIBRAND. Challenges we face as a nation are serious and ever-evolving, from the growing threats of climate change-fueled natural disasters to global diseases like COVID–19. During those crises, we rely on 20,000 women and men of FEMA to form the front lines of our response. They, and the American people, require competent, qualified, permanent, and Senate-confirmed leadership.

Ms. Criswell is the experienced leader FEMA needs at the helm. Ms. Criswell is crisis tested. She served in the Colorado Air National Guard for 21 years, deploying to support overseas operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, where she responded to crises in a high-stakes environment.

At her day job as Emergency Manager for the city of Aurora, Colorado, she gave key experience at the local level. During her tenure as the senior leader at FEMA, she led Federal response and recovery operations for emergencies and disasters, including flooding in North Dakota and South Carolina, wildfires in Colorado, and tropical storms and typhoons in Florida and Guam. She also coordinated key stakeholders during the development of the national response to the Ebola outbreak.

She currently serves as the Commissioner of New York City Emergency Management, where she made history as the first woman to hold that job. In that role, she has coordinated the city’s response to COVID–19, tropical storms, extreme summer heat, large fires, and power outages, including the July 2019 blackouts.

As evidence by her vision as Emergency Management Commissioner, Ms. Criswell knows that the best way to manage risk is by taking a proactive approach to reducing risk, increasing resiliency, and creating the capability to respond to new and emerging threats. She knows, from her experience as a first responder and local emergency manager, that State and local leaders know their
community best, and a disaster response should take a coordinated approach that supports their efforts.

This forward-thinking, collaborative mindset would be an asset to all of FEMA's operations. Ms. Criswell, if confirmed, would be the first woman to lead the Agency, is also the leader FEMA needs to tackle its internal challenges.

A 2018 Rand report estimated high rates of harassment and discrimination within FEMA's ranks. As the New York State Emergency Management Commissioner, she has worked to proactively address racial and gender inequalities, and encouraged employees to share their concerns. She knows that a team is only made stronger by its diversity, and that welcoming a variety of experiences and perspectives leads to better ideas.

If confirmed, Ms. Criswell will bring a wealth of first-hand knowledge and experience to the role that will leave FEMA and our country better prepared to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

Chairman Peters. Thank you. Ranking Member Portman, you are recognized for your opening comments.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR PORTMAN

Senator Portman. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks to my colleague, Senator Gillibrand, for introducing Ms. Criswell. I enjoyed our conversation, and as we talked about, FEMA plays an incredibly important role always, but particularly now, not just with the natural disasters we have recently encountered but with the work that FEMA is doing along the border as we deal with the influx of unaccompanied kids and others.

You have a lot of experience, 25 years of experience working in emergency management at the State, local, and even the Federal level. I am glad you had that time with the National Guard in Colorado as well, because you led emergency management units while being deployed in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Qatar, so that experience is very important.

The next FEMA administrator will lead more than 21,000 staff, so it is a big management job. The budget is $74 billion, and again, we have plenty of natural disasters that need to be coordinated. The COVID–19 pandemic has made that more difficult. We just had a historic hurricane season, and then again what is going on on the Southern Border, to name some of the important issues.

One of the things that I want to focus on today is how every State is different and how we need to be sure that, at the FEMA leadership level, there is an understanding of that. Ohioans have been provided significant COVID support, thanks to FEMA, $100 million in emergency protective measures, $1.4 billion in lost wages assistance. Last week, FEMA launched a mass vaccination clinic in Cleveland, Ohio, to administer 6,000 doses a day, prioritizing high-risk Ohioans and underserved populations. So again, FEMA is playing a big role, some are not aware, even with regard to COVID–19 vaccinations.

The tragic attacks that we have seen at synagogues and other places of worship over the past decade, which have increased, have led FEMA to play a bigger role in what is called the Nonprofit Se-

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1 The prepared statement of Mr. Portman appears in the Appendix on page 35.
curity Grant Program (NSGP). Senator Peters and I have spent a lot of time working on this and increased the funding, but also managed to pass an authorization for another 5 years.

This is an area where, as you know from our conversation, I have a strong interest, and my hope is that this Nonprofit Security Grant Program is something that you will focus on personally to ensure that the appropriate funding continues to be there for these purposes—there is a lot of demand, sadly, right now for this—but also to be sure that the appropriated funding comes increased responsibility for guarding against fraud or waste, or certainly abuse of taxpayer funds.

Commissioner Criswell, I look forward to hearing what you will do to address these issues, should you be confirmed. I appreciate your willingness to serve again at a time when our country is facing some of these unprecedented challenges, and I look forward to the discussion today regarding your thoughts on the role FEMA can play in response.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate you allowing me to give an opening statement.

Chairman Peters. Thank you. Thank you, Ranking Member Portman.

Ms. Criswell, now, it is the practice of this Committee to swear in witnesses. If you would please stand and raise your right hand. Do you swear that the testimony you will give before this Committee will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you, God?

Ms. Criswell. I do.

Chairman Peters. You may be seated.

Ms. Criswell, you may now proceed with your opening remarks.

TESTIMONY OF DEANNE B. CRISWELL, TO BE ADMINISTRATOR, FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Ms. Criswell. Thank you. Good morning, Chairman Peters, Ranking Member Portman, and distinguished Members of this Committee. I am honored to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to be the next Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. I would like to start by thanking Senator Gillibrand for her very kind introduction. It has been a true honor to serve New York City as their Commissioner for New York City Emergency Management.

I would also like to thank my family and friends for all their support throughout this process. In particular, I would like to recognize my two sons, RJ and Eddie, who are here with me today. They have sacrificed much over the years and have supported me throughout my service to our country, and I am very happy that they could join me here today.

I believe in FEMA's mission of helping people before, during, and after disasters, particularly as we seek to bring an end to the COVID–19 pandemic. The pathway to a ready and resilient nation requires a shared vision and takes a proactive mindset. We must reduce risk through system-based mitigation; we must increase the

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1 The prepared statement of Ms. Criswell appears in the Appendix on page 38.
resilience of our communities so they can adapt as threats change; and we must scale our response to minimize the consequences of disasters and emergencies.

I understand this is a challenging mission, and if confirmed, I welcome the opportunity to meet this challenge and lead FEMA in its efforts to create a more prepared and resilient nation.

This last year has been the most challenging of my career. As New York City responded to the impacts brought on by the COVID–19 global pandemic, I led a team that worked tirelessly to prevent the collapse of the health care system. We worked to ensure no one went hungry. We stood up a first-of-its-kind program to provide sheltering operations for vulnerable populations. Sadly, we also implemented a mass-fatality operation to meet the scale and severity of the impacts of COVID–19. We had to have the ability to make decisions with imperfect information and pivot as more details become available. This was a critical skill that emergency managers across this country bring to bear every day.

As FEMA responds to the COVID–19 pandemic, it must also support communities in preparing for future challenges and adapting to a changing world. The 2020 Atlantic Hurricane season brought a record 30 named storms, and we also saw wildfires cause significant damage.

I believe the best way to balance the competing demands is to make risk reduction investments to build more resilient communities and infrastructure, including against the threat of climate change. FEMA has developed robust preparedness and response capabilities, and now we have an incredible opportunity to invest in our ability to reduce risk.

As we look to the future, I believe emergency management across the Nation is at a pivotal point. As an emergency manager, I have always focused on keeping families and communities safe. There is nothing more rewarding than being able to help the people of this Country, and I am deeply grateful to be nominated for that important role.

Finally, I understand the importance of working closely with Congress and the Members of this Committee to make sure FEMA is responsive to your communities and the people you represent. I have appreciated the opportunity to speak with Members on both sides about the importance of emergency management, and, if confirmed, commit to working in a bipartisan manner at all times.

Thank you for your consideration of my nomination, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

Chairman Peters. Thank you, Ms. Criswell. Before we get started there are three questions the Committee asks of every nominee for the record.

First, is there anything that you are aware of in your background that might present a conflict of interest with the duties of the office for which you have been nominated?

Ms. Criswell. No.

Chairman Peters. Second, do you know of anything, personal or otherwise, that would in any way prevent you from fully and honorably discharging the responsibilities of the office for which you have been nominated?

Ms. Criswell. No.
Chairman Peters. And lastly, do you agree, without reservation, to comply with any requests or summons to appear and testify before any duly constituted committee of Congress, if you are confirmed?

Ms. Criswell. Yes.

Chairman Peters. Ms. Criswell, according to multiple studies, minority and impoverished communities feel the impact of natural disasters far more severely than others, and we have certainly seen that time and time again in my home State of Michigan. These communities often have difficulty obtaining the assistance that they need from the Federal Government, and therefore, they do not recover as quickly as they could have otherwise, or certainly to the same level pre-disaster.

My question to you is, if confirmed, specifically what steps would you take to make sure that these communities have the same access and the same assistance as others affected by a disaster?

Ms. Criswell. Chairman, thank you very much for that question. It is incredibly important to make sure that we provide programs and services to communities in an equitable way. I think, as you mentioned in your opening remarks, that a one-size-fits-all does not fit every community.

I have seen, first-hand, the devastation that communities have experienced across this country, and, if confirmed, I am committed to working with our leadership team, FEMA’s leadership team, as well as our regional leadership to ensure that programs are delivered consistently and equitably across the Nation.

Chairman Peters. Last Congress, I introduced the Achieving Racial and Ethnic Equity in Disaster Response, Recovery, and Resilience Act to establish a dedicated office to help to address the disparities that we see in disaster response, to make sure there is a focus on it, to make sure it not occurring. Can I receive your commitment today to work together, and particularly with this piece of legislation which I intend to introduce shortly here in the Congress, to help address the unacceptable gap in Federal assistance?

Ms. Criswell. Chairman, I have not had a chance to see your legislation but I, again, think it is incredibly important that equity in how FEMA delivers its programs is incredibly important. If confirmed, you have my commitment to work with you as this legislation gets introduced again to see how FEMA can be a part of that.

Chairman Peters. Great. Good to hear.

Studies have also shown that our nation can avoid $6 in future disaster costs for every $1 that we spend on hazard mitigation today. That is a pretty good return on investment, regardless of your perspective. However, mitigation projects have historically made up only a small part of the nation’s disaster spending. Communities in my home State of Michigan are facing serious challenges due to shoreline erosion and rising water levels, destroyed homes and public property, and it has even forced some residents to relocate.

A bill that I authored, the Safeguarding Tomorrow Through Ongoing Risk Mitigation Act, recently was signed into law, and will allow States to really access revolving loan funds for mitigation projects in their States, such as protecting coastlines from further erosion.
If confirmed, would you support the expansion of mitigation programs such as these revolving loan funds to help protect our local communities?

Ms. Criswell. Chairman, mitigation is so critically important in today's time, as we see an increase in the number and severity of disasters. The best way for us to protect against that is to try to reduce risk. If confirmed, I am looking forward to learning more about the resources that will become available through that act, and working with you and your team to see how we can make sure communities across the Nation understand the new resources that might be available to them.

Chairman Peters. I appreciate your understanding of the issue and your willingness to work on that issue. We passed the authorizing language, and now we have to get the funding and appropriations. But I can assure you local communities are looking forward to having this opportunity to invest in their communities and put in the kind of mitigation dollars necessary to protect their residents and also reduce costs in the long run.

Ms. Criswell, as I am sure you are well aware, the suite of FEMA preparedness grants was developed following the attacks of September 11, 2001 (9/11). These grants help secure our nation's buses, trains, and ports from the threat of terrorism, among other efforts. In many ways, these grants were designed to prevent a large-scale terrorist attack on our country, like we saw on 9/11. Twenty years later, I think we can all agree that our threat landscape has certainly changed dramatically since that time. Our communities must now be prepared to prevent an attack from a white supremacist with an assault rifle, a ransomware attack by a criminal organization, as well as large-scale attacks by international terrorists, which continues to be something that we need to be prepared for.

If confirmed, what changes would you undertake to FEMA's grant programs to better align with these modern threats that we face?

Ms. Criswell. Chairman, you raise a really great point, and the preparedness grants, as you mentioned, started after September 11th, and they have done a tremendous job at increasing the capabilities and the preparedness of jurisdictions across this country.

As the risk and threats do continue to change, the grant program also must change with it. It is my understanding that Secretary Mayorkas has also asked FEMA to do an assessment of the current risk formula to make sure that we are addressing, that FEMA is addressing the current risks across the Nation. If confirmed, I look forward to seeing where FEMA is at with that current assessment and seeing how we can always make sure that we take the opportunity to improve our programs to make a more prepared and resilient nation.

Chairman Peters. Extreme weather events, such as hurricanes, floods, wildfires, they are likely to become more frequent and intense due to climate change. We are already seeing that. These events lead to a rising number of human casualties, economic losses, and there does not seem to be any abatement in that. In fact, we are likely to continue to see it escalate in the years ahead.
If confirmed as Administrator, what would you do to ensure that the entire country, from the Federal Government to State and local partners, are actively considering climate change in their disaster planning?

Ms. Criswell. Chairman, we are definitely seeing the increase in the impacts from climate change. As I said in my opening remarks, if we look back last year, with the most number of named storms and a record-breaking wildfire season, and the time is really now to make sure that we are making investments for this future risk, and looking out 5, 10 years, to try to reduce that risk as much as possible.

If confirmed, I really do look forward to understanding more about how jurisdictions utilize the newly implemented Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities program to continue to buy down that risk, but also to make sure that the plans that they have in place are taking into account this changing climate, and that they are looking forward to the future of what those impacts might be in addressing those in their plans and their responses.

Chairman Peters. Thank you, Ms. Criswell, for your answers to my questions, and I now recognize Ranking Member Portman for your questions.

Senator Portman. Thank you, Chairman Peters. Commissioner Criswell, we had a chance to talk about some of this during our conversation, but as you know we have made efforts here in this Committee to ensure that FEMA's Nonprofit Security Grant Program is effective in providing protection to synagogues, other places of worship, nonprofits. We have increased the funding. We have ensured that it does not just go to urban areas.

Have you had much experience with the Nonprofit Security Grant Program?

Ms. Criswell. Senator, I have not had personal experience with the Nonprofit Security Grant Program, but I do understand the importance of having a program like this, as we continue to see more soft target attacks across our country. The Nonprofit Security Grant Program is an excellent tool to help these soft targets and these nonprofit organizations build their resilience and harden their infrastructure to be better prepared for them.

Senator Portman. One of the concerns that I have had is sustainability and the need for local communities to work with the local police departments in coordination with FEMA, so if you will focus on that. Also, this notion that it is not just about money. I do not think the funding is all this is about. It is also about providing good counsel, advice, recommendations. As an example, ensuring that there is proper hardening of the facilities, that the cameras are in the right place, and so on.

I hope you will work with us on that too, to make sure that this is about providing best practices and expertise, and be sure that those States and areas, rural and suburban, that are not using the program yet understand the use of the program. I assume you would be committed to trying to do that.

Ms. Criswell. Senator, absolutely. It is my understanding that the funding for that program was recently increased, and so I think it is incredibly important that outreach is done so communities do
know that this resource is available to them, and then provide technical assistance so they can make the most advantage of it.

Senator PORTMAN. Let me ask you about the Southern Border. We talked again a little about this. FEMA has now been called into service to support the response to the ongoing crisis that is occurring at the Southern Border. Although no disaster declaration has been issued, is it your understanding that the Stafford Act requires the President to first declare a disaster before public assistance can be used to care for migrants?

Ms. CRISWELL. Senator, my understanding of FEMA’s role in the Southern Border is providing support to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) in the execution of their mission. I have not been briefed on their specific activities that they are performing, but through the Economy Act, Federal agencies can provide support to one another as they execute their missions.

Senator PORTMAN. Yes. My feeling is that—and I was just down at the border—is that FEMA’s role can be advisory, but the public assistance is not appropriate unless there is a disaster declaration. If migrants are arriving with COVID, which seems to be, I guess, the hook for FEMA to be there, isn’t the best way to address this stopping the surge rather than warehousing arriving children in close quarters?

Ms. CRISWELL. Senator, again, I am not familiar with the details of exactly what supports FEMA is providing, but I do understand that they are providing assistance with a small footprint to assist HHS and CBP with their mission, in particular, of trying to identify locations to provide the sheltering for the migrants.

Senator PORTMAN. We will have to talk about that more once we understand better what the mission is.

In terms of opening schools, I am a big fan of reopening our schools. According to Congressional Research Service (CRS), all 50 States have now had some schools reopen. My home State of Ohio has opened a lot of schools. Thus far, FEMA has only made reimbursements for schools reopening and operating in this year, 2021. If confirmed, would you commit to reviewing the decision to leave behind these schools that reopened back in 2020, and report back whether there will be a change in eligibility for all schools that have safely reopened under the new COVID–19 protocols?

Ms. CRISWELL. Senator, my experience in New York City has been very similar to what you just explained, really trying to make sure that schools are opened. It is one of the first things that we can do as a nation to really move toward recovery. The guidance that has come out of FEMA throughout this time has changed and been kind of vague at times. If confirmed, I am committed to seeing where the current policy is with reopening schools and what is reimbursable, and working with you and your staff to understand better your challenges and issues.

Senator PORTMAN. OK. I think that is really important, again, not to leave the schools behind that made the decision in 2020 to go ahead and continue educating our kids, and did so in a safe manner.

Many of the recent Government Accountability Office (GAO) and Inspector General (IG) reports covering FEMA highlight significant
challenges in managing risks inherent in any emergency and disaster response. Specifically, the GAO reports that FEMA is too focused on eligibility and compliance and too little focused on fraud prevention. As an example, the Inspector General recently reported that FEMA made more than $3 billion in improper and potentially fraudulent home repair payments since 2003.

What are ways that you have mitigated the risk of fraud in your programs, as Commissioner in New York City, and will you commit to me that should you be confirmed you will prioritize fraud prevention in program design and in every response during your tenure at FEMA?

Ms. Criswell. Senator, it is an incredibly important topic. With the amount of contracts and funding that is distributed during the initial phases of a disaster, it always opens up the opportunity for the potential for fraud.

During my time in New York City, and in particular during our response to COVID–19, we executed more emergency contracts than we ever had, and we put in place internal controls and auditing measures to make sure that we were trying to mitigate fraud as much as we could. In fact, we even reached out to the City's Department of Investigation to engage them early on so we could help identify potential issues ahead of time and put appropriate mechanisms in place to try to prevent fraud.

If confirmed, Senator, I am certainly committed to making sure that we have the appropriate internal controls and measures in place to audit the programs, while being very good stewards of the taxpayer dollar.

Senator Portman. I hope you work with your IG, and we certainly work closely with GAO in that. We will continue to have oversight over that. By the way, the Committee has oversight over a number of things, including the response to COVID, and we hope that you will be responsive to legitimate requests from the Committee. We talked about that, and you said that you would be. Can you just confirm that here, in the public hearing?

Ms. Criswell. Yes, Senator, I commit to cooperating with any of the hearings and the investigations that you are doing.

Senator Portman. A final thing for me is mitigation efforts, and along the shore of Lake Erie, unfortunately, we have more erosion as waters have risen. I believe it is cost-effective—Senator Peters has the same issue, I am sure, with Lake Michigan, and he has talked about that. But we have a real interest in providing funding up front for mitigation, because we think it is more cost effective to be able to deal with the problem and prepare for it, rather than try to fight erosion once it occurs. Would you commit to working with us on that?

Ms. Criswell. Yes, Senator. The new, again, Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program, is an excellent opportunity for us to have a transformational approach to how we prevent risk and reduce risk ahead of disasters. With a committed funding stream and the larger Federal share, I think communities really have an opportunity to do widespread community-wide projects to really help address some of the things that you are talking about.
If confirmed, I would really appreciate the opportunity to work with you and your staff to better understand the challenges you are facing, as well as making sure communities understand and can take advantage of this new, important resource.

Senator PORTMAN. Great. I look forward to working with you on that. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman PETERS. Thank you, Senator Portman. Senator Hawley, you are recognized for your questions.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR HAWLEY

Senator HAWLEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Nice to see you, Ms. Criswell. I appreciate our phone conversation and I look forward to chatting with you more here now.

We discussed yesterday, when we talked on the phone, the historic flooding that happened in the State of Missouri and other States, too, in the Midwest, but in Missouri very badly in the spring of 2019. One of the things we talked about was the difficulty that many residents of my State had in applying for and receiving individual assistance, and the inconsistent rules, the lack of information for local residents on the ground.

Will you work with me and Members of this Committee, if you are confirmed, to get rid of the bureaucratic red tape, to streamline this process, and to make sure that local residents, who are in the midst of a disaster—the worst part about this is they are not sitting at home with lots of time on their hands, applying. They are out of their homes, they have lost their farms, they are in desperate need, and they have no idea where to go to or what to do, and they are getting conflicting information. Will you work to remedy that and to streamline this process, if you are confirmed?

Ms. CRISWELL. Senator, I understand, being a local emergency manager at a small jurisdiction in Colorado, as well as even in a large urban area, the complexity of FEMA programs and how burdensome they can feel, especially to individuals as they are trying to recover. I am committed to, if confirmed, working with you to really better understand the challenges that you are seeing there in Missouri. FEMA has one of their strategic goals of reducing the complexity of FEMA, and I am committed, if confirmed, to continuing that and trying to streamline processes to the best of our ability.

Senator HAWLEY. Great. What about clawbacks? We talked about this as well. In Missouri, we have had the unfortunate situation of folks who waited a long time to get individual assistance were then awarded, eventually, individual assistance, and then a number of them were told, “Oops. We, FEMA, made a mistake and you either got too much or you didn't qualify, so we want it back.” Again, when many of these people are out of their homes, their property is literally under water, and now they are told, “Oh, you have to get back what we wrongly represented you could get.” I mean, to say it is frustrating is a dramatic understatement.

When it comes to these clawbacks that are a result of unclear rules, unclear procedures, inconsistent application of the rules, will you work with me and other Members of the Committee, if confirmed, on that issue, to make sure that residents get timely information, once they are awarded assistance they keep the assistance
and they are not then told, “Oh, you should not have gotten it after all”? 

Ms. CRISWELL. Senator, I am committed, if confirmed, to making sure that everyone who is eligible to receive assistance gets that assistance. It is a very difficult time for homeowners and individuals as they are responding to their own disaster and trying to recover from this, and, again, the programs can be hard to maneuver. If confirmed, I am committed to working with you and your staff to better, again, understand the challenges you are facing and ensuring that everybody who deserves assistance or is eligible for assistance gets that.

Senator HAWLEY. Very good. Beyond the individual assistance issue, do you have other ideas, from your experience at this agency before, in New York City recently, back in Colorado, about how FEMA can improve its communications with local stakeholders and can do a better job in terms of administering the important relief that is within the agency’s purview?

Ms. CRISWELL. Senator, I think the point that you made about communicating with stakeholders is the key to helping to improve programs, and without that communication to stakeholders at the State and local level, and truly understanding what their challenges are, then it is hard to make improvements in that program. If confirmed, I believe that my experience at the local level, again, at a small jurisdiction and a large jurisdiction, will really help to inform changes and improvements that could potentially be made to the program, and commit to working with you on that.

Senator HAWLEY. Great. Do you have any specific ideas about changes you might like to see?

Ms. CRISWELL. Right now I would like to, if confirmed, really get an understanding and a briefing of where the programs are at. They may have changed since my time at FEMA. Again, working with State and local and both you and your staff to understand some of the ideas that you may have.

Senator HAWLEY. Great. Very good. I want to follow Senator Portman and ask you now about the Southern Border. As he mentioned, there is no disaster declaration. You talked about that FEMA is able, your understanding is to provide advice, potentially support. However, we have been briefed that FEMA is working to set up temporary influx care centers, and have assigned at least 67 personnel to work at the border. That does not sound like advisory to me. I mean, that is a significant number of people, and care centers, that sounds like disaster relief work.

Can you give me a sense of what FEMA is doing, exactly, to your knowledge, and what are you going to do to get a handle on what precisely FEMA’s role is at the border right now, in what seems to be a very chaotic situation?

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes, Senator. I have not been briefed on the specifics of what FEMA is doing. I do understand, from a recent testimony from Acting Administrator Fenton that they are providing some assistance at the border. If confirmed, obviously one of the very first things that I want to do is get a better understanding of the role that FEMA is playing, the assistance that they are providing, to make sure that we are supporting HHS and CBP in the execution of their missions.
Senator HAWLEY. Will you also, if you are confirmed, when it comes to the border crisis, make sure that whatever FEMA is doing it is within the bounds of the statute and the law, No. 1, and then also, No. 2, make sure that we are not diverting resources, as we are about to enter flood season in my State, tornado season, disaster season in many parts of the country with spring weather coming, natural disaster season, that FEMA is ready to respond to those natural disasters, and what we know is going to be a difficult time, and is not being used to gap-fill at the border when, frankly, other agencies should be standing up and doing that work.

Again, the administration’s response so far is so chaotic and so uncoordinated, but we have really no idea what is going on at the border. They will not allow press to cover it. They are not keeping Congress informed. So really, you do not know what is happening. Really, nobody knows what is happening. But I want to be sure that whatever FEMA is doing is lawful, and also that FEMA is ready to respond to its other core mission sets. Will you commit to working on that, and ensuring that FEMA is ready to meet its core responsibilities in other parts of the country?

Ms. CRISWELL. Absolutely, Senator. First and foremost, I will always follow the laws that direct FEMA in their activities. Second, our workforce, FEMA’s workforce is our most valuable resource. The women and men of FEMA do incredible work every day, and they have been responding to multiple disasters for several years now. I do look forward, if confirmed, to understanding the current status of FEMA’s workforce, what challenges they may be having, and what improvements we need to make to ensure we are ready for upcoming flood and hurricane season.

Senator HAWLEY. Great. I look forward to working with you on all of that, if you are confirmed. Thanks for being here today. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman PETERS. Thank you, Senator Hawley. Senator Carper, you are recognized for your questions.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR CARPER

Senator CARPER. Thanks, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member. Welcome to all of our witnesses. I have, for a long time, been saying the only way to get our economy back on track, to get our lives back to normal is to put the pandemic in our nation’s rear-view mirror. Getting more vaccines in more arms is crucial for keeping ourselves and our communities safe.

As FEMA continues to assist in the coronavirus vaccine rollout, how would you, if confirmed ensure that State, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) governments have what they need from FEMA in order to continue administering vaccines? Go ahead, please.

Ms. CRISWELL. Senator Carper, thank you very much for that question. I believe that we all have a responsibility to make sure that America gets vaccinated, and the best way for us to move on to recovery is to get Americans vaccinated, and that is a shared responsibility at the Federal, State, and local level.

It is my understanding that FEMA is setting up community vaccine centers in various sites across the country, but they are also providing assistance in other ways. Again, there is no one-size-that-
fits-all, and jurisdictions know their needs best and what type of resources they need to help execute their vaccine missions.

If confirmed, I am committed to engaging with our State and local communities to better understand what their requirements are, and working within the appropriate authorities that FEMA has to make sure they get the resources they need to get America vaccinated.

Senator CARPER. I have a follow-up, if I could. How would you seek to improve the coordination and communication between FEMA and State and local governments? I say this as a recovering Governor. I was the Governor of Delaware for eight years. But how would you seek to improve coordination and communication between FEMA and State and local governments to address each locality's specific needs during the pandemic?

Ms. CRISWELL. Senator, coordination and collaboration is really one of the fundamental principles of effective emergency management, and if you are not doing that level of coordination and collaboration then it is hard to provide the assistance that is needed. It has been said often that disasters start local and end local, and it is important that we understand what the needs are of State and local communities.

From my previous time at FEMA and my work as a local emergency manager, FEMA has ten regions that really work hard every day at trying to coordinate and understand the needs of the communities within their regions. If confirmed, I am committed to making sure that our regional offices as well as our headquarters staff are making sure that they are engaging with the stakeholders that they are serving, and the customers that they are serving, so we can have a more prepared and resilient nation.

Senator CARPER. Ms. Criswell, my sister and I were about 10, 11 years old during the polio epidemic in our country, and at the time the percentage of teenagers who were willing or interested in being vaccinated was in single digits. One Sunday night, on the "Ed Sullivan Show," a rock-and-roll sensation named Elvis Presley came on the stage, and he was vaccinated, and within a matter of weeks the acceptance rate among our nation's teenagers was about 80 percent or higher.

There are a lot of people, and I talk to them in Delaware and in other places as well, who just say, "I don't think I am going to get this vaccine. I am just not going to do it," for one reason or the other.

There have been a couple of nonprofits set up, one in consultation with an ad agency, to address, to message to people who are reluctant to take the vaccination. I heard the number could be as high as a third, and that is not good, as you know.

Any thoughts that you might have for helping to address and bring down that number in the weeks and months ahead, should you be confirmed?

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes, Senator.

Senator CARPER. Aside from bringing Elvis back to life.

Ms. CRISWELL. I do not know if I can bring Elvis back, but, Senator, you raised such a concerning point, actually, right now, because we do have this goal of making sure that all Americans get
vaccinated, and vaccine hesitancy is a concern, and we have experi-
enced that in New York City.
What I have discovered throughout this vaccine rollout so far, is
that the best way to do that is to provide trusted messengers, and
we need to have the communities that are hesitant receive informa-
tion from those that they trust. That is going to be the best way
to help them get beyond their concerns over whether or not they
should be vaccinated.
If confirmed, I think, FEMA has an extensive network that they
rely on to help provide information out to the public, and as much
as we can to continue to build that trust with those communities
I think will go a long way in helping to continue to get more Ameri-
cans vaccinated.
Senator CARPER. Thanks for your service, in so many different
roles. Thanks for the willingness to take this one on as well.
Thanks to your family for sharing you with us.
Ms. CRISWELL. Thank you, Senator.
Chairman PETERS. Thank you, Senator Carper. Senator Scott,
you are recognized for your questions.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR SCOTT

Senator SCOTT. Thank you, Chairman Peters. First off, thanks
for being here. First off, I want to thank FEMA. I mean, I had four
big hurricanes, I had floods. It seems like a very Old Testament
problem in my years as Governor, and FEMA always showed up,
and Gracia Szczech was outstanding. I hope she is somebody that
sticks around for a long time, because she always showed up, she
answered the questions, and she seemed like she was very fair and
cared about not wasting dollars. I did not deal with all the other
regions, but I dealt with her.
Can you talk about what we talked about on the phone, about
this idea that it seems like it is a little bit of a game of what per-
centage the Federal Government reimburses these States. How
should it work, and how does it actually work? I mean, somebody
would say, “Oh yes, you can get 100 percent.” Some States would
get, after some disaster, 100 percent reimbursement, and some
other State got 75 percent reimbursement. Can you talk about why
that is the way, and should it be that way?
Ms. CRISWELL. Senator, the application of the Public Assistance
Program can often be complicated and confusing, and I understand
that there is frustration at the local level. I have experienced it my-
self, as a local emergency manager, in what is going to be eligible
and what is not eligible.
If confirmed, I am committed to making sure that the programs
are implemented equitably and consistently across the Nation and
across all of the regions. I think oftentimes there can be opportuni-
ties for interpretation, and I think it is important that we make
sure that that consistency happens, so jurisdictions know what
they can expect, and really how they can maneuver and work with
their local leadership, the local FEMA leadership, to help them
apply for that assistance.
Senator SCOTT. Thanks. My goal is just whatever it is supposed
to be, that one State does not get treated better than another
State.
The next issue, and we talked about this a little bit, is that it did not seem like there was like a toolkit that said that if you have this problem, this is what FEMA can do, and if you have this problem. It was sort of like you sat down—and Gracia Szczech was great—you sat down and said, OK, can I organize a program to do these things, rather than this is the program that we have and these are your options.

Does it make sense to have more options for people, rather than, it like almost a little bit like “Let’s Make a Deal?”

Ms. CRISWELL. I think, Senator, it is a great question. There are tools that I believe FEMA does have. They have increased the number of tools that I have seen on their website on, what you can and cannot expect from different programs. In fact, I have seen some tremendous tools that they have put on there for what is eligible under the COVID–19 assistance.

But I agree that sometimes it can be confusing. But I think it is also important that we strike a balance remaining flexible with what the Stafford Act has, so we can be creative and innovative, because no two disasters are alike. They may have different needs. It is important to be able to use the Stafford Act, as available and applicable, to meet those unique needs that we might see in the different disasters.

Senator SCOTT. I talked to Chairman Peters about this thing yesterday, and we talked about this on the phone. The way that, in my State, after Hurricane Irma, we had this debris pickup, and if we had an existing contractor in place we used that, and reimbursement was like $7.50 or $8.50 a cubic yard, I guess it is. But then if we used the Corps of Engineers it was over $70, is my understanding. How can this happen? I mean, what is the process to make sure that does not happen? It does not seem fair to whoever is paying the check, and, for debris pickup, the Federal Government is going to pay the lion’s share of that.

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes, Senator. I have worked a lot with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) in a variety of different disasters, and they are very good at what they do, but they also come with a price tag. I do believe that one of the ways that jurisdictions can be better prepared is by doing some pre-existing contracts ahead of time. In New York City, we put 13 different on-call emergency contracts in place, that we worked with FEMA to develop to make sure that they would be eligible. So that way we could expedite the response that we were going to have to those disasters.

If confirmed, I think it would be really important to try to educate more jurisdictions on the value of this, and use maybe some of New York City’s or some of Florida’s emergency contract examples of how they can be better prepared.

Senator SCOTT. I did not make any progress on this bill, but I proposed a bill—I have been up here 2 years, and I think it was the first year—that basically said that you are not going to get reimbursed if you do not do that. I mean, why should we—it is not that hard to go get a contract for debris pickup, right? I mean, you just go put out a bid, and there is a whole process you can do. FEMA actually has a process here they are required to do anyway, right?
Why wouldn’t we mandate that if they want to get reimbursed to do that, so we do not sit and put ourselves in a position that after the fact, that somebody can come in and say, “Oh, now I am really busy. I want a higher price.” I mean, why wouldn’t we do that? Why wouldn’t we mandate that? Doesn’t it seem to make sense?

Ms. Criswell. Yes, Senator. Again, I believe it is really important that we do everything we can to help communities be prepared, but again, I also think that we have to have a balance between what their own capacities are, and some jurisdictions have less capacity than others. But I do believe it is important and, if confirmed, would work to help educate and use some of FEMA’s resources such as their procurement disaster assistance teams to help people understand how to better put those types of tools in place to help them.

Senator Scott. One thing that surprised me up here, and the Inspectors General have different reports, and GAO has different reports about waste, fraud, and abuse. I mean, you can call it all different things. We saw a lot of it in the debris pickup.

When you were at FEMA, do you use that stuff to try to get rid of the waste, whether it is waste or fraud, whatever it is, to try to reduce the cost for the taxpayers, that we have found? Has that been helpful at all, the Inspectors General and GAO reports?

Ms. Criswell. Senator, I have read some of the Inspector General reports and GAO reports, and, if confirmed, I look forward to working with the leadership at FEMA to better understand their goal, or where they are at in implementing them. I have found, again, during my personal experience in New York City, of bringing in the Department of Investigations, the City’s version of Inspector General, to help issue spot and identify ways that we can put measures in place to help prevent fraud, waste, and abuse ahead of time. If confirmed, I am committed to really looking at where we are at and then what we can do to continue to improve that process.

Senator Scott. So you guys do a good job with the problems in Florida. I mean, your teams always were there early, and, they were always very responsive. Everybody wants everything done like that, but, I mean, FEMA has done a good job.

I worked a lot with Brock Long, because that is what my head and my heart thinks. But Gracia Szczek, I hope she sticks around, because she did a great job.

Ms. Criswell. I have worked many disasters with Ms. Szczek, and you have a great resource there.

Senator Scott. Good luck.

Chairman Peters. Thank you, Senator Scott. Ms. Criswell, as I mentioned, people are coming and going. We have a series of votes going on during this hearing. I am going to have to leave to vote now. Senator Hassan will now preside over the hearing, and you are also recognized for your questions. Thank you, Senator Hassan.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR HASSAN

Senator Hassan [presiding.] Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to thank you and our Ranking Member, Senator Portman, for convening this hearing. I also want to thank Ms. Criswell for coming
before the Committee today, for the service you have already provided to this country and your community, and for your continued interest in doing this kind of work and serving.

As our country grapples with the COVID–19 pandemic, it is critical that this Committee and the full Senate work quickly to confirm a FEMA Administrator so that the agency has the leadership it needs to make our country more resilient to all hazards and threats, including pandemics, natural disasters, and terrorist incidents.

Before I proceed to my questions I just want to say, too, that I echo Senator Portman’s sentiments about ensuring that schools may receive FEMA funds for personal protective equipment (PPE) dating back to the beginning of the pandemic. This is truly a bipartisan issue, and I really look forward to working with FEMA on it.

So now turning to my questions, Ms. Criswell, to put an end to this pandemic the Federal Government must, in partnership with State governments, quickly and comprehensively distribute vaccines to all parts of the country. To that end, I am pleased that FEMA has begun standing up the first of 100 federally run vaccine sites across the country, which are supported by Federal personnel and additional vaccine supply. However, based on its site selection thus far it is unclear what analysis FEMA is conducting when making decisions about site locations.

Ms. Criswell, if confirmed, will you commit to ensuring that FEMA equitably considers locations in smaller States, like New Hampshire, for these vaccination sites supported by Federal personnel and additional vaccine supply?

Ms. CRISWELL. Senator, thank you for that question. I think one of the things that we have seen with COVID–19 is that it has truly had a disproportionate impact on our underserved populations, and as we continue to roll out the vaccine it is incredibly important that we continue to strive to reach those communities and help them recover from the impacts of COVID–19.

I know in New York City, we have taken that very seriously, and as the city has rolled out vaccine, taken a look through the social vulnerability index to identify the areas that can be used, or the areas that need to have vaccine sooner rather than later. I understand FEMA has also used the same index in some of their decisionmaking.

If confirmed, I am committed to working with the leadership team at FEMA to better understand how they are making decisions, but I also think it is really important that the engagement with State and local is part of that conversation, because they know their communities best. They know where these vaccine sites should be, or the resources that they may need to support their communities. I am committed to working with you and your team and this Committee to better understand the needs of communities and using FEMA resources to address those.

Senator HASSAN. I thank you for that. I appreciate it. One of the points I want to make, though, is sometimes the Federal Government just makes calls on where to send resources based on sheer population, and in a small State, we have 234 towns for 1.3 million people, right, so there are going to be population centers that really
need the help that do not meet certain thresholds if the analysis is not careful.

I just would urge you to look at that. I would look forward to working with you on that. The other point I would make is sometimes what happens is State partners are doing their best in some of these places, and then, at times, the Federal Government will come in and essentially supplant but not supplement what is happening. I think it is going to be really important to work closely with your State and local partners to make sure that you are not undermining the efforts that are already there, which I know you would not want to do, but just sometimes it happens.

Ms. CRISWELL. I understand that completely, Senator, and again, if confirmed, I am committed to making sure that all efforts should be coordinated with the State and local partners to understand their needs and their requirements, and not pushing those requirements that may not meet their current situation.

Senator HASSAN. Thank you for that.

Now I want to turn to the topic of the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS). When it comes to ensuring that the Strategic National Stockpile is adequately stocked, maintained, and pre-positioned geographically, the Department of Health and Human Services is the lead agency. However, what we have learned in the COVID–19 pandemic is that there have been deficiencies in the availability and distribution of the assets in the stockpile.

Given FEMA’s experience in managing and distributing supplies during natural disasters, FEMA is a partner that could provide valuable advice to improve management of the Strategic National Stockpile before the next national crisis. Will you commit to coordinating with HHS to improve management of the Strategic National Stockpile?

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes, Senator. The Strategic National Stockpile was a great resource for New York City during the beginning of this, and we understood the limitations of it as we were starting to see cases increase. I believe FEMA has always had a great partnership with HHS, and, if confirmed, I am committed to continuing to work with them to see how we can improve that resource to make sure that we have better preparedness in place and ready for the next pandemic.

Senator HASSAN. Thank you. Last question. Early in the pandemic, lack of clarity in the Stafford Act delayed FEMA from providing Federal assistance and funding to States and localities to combat the COVID–19 pandemic. Toward that end, there has been some discussion in the emergency management community to clarify the definition in Federal statute of emergency eligible for Federal funding and assistance.

During yesterday’s Emerging Threats and Spending Oversight Subcommittee hearing, which focused on preparing for future crises, we heard testimony from General Votel and other members of the Business Executive for National Security Commission on the national response enterprise, and they were advocating for updating the Stafford Act.

Ms. Criswell, do you support updating Stafford Act emergencies or disasters to include pandemics or major cyberattacks?
Ms. Criswell. Senator, FEMA is an all-hazards agency, and they continue to respond to hazards, whether it is a pandemic or a natural hazard or a manmade event. I would welcome the opportunity, if confirmed, to working with Congress to see what authorities could help us do our job better, so we can, again, make a more prepared and resilient nation and help people.

Senator Hassan. Thank you for that. I would look forward to that too. It is both the type of disaster and the extent of disasters that we have to be prepared for, I think, and realize that some of the situations on the ground are changing. I look forward to working with you very much.

Now I can turn to Senator Ossoff, who is ready to take his round of questions next.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR OSOFF

Senator Ossoff. Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate that, and thank you, Ms. Criswell. I enjoyed the conversation that we had, discussing some of the most urgent concerns in Georgia, when it comes to emergency management. I just, in the interest of everybody's time, have one question for you, which is, Ms. Criswell, will you commit that in your first year in this position, should you be confirmed, that you will join me in Georgia to meet with the farmers who are impacted by Hurricane Michael, and to engage in planning with local leaders and local officials to ensure that we have the plans in place to get swifter aid to Georgia's agricultural sector if and when another devastating tropical storm or hurricane strikes our State? Thank you.

Ms. Criswell. Senator, thank you. I appreciated the conversation that we did have about the variety of challenges that Georgia faces, and, if confirmed, I would welcome the opportunity to come meet with you and your staff and better understand the challenges that you are facing across the variety of communities that you serve.

Senator Ossoff. Thank you, Ms. Criswell. I look forward to welcoming you to Georgia, and, Madam Chair, I yield back. Thank you.

Senator Hassan. Thank you very much, Senator Ossoff. We have a couple of other Members of the Committee who are trying to make it back from other committee hearings and votes, because they would like to touch base with you. While we see if those logistics work, why don't I ask you this.

You have been through, over the last year of this pandemic, this critical frontline role in New York City. You have been talking with a number of Senators as you prepare for this nomination hearing and for taking on the work, if you are confirmed. Are there things we have not touched on yet, that you would like to bring up to the Committee, or update us on?

Ms. Criswell. Senator, I appreciate that opportunity. New York City was really at the epicenter of the COVID–19 response from the very beginning, and I think it is important to understand that as we were going through that response in March and April, before it started to improve in May, is that, we were responding to the situation when we did not know how bad bad was going to get, and making decisions, literally, at times of, each day, do I have enough
staff, do I have enough people, do I have enough resources to get through the next 72 hours?

As we have discussed with the Strategic National Stockpile and other preparedness efforts, I think that we have such a great opportunity right now to learn so many lessons of the beginning days of this pandemic and how we can invest in preparedness going forward. I think, the Nation did a great job of investing in preparedness for terrorist attacks after 9/11, and I think we have another really great opportunity to invest in preparedness against a future pandemic.

Senator HASSAN. As the pandemic evolved in New York City, and as you had to make decisions on the ground in real time, thinking back to that experience now, are there ways of using technology now that you would like FEMA to work on, that would allow you to be more nimble in the field?

Ms. CRISWELL. I think, Senator, technology is an incredibly important tool for us to use, and I think what I would say, what we have learned from the pandemic and the ability to do more of the work remotely, I think that there is also a really great opportunity right now to continue some of those lessons learned on how we can use technology to be more efficient in our support to State and local communities. If confirmed, I really want to look at some of the benefits that happened and how we can institutionalize those going forward, so when we have more efficient deployment of resources and we are serving communities better.

Senator HASSAN. Thank you for that. I appreciate it very much. I now see that Senator Lankford has joined us, and I will turn to Senator Lankford for his round of questions.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR LANKFORD

Senator LANKFORD. Thank you. It is good to get a chance to visit with you again. Thank you. Thanks for the time we could already spend before, to be able to talk through several of these issues. I appreciate you making yourself available, to be able to go through those. Let me talk through a couple of things we had talked about before and some additional things to be able to talk about.

My State, we are overachievers with FEMA. We get frequent flyer points, because we have tornados, we have floods, we have wildfires. We are not a hurricane State, in the sense that you are going to hit a major urban area. It is hitting a lot of rural areas, and so there are some different dynamics there. But I want to zero in on a couple of things.

One is the flooding issue, and specifically the issue of hazard mitigation. We have areas that are repetitive flood areas, and they would do buyouts except the process on a buyout takes 12 to 18 months, at least. Even when my State wants to be able to partner with the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) disaster relief funds (DRF), and to be able to also partner out with some of the buyouts, the timelines are different on it. To be able to figure out how to be able to pull that together makes it incredibly challenging.

What I am looking for is not what has been done in the past. How do we fix an issue where we have a neighborhood that is going to be flooded out, that it is obvious we should buy out this
whole neighborhood, but we tell people, “We will talk to you about buying this neighborhood out in 18 months,” so basically live in a hotel for 18 months until we figure out what we are going to do. Does not work. How do we fix that?

Ms. CRISWELL. Senator, thank you very much for that question. I have seen first-hand the devastation that flooding provides, it does to communities across this country, and the slow recovery initially as floodwaters are trying to recede, just even delays some of those response efforts initially.

As you and I discussed, even in New York City, we are still having conversations about how to do buyouts from the experiences from Hurricane Sandy. I understand that the programs are complicated, they are cumbersome, and difficult to maneuver, and the frustrations that people feel.

If confirmed, I am committed to really having a hard conversation with our mitigation team and understanding how we can continue to reduce the complexity of those programs and really help communities reduce their risk earlier, ahead of disasters, but more potentially, how we can assist afterwards, as needed.

Senator LANKFORD. Right. We will get to the earlier part in just a moment, but the issue still comes back to, at the moment of a disaster, when people are having to make a life decision—am I going to rebuild or am I going to try to move to somewhere else?—if you tell them, “I will answer your question in 18 months,” that does not work.

For the local community that is there, that knows, 25 years from now or so, this is going to flood again so let’s buy it out and figure out how to do this different, people would say, “Well, you can’t yet. We have to wait 18 months before we can make that decision.” It does not work for them. It is just frustrating for everyone, and it definitely damaging for the taxpayer, because we end up paying for the same thing over and over again, because we were not able to make the decision the previous time.

The preparation side is significant. There are some counties that have not gone through the process of preparation, the filings for the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). There are lots of reasons why on that, but typically in rural counties especially, it is just personnel and paperwork and processing. Individuals within that county cannot get flood insurance because they are in a very rural county that just does not have the structure to be able to take care of that. How can we help those counties and those individuals to be able to finish out the process and preparation for them, so that those individuals can get flood insurance?

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes, Senator. Hazard mitigation plans are a really valuable and important tool for communities to have, one, not to just help better understand their risk but also to make them eligible for flood insurance. I do understand that it is hard to develop those plans, that it takes a lot of time and effort.

I do believe that there are programs that FEMA administers that will help with technical assistance and the ability for them to develop those plans, and, if confirmed, I am committed to—I would love to work with you and your team to better understand the communities within your area that are having difficulty, and what we can do to better assist them to get those plans done, because it not
only helps individuals get flood insurance, but it helps jurisdictions better understand their risks so they can take the appropriate measures.

Senator LANKFORD. Right. In a rural State like mine, we have some unique challenges. We had a wildfire in the northwest of our State, as we did several years ago. We not only had a wildfire larger than the State of Rhode Island. Folks in the Northeast did not even notice it, though, because it is not going to be on national news, but it was very significant to us. A lot of cattle were lost, a lot of grazing land was lost, a lot of fence line was lost. Thankfully, firefighters in all those areas worked hard to be able to protect homes, but we had a tremendous amount of loss.

At the end of it, on the whole, FEMA would say, “Not enough homes were damaged so you cannot get help.” A wildfire the size of the State of Rhode Island does not count as a FEMA disaster because it is in a rural area, though there is a lot of loss there.

We start working to the complexity. What is the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)? What is an Farm Service Agency (FSA) piece? What is going to be FEMA issues? What is Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery (DR)? And you start working through all the complexity of that.

Two big questions that I have for you. How do we deal with this urban-rural challenge, which is getting harder, based on the redefinition of the size of a disaster and the amount for a disaster? How do we deal with that complexity, and how do we deal with the complexity of how many different agencies are involved in disaster relief, how many different deadlines, how many different forms, and for a county or a State, you better be an expert, and you have been on the other side of this. You better be an expert to be able to figure out how to be able to navigate all this. How do we help people navigate it, and all the issues, and how do we help determine what we are going to do on a rural versus urban assistance?

Ms. CRISWELL. Thank you, Senator. To your first point, I understand. Even in my State of New York, the large urban area of New York City really has an impact on the ability of smaller jurisdictions within New York State to get assistance. I talked about the need to have equity in how we deliver programs.

I think that there is an opportunity for us to really take a look at how those decisions are made and the factors that are used so we can take jurisdictions’ needs into consideration. If confirmed, I am committed to working with you to better understand potential ways to improve that analysis and better serve all communities, so they can get the assistance that they are eligible for.

On the second part, you are right, there are many different programs that are out there that provide assistance, and that is a good thing, right? We want to have different options for different communities, because again, no two hazards are alike, and jurisdictions have different needs.

I do remember FEMA had a program called the Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator, and one of their roles was to help bring all of those different programs to bear in a community that was recovering from a disaster and help jurisdictions navigate those different resources.
If confirmed, I am committed to seeing where the status is of that program and how we can better support jurisdictions as they are trying to maneuver through the variety of different bureaucratic programs that are out there and make it easier for them to get the assistance they need.

Senator LANKFORD. Thank you. Madam Chair, may I ask one additional question? Let me ask this additional question, just on keeping the rules consistent. If anything changed last year, it was everything, so we understand that full well. FEMA was very engaged in what was happening with the pandemic relief.

But we experienced things with FEMA last year that are consistent with FEMA before, that is the rules changing midway through. I am just going to give you an example of what I mean by this.

When protective equipment, was coming out to local law enforcement, it was, “Have PPE. We know that you need it.” Then a few months it was into, it was, “No, actually, the PPE can only be used if you are actually dealing with a COVID case,” so you need to document each location to make sure that it was actually used in a COVID case location. It is a bureaucratic nightmare for them to be able to do that, and obviously we cannot test every person to know when we walk up, so everyone had to assume everyone they interacted with, especially in the earliest days, was COVID-positive, because you did not know, and we did not have enough testing capability in the earliest days. But the change in rules midstream drove everybody crazy on this.

You cannot answer this question for the days ahead, but I want to make you aware that if you are an emergency manager in any State, it is hard enough to be able to manage the emergency. It is harder to be able to manage the rule changes midstream during an emergency, and how we are going to respond back to FEMA—deadline changes, rule changes, what you need to keep, you need to have a picture of this pre-emergency, you need to have all this documentation.

Would you be willing to be able to work with us to be able to make sure we have one set of rules that goes out, and if there is going to be a change there is enough time, retroactively, to be able to deal with this and it does not create the bureaucracy for local governments?

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes, Senator. I experienced that in New York City as we were trying to manage the response to COVID–19 through March and April, and, at the same time, really trying to understand the rules that were coming out from FEMA. I understand the frustration. We experienced that frustration in our own response.

If confirmed, I am committed to working with you, and would welcome the opportunity to work with you and your team to better understand ways that that can potentially be improved, and information can be delivered more timely and more consistently.

Senator LANKFORD. OK. Thank you.

Senator HASSAN. Thank you, Senator Lankford. Now we will move to Senator Sinema, who will be joining us virtually.
OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR SINEMA

Senator SINEMA. Thank you, Chairman. Ms. Criswell, as Arizona's senior Senator and Chair of the Subcommittee on Government Operations and Border Management, it is important that I closely examine the management and effectiveness of Federal programs.

You are entering FEMA during a time of crisis. In addition to the natural disasters that FEMA is accustomed to handling, you will also need to balance those priorities with the continued impacts of the coronavirus and a growing crisis with migrants and unaccompanied minors at our Southwest Border.

Given the significant increase in the number of families and unaccompanied minors coming to our border, there is a critical need in my State of Arizona for Federal resources and personnel to manage the challenge, protect our communities, and ensure that migrants are treated fairly and humanely.

The American Rescue Plan included funds through the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) for non-governmental organizations (NGO's) and local communities to provide assistance to migrants. If confirmed, will you ensure that FEMA works with the EFSP National Board to get these funds allocated efficiently and fairly, ensuring that the program is as flexible as possible to respond to NGO needs, including providing advanced funds where appropriate?

Ms. CRISWELL. Senator, thank you for the question. Yes, if confirmed, I am committed to better understanding the current status of FEMA's support through the EFSP program, and welcome the opportunity to work with you and your staff to understand some of the challenges you are facing and what might be done to improve them.

Senator SINEMA. Thank you. Secretary Mayorkas has recently tasked FEMA with stepping in to help manage the challenge of unaccompanied children arriving at the border. This was a good decision, and I believe that FEMA's vast experience in disaster management can help manage other aspects of the crisis as well.

What further actions do you believe FEMA can take to assist with the ongoing migration challenges at the border, and will you continue to work with my office to explore opportunities to make sure that our nation is better prepared, moving forward?

Ms. CRISWELL. Senator, FEMA is an all-hazards agency, and they are one part of the team. They have continued to provide support to other Federal partners and, as in this case, providing support right now to HHS and CBP in the execution of their mission.

I have not been briefed on the specific activities of what FEMA is doing, but if confirmed, I look forward to getting a better understanding of FEMA's current role, and I would appreciate the opportunity to work with you and your team to see what we can do to better assist.

Senator SINEMA. Earlier in this hearing, Senator Hassan brought up the hearing that she held as the Chair of the Subcommittee on Emerging Treats and Spending Oversight, and the recommendation that the Stafford Act be expanded to include pandemics and cyber events. I believe that any such debate should include humanitarian crisis, such as the migrant crisis we are facing in Arizona and along our border.
What guardrails would you recommend be placed on any Stafford Act expansion to ensure that our nation responds effectively and efficiently to emergencies, while not overburdening FEMA’s response capabilities?

Ms. Criswell. Senator, FEMA is an all-hazards agency, and they have provided support to humanitarian missions in other parts of the country and the world as well, and, if confirmed, I would appreciate the opportunity to work with Congress to see what authorities could potentially be given to FEMA to help them with their current mission.

Senator Sinema. During our conversation last week we discussed the Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) and the preparedness grants that are offered through FEMA’s grants directorate. During our conversation, you noted Secretary Mayorkas’ interest in reviewing the entire suite of preparedness grants to ensure that the United States is utilizing these programs wisely, and to make sure that we are increasing resiliency and not simply maintaining the status quo.

You also noted the need for stakeholder engagement as part of any review. I would urge you to make sure that communities such as Phoenix, that utilize these programs, are brought to the table early and often to make sure that FEMA knows what works and what does not work on the ground, and to identify opportunities to increase the relevance of the data utilized in determining relative risk.

Ms. Criswell. Senator, yes. As we discussed, Secretary Mayorkas, it is my understanding, has asked for a review of the risk formula being used for grant programs, and, if confirmed, I look forward to better understanding the current status of that review. But again, as we discussed, I think it is critically important that any part of a formal review like that should have stakeholder engagement, because those are the customers, and we need to understand their challenges and their needs so the programs can be more effectively delivered.

Senator Sinema. On another topic, almost all of Arizona is experiencing severe drought, and this week the State reported that it expects fire season this year will be just as bad as what we experienced in 2020. Now last year, 2,500 fires in Arizona burned 980,000 acres of land, and worst of all, fire, tornado, and hurricane seasons all overlap in our country. When this is layered over our response to a pandemic that has claimed over 16,800 lives in Arizona, plus a humanitarian crisis at our border, it is a lot to handle.

If confirmed, how do you plan to utilize the resources at FEMA’s disposal to provide prompt and effective support for each of these crises while still maintaining sufficient readiness for additional disasters that could occur?

Ms. Criswell. Senator, it is a really great point, and FEMA has consistently, across the years, responded to multiple missions at the same time. If confirmed, I currently do not understand the current challenges that the workforce is facing, but it is a priority of mine to make sure that the workforce is ready for this upcoming hurricane season and the multiple missions it is currently supporting.
Senator Sinema. Thank you, Mr. Chair, I yield back, and I thank our nominee for being with us today.

Senator Peters [presiding.] Thank you, Senator Sinema.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR PADILLA

Senator Padilla. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I assume you guys can see and hear me OK.

I want to begin by just echoing and associating myself with the comments by Senator Sinema vis-à-vis the role of FEMA in helping address the situation at the border at this present time. We will be in touch with the agency if there are additional resources or anything else needed to continue to make progress there.

But my main questions that I wanted to raise are inspired, as Senator Sinema just acknowledged for Arizona, by recent wildfire seasons in the State of California, the recent wildfire season being the worst on record. In 2020, the State experienced 10,000 fire incidents, with 4.2 million acres of land burned, and more than 10,000 structures damaged or destroyed.

FEMA, specifically Region 9, has been an excellent and consistent partner with California, not just State government, but counties as well, to weather repeated, unprecedented disasters, year after year. In between, what seems to be like an expanding fire season, we want to take advantage of this time period to look for increased funding, support, and understanding of the unprecedented times that we are living in. After another dry winter, California is entering drought conditions once again, and expecting another extreme fire season.

Ms. Criswell, how can we assure that FEMA is not just responsive to wildfires during and after an event but also more active in the off-season, in working with State and local governments, as well as other Federal agencies, to support mitigation efforts to reduce either the chance of devastating fires or the devastation, level of devastation from fires that do occur?

Ms. Criswell. Thank you very much for that question, Senator. As we have seen, the number and severity of disasters continues to increase year after year, and the record-breaking wildfire season that we had last year was another example of why it is so important right now for us to be able to invest in pre-disaster mitigation.

I do believe that the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Grant that was released last year is an excellent tool for communities to now really have transformational progress at reducing risk across their communities.

But it is often my experience that the technical assistance that is provided is only provided when the Notice of Funding Opportunity is released, and I think we have a real opportunity to make sure that we are doing outreach and engagement year-round, on a continual basis, so jurisdictions can better plan and prepare for these events that are going to happen, not just next year but 5 years from now or 10 years from now. It takes a lot of work to put in the planning and scoping steps of these programs. By providing outreach assistance year-round I think that communities can build better projects, so when the funding opportunities are released they can have better projects to put in requests for.
If confirmed, I am committed to this outreach and engagement. I think the time is now for us to really take a very proactive and deliberate approach to how we are reducing risk and using all the tools that we have available to do that.

Senator Padilla. Thank you, and I think the same spirit can be expressed in a very similar question vis-à-vis earthquakes, much less frequent but more devastating, and it is only a matter of time before California experiences the next big one. I will assume that your response would also apply for other categories of natural disasters.

I had another follow-up question. I know Senator Sinema also mentioned, or made reference to the Stafford Act, which governs FEMA’s disaster efforts, which has not been explicitly inclusive of wildfires. Due to the unique nature of wildfires, California communities have too often experienced difficulty after recent catastrophic wildfires in accessing disaster assistance due to eligibility language, home insurance, and relocation assistance.

If confirmed, will you commit to working with my office to ensure the needs of wildfire recovery and mitigation are fully supported by FEMA?

Ms. Criswell. Yes, Senator. I believe that we have opportunity right now to really look at what the authorities are within the Stafford Act, and I would appreciate the opportunity to work with you and your team and Congress to see if additional authorities can be given that FEMA has the ability to address the current risk and threat environments.

Senator Padilla. OK. Thank you, and just one last comment, and it is really a question for a lengthy response, but an acknowledgment that, FEMA has been working alongside the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other Federal agencies, in coordination with State and local and tribal and territorial authorities, and private sector partners to ramp up and improve vaccine distribution. Partnerships have been critical in combating the COVID–19 pandemic, including multiple mass vaccination sites in California. But I understand some of these contracts formalizing the partnerships are due to expire in the coming weeks. I would hope, if you are confirmed, and to the extent appropriate prior to your confirmation, we can count on your help in extending these agreements to continue the proven success of the vaccination strategy.

Ms. Criswell. Senator, yes. I think, again, we all have a role to play in getting America vaccinated. It is one of the most important things we can do right now to move on to recovery from this COVID–19 global pandemic. If confirmed, I am committed to working with you and your team to understand the needs that California is facing, so we can get the resources needed to help get America vaccinated.

Senator Padilla. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Senator Peters. Thank you, Senator Padilla. Senator Rosen, you are now recognized for your questions.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR ROSEN

Senator Rosen. Thank you, Chairman Peters, Ranking Member Portman, and thank you, Commissioner Criswell, for your willing-
ness to serve. FEMA is an extremely important organization, to every State here in our Nation. I would like to thank you for talking with me yesterday about the Urban Area Security Initiative grants. It is a vital program that protects our people in Las Vegas, our critical infrastructure, and really our tourism-based economy. As we discussed, the city of Las Vegas depends on UASI funds as it builds the infrastructure it needs to defend residents and visitors against terrorism.

You also need reforms to ensure that densely populated tourist destinations, like Las Vegas, have predictability and stability in funding over a period of years so it can make long-term security plans. In 2018, the Nevada congressional delegation urged FEMA to incorporate visitor and special event data into the risk assessment profile, to determine how much funding each urban area receives.

You mentioned during our conversation you believe Secretary Mayorkas will be taking a look at the UASI program, including the funding formula. Can you commit to working with us and using any authority and influence you have to ensure that grantees and other stakeholders can participate fully and meaningfully in this process?

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes, Senator. If confirmed, I look forward to seeing the current status of the assessment of the risk formula that is currently underway, and the only way to be successful with that is to make sure that we are engaging the stakeholders that are receiving this assistance. If confirmed, I would welcome the opportunity to work with you and your staff to better understand your needs and your ideas about how this could be improved.

Senator ROSEN. Thank you. I appreciate that. I am going to move on to some other issues we have in Nevada, of course, the wildfires, and Fire Management Assistance Grants (FMAGs). Last year’s wildfire season unfortunately was one of the worst in our history. It burned more than 10 million acres across the country, devastating communities. FEMA, of course, has several programs to assist communities, both before and after the fire, and, in particular, Fire Management Assistance Grants program has been vital for our communities as they recover and rebuild.

However, I have heard from a lot of my constituents that the current criteria for FMAG is just too restrictive for our rural communities. These areas are smaller in population, but they rely heavily on the land for income through mining, through ranching, outdoor recreation, and without assistance from FEMA it is much harder for these communities to quickly respond and recover from a wildfire.

Will you consider working with me to change the FMAG formula to make it more accessible, more nimble for our rural communities that really need this in a time of devastation, and also talk about what other resources or ways that you might assist our remote rural communities in dealing with emergencies such as wildfire.

Ms. CRISWELL. Thank you, Senator. If confirmed, I look forward to better understanding more about the FMAG criteria and the formula that is used, and I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and your staff to understand how it has impacted, helped in the challenges that you face with the use of the FMAG grant to
help you. If confirmed, I would love that opportunity to work with you.

As far as helping communities help prepare against future wildfire, again, I believe we really have an opportunity right now to take advantage of some of the new resources that are out there, such as the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities grant, to help communities use this to reduce the risk within their neighborhoods, especially as we continue to see number of severity of disasters rise year after year.

Senator Rosen. Thank you. I appreciate that. I would like to move on to, unfortunately we have a rise in domestic terrorism in our country, and we have a program, our Nonprofit Security Grant Program, that is really important to folks. Over the past few years, like I said, we have seen a dangerous rise in threats and attacks on at-risk communities, including the deadliest attack on the American Jewish community in modern history at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh. We want to protect houses of worship and other nonprofits against terrorist attacks and targeted violence.

FEMA’s Nonprofit Security Grant Program, it makes grants to eligible nonprofit organizations for target hardening and other security enhancement. We know the threats are growing to these institutions, and the demand for grant money has far outpaced their availability in recent years. In fiscal year (FY) 2021, DHS budget, they failed to request a specific funding amount for the Nonprofit Security Grant Program. Fortunately, we have doubled it to $180 million, but, if confirmed, Ms. Criswell, will you advocate for future funding requests to include specific allocations for Nonprofit Security Grants for that program, so that the allocation meets the growing needs of the communities as domestic terror threats continue to rise?

Ms. Criswell. Yes, Senator. We are continuing to see increased threats to soft targets, and they are becoming an increasing concern. I believe that this grant is a great opportunity to help reach out to those communities and those nonprofits, to help them improve their preparedness and their resilience.

I am not familiar with the funding authorities in the past, but I appreciate Congress’ support in getting it funded, and I understand that funding this year was even increased. I think it is incredibly important that we continue to do outreach and engagement with the nonprofit community and the houses of worship so they understand that this resource is available and how they can use it, so we can continue to help them build their own resilience for the future.

Senator Rosen. Thank you. Houses of worship and the nonprofits, oftentimes they have small staff, and some of these grants, they are quite difficult, and they require some technical assistance in order to be able to fill them out adequately and receive the information.

Do you have plans, or can you talk to some plans that you might consider to increase FEMA’s outreach to these smaller nonprofits, houses of worship, with limited staff and resources, to be able to compete and get these grants to improve their security and safety?
Ms. CRISWELL. Senator, if confirmed, I look forward to seeing the current strategies that FEMA has in place for how they are currently engaging in doing outreach, and working with them to see if there are ways that we can improve the outreach, and identify maybe some of the gaps that we might see across the Nation, of areas that we think could potentially utilize this but have not taken advantage of this.

If confirmed, I am committed to working with them to engage with more communities. I think it is incredibly important that we do outreach so they understand that this resource is available, but that we also provide the technical assistance, because the grant programs are complex, and they are cumbersome and very hard to apply for at times, and not all communities have the same level of resources to do that. I believe technical assistance is an important part of this entire process.

Senator ROSEN. Thank you. I appreciate that, because we try to fund as many grants as we can. FEMA is an important part of much of our community response in a lot of these disasters, and having that technical assistance is very important.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman PETERS. Thank you, Senator Rosen, and Ms. Criswell, we are coming to the end here of this hearing. That was the last set of questions. But before I close out the hearing I just want to pick up on the point Senator Rosen made about the complexity of these grants and the preparedness grants. They are so important. The entities that need them the most, and they are impacted the most, are the ones that do not have the resources to actually put together the paperwork. Houses of worship are really a key area, but it is all across the board, smaller communities, et cetera.

I hear you, if you are confirmed, you have to do a deep dive. It does not do any good for us to have these grants if the folks who need it the most simply are unable to jump over all of the hurdles that you have to jump over to get them. I look forward, and you can reiterate that you are going to be focused on that, because I think it is critically important.

Ms. CRISWELL. Senator, absolutely. I think, those that have the resources take advantage of these grants all the time, and the grants have done a great job of increasing the capabilities and preparedness across the Nation. But I am committed, if confirmed, to making sure that jurisdictions across the country get the assistance they need to take advantage of these resources, and we have a shared responsibility to improve the resilience and the readiness of the Nation, and the grants are one way to do that.

Chairman PETERS. Thank you, Ms. Criswell. Thank you for your willingness to serve in this capacity. As I said in my opening remarks, it is clear from all of the questions you have this is an incredibly difficult job. It is incredibly complex, but also of vital importance to our country. Thank you for your willingness to serve. If confirmed, this Committee is actively involved with FEMA issues, and we will want to partner with you very closely to make sure that you are successful in your job, if confirmed. Your success means success for the country, that we will be a part of that.

With that I will state for the record, Ms. Criswell has made financial disclosures and provided responses to biographical and pre-
hearing questions submitted by this Committee.\footnote{The information of Ms. Criswell appears in the Appendix on page 41.} Without objection, this information will be made part of the hearing record, with the exception of financial data, which is on file and available for public inspection in the Committee office.

The hearing will remain open until 12 p.m. tomorrow, March 26th, for the submission of statements and questions for the record.

With that this hearing is now adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:52 a.m., the Committee was adjourned.]
A P P E N D I X

Chairman Peters Opening Statement As Prepared for Delivery
March 25, 2021

Today we are considering the nomination of Ms. Deanne Criswell to be Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or “FEMA”, a critical part of the Department of Homeland Security.

Welcome Ms. Criswell, good to see you, and your sons RJ and Eddie, here today. Congratulations on your historic nomination, and thank you for your willingness to serve your country again.

FEMA is charged with helping people before, during, and after disasters. The Administrator leads the agency’s efforts to respond to disasters, from hurricanes to historic flooding and wildfires, to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The FEMA Administrator coordinates closely with state and local partners to provide emergency assistance and save lives in times of crisis, and to help communities across the country rebuild and become safer and more prepared for the next disaster.

This is an immensely challenging job, one that demands an experienced, crisis-tested leader. Ms. Criswell, you have over 25 years of emergency management and disaster response experience at the federal, state, and local levels, a record that shows you are well prepared to lead this critical agency.

You have the support of multiple emergency management and law enforcement groups, as well as former FEMA Administrators who served under both Democratic and Republican presidents.

If confirmed, you will take the helm while the nation still faces a historic public health crisis, and FEMA is actively engaged in response and relief efforts. You will play a key role in ensuring vaccine distribution is efficient and effective, and that every community has the resources needed to recover from the pandemic.

As you know, the pandemic is only one of many emergencies that FEMA is facing and will face in the months and years ahead. We are in the midst of spring flooding and heading into hurricane and wildfire seasons, while many communities are still recovering from severe winter storms.

From our earlier conversation, I know you understand that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to disaster response.

I also know you that you understand that we must do more to invest in mitigation, to reduce risk before a disaster strikes. As communities across the nation continue to experience the impacts of climate change, we must work together to mitigate this growing threat.

Ms. Criswell, I look forward to hearing more about your plans to lead this critical agency.
Thank you again for your willingness to serve, and for being here with us today.
OPENING STATEMENT
RANKING MEMBER ROB PORTMAN
NOMINATION HEARING: DEANNE B. CRISWELL TO BE ADMINISTRATOR, FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

March 25, 2021

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks to my colleague Senator Gillibrand for introducing Ms. Criswell.

I enjoyed our conversation, and as we talked about, FEMA plays an incredibly important role always—but particularly now.

- Not just with the natural disasters we’ve recently encountered but with the work that FEMA is doing along the border as we deal with the influx of unaccompanied kids and others.

You’ve got a lot of experience, 25 years of experience, working in emergency management at the state, local, and even the federal level.

- I’m glad you had that time with the National Guard in Colorado as well because you led emergency management units while being deployed in Afghanistan, Iraq and Qatar.

- So that experience is very important.

The next FEMA Administrator will lead more than 21,000 staff so it’s a big management job.

- The budget is $74 billion, and again, we’ve got plenty of natural disasters that need to be coordinated.

- The COVID-19 pandemic has made that more difficult.

- We just had a historic hurricane season and then again what’s going on at the southern border to name some of the important
issues.

One of the things I want to focus on today is how every state is different.

- And how we need to be sure that at the FEMA leadership level, there’s an understanding of that.

Ohioans have been provided significant support, thanks to FEMA, $100 million in emergency protective measures.

- $1.4 billion in lost wages assistance.

- Just last week, FEMA launched a mass vaccination clinic in Cleveland, Ohio to administer 6,000 doses a day, prioritizing high-risk Ohioans and underserved populations.

- So again, FEMA is playing a big role that some are not aware of, even with regard to COVID-19 vaccinations.

The tragic attacks that we have seen at synagogues and other places of worship over the past decade which have increased, have led FEMA to play a bigger role in what’s called the Nonprofit Security Grant Program.

- Senator Peters and I have spent a lot of time working on this and increased the funding, but also just managed to pass an authorization for another five years.

- This is an area where, as you know from our conversation, I have a strong interest and my hope is this Nonprofit Security Grant Program is something that you will focus on personally to ensure that the appropriated funding continues to be there for these purposes.

- There’s a lot of demand, sadly, right now for this.
• But also to be sure that the appropriated funding comes with increased responsibility for guarding against fraud or waste or certainly abuse of taxpayer funds.

So, Commissioner Criswell, I look forward to hearing what you will do to address these issues should you be confirmed.

• I appreciate your willingness to serve, again, at a time when our country is facing some of these unprecedented challenges.

• And I look forward to the discussion today regarding your thoughts on the role FEMA can play in response.
Statement of Deanne Criswell
Nominee for Administrator of Federal Emergency Management Agency
Department of Homeland Security

Before the
U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

March 25, 2021

Good Morning Chairman Peters, Ranking Member Portman, and distinguished members of the Committee.

I am honored to appear before you today as President Biden’s nominee for the position of Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. I would like to start by thanking Senator Gillibrand for her kind introduction. It has been a true honor to serve in New York City as the Commissioner for New York City Emergency Management.

I would also like to thank my family and friends for all their support through this process. In particular I would like to recognize my two sons, RJ and Eddie, who are here with me today. They have sacrificed much over the years and have supported me throughout my service to our country and I am very happy that they could join me here today.

I believe in FEMA’s mission of helping people before, during, and after disasters – particularly as we seek to bring an end to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pathway to a ready and resilient nation requires a shared vision that takes a proactive mindset:

- We must reduce risk through system-based mitigation;
- We must increase the resilience of our communities so they can adapt as threats change; and
- We must scale our response to minimize the consequences of disasters and emergencies.

I understand this is a challenging mission. If confirmed, I welcome the opportunity to meet this challenge and lead FEMA in its effort to create a more prepared and resilient nation.

I have spent most of my life in public service, which has helped prepare me for this challenge and respond to novel and emerging threats across federal, state, and local levels. I have served as a local emergency manager for a small jurisdiction and a major urban area. I retired after 21 years as a traditional guardsman in the Colorado Air National Guard. I also spent six years at
FEMA leading responses across the nation. And I held a leadership position in the private sector supporting communities in their preparedness efforts.

I began my career in Aurora, Colorado, first as a firefighter and paramedic, and eventually taking on the role of emergency manager. In this role, Aurora was asked to provide mass care services to evacuees leaving Louisiana because of Hurricane Katrina. We supported nearly 1,000 survivors in their sheltering needs and ultimately helped reunite them with their families who were evacuated across the country. I learned the importance of collaboration to meet shared goals, bringing stakeholders together, and building relationships with partners.

This last year has been the most challenging of my career. As New York City responded to the impacts brought on by the COVID-19 global pandemic, I led a team that worked tirelessly to prevent the collapse of the healthcare system. At the same time, we also established a number of first-time programs. We worked to ensure no one went hungry, standing up a first of its kind program to provide sheltering options for vulnerable populations. Sadly, we also implemented a mass-fatality operation to meet the scale and severity of the impacts of COVID-19. We had to have the ability to make decisions with imperfect information and pivot as more details become available—a critical skill that emergency managers across this country must have to set them apart.

As FEMA responds to the COVID-19 pandemic, it also must also support communities in preparing for future challenges and adapting to a changing world. The 2020 Atlantic Hurricane season brought a record 30 named storms, and we also saw wildfires cause significant damage. I believe the best way to balance the competing demands is to make risk reduction investments to build more resilient communities and infrastructure, including against the threat of climate change. FEMA has developed robust preparedness and response capabilities, and now we also have an incredible opportunity to reduce risk.

There is an opportunity in front of us to continue to build on the successes the emergency management community have made and continue our work to professionalize this young discipline. As we look to the future, I believe emergency management across the nation is at a pivotal point. As an emergency manager, I have always focused on keeping families and communities safe. There is nothing more rewarding than being able to help the people of this country. I am deeply grateful to be nominated for the important role. If I am confirmed, I commit to firmly establishing and defining the essential role of emergency management at all levels in support of the American people.

Finally, I understand the importance of working closely with Congress and Members of this Committee to make sure FEMA is responsive to your communities and the people you represent. I have appreciated the opportunity to speak with Members on both sides of the aisle about the importance of emergency management, and—if confirmed—commit to working in a bipartisan manner at all times.
Thank you for your consideration of my nomination, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.
HSGAC BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONS FOR
EXECUTIVE NOMINEES

1. Basic Biographical Information

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<tr>
<td>City: New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Office Address</strong> (include street address)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City: Brooklyn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other Names Used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deanne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deanne</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Birth Year and Place

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Birth (Do not include month and day.)</th>
<th>Place of Birth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Ludington, Michigan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Marital Status

**Check All That Describe Your Current Situation:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annulled</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Spouse’s Name

**(current spouse only)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spouse’s First Name</th>
<th>Spouse’s Middle Name</th>
<th>Spouse’s Last Name</th>
<th>Spouse’s Suffix</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Spouse’s Other Names Used

**(current spouse only)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Name</th>
<th>Middle Name</th>
<th>Last Name</th>
<th>Suffix</th>
<th>Name Used From (Month/Year) (Check box if estimating)</th>
<th>Name Used To (Month/Year) (Check box if estimating)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Children’s Names (if over 18)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Name</th>
<th>Middle Name</th>
<th>Last Name</th>
<th>Suffix</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>Timothy</td>
<td>Habble</td>
<td>Jr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward</td>
<td>Lawrence</td>
<td>Habble</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2. Education

List all post-secondary schools attended.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of School</th>
<th>Type of School</th>
<th>Date Begun School (month/year)</th>
<th>Date Ended School (month/year)</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Date Awarded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Naval Postgraduate School/Center for Homeland Security</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>November 2008</td>
<td>March 2012</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>March 13, 2012</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado State University</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>January 2003</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>August 8, 2003</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Rocks Community College</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>January 1993</td>
<td>AAS</td>
<td>May 6, 1994</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Nevada, Las Vegas</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>September 1985</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>Start Date</td>
<td>End Date</td>
<td>Else Present</td>
<td>Else Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Camino College</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>September 1990</td>
<td>December 1990</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College of Aurora</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>May 1993</td>
<td>August 2003</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College of the Air Force</td>
<td>Military</td>
<td>March 1992</td>
<td>January 2010</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. **Employment**

(A) List all of your employment activities, including unemployment and self-employment. If the employment activity was military duty, list separate employment activity periods to show each change of military duty station. Do not list employment before your 18th birthday unless to provide a minimum of two years of employment history.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Employment</th>
<th>Name of Your Employment/Assigned Duty Station</th>
<th>Most Recent Position Title/Rank</th>
<th>Location (City and State only)</th>
<th>Date Employment Began (month/year) (check box if estimate) (check &quot;Present&quot; box if still employed)</th>
<th>Date Employment Ended (month/year) (check box if estimate) (check &quot;Present&quot; box if still employed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City Government</td>
<td>New York City Emergency Management</td>
<td>Commissioner</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>July 2019</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Contractor</td>
<td>The Cadmus Group, LLC</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Arlington, VA</td>
<td>January 2017</td>
<td>July 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Government</td>
<td>Aurora Fire Department</td>
<td>Emergency Manager</td>
<td>Aurora, CO</td>
<td>May 1994</td>
<td>April 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Guard</td>
<td>Colorado Air National Guard</td>
<td>Senior Master Sergeant</td>
<td>Aurora, CO</td>
<td>February 1992</td>
<td>March 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-government Employment</td>
<td>San Francisco Music Box Company</td>
<td>Retail Sales</td>
<td>Denver, CO</td>
<td>June 1991</td>
<td>November 1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-government Employment</td>
<td>Sportsman's Hotel</td>
<td>Front Desk Agent</td>
<td>Las Vegas, NV</td>
<td>February 1990</td>
<td>May 1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-government Employment</td>
<td>Hacienda Hotel</td>
<td>Corporate Sales Manager</td>
<td>El Segundo, CA</td>
<td>June 1988</td>
<td>February 1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-government Employment</td>
<td>Holiday Inn Hotel and Casino Reservations Agent</td>
<td>Las Vegas, NV</td>
<td>6/86</td>
<td>6/88</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-government Employment</td>
<td>MTT Vacations Customer Service Agent</td>
<td>Las Vegas, NV</td>
<td>8/84</td>
<td>6/86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6
(B) List any advisory, consultative, honorary or other part-time service or positions with federal, state, or local governments, not listed elsewhere.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Government Entity</th>
<th>Name of Position</th>
<th>Date Service Began (month/year)</th>
<th>Date Service Ended (month/year) (check box if estimate)</th>
<th>Ext. Present</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FEMA National Advisory Council (NAC)</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>Est. November 2020</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMA National Integration Center (NIC) National Coordination Group (NCG)</td>
<td>Member (Ex officio)</td>
<td>Est. September 2019</td>
<td>Est. Present</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Potential Conflict of Interest

(A) Describe any business relationship, dealing or financial transaction which you have had during the last 10 years, whether for yourself, on behalf of a client, or acting as an agent, that could in any way constitute or result in a possible conflict of interest in the position to which you have been nominated.

In connection with the nomination process, I have consulted with the Office of Government Ethics and the Department of Homeland Security’s Designated Agency Ethics Officer to identify any potential conflicts of interest. Any potential conflicts of interest will be resolved in accordance with the terms of an ethics agreement that I will sign and transmit to the Department’s Designated Agency Ethics Officer, which will be provided to this Committee. I am not aware of any other potential conflicts of interest.

(B) Describe any activity during the past 10 years in which you have engaged for the purpose of directly or indirectly influencing the passage, defeat or modification of any legislation or affecting the administration or execution of law or public policy, other than while in a federal government capacity.

During my tenure at New York City Emergency Management, I have sent the following
communications regarding FEMA policies:

- Letter to Acting FEMA Administrator Gaynor, urging FEMA not to discontinue the STEP program. (August 19, 2019);
- Follow up letter to Acting FEMA Administrator Gaynor, reiterating NYC’s position not to end the STEP program. (October 29, 2019);
- Letter responding to 28 New York elected officials, describing the assistance NYC agencies sent to Puerto Rico following the January 2020 earthquakes. (February 26, 2020);
- Senator Schumer, Senator Gillibrand, Congresswoman Clarke, Congressman Rose, Congressman Meeks, Congresswoman Meng, Congressman Espaillat, Congressman Engel, Congresswoman Velázquez, and Congressman Nadler sent a letter on my behalf to FEMA Administrator Gaynor, recommending me for the National Advisory Committee. (March 9, 2020);
- Letter to FEMA Administrator Gaynor in response to his guidance on COVID-19 best practices, laying out New York City’s strategies. (April 4, 2020);
- Letter sent to Congresswoman Clarke, in response to a letter I received asking for enhanced planning around nursing homes that may experience extended power outages. (November 16, 2020), and
- Joint letter with Chairman Gregory Russ, NYCHA, to Congresswoman Velázquez, Assembly member Epstein, Manhattan Borough President Brewer, Councilmember Rivera, and Senator Hoylman regarding concerns after a construction accident at NYCHA Jacob Riis Houses. (August 30, 2019).
5. Honors and Awards

List all scholarships, fellowships, honorary degrees, civilian service citations, military medals, academic or professional honors, honorary society memberships and any other special recognition for outstanding service or achievement.

Ellis Island Medal of Honor – Notified 2020, Award postponed until later in 2021 due to pandemic.

As documented in my Service Record Book, I was awarded the following Colorado Air National Guard Awards and Decorations:

- Meritorious Service Medal;
- Army Achievement Medal;
- AF Outstanding Unit Award (1 device);
- Air Reserve Forces Meritorious Service Medal (9 devices);
- National Defense Service Medal (1 device);
- Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal;
- Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal;
- Global War on Terrorism Service Medal;
- Air Force Overseas Ribbon Short;
- Air Force Expeditionary Service Ribbon with Gold Border;
- Air Force Longevity Service (1 device); and
- Armed Forces Reserve Medal (2 devices).

Aurora Fire Department:

- Rocky Mountain Fire Academy Academic Award – Class 94-2, August 5, 1994;
- Rocky Mountain Fire Academy Instructors’ Choice Award – Class 94-2, August 5, 1994; and

6. Memberships

List all memberships that you have held in professional, social, business, fraternal, scholarly, civic, or charitable organizations in the last 10 years.

Unless relevant to your nomination, you do NOT need to include memberships in charitable organizations available to the public as a result of a tax deductible donation of $1,000 or less, Parent-Teacher Associations or other organizations connected to schools attended by your children, athletic clubs or teams, automobile support organizations (such as AAA), discounts clubs (such as Groupon or Sam’s Club), or affinity memberships/consumer clubs (such as frequent flyeer memberships).
7. Political Activity

(A) Have you ever been a candidate for or been elected or appointed to a political office?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Office</th>
<th>Elected/Appointed/Candidate Only</th>
<th>Year(s) Election Held or Appointment Made</th>
<th>Term of Service (if applicable)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(B) List any offices held in or services rendered to a political party or election committee during the last ten years that you have not listed elsewhere

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Party/Election Committee</th>
<th>Office/Services Rendered</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
<th>Dates of Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(C) Itemize all individual political contributions of $200 or more that you have made in the past five years to any individual, campaign organization, political party, political action committee, or similar entity. Please list each individual contribution and not the total amount contributed to the person or entity during the year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Recipient</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Year of Contribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kathryn Garcia, candidate for New York City Mayor</td>
<td>$250.00</td>
<td>2020</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


8. Publications and Speeches

(A) List the titles, publishers and dates of books, articles, reports or other published materials that you have written, including articles published on the Internet. Please provide the Committee with copies of all listed publications. In lieu of hard copies, electronic copies can be provided via e-mail or other digital format.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Date(s) of Publication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Op-Ed: City agencies are planning for winter snow. Are you?</td>
<td>AM New York</td>
<td>December 8, 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing for a Complex Coordinated Terrorist Attack</td>
<td>Domestic Preparedness</td>
<td>January 2018</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(B) List any formal speeches you have delivered during the last five years and provide the Committee with copies of those speeches relevant to the position for which you have been nominated. Include any testimony to Congress or any other legislative or administrative body. These items can be provided electronically via e-mail or other digital format.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title/Topic</th>
<th>Place/Audience</th>
<th>Date(s) of Speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Testimony of Deanne Criswell, Commissioner NYC Department of Emergency Management / COVID Hospitals</td>
<td>New York City Council Committees on Hospitals</td>
<td>November 5, 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What We've Learned about the National Emergency Management System in Response to a Pandemic</td>
<td>National Emergency Management Association (NEMA) Virtual Summit</td>
<td>September 2, 2020 – pre-recorded September 23, 2020 – session date with live Q and A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testimony of Deanne Criswell, Commissioner NYC Department of Emergency Management / Tropical Storm Ida</td>
<td>New York City Council Committees on Consumer Affairs and Business, Resiliency and Waterfronts, Environmental Protection, Consumer Affairs and Business, and Parks and Recreation</td>
<td>September 14, 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19 Lessons Learned from NYC</td>
<td>Aberdeen Proving Ground's Consequence Management Unit</td>
<td>August 25, 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testimony of Deanne Criswell, Commissioner, NYC Department of Emergency Management / Summer Preparedness</td>
<td>New York City Council Committees on Consumer Affairs and Business, Waterfronts and Resiliency, Environmental Protection, and Health</td>
<td>May 26, 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology Partnerships for Public Safety and Security</td>
<td>City &amp; State Collaborative Technology Conference</td>
<td>November 7, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet the NYC Emergency Management Commissioner</td>
<td>John Jay College</td>
<td>October 15, 2019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(C) List all speeches and testimony you have delivered in the past ten years, except for those the text of which you are providing to the Committee.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Place/Audience</th>
<th>Date(s) of Speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Think Tank: Learning Lessons During COVID-19</td>
<td>IAEM Think Tank</td>
<td>December 15, 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing Opportunities from 2020 Challenges</td>
<td>CHDS Virtual Alumni Hour</td>
<td>November 19, 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency Management Leadership and Lessons</td>
<td>Harvard NPLI Executive Education Cohort Concluding Session</td>
<td>June 28, 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety and Emergency Management During the Coronavirus Pandemic</td>
<td>City &amp; State Webinar Series</td>
<td>May 5, 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Future and Challenges in Emergency Management for 2020 and Beyond</td>
<td>IAEM@harvard NPLI Think Tank</td>
<td>March 4, 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in Leadership: Being Prepared for Success</td>
<td>NYC Parks: The Arsenal</td>
<td>October 30, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning to Lead: My Personal Journey</td>
<td>NYC Emergency Management</td>
<td>October 23, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebola and the Risk of Pandemic Outbreaks</td>
<td>Center for Homeland Defense and APEX Summit</td>
<td>March 4, 2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To the best of my abilities, I have recounted the speeches and testimony I have delivered in the last 10 years. As instructed, the above list does not include the speeches and testimony that I have provided to the Committee. In addition, there may have been occasions on which I provided informal remarks, participated in panel discussions, or otherwise spoke other than from prepared remarks. While serving as Emergency Manager for Aurora, Colorado, I would regularly provide information to the public and the media related to the City’s preparedness efforts. Similarly, while serving at FEMA on the IMAT team and as a Federal Coordination Officer, I regularly provided information to the public and the media related to any event on which I was leading agency efforts.

9. Criminal History

Since (and including) your 18th birthday, has any of the following happened?

- Have you been issued a summons, citation, or ticket to appear in court in a criminal proceeding against you? (Exclude citations involving traffic infractions where the fine was less than $500 and did not include alcohol or drugs.)
  - No
• Have you been arrested by any police officer, sheriff, marshal or any other type of law enforcement official?
  • No

• Have you been charged, convicted, or sentenced of a crime in any court?
  • No

• Have you been or are you currently on probation or parole?
  • No

• Are you currently on trial or awaiting a trial on criminal charges?
  • No

• To your knowledge, have you ever been the subject or target of a federal, state or local criminal investigation?
  • No

If the answer to any of the questions above is yes, please answer the questions below for each criminal event (citation, arrest, investigation, etc.). If the event was an investigation, where the question below asks for information about the offense, please offer information about the offense under investigation (if known).

A) Date of offense:
   a. Is this an estimate (Yes/No):

B) Description of the specific nature of the offense:

C) Did the offense involve any of the following?
  1) Domestic violence or a crime of violence (such as battery or assault) against your child, dependent, cohabitant, spouse, former spouse, or someone with whom you share a child in common: Yes / No
  2) Firearms or explosives: Yes / No
  3) Alcohol or drugs: Yes / No

D) Location where the offense occurred (city, county, state, zip code, country):

E) Were you arrested, summoned, cited or did you receive a ticket to appear as a result of this offense by any police officer, sheriff, marshal or any other type of law enforcement official: Yes / No
   1) Name of the law enforcement agency that arrested/cited/summoned you:
2) Location of the law enforcement agency (city, county, state, zip code, country):

F) As a result of this offense were you charged, convicted, currently awaiting trial, and/or ordered to appear in court in a criminal proceeding against you: Yes / No

1) If yes, provide the name of the court and the location of the court (city, county, state, zip code, country):

2) If yes, provide all the charges brought against you for this offense, and the outcome of each charged offense (such as found guilty, found not-guilty, charge dropped or "nolle pros," etc.). If you were found guilty of or pleaded guilty to a lesser offense, list separately both the original charge and the lesser offense:

3) If no, provide explanation:

G) Were you sentenced as a result of this offense: Yes / No

H) Provide a description of the sentence:

I) Were you sentenced to imprisonment for a term exceeding one year: Yes / No

J) Were you incarcerated as a result of that sentence for not less than one year: Yes / No

K) If the conviction resulted in imprisonment, provide the dates that you actually were incarcerated:

L) If conviction resulted in probation or parole, provide the dates of probation or parole:

M) Are you currently on trial, awaiting a trial, or awaiting sentencing on criminal charges for this offense: Yes / No

N) Provide explanation:
10. Civil Litigation and Administrative or Legislative Proceedings

(A) Since (and including) your 18th birthday, have you been a party to any public record civil court action or administrative or legislative proceeding of any kind that resulted in (1) a finding of wrongdoing against you, or (2) a settlement agreement for you, or some other person or entity, to make a payment to settle allegations against you, or for you to take, or refrain from taking, some action. Do NOT include small claims proceedings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Claim/ Suit WasFiled or Legislative Proceedings Began</th>
<th>Court Name</th>
<th>Name(s) of Principal Parties Involved in Action/Proceeding</th>
<th>Nature of Action/Proceeding</th>
<th>Results of Action/Proceeding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 16, 1992</td>
<td>Superior Court of the State of California for the County of Los Angeles</td>
<td>Robert T. Hable, Deanne Hable</td>
<td>Divorce</td>
<td>Dissolution of Marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 22, 2018</td>
<td>Circuit Court of the City of Alexandria</td>
<td>John William Crawell, Deanne Burrell, Crawell</td>
<td>Divorce</td>
<td>Dissolution of Marriage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(B) In addition to those listed above, have you or any business of which you were an officer, director or owner ever been involved as a party of interest in any administrative agency proceeding or civil litigation? Please identify and provide details for any proceedings or civil litigation that involve actions taken or omitted by you, or alleged to have been taken or omitted by you, while serving in your official capacity.

During my tenure as the Commissioner of New York City Emergency Management, the agency was named in two civil lawsuits. While the lawsuits do concern actions taken by me, I took these actions in my official capacity as Commissioner of the agency and as the highest supervisory authority at the agency. I took these actions on the advice of agency legal counsel and based on the decisions and practices carried out by my team.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Claim/ Suit Was Filed</th>
<th>Court Name</th>
<th>Name(s) of Principal Parties Involved in Action/Proceeding</th>
<th>Nature of Action/Proceeding</th>
<th>Results of Action/Proceeding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Notice of Claim filed on or about October 8, 2020</td>
<td>Office of the NYC Comptroller</td>
<td>CrewFacilities.com, LLC against The City of New York and NYC Emergency Management</td>
<td>Alleges improper interference with a contract and business relations, and seeks monetary damages for improper termination</td>
<td>Pending</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(C) For responses to the previous question, please identify and provide details for any proceedings or civil litigation that involve actions taken or omitted by you, or alleged to have been taken or omitted by you, while serving in your official capacity.

11. Breach of Professional Ethics

(A) Have you ever been disciplined or cited for a breach of ethics or unprofessional conduct by, or been the subject of a complaint to, any court, administrative agency, professional association, disciplinary committee, or other professional group? Exclude cases and proceedings already listed.

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<tr>
<th>Name of Agency/Association/Committee/Group</th>
<th>Date Citation/Disciplinary Action/Complaint Issued/Initiated</th>
<th>Describe Citation/Disciplinary Action/Complaint</th>
<th>Results of Disciplinary Action/Complaint</th>
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(B) Have you ever been fired from a job, quit a job after being told you would be fired, left a job by mutual agreement following charges or allegations of misconduct, left a job by mutual agreement following notice of unsatisfactory performance, or received a written warning, been officially reprimanded, suspended, or disciplined for misconduct in the workplace, such as violation of a security policy?

- No

12. Tax Compliance

(This information will not be published in the record of the hearing on your nomination, but it will be retained in the Committee’s files and will be available for public inspection.)

**REDACTED**
13. **Lobbying**

In the past ten years, have you registered as a lobbyist? If so, please indicate the state, federal, or local bodies with which you have registered (e.g., House, Senate, California Secretary of State).

- No

14. **Outside Positions**

X See OGE Form 278. (If, for your nomination, you have completed an OGE Form 278 Executive Branch Personnel Public Financial Disclosure Report, you may check the box here to complete this section and then proceed to the next section.)

For the preceding ten calendar years and the current calendar year, report any positions held, whether compensated or not. Positions include but are not limited to those of an officer, director, trustee, general partner, proprietor, representative, employee, or consultant of any corporation, firm, partnership, or other business enterprise or any non-profit organization or educational institution. **Exclude** positions with religious, social, fraternal, or political entities and those solely of an honorary nature.

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<tr>
<th>Name of Organization</th>
<th>Address of Organization</th>
<th>Type of Organization (corporation, firm, partnership, other business enterprise, other non-profit organization, educational institution)</th>
<th>Position Held</th>
<th>Position Held From (month/year)</th>
<th>Position Held To (month/year)</th>
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15. Agreements or Arrangements

As of the date of filing your OGE Form 278, report your agreements or arrangements for:
(1) continuing participation in an employee benefit plan (e.g. pension, 401k, deferred compensation);
(2) continuation of payment by a former employer (including severance payments);
(3) leaves of absence; and (4) future employment.

Provide information regarding any agreements or arrangements you have concerning (1) future employment; (2) a leave of absence during your period of Government service; (3) continuation of payments by a former employer other than the United States Government; and (4) continuing participation in an employee welfare or benefit plan maintained by a former employer other than United States Government retirement benefits.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Status and Terms of Any Agreement or Arrangement</th>
<th>Parties</th>
<th>Date (month/year)</th>
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16. Additional Financial Data

All information requested under this heading must be provided for yourself, your spouse, and your dependents. (This information will not be published in the record of the hearing on your nomination, but it will be retained in the Committee’s files and will be available for public inspection.)

REDACTED
SIGNATURE AND DATE

I hereby state that I have read the foregoing Statement on Biographical and Financial Information and that the information provided therein is, to the best of my knowledge, current, accurate, and complete.

Deanne Criswell
Digitally signed by Deanne Criswell
Date: 2021.02.26 18:22:39 -05'00'

This ______ day of ____________ 20
February 23, 2021

The Honorable Gary C. Peters  
Chairman  
Committee on Homeland Security  
and Governmental Affairs  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

In accordance with the Ethics in Government Act of 1978, I enclose a copy of the financial disclosure report filed by Deanne Criswell, who has been nominated by President Biden for the position of Administrator, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Department of Homeland Security.

We have reviewed the report and have obtained advice from the agency concerning any possible conflict in light of its functions and the nominee's proposed duties. Also enclosed is an ethics agreement outlining the actions that the nominee will undertake to avoid conflicts of interest. Unless a date for compliance is indicated in the ethics agreement, the nominee must fully comply within three months of confirmation with any action specified in the ethics agreement.

Based thereon, we believe that this nominee is in compliance with applicable laws and regulations governing conflicts of interest.

Sincerely,

DAVID APOL
General Counsel

1201 NEW YORK AVE NW • SUITE 500 • WASHINGTON DC 20005
February 3, 2021

Mr. Joseph Maher
Designated Agency Ethics Official
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr. Ave., SE
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Mr. Maher:

The purpose of this letter is to describe the steps that I will take to avoid any actual or apparent conflict of interest in the event that I am confirmed for the position of Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Department of Homeland Security. It is my responsibility to understand and comply with commitments outlined in this agreement.

SECTION 1 – GENERAL COMMITMENTS

As required by the criminal conflicts of interest law at 18 U.S.C. § 208(a), I will not participate personally and substantially in any particular matter in which I know that I have a financial interest directly and predictably affected by the matter, or in which I know that a person whose interests are imputed to me has a financial interest directly and predictably affected by the particular matter, unless I first obtain a written waiver, pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 208(b)(1), or qualify for a regulatory exemption, pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 208(b)(2). I understand that the interests of the following persons are imputed to me:

- Any spouse or minor child of mine;
- Any general partner of a partnership in which I am a limited or general partner;
- Any organization in which I serve as an officer, director, trustee, general partner, or employee; and
- Any person or organization with which I am negotiating or have an arrangement concerning prospective employment.

In the event that an actual or potential conflict of interest arises during my appointment, I will consult with an agency ethics official and take the measures necessary to resolve the conflict, such as recusal from the particular matter or divestiture of an asset.

If I rely on a de minimis exemption under 5 C.F.R. § 2640.201(b) with regard to any of my financial interests in sector mutual funds, I will monitor the value of those interests. If the aggregate value of my interests in sector mutual funds that concentrate in any one sector exceeds $50,000, I will not participate personally and substantially in any particular matter that to my knowledge has a direct and predictable effect on the financial interests of any holdings of the funds that are in the specific sector in which the funds concentrate, unless I first obtain a written waiver pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 208(b)(1).
If I have a managed account or otherwise use the services of an investment professional during my appointment, I will ensure that the account manager or investment professional obtains my prior approval on a case-by-case basis for the purchase of any assets other than cash, cash equivalents, investment funds that qualify for the regulatory exemption for diversified mutual funds and unit investment trusts at 5 C.F.R. § 2640.201(a), obligations of the United States, or municipal bonds.

I will receive a live ethics briefing from a member of the ethics office after my confirmation but not later than 15 days after my appointment pursuant to the ethics program regulation at 5 C.F.R. § 2638.305. Within 90 days of my confirmation, I will submit my Certification of Ethics Agreement Compliance which documents my compliance with this ethics agreement.

I understand that as an appointee I will be required to sign the Ethics Pledge (Exec. Order No. 13989) and that I will be bound by it. Among other obligations, I will be required to recuse from particular matters involving specific parties involving my former employer or former clients for a period of two years after I am appointed, with the exception of federal, state and local government.

I will not modify this ethics agreement without your approval and the approval of the U.S. Office of Government Ethics pursuant to the ethics agreement requirements contained in the financial disclosure regulation at 5 C.F.R. § 2634.803(a)(4).

SECTION 2 – RESIGNATIONS

Upon confirmation, I will resign my positions with the following entities:

- New York City Emergency Management Department
- Big City Emergency Managers

Pursuant to the impartiality regulation at 5 C.F.R. § 2635.502, for a period of one year after my resignation from each of these entities, I will not participate personally and substantially in any particular matter involving specific parties in which I know that entity is a party or represents a party, unless I am first authorized to participate, pursuant to 5 C.F.R. § 2635.502(d).

SECTION 3 – DIVESTITURES

I will divest my interests in the following entities as soon as practicable but not later than 90 days after my confirmation:

- Honeywell International, Inc.
- Johnson & Johnson
- Home Depot, Inc.
- FedEx Corporation
With regard to each of these entities, I will not participate personally and substantially in any particular matter that to my knowledge has a direct and predictable effect on the financial interests of the entity until I have divested it, unless I first obtain a written waiver, pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 208(b)(1), or qualify for a regulatory exemption, pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 208(b)(2). I have verified that I will be able to carry out the divestitures within the timeframe described above.

I understand that I may be eligible to request a Certificate of Divestiture for qualifying assets and that a Certificate of Divestiture is effective only if obtained prior to divestiture. Regardless of whether I receive a Certificate of Divestiture, I will ensure that all divestitures discussed in this agreement occur within the agreed upon timeframes and that all proceeds are invested in non-conflicting assets. I understand that I must timely submit my request for a Certificate of Divestiture to allow for adequate time for OGE to process the Certificate of Divestiture, and in order to divest assets within the agreed upon timeframe.

I (including my spouse and dependent children if applicable) will not repurchase any asset I was required to divest without my consultation with my agency ethics official and the U.S. Office of Government Ethics.

SECTION 4 – PUBLIC POSTING

I have been advised that this ethics agreement and the Certification of Ethics Agreement Compliance will be posted publicly, consistent with the public information law at 5 U.S.C. § 552, on the website of the U.S. Office of Government Ethics with ethics agreements of other Presidential nominees who file public financial disclosure reports.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Deanne Criswell
I. Nomination Process and Conflicts of Interest

1. Did the President or the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) give you specific reasons why you were nominated to be the next Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and if so, what were they?

   I understand the President was interested in having a tested crisis leader with the knowledge, experience, and abilities to successfully lead before, during, and after disasters.

2. Were any conditions, expressed or implied, attached to your nomination? If so, please explain.

   There were no conditions, expressed or implied, attached to my nomination.

3. Have you made any commitments with respect to the policies and principles you will attempt to implement as Administrator? If so, what are they, and to whom were the commitments made?

   I have made no commitments with respect to the policies and principles I may or may not implement as Administrator if confirmed.

4. Are you aware of any business relationship, dealing, or financial transaction that can result in a possible conflict of interest for you or the appearance of a conflict of interest? If so, please explain what procedures you will use to recuse yourself or otherwise address the conflict. And if you will recuse yourself, explain how you will ensure your responsibilities are not affected by your recusal.

   In connection with the nomination process, I have consulted with the Office of Government Ethics and the Department of Homeland Security’s Designated Agency Ethics Official to identify any potential conflicts of interest. Any potential conflicts of interest will be resolved in accordance with the terms of an ethics agreement that I will sign and transmit to the Department’s Designated Agency Ethics Official, which will be provided to this Committee. I am not aware of any other potential conflicts of interest.

5. Please provide the name of any individual, law firm, consulting firm, lobbying firm, public relations firm, or other entity you have formally retained or contracted with regarding this nomination, including any amounts paid in fees or otherwise.
I have not retained or contracted with any individuals, firms, or other entities regarding this nomination.

II. Background of the Nominee

6. Why do you want to serve as Administrator of FEMA?

I have spent most of my life in public service, and there is nothing more rewarding than being able to help the people of this country. As an emergency manager who has built a wide and diverse skill set and progressively taken on more responsibility throughout my career, I believe I am well-suited to lead FEMA through the challenges it faces, and to evolve the agency to better serve the American people, now and into the future. Emergency management is a young discipline and I believe is at a pivotal point in defining its value. Unlike other traditional first responder disciplines, I believe there is a gap in public understanding of the critical value of capable emergency managers, despite our equally critical role of keeping communities safe when it comes to the threats and hazards they face.

In my current position as Commissioner of the New York City Emergency Management Department, I have committed myself to advancing the capabilities that emergency management brings with the goal of establishing a national model. What sets emergency management apart is the unique ability to solve complex problems through bringing stakeholders together. I look forward to continuing this endeavor, should I be confirmed, and firmly establishing and defining the essential role of emergency management in support of the American people.

7. What specific background, experience, and attributes affirmatively qualify you to be Administrator of FEMA?

I have over 25 years of experience at the local, state, and federal levels in disaster response and emergency management. During this time, I have led the federal response to historic flooding in North Dakota, Colorado, and South Carolina; supported the federal response to Hurricane Sandy in NYC and historic wildfires in Colorado; led the federal response to a typhoon and tropical storms in Guam and Florida, and the local response in NYC; and led the coordination of New York City’s response to COVID-19 as Commissioner of New York City Emergency Management. These experiences have afforded me an understanding of the difficulties states and local governments face while preparing for and responding to disasters, from the small jurisdiction of Aurora, CO to a large urban area in New York City. Likewise, during my time at FEMA as a national Incident Management Assistance Teams (IMAT) lead, I developed a strong working knowledge of the agency’s programs and policies, as well as gaining firsthand insight into many of the challenges and opportunities the agency now faces.

Additionally, I served 21 years in the Air National Guard providing Defense Support to Civil Authorities (DSCA) for disaster response as well as supporting operations overseas.
My time serving in the military helped establish my leadership style. Leading a traditional National Guard unit—one weekend a month and two weeks a year—required an awareness of work-life balance for members of my unit, while ensuring we were providing the required capacity to perform in crisis environments. I led the deployment of my team to Kuwait shortly after the attacks of September 11, and in 2010 deployed as the Fire Protection Manager for CENTCOM forward, managing fire protection resources during the drawdown in Iraq while forces were surging in Afghanistan. Through these experiences, I gained invaluable perspective on managing teams in challenging environments, and further developed my existing crisis leadership and emergency response skills.

If confirmed, I will draw upon my unique skill set and background to tackle agency-wide challenges not just through the lens of an experienced and crisis-tested leader of large organizations, but as informed by my decades of firsthand experience as an emergency manager leading response at the federal, state, and local levels.

8. Please describe:

   a. Your leadership and management style.

   I consider myself to have a collaborative leadership style—breaking down silos and creating cross-sectional work streams to solve problems. This is essential in emergency management, where we often must bring people together when there are not always clear and existing organizational structures to do so. Some key characteristics of my leadership style are flexibility and adaptiveness; understanding the dynamics of the operating environment; responding thoughtfully and respectfully to the opinions of others; and trusting people to solve problems at the lowest level while being appropriately accountable for those decisions and actions as a leader.

   b. Your experience managing personnel.

   I have led individuals, teams, and organizations in crisis situations for over 25 years—to include hazardous conditions such as firefighting as a Captain, military deployments to the Middle East as a Deputy Fire Chief, high-tempo environments as the leader of FEMA’s National IMAT, and complex political situations as Commissioner in NYC.

   As the Commissioner for NYC Emergency Management, I have led my team through a comprehensive reform of the organization addressing systemic challenges the agency was facing.

   In addition to the above, I have also served as a mentor as part of leadership programs sponsored by FEMA and instituted a lessons in leadership series at NYC Emergency Management to highlight the broad challenges faced by emergency management leaders, in particular women in these roles.

   c. What is the largest number of people that have worked under you?
I currently have approximately 250 people working under my direction as Commissioner of NYC Emergency Management. In my federal service in response to flooding in North Dakota, I was appointed by President Obama as the Federal Coordinating Officer responsible for up to 2,000 emergency management professionals as they operated in a crisis doing everything they could to save lives and mitigate the damage caused by that historic event. Additionally, while deployed to Qatar in 2010 with the Air National Guard, I provided leadership oversight to firefighters performing contingency operations in support of Operation Enduring Freedom who were stationed in five countries and spread across dozens of bases.

9. Please give examples of times in your career when you disagreed with your superiors and aggressively advocated your position. Were you ever successful?

I have always respectfully provided my best advice and recommendations to leaders based on experience and knowledge of the situation. During the peak of New York City’s response to COVID-19, preventing the collapse of the healthcare system was a primary concern. The Department of Defense (DOD) was requested to provide support, and their initial planning assumption was to only treat COVID-negative patients at the Javits Center Alternate Care Facility, with the understanding this would increase capacity for hospitals to treat COVID-positive patients. What the hospitals really needed, though, was the ability to decant COVID-positive patients who were convalescing but were not ready to go home. I had several conversations with DOD leadership in NYC, as well as NORTHCOM leadership, to explain the actual needs on the ground, and to share my perspective that it was in the best interest of New Yorkers for them to change their policy and begin to treat COVID-positive patients at the Javits Center. My expertise and understanding of the needs of the City, and my ability to communicate and advocate this to DOD leadership, was influential in the ultimate change in policy and created COVID-19 convalescent care at alternate care facilities.

As another example, in 2005 I went from serving as a Captain on the Fire Department for the City of Aurora, Colorado to the head of the Office of Emergency Management. I was interested in becoming the Emergency Manager, a position which had previously been held by a lower rank. I advised the Fire Chief that I believed the Emergency Manager role should be elevated to a Captain-level position in order to meet the current risk environment. But an analysis of the position conducted in 1995 had concluded the current rank was adequate and I would have to take a demotion if I wanted the position. I disagreed with this assessment, and wrote a justification based on the changing emergency management landscape post 9/11, including increasing grant dollars and responsibilities that had not been included in the pre-9/11 analysis. The Fire Chief agreed with my assessment and elevated the position to a Captain. I believe my efforts ultimately ensured the Emergency Manager position was staffed appropriately to best serve the interests of the City during my tenure and beyond.

10. Do you seek out dissenting views and encourage constructive critical dialogue with subordinates? Please provide examples of times in your career when you have done so.
The essence of a collaborative leadership style is creating a safe space for differing opinions and being willing to make changes based on opinions that differ from mine. I always surround myself with advisors who are not afraid to provide their best professional advice. As a recent example, one of my directors reached out to share her thoughts and express her belief that we had an opportunity to take proactive action and create a culture that addressed institutional systemic racism, at NYC Emergency Management and within the emergency management field, to support both our staff and the people we serve in a deeper, more comprehensive way. As a result, I asked her to form an initial working group across the agency to bring me feedback on where injustice and inequality is in our workplace and in our programs, along with their suggestions for improvement. This resulted in what is now our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council as a standing advisory body.

11. Please list and describe examples of when you made politically difficult choices that you thought were in the best interest of the country.

Disasters don’t discriminate and often bring politically difficult situations. In my role as Federal Coordinating Officer, I often made decisions in the best interest of the communities, as allowable by law or statute, that were not always in alignment with views of political leadership. For example, during a response effort I led to historic flooding in a Midwestern jurisdiction thousands of residents were displaced. Local and state leadership had requested assistance that was not allowable under the Stafford Act, which would have had longer-term implications on the community in future years requiring them to pay back funding that was not allowable. I worked with my team to find alternate solutions that would ultimately achieve a similar result and provide the necessary support to help those impacted.

12. What would you consider your greatest success as a leader?

Leading the coordination of New York City’s response to COVID-19 was the biggest challenge of my career, and although the circumstances were incredibly challenging and the pandemic had devastating effects on many New Yorkers, we had a number of successes at New York City Emergency Management which I believe ultimately contributed to saving lives and ensuring services were in place for those who needed them most. First, leading the coordination across federal/state/local levels ensured the right resources were in the right place at the right time. Second, taking care of our people by making sure we provided for their personal and mental health needs during these trying times was key to continued capacity to deal with the months-long response. And lastly, we took an equity lens from the very beginning of our response—from testing sites to installing air conditioners for the most vulnerable to COVID-19 and summer heat to now supporting the equitable delivery of vaccines.

Some key successes include adding over 25,000 medical surge beds at ten different facilities; instituting an employee mental health support program to provide proactive resources to support employee mental health throughout the pandemic to include one-on-one counseling, groups sessions, and webinars; and the installation of 74,000 air
conditioners to the most vulnerable New Yorkers to stay safely indoors during the summer months.

13. What do you consider your greatest failure as a leader? What lessons did you take away from that experience?

First and foremost, as an emergency manager, my job has always been preventing, responding to, and mitigating emergencies so families and communities are kept safe. Anytime someone loses their home, a community is devastated, or people lose their lives as a result of disasters, emergency managers like me feel that. No matter how hard we try to prevent those consequences from coming to pass, we treat that as a failure of our mission. Part of the job is to shoulder that failure and do everything you can to prevent it from happening again in the future. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, any loss of life would have been tragic and would mean that we failed to keep people safe. With that said, we responded to that failure by building capacity to support the needs of the community and lessen the burden that was being felt across the City.

14. During your career, has your conduct as a government employee ever been subject to an investigation or audit by an agency Inspector General, Office of Special Counsel, Department of Justice, agency Equal Employment Opportunity office or investigator, or any other federal, state, or local investigative entity? If so, please describe the nature of the allegations/conduct and the outcome of the investigation(s) or audit(s).

No.

III. Role of the Administrator of FEMA

15. What do you consider to be the mission of FEMA? What are FEMA’s principal strengths and weaknesses in its ability to accomplish that mission?

I believe in FEMA’s mission of helping people before, during, and after disasters. Recently, FEMA has described this as federally supported, state managed, and locally executed—but in reality, successful mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery require a coordinated approach. We have a collective responsibility to ensure the response and recovery enterprise is ready and our communities and individuals are prepared for the increasing risks we are facing.

16. If confirmed, what do you expect will be your immediate and longer-term priorities for FEMA? What do you hope to accomplish during your tenure?

My first priority is our people. As stated in a recent RAND study, there is distrust at the senior level and employee morale ranks low.

My second priority is to lead the coordination of the disaster enterprise. The first challenge is the continuing response to COVID-19, and if confirmed, I’m looking forward to learning
where we are and how FEMA can further assist in the ongoing response and recovery. Beyond short- and medium-term COVID-19 response, we must build and sustain a responsible, accountable, and ready FEMA that can continue to support state, local, territorial, and tribal entities to meet the needs of future risks and threats.

My third priority is to build capacity and resilience to the physical impacts of a changing climate. We must address the risks our changing climate is causing and understand this is a long-term obligation—and necessity, from a risk standpoint—at all levels of government. To do this, we must institutionalize climate change dynamics into our policy and planning efforts and incentivize state and locals to do the same.

My fourth priority is to ensure equity across all FEMA operations, both internally and externally. If confirmed, I would adopt a similar approach as I did in NYC, creating a diversity, equity, and inclusion council. The council was intended to foster representation in our workforce across the various dimensions of social and cultural identity and practice equity and inclusion in how we work with one another and deliver emergency management programs.

IV. Policy Questions

FEMA Management & Workforce

17. What changes or improvements do you believe need to be made to FEMA’s existing regulations, policies, and practices?

FEMA’s workforce is its most important resource and the organizational culture established is the foundation for success. If confirmed, I look forward to assessing FEMA’s current regulations, policies, and practices to identify potential areas for improvements to take care of the workforce and provide timely and effective assistance to FEMA’s stakeholders and customers.

18. What do you see as FEMA’s most important management challenges, and what steps will you take to address these challenges if confirmed?

One of the most important management challenges is recruiting and retaining a quality workforce in a competitive environment. This is further complicated by the high operational tempo and long deployments which have been increasing year after year. If confirmed, I look forward to better understanding the current challenges FEMA is facing and solicit feedback and suggestions from across the agency to inform the pathway forward.

19. FEMA recently published the Culture Improvement Action Plan and Pub 1 – We Are FEMA, with a focus on eradicating sexual harassment, creating an environment free of misconduct, and promoting core values such as compassion, integrity, fairness, and respect.
FEMA also recently created the Office of Professional Responsibility that holds FEMA employees accountable through investigations of misconduct.

a. What additional changes, if any, in culture and leadership tone at FEMA are needed, and what would you do to make progress in these areas?

I have always embraced a culture of innovation and collaboration that is free of harassment and discrimination. If confirmed, I would work to create an environment where staff feel supported and empowered to take initiative. In order for all of our colleagues to perform at the level of excellence they are capable of, if confirmed, I will assess the current environment and work to ensure FEMA has a tone that respects cultural differences in which staff can feel confident in being able to perform to the best of their ability.

b. What steps have you taken as Commissioner of the New York City Emergency Management Department to ensure that the Department provides its employees with a discrimination- and harassment-free workplace?

As Commissioner of New York City Emergency Management, providing a work environment that celebrates our differences has been a priority. One of the first steps I took was to separate the role of the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and Human Resources. These were combined under one person and I did not feel the role of EEO was being performed effectively. Having a dedicated focus on EEO was well-received across the agency.

Additionally, we created and expanded the diversity, equity, and inclusion council to act as an advisory body for our internal and external operations. One of their first actions was holding unconscious bias workshops for all employees to bring awareness to the impact that systemic racism has on our employees.

c. If confirmed as FEMA Administrator, what steps would you take to ensure that FEMA provides those workplace conditions?

If confirmed, I would work with the existing leadership to better understand where FEMA is in addressing its past challenges and how and what efforts the agency has taken to provide training to be more effective in dealing with harassment and discrimination as well as more formal training on the mechanics of how to be a supervisor.

20. What do you believe is the role of the FEMA Administrator in encouraging diversity across the FEMA workforce?

FEMA has long struggled with developing a diverse leadership team and the Administrator must set the tone and lead by example. As the first female Commissioner for NYC Emergency Management, I had an opportunity to model and promote greater diversity within our workforce and the emergency management discipline. I instituted a Lessons in
Leadership series, bringing in leaders of diverse backgrounds to have “fireside chats”, sharing their leadership journeys, lessons learned, and encouraging staff to never underestimate their potential. These sessions were well received by staff as well as the leaders I brought in, to include one leader taking this idea back to his organization. If confirmed, I will work with my leadership team to foster a workplace that values inclusion and diversity, in which all employees feel supported and able to contribute to the best of their ability.

COVID – 19

21. How will your experience as New York City Emergency Management Commissioner inform your approach to COVID-19 response at FEMA, if confirmed? Do you think States have the responsibility to obtain and maintain a certain level of preparedness for future pandemics? If so, what are some of your ideas to rethink how to achieve pandemic readiness at the state, local, tribal and territorial levels?

Throughout New York City’s response to COVID-19, I saw firsthand the devastation and inequities experienced across the City. I coordinated with federal, state, local, private, and non-profit entities, and witnessed how quickly local and state resources were overwhelmed. Support from the federal government was critical in overcoming these challenges. We have a collective responsibility to ensure SLTT’s are prepared for all hazards, including pandemics. The capabilities and gaps must be better understood so more effective investments can be made. Just as the federal government invested in expanding preparedness and capability for terrorist attacks after September 11, thought should be given to whether there is an opportunity to assist in increasing the preparedness for pandemics. If confirmed, I will build from this experience. Additionally, as stated in other answers, if confirmed, I will seek to prioritize equity in FEMA’s COVID-19 response, as I did in my role as Commissioner of NYC Emergency Management.

22. FEMA is helping distribute COVID-19 vaccines and other critical supplies across the country. If confirmed, what steps will you take to address and prevent COVID-19 health disparities and ensure that resources such as COVID-19 vaccines are distributed equitably?

COVID-19, as with many disasters, disproportionately impacts underserved communities. As part of our response in NYC, we have mapped our most vulnerable neighborhoods, and identified gaps in our testing and vaccine distribution. This informed where we needed to prioritize our resource placement. We also provided transportation to increase our outreach to vulnerable populations. If confirmed, I would work closely with state and local authorities who understand their communities best, to establish adequate geographic distribution of resources to address their gaps.

23. What role, if any, do you believe FEMA should play in combating misinformation related to vaccine development and safety to alleviate concerns and ensure the widest possible participation in the vaccination program?
I believe we all have a role to play in getting America vaccinated. Through FEMA’s established networks, the Agency can conduct outreach to state, local, tribal and territorial governments to amplify official messaging from CDC and other public health officials. People receive information in a variety of ways, and social media presents an ongoing opportunity to engage in new and innovative ways to reach more of the general public.

Response and Recovery

24. What do you see as the proper role of FEMA in response and recovery from disasters, both man-made and natural?

I view FEMA’s role as supporting State, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) jurisdictions when they cannot respond or recover with existing resources. FEMA does this by leading the coordination of the federal family and providing resources and assistance to minimize suffering and aid in recovery.

25. What are your goals and priorities for FEMA’s response and recovery programs? What, if any, changes do you believe need to be made to FEMA’s response and recovery programs?

One of FEMA’s current strategic goals is to reduce the complexity of the programs they deliver. While this has been a goal for several years, little forward progress seems to have been made. If confirmed, I will make it a priority to fully realize this strategic goal by soliciting input from SLTTs and reimagining programs with this lens. When necessary and appropriate, if confirmed, I will work with Congress to ensure FEMA has the right statutory authorities in order to carry out its mission.

26. Do you believe FEMA should have different regulations, policies, and/or practices for response to and recovery from catastrophic disasters than for less destructive disasters?

Requirements to respond to or recover from a disaster are dependent upon the capability and capacity of the jurisdiction impacted. Therefore, a one size fits all regulation, policy, and/or practice does not work, whether for catastrophic or less destructive disasters.

27. In recent decades, FEMA’s disaster response efforts have been plagued by racial and socioeconomic disparities. If confirmed, what steps would you take to ensure that FEMA assistance is equitably provided across communities?

Throughout my career, I have seen first-hand the disproportionate impacts of disasters across society. If confirmed, I am committed to examining FEMA’s programs to find areas for improvement in the delivery of services to underserved communities.

28. Last Congress, the Achieving Racial and Ethnic Equity in Disaster Response, Recovery, and Resilience Act of 2020 was introduced to establish an Office of Equal Rights and Community Inclusion (OERC) within FEMA. Would you support efforts to establish an office within FEMA dedicated to improving access to assistance for underserved communities across the country?
If confirmed, I would work with Congress to ensure FEMA has the authorities it needs to successfully promote equity in disaster response, recovery, and resilience programs.

Federal Disaster Costs and Programs

29. What steps would you take to decrease the federal government’s future fiscal exposure to disasters and extreme weather?

Extreme weather events are becoming more frequent and more severe due to climate change. The best way to reduce the costs of these events is to work across the whole community to invest in mitigation projects to improve resilience. If confirmed, I would work to ensure all of FEMA’s programs and funding are addressing our changing risk.

30. How can FEMA improve its support to state, local, Tribal, and territorial (SLTT) governments to ensure they are prepared to meet their emergency management responsibilities?

During my time in local government, I have often utilized FEMA’s technical assistance to aid in our preparedness activities. In addition, the agency administers a portfolio of preparedness grants that can be used by state, local, tribal, and territorial governments to execute preparedness activities. With regards to program delivery, the agency has developed and made available a wide range of training and planning guidance for SLTT partners. FEMA Regions also play a large role in assisting states with preparedness activities. If confirmed, I would ensure that regular outreach and needs assessments are taking place, especially with jurisdictions identified as needing more assistance.

I would also like to see FEMA utilize the data collected from SLTTs to better inform and prioritize grants, technical assistance, training, planning and exercises. SLTTs know their gaps best. The resources and support FEMA provides should help close those gaps.

31. How would you strike a balance between maintaining effective working partnerships with SLTT governments and being a good steward of taxpayer dollars by holding SLTT governments accountable for monitoring subgrantees?

Building strong relationships and communicating expectations is the foundation for maintaining effective partnerships. This is reinforced through continual engagement and quickly addressing problem areas.

32. How would you enhance transparency and ensure the proper use of public funds in contracting and subcontracting?

It has been my experience that it is critically important to have internal controls and auditing mechanisms in place to provide for the proper use of public funds. If confirmed, I
will make it a priority to provide the necessary training to improve existing processes and procedures.

33. FEMA has a draft rule out for comment that updates the per-capita indicator for a major disaster. As you may know, this indicator, which currently helps FEMA measure whether a State needs supplemental federal assistance, was not adjusted for inflation for more than a decade. What are your views on whether or not this indicator helps control the federal government’s fiscal exposure? Should this indicator be regularly adjusted?

As a local official, I am very familiar with the wide range of disasters and emergencies facing states and local governments every day. At the same time, I understand the need to periodically review disaster declaration factors to better manage the federal government’s fiscal exposure and ensure that federal resources are available for catastrophic events.

There are some challenges I can see with the proposed draft rule, to include but not limited to, whether this new formula would accurately account for a jurisdiction’s current fiscal environment, a reduction in disaster declarations will also impact the amount of money available to invest in mitigation, and States with a higher Cost of Assistance indicator based on a few large urban areas will affect smaller jurisdictions that are already disproportionately impacted by disasters.

If confirmed, I am committed to working with FEMA Public Assistance leadership and stakeholders to identify a measured approach so states can plan accordingly for the future.

*Climate Change*

34. Do you believe that man-made climate change has contributed to the growth in the frequency, magnitude, and financial impact of natural disasters in recent years? If yes, please explain how FEMA can use this information to improve preparedness. If no, please explain why not.

There is no question that we are seeing an increase in the number of and severity of extreme weather events. The science backs this up: all we have to do is look back to the past year, when we had the most named tropical storms in recorded history, a record-breaking wildfire season, and the highest number of events that resulted in a billion dollars or more in damages. Furthermore, we must keep in mind that disasters often hit minority and low-income populations the hardest with disproportionately high impacts. The time is now to address the risks that our changing climate is causing and understand that this is a long-term obligation at all levels of government. To do this, we must institutionalize climate change dynamics into our policy and planning efforts, and seek to incentivize states to do the same. To adequately address the rapidly increasing frequency, magnitude and financial impact of disasters, FEMA must use the best available data to inform its existing programs, leverage standards to address growing risk, and support emergency managers to help their communities prepare for and adapt to a changing world.
35. What importance do you give to solar and other renewable energy sources in creating resilient infrastructure? What role does FEMA have in determining state and local energy sources and approaches?

Renewable energy sources can provide a sustained and enduring source of energy for communities across the country. One of the most significant challenges of natural disasters and extreme weather is the ability to sustain the continuous flow of electricity necessary for communities and households as well as water, transportation, and communications systems. Renewable energy sources may be one way in which communities could achieve redundancies for critical power generation amid these emergencies. Part of FEMA’s responsibilities include helping SLTT’s understand the threats and risks to critical infrastructure, including the cascading impacts if compromised. If confirmed, I pledge to further examine the applicability of renewable resources for facilitating increasing resilient infrastructure.

36. How will you balance competing demands and limited resources to best respond to the sustained effects of climate change and acute emerging threats?

FEMA’s mission of helping people before, during, and after disasters is undoubtedly impacted by climate change. FEMA’s role is to manage disasters and support communities in adapting to the changing climate. It is critically important that climate change be understood, discussed, and built into our modeling and planning so we are collectively better prepared to anticipate, mitigate, and respond to these systemic threats. The best way to balance the competing demands resulting from the sustained effects of climate change is to make sound risk reduction investments in advance to build more resilient communities and infrastructure. If confirmed, I would assess how climate change is affecting the ability of FEMA to incentivize more investment in reducing risk and what steps FEMA can take to address it.

Hazard Mitigation and Disaster Resilience

37. How do you evaluate the current state of national preparedness for emergencies and disasters, including the capabilities of individuals and communities?

Like threats and hazards, preparedness varies greatly across jurisdictions and is difficult to measure. Currently, FEMA has SLTTs complete the Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (THIRA) and Stakeholder Preparedness Review (SPR) to attempt to quantify jurisdictional risks and capabilities to manage those risks. Unfortunately, these tools take a quantitative approach for specific scenarios in measuring preparedness—focusing on the “how much” instead of the “how well” of disaster response. For example, jurisdictions are asked to measure their Operational Coordination by quantifying how many response partners they have but it does not account for the level of capability or capacity those partners bring. The tools also do not assess individual preparedness, only the government’s ability to provide for citizen needs following a disaster. Based on my experience at the local level, these tools would benefit from modification, regional
tailoring, and interactive sessions between SLTT, non-profits, and federal response partners to understand local and regional capabilities and gaps.

For example, NYC Emergency Management has collaborated with the New York State Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Services in the development and implementation of the City/County Emergency Preparedness Assessment (CEPA). Unlike THIRA which seeks to assess preparedness capabilities associated with specific scenarios and requires a series of educated guesses, the CEPA program involves highly collaborative workshops with state and local emergency management stakeholders to capture both quantitative and qualitative information on risk and preparedness capabilities. CEPA has a broader and more holistic approach to assessing preparedness capabilities by examining the entire capability instead of discrete targets associated with specific scenarios. This insight helps state and local emergency management stakeholders make more informed preparedness decisions. Like most activities in emergency management, the key to success is collaboration, and it is this notion that helps drive the CEPA process.

38. What do you see as the proper role of FEMA in mitigation against disasters, both man-made and natural?

FEMA’s role is to help jurisdictions protect their communities by reducing risk: natural and known risks, but also future risks and risks we have not thought of yet. FEMA can help identify the highest priorities by providing the latest risk information and acknowledging that risk is increasing for many hazards due to climate change, aging infrastructure, and changing land use and population patterns.

39. What can FEMA do to help states, localities, and individuals better assess and mitigate their own disaster risk?

The release of FEMA’s national risk index is a new tool to help communities understand their risk and take more informed actions. If confirmed, I look forward to understanding the algorithm behind the risk index and finding ways to provide technical assistance to help communities tailor this information and promote more equitable investments in risk reduction. Ultimately, integrating risk and mitigation into community planning and strong codes and standards are the foundation for resilient communities. Hazard mitigation planning reduces loss of life and property by minimizing the impact of disasters. If confirmed, I will support SLTTs in building those foundations in their communities, especially for those with limited capacity, and working with them to align on priority mitigation investments.

40. How could FEMA better design pre-and post-disaster mitigation grant programs to increase incentives for states, localities, businesses, and individuals to invest in disaster resilience?

Navigating the federal policies and procedures are cumbersome and time consuming. Guidance is also outdated and does not align with the projects being showcased by FEMA’s Building Resilient Infrastructures and Communities (BRIC) program. I’ve also heard frustration about the length of time it takes between a community applying to, receiving
funding for, and completing projects. If confirmed, I would continue to look for ways to reduce the complexity of the grant programs and provide clear guidance through candid conversations with state and local partners about what they need and where their frustrations are.

41. The Safeguarding Tomorrow through Ongoing Risk Mitigation (STORM) Act of 2020, which was signed into law early this year, authorizes FEMA to enter into agreements with state and Tribal governments to make capitalization grants for the establishment of hazard mitigation revolving loan funds. What steps would you take, if confirmed, to ensure effective implementation of this program, once funding is appropriated?

Engagement and outreach are essential in helping communities understand the resources available with this new program. If confirmed, I would work with FEMA’s Resilience team to develop appropriate policies and protocols for program implementation. Next, I would ensure FEMA is proactively providing the tools, resources, and education necessary for jurisdictions to effectively utilize the program if funding is appropriated.

42. If confirmed, what additional steps will you take to ensure that the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program delivers on the intent of Congress to reform and revitalize mitigation efforts throughout the country?

We were very excited to be able to submit New York City applications for the BRIC program and I think it is going to be a value add for state and locals to continue to reduce risks in their neighborhoods. From a local perspective, advance funding to scope and plan future projects was reduced from previous years. Many of our agencies have ideas to reduce our risk but require an investment in the scoping and planning stages to better develop implementable projects for future years. From my perspective, the scoping and planning funding should be prioritized in order to address this need. If confirmed, I would like to work with communities to learn what other opportunities may exist to ensure the BRIC program’s design is consistent with achieving its intended purpose.

43. Do you believe that FEMA, when it designed the BRIC program, transformed the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Program or simply applied a new name to a previously established program? What has your experience been with the BRIC program? Are there ways you think it could be improved?

The former Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) grant program provided less funding, causing jurisdictions to approach mitigation from a house-by-house approach. The continuous funding stream established for BRIC and the increase in the federal share provides the opportunity for community wide investment to reduce risk. This is a transformative approach to reducing risk. In contrast with PDM, BRIC also rewards jurisdictions for being mitigation leaders and places emphasis on building code compliance which is proven to have a positive impact on reducing risk.

New York City’s experience with the BRIC program has been one of anticipation and frustration. The prospect of being able to do community wide projects to affect real change
provided an opportunity for agencies across the City to submit projects that were previously not allowable. However, navigating the new policies and guidance, coupled with the implementation of the new FEMA GO grant system, resulted in some initial project ideas not reaching the final submission stage. FY 2020 was just the start, and if confirmed, I look forward to using each year to build in more flexibility and innovation to help state and local jurisdictions realize the full potential of this program.

44. On August 4, 2020, FEMA published the FY20 Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for the new BRIC program. FEMA preceded the NOFO publication with a public rollout and summer engagement series to inform stakeholders and help them navigate the application process.

   a. In your view, was the rollout sufficient to meet the demands of SLTTs and prepare SLTTs to participate in the BRIC program?

      FEMA built a structure for virtual education and outreach in the COVID-19 environment through numerous webinars and educational sessions, but only provided high level points of the program. FEMA was not ready to speak about how policies would be implemented or other technical questions regarding the program. Final policy guidance was not readily available by the deadline to submit. FEMA also launched a new grant application program at the same time, FEMA GO, causing additional confusion throughout the process.

   b. What would you have done differently to maximize outreach and enhance participation in the BRIC program?

      If confirmed, I will work with states and locals to better anticipate questions and problem areas and align the policy and implementation gaps prior to the formal outreach. I also believe that outreach should be a year-round approach. In order to realize the transformative projects that BRIC can now support, technical assistance must be made available throughout the year to ensure adequate time to develop quality projects when the NOFO is released.

45. The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) has been on the Government Accountability Office’s (GAO’s) high-risk list since 2006. If confirmed, what steps would you take to address this problem?

   If confirmed, I will work with the FEMA senior leadership team, GAO, and Congress to find ways to come off the high-risk list.

Grants

46. The largest share of DHS’s budget authority is provided to FEMA to carry out its mission; however, the DHS Inspector General and other government watchdogs have identified problems with FEMA’s management of its grant programs.
a. If confirmed, what initial actions would you take to improve FEMA’s management of its grant programs?

If confirmed, I will commit to working with the DHS Inspector General to fully understand their findings and recommendations, as well as work with FEMA leadership to understand the issues from all sides before implementing improvements for grant program management and oversight.

b. If confirmed, will you commit to conducting a full review of open DHS Office Inspector General (OIG) recommendations and directing program offices to work with the DHS OIG on closing outstanding recommendations?

Yes.

47. Do you believe the preparedness grants administered by FEMA are meeting their intended statutory and policy goals? What are some ways that FEMA can incentivize and ensure state and local governments invest in sustainability and maintenance, and that these grants are not used for those purposes but for investment in innovation and the ability to meet emerging threats and risk?

FEMA’s preparedness grants have grown and evolved over time as new threats and hazards have emerged. Many jurisdictions across the United States have increased their capabilities to address these threats and hazards as a result of the many preparedness grants available. There are, however, challenges across the country in the ability to sustain these capabilities, which is even more prevalent with the economic impacts seen from COVID-19. As with most processes, there is room for improvement in evaluating and ensuring the return on investment. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the Grants Programs Directorate to better understand their successes and challenges in meeting their statutory and policy goals and developing plans for improvement as needed.

48. Do you believe that FEMA does an adequate job of collecting data on grant effectiveness and using risk-based formulas to determine appropriate funding levels and awards for preparedness grants?

Capturing and measuring the effectiveness of grant programs is an area that FEMA can improve. The use of risk-based formulas to allocate funding has been mandated in statute for many years. The exact formula has matured over time and is evaluated annually. If confirmed, I plan to work with the Grant Programs Directorate to assess the current data collection procedures, and also to ensure the risk formulas used to determine funding levels are set in a way to maximize the reach of grant dollars to close national capability gaps.

49. Do you believe there are policy differences between FEMA regions that result in different reimbursements across regions and states? If so, how would you address this?

For the Public Assistance Program, policies, job aides, guidance and tools are developed at the national level, in partnership with FEMA regional staff and executed at the regional
level to ensure consistent understanding and application of program policies. FEMA has also established Consolidated Resource Centers to support the processing, development and review of grant applications and projects under the Public Assistance Program. If confirmed, I will assess whether the interpretation and execution of policy varies and work with program leadership to develop solutions to ensure equitable application across all regions.

It is my understanding that policy for the implementation of preparedness grant programs is established at the Grants Programs Directorate and executed at the regional level. If confirmed, I will assess whether the interpretation and execution of policy varies and develop solutions to ensure equitable application at all regions.

Cybersecurity

50. Please describe your understanding of FEMA’s responsibilities for cybersecurity, both federal and non-federal.

Cybersecurity attacks are having an increasing impact on our states and communities. As a consequence of the evolution of cyber threats, the emergency management community will increasingly be required to respond to the consequences of cyber-attacks. During a recent cyber-attack at a health care facility in NYC, emergency management was called upon to provide resource support as the impacts were mitigated. This highlights that it will be more important than ever to ensure that the Cyber and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) and FEMA work hand in hand to be prepared to respond to and mitigate the impacts of cyber threats. I understand FEMA is also working with CISA closely to prepare SLTTs for cyber-attacks, including grant funding, training, exercises and planning guidance. However, as the last several years of the National Preparedness Report have highlighted, cyber continues to be an area of concern across the country. If confirmed, I will work closely with CISA to close this gap.

51. What do you view to be the most significant current and potential cybersecurity threats to emergency preparedness and the execution of FEMA’s emergency management plans?

Technology has played a significant role in increasing our ability to carry out our emergency management responsibilities. This creates opportunities for our adversaries to create a disaster within a disaster by attacking our critical infrastructure as we are responding to or recovering from events.

52. If confirmed, what will be your immediate and longer-term priorities to improve FEMA’s cybersecurity posture?

If confirmed, I plan to immediately assess what redundancies are in place, what protective measures are currently in use, and in the long-term work towards strengthening any deficiencies identified. If confirmed, I will engage with subject matter experts within the Department, such as CISA, to learn if they have any recommendations on how to better position the Agency to protect itself from potential cyber-attacks.
53. What specific strategies and policies would you pursue to ensure that SLTT governments are utilizing FEMA resources to bolster their cybersecurity postures?

It is my understanding that FEMA currently requires jurisdictions to invest 7.5% of their SHSP and UASI grant award towards addressing cybersecurity threats. If confirmed, I would evaluate the effectiveness of these investments and baseline best practices from SLTT governments.

V. Accountability

Whistleblower Protections

54. Protecting whistleblowers and their confidentiality is of the utmost importance to this Committee.

a. Please describe any previous experience with handling whistleblower complaints. What steps did you take to ensure those individuals did not face retaliation and that their claims were thoroughly investigated?

   During my career, I have not directly handled a whistleblower complaint.

b. If confirmed, what steps will you take to ensure that whistleblower complaints are handled appropriately at FEMA?

   If confirmed, I would follow established protocols, procedures, and all applicable laws to ensure that individuals did not face retaliation and that their claims were thoroughly investigated.

c. If confirmed, what steps will you take to ensure that whistleblowers at FEMA do not face retaliation, that whistleblower identifiers are protected, and that complaints of retaliation are handled appropriately?

   If I received a whistleblower complaint, I would take it very seriously. I would use all available resources to address the situation, including whether to refer the matter to the Office of Special Counsel.

Cooperation with Inspectors General

55. What is your view of the role of the DHS Office of Inspector General (OIG)? Please describe what you think the relationship between the FEMA and the OIG should be. If confirmed, what steps would you take as Administrator to establish a working relationship with the Inspector General?

While the DHS IG is an independent entity, I view the role of the DHS IG as a partner in ensuring taxpayers dollars are utilized properly and effectively. During my previous tenure with FEMA, I requested that the IG be embedded in our disaster field office to identify
potential issues and recommend courses of action. If confirmed, I would hope to continue
this practice of partnering closely with the IG during response operations, and would
cooperate fully with any investigations.

56. If confirmed, do you commit to ensuring that all recommendations made by the DHS
Inspector General to FEMA are reviewed, responded to, if necessary, and, unless the
agency justifies its disagreements with the recommendations, implemented to the fullest
extent possible within a reasonable time period?

Yes.

57. If confirmed, do you commit without reservation to ensuring DHS OIG receives timely
access to agency records and to interview agency employees?

Yes. If confirmed, I will ensure that the Inspector General has access to agency information
as appropriate to perform its vital function.

58. If confirmed, what steps will you take to ensure all FEMA offices and employees cooperate
fully and promptly with OIG requests?

If confirmed, I am committed to cooperating with OIG requests and expect the same from
all FEMA offices and employees.

Cooperation with GAO

59. If confirmed, do you commit without reservation to ensuring GAO receives timely,
comprehensive responses to requests to FEMA for information, including for records,
meetings, and information?

Yes, in accordance with all Administration policies and laws.

60. If confirmed, do you commit to fully cooperate in a timely manner with any audits,
investigations, and other reviews and related requests for information from GAO?

Yes, in accordance with all Administration policies and laws.

61. If confirmed, what steps would you take to facilitate and encourage timely cooperation by
federal agencies with GAO?

Each federal agency head is responsible for ensuring their individual employees and agency
cooperates with GAO in a timely manner and, it is incumbent upon all agency heads to lead
by example and to be responsive to requests from GAO and Congress in the exercise of
their oversight responsibilities. The work of GAO helps inform ways that the government
could be more effective and efficient and if confirmed, I look forward to partnering with
GAO.
62. If confirmed, what steps will you take to ensure all FEMA offices and employees cooperate fully and promptly with GAO requests?

If confirmed, I am committed to cooperating with all GAO requests and expect the same from all FEMA offices and employees.

VI. Relations with Congress

63. Do you agree without reservation to comply with any request or summons to appear and testify before any duly constituted committee of Congress if confirmed?

Yes. If confirmed, I intend to work closely with Congressional partners, and will comply with requests or summons to appear and testify from Congressional committees with legislative or oversight jurisdiction over FEMA.

64. Do you agree without reservation to make any subordinate official or employee available to appear and testify before, or provide information to, any duly constituted committee of Congress if confirmed?

Yes, in accordance with all Administration policies and laws.

65. Do you agree without reservation to comply fully, completely, and promptly to any request for documents, communications, or any other agency material or information from any duly constituted committee of the Congress if confirmed?

Yes, in accordance with all Administration policies and laws.

66. If confirmed, how will you make certain that you will respond in a timely manner to Member requests for information?

If confirmed, I will work closely with FEMA’s Congressional Affairs and applicable offices and programs to ensure timely responses to any requests for information. Additionally, I will ensure that FEMA maintains clear and open lines of communication with Congress, including committees of jurisdiction.

67. If confirmed, will you direct your staff to adopt a presumption of openness where practical, including identifying documents that can and should be proactively released to the public, without requiring a Freedom of Information Act request?

Yes, in accordance with all Administration policies and laws.

68. If confirmed, will you keep this Committee apprised of new information if it materially impacts the accuracy of information your agency’s officials have provided us?

Yes.
VII. Assistance

69. Are these answers your own? Have you consulted with DHS, FEMA, or any other interested parties? If so, please indicate which entities.

Yes. The responses to all questions are my own. I relied on my own experiences, knowledge of the agency and of emergency management, and publicly available information, and sought and received comment from appropriate DHS staff, which I was free to incorporate or refuse.

I, Deane Criswell, hereby state that I have read the foregoing Pre-Hearing Questionnaire and that the information provided therein is, to the best of my knowledge, current, accurate, and complete.

(Signature)

This 16th day of March, 2021
1. If confirmed, will you commit to look closely at FEMA’s “Cost of Assistance Estimates in the Disaster Declaration Process for the Public Assistance Program” proposed rulemaking and commit to examining other routes FEMA could pursue to achieve the underlying goals?

I have not been briefed on FEMA’s proposed rulemaking relating to Cost of Assistance Estimates in the Disaster Declaration Process for Public Assistance. If confirmed, I commit to working with FEMA Public Assistance leadership to look closely at the proposed rulemaking, and stakeholder feedback the agency has received, to ensure that any approach FEMA takes ultimately upholds the dual goals of responsible fiscal stewardship, while allowing state, local, tribal, and territorial governments to effectively plan for the future.

2. Will you commit to reviewing FEMA’s recoupment processes?

The time after a community experiences a disaster is one of the most difficult times many individuals will face in their lives. I understand firsthand the importance of ensuring clarity and consistency in FEMA guidelines for assistance. If confirmed, I will work to ensure that all eligible recipients of individual assistance receive that assistance, and to continue to improve outreach and education to communities regarding eligibility.
1. In December, FEMA published a proposed rule titled “Cost of Assistance Estimates in the Disaster Declaration Process for the Public Assistance Program.” This NPRM proposes to raise the per capita indicator and minimum threshold, which could further limit incidents that rise to a level that warrants a disaster declaration. Based on FEMA’s Regulatory Impact Analysis for the proposed rule, it is anticipated that this rule, in its current form, would result in 16 fewer disaster declarations per year. While it is important to ensure that federal disaster dollars are used effectively, it is also necessary to ensure that any changes recognize the financial impact of this decision on impacted states and localities. If confirmed, will you work to ensure that any final rule considers and ensures equitable outcomes in rural and tribal communities that have fewer financial options in response to a disaster?

I have not been briefed on FEMA’s proposed rulemaking relating to Cost of Assistance Estimates in the Disaster Declaration Process for Public Assistance. If confirmed, I commit to working with FEMA Public Assistance leadership to look closely at the proposed rulemaking, and stakeholder feedback the agency has received, to ensure that any approach FEMA takes ultimately upholds the dual goals of responsible fiscal stewardship, while allowing state, local, tribal, and territorial governments to effectively plan for the future. Additionally, if confirmed as Administrator, I commit to ensuring an "equity lens" is used to inform Agency decision-making in order to reduce disparities throughout the emergency management spectrum.

2. The recent FEMA National Advisory Council (NAC) report (to which you contributed) showed that, in areas where FEMA provides recovery assistance, affluent families gained net worth while economically disadvantaged communities lost net worth over the course of recovery. Under your leadership and direction, how will the agency ensure greater equity in the disaster damage inspection and award process? What opportunities are there to use technology to ensure more fairness and consistency in the damage assessment process?

FEMA must always work to ensure that its approach to response and recovery does not exacerbate existing inequalities, nor leave eligible families behind when it comes to disaster assistance. If confirmed, I commit to working with our response and recovery team to review findings of the National Advisory Council report in order to better understand where the agency could improve its practices. Additionally, if confirmed, I look forward to reviewing the NAC report and GAO findings in order to understand how technologies can assist in ensuring more equitable outcomes in disaster response.
3. Historically, FEMA inspections and awards have been subject to conscious and unconscious bias, human error, and wide inconsistencies, what do you think about using flyover imagery, remote estimation software, and other technology and data to improve the speed, accuracy, and consistency of damage assessments? What technology should FEMA adopt in order to level the playing field for disaster-impacted Americans? Could FEMA use digital imagery from satellites and flyovers to calculate loss, at least in instances where houses are totally obliterated and/or when damage will clearly meet maximum award thresholds?

Technology is an incredibly important tool not only for FEMA, but for first responders and all levels of government as they work to respond to and recover from disasters. I have not been briefed on specific technologies that FEMA should adopt, but certainly remote imagery is one example of a tool FEMA could use to augment or improve the reliability of its damage assessments. If confirmed, I look forward to working with our teams to better understand how FEMA conducts damage assessments now, and to identify and act on any opportunities for improvement.

4. The recent FEMA NAC report notes that technological adoption, acquisition, and solution development are hampering FEMA’s ability to perform its mission. The NAC report also notes the importance of technology and collaboration for FEMA’s future success. How do you plan to partner and collaborate with industry to ensure FEMA learns and adopts the technology and capabilities of the insurance industry to aid in the execution of FEMA’s mission? Will you support pilot programs with industry, academia, and others to test new technologies and advance innovation at FEMA?

The private sector plays a crucial role throughout the emergency management spectrum, from preparedness to response and recovery. If confirmed, I look forward to exploring possible pilots with industry and academia with the aim of advancing innovation at FEMA.
1. As Administrator of FEMA, you will be responsible for implementing the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program, first authorized in 2018, with funding made available for the first time last year. The BRIC program presents enormous opportunities to use nature-based solutions to prepare communities to be resilient in the face of many types of disasters, including wildfires and drought.

   a. From what you’ve learned as you prepare to lead FEMA, are natural infrastructure projects competitive in the agency’s 2021 qualitative review process?

      I have not been briefed on the 2021 award process for BRIC funds, nor on FEMA staff findings regarding the first round of BRIC funding. If confirmed, I look forward to working with FEMA staff to understand the competitiveness of natural infrastructure projects, and any impediments that may exist to funding such projects through the BRIC program.

   b. What barriers have FEMA staff identified as a result of the first round of funding that impede the BRIC program from supporting natural infrastructure projects?

      I have not been briefed on the 2021 award process for BRIC funds, nor on FEMA staff findings regarding the first round of BRIC funding. If confirmed, I look forward to working with FEMA staff to understand the competitiveness of natural infrastructure projects, and any impediments that may exist to funding such projects through the BRIC program.

   c. Will you commit, if you are confirmed, to ensure that nature-based solutions and natural infrastructure projects are given serious consideration by FEMA?

      Nature-based solutions and natural infrastructure projects are an important tool in our mitigation toolbelt. If confirmed, I commit to working with the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Assistance office to better understand how nature-based solutions and natural infrastructure project applications are reviewed and evaluated during the BRIC application period, and look forward to discussing these findings with Congress.
1. In general, please describe your position on federal funding, both pre- and post-disaster, to state and local governments.
   a. What is the proper role of the federal government in disaster response relative to state and local governments, non-governmental organizations, and private stakeholders?

   Response and recovery efforts ultimately are executed by the local officials and stakeholders who know their communities best. However, in the event of a disaster, local resources can be quickly overwhelmed by circumstances on the ground. I view FEMA’s role as supporting State, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) jurisdictions when they cannot respond or recover with existing resources. FEMA does this by leading the coordination of the federal response and recovery efforts, providing resources and assistance to minimize suffering and aid in recovery, and partnering with private sector and nonprofit agencies on the ground.

   b. What are your plans to ensure that federal funds are utilized only when necessary, and to ensure that federal taxpayers are not footing the bill for services that are more appropriately performed by state and local jurisdictions?

   Disasters start locally and end locally, and preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery are shared responsibilities across all levels of government, from local communities all the way up to federal assistance. If confirmed, I commit to work with Congress to ensure FEMA is acting as a responsible steward of taxpayer dollars. One important element of that stewardship is encouraging state and local governments to make needed investments to prepare for, and mitigate the impacts of, eventual disasters on their communities. Such investments can drastically reduce the costs of response and recovery.

   c. Please identify any functions currently performed by FEMA that you believe could be performed more efficiently or more appropriately by a state/local government or a private entity.

   The private sector is a critical partner throughout the emergency management spectrum. The private sector can often move faster and more
nimble than the federal government when it comes to commodity
distribution and the provision of supplies. From a public information
perspective, individuals are most likely to listen to those trusted officials and
influencers at the most local level. FEMA can assist in providing those state
and local officials with important disaster-related information, but in many
instances, that message is best received when it comes from those established
state and local community members and elected officials. If confirmed, I look
forward to working with the FEMA Office of External Affairs on how we
currently engage with state and local officials and private entities, and any
areas in which that engagement could be improved.

2. If confirmed, how will you be responsive to recommendations (from the Department of
Homeland Security Office of the Inspector General, or the Government Accountability
Office (GAO), or elsewhere) for improvements to FEMA?

Oversight and accountability are critically important to any agency’s success.
Throughout my career, I have fostered open and collaborative lines of
communication both within the agencies and teams I led, and with outside auditors
including Inspectors General. During my previous tenure with FEMA, I asked the
Inspector General’s office to embed in our disaster field office in order to better
identify potential problem areas in real time. If confirmed, I look forward to
working closely with GAO, the IG, and Congress to identify ways for FEMA to
improve.

a. GAO’s website indicates that it has made 73 recommendations to FEMA that
remain open, including 1 “Priority Recommendation” from 2012. How do you
intend to resolve these recommendations, and on what timeline?

If confirmed, I intend to sit down with Comptroller General Dodaro and
discuss open GAO recommendations to FEMA.

3. According to GAO, FEMA has provided well over $50 billion in preparedness grants
from 2002-2018. However, all too often, state and local governments are using federal
dollars to purchase things they would not otherwise, including past examples such as
snow cone machines and armored vehicles.

a. What are the key objectives, elements, and metrics of a more focused and risk-
based approach to allocating FEMA preparedness grants, and how do you intend
to implement these?

1 GAO’s Recommendations Database; accessed March 26, 2021; https://www.gao.gov/reports-
testimonies/recommendations-
database?accessed=1&topic=all&agency=Federa
Emergency%20Management%20Agency&sh-
skiptoolkit?target=FullSearchResults
2 GAO-18-334, Homeland Security Grant Program: Additional Actions Could Further Enhance FEMA’s Risk-
The threats and hazards we face as a nation have evolved significantly since 9/11. As I stated during my confirmation hearing, I understand that Secretary Mayorkas has initiated a systematic review of FEMA preparedness grants in order to ensure these grants are truly addressing the evolving threat landscape we face. I support the Secretary’s decision to direct the Department to undertake this review, and if confirmed, I look forward to working with the Grant Programs Directorate team at FEMA to better understand how the agency currently evaluates the effectiveness of preparedness grants, and to making needed improvements in order to ensure these dollars are helping make us a more prepared nation.

b. Do you believe that FEMA’s list of allowable costs and equipment is too expansive?

Ensuring responsible stewardship of taxpayer funds is a critically important role of the FEMA Administrator. Part of that process involves continuously reviewing expenditures and making updates as needed. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the Grant Programs Directorate at FEMA to gain a better understanding of the allowable use of funds for the preparedness grants. Further, I plan on conducting outreach to all of the Agency’s stakeholders, including Congress, to solicit their input regarding allowable costs.

c. How will you approach any future additions or subtractions to the allowable costs and equipment lists?

As noted, Secretary Mayorkas has initiated a systematic review of FEMA preparedness grants in order to ensure these grants are truly addressing the evolving threat landscape we face. If confirmed, I look forward to reviewing those findings, along with any open GAO and IG recommendations. Additionally, if confirmed, I will work with the Grant Programs Directorate, as well as the agency’s stakeholders and with Congress, to understand the type of feedback we have received from our grant recipients regarding allowable costs.

d. What will you do to better prioritize grant funds and to ensure that expenditures are approved only for equipment that will measurably improve our national preparedness posture?

Continuously monitoring and evaluating expenditures is a key tool to ensure grants are used for expenses that build national resilience. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the Grant Programs Directorate at FEMA to better understand the metrics employed to measure how these dollars are helping make us a more prepared nation. I would also look forward to engaging with our various stakeholders and grant recipients to hear from
them about what projects have seen the most impact.

e. How do you intend to improve the measurement of the overall effectiveness of these grant programs?

If confirmed, I look forward to working with the Grant Programs Directorate at FEMA to better understand the metrics employed to measure program success, and to develop a plan to update these metrics if necessary to ensure these dollars are helping make us a more prepared nation.

f. At what point is it appropriate to reassess our capacity-building posture, given the follow-on costs to maintain equipment that the communities must now bear?

FEMA’s preparedness grants are an important tool to assist state and local partners in becoming more prepared for disasters, regardless of the type of hazard. The maintenance of equipment purchased through those grants is an important facet in ensuring that preparedness. I believe that we should constantly be assessing how these dollars are being invested, and the difference they are making. If confirmed, I look forward to learning more about the metrics we have in place to measure how these dollars are helping make us a more prepared nation.

4. As I have noted in previous hearings, I have heard concerns that flood maps are not clear enough for local officials to make fully informed decisions. 3

a. What will you do to increase the efficiency and usability of FEMA’s flood maps, and ensure better buy-in from communities?

If confirmed, I look forward to working with colleagues at FIMA (Federal Insurance and Mitigation Administration) to better understand the process used to update flood maps. I am very much aware of the unease that changing flood maps can place on individuals, and deeply value the importance of being transparent throughout that process. Stakeholder outreach and engagement is key, and if confirmed, I commit to ensure that we are properly socializing this process with our communities and other stakeholders.

b. How will you address community map disputes?

If confirmed, I look forward to working with colleagues at FIMA (Federal Insurance and Mitigation Administration) to better understand how disputes are currently resolved. Additionally, I plan on engaging with stakeholders to solicit their feedback and will take all inputs into consideration.

5. What are your thoughts on the ability for homeowners to satisfy flood coverage requirements with private flood insurance policies (if approved by a state), to satisfy the mandatory purchase requirement under the Flood Disaster Protection Act of 1973?

If confirmed, I look forward to working with colleagues at FIMA (Federal Insurance and Mitigation Administration) to better the availability of private flood insurance policies and understand what barriers might exist.

a. What about other reforms to improve access to otherwise expensive flood insurance coverage, such as community bulk plans or high-deductible plans?

If confirmed, I look forward to working with colleagues at FIMA (Federal Insurance and Mitigation Administration) to improve the availability of private flood insurance policies and understand what barriers might exist. This would include information on community bulk plans or high-deductible plans.

b. Would these help this program financially or improve coverage in your view?

If confirmed, I look forward to working with colleagues at FIMA (Federal Insurance and Mitigation Administration) to improve the availability of private flood insurance policies and understand what barriers might exist. This would include information on community bulk plans or high-deductible plans. I would also look forward to getting more information on how these programs might lead to more coverage and any associated fiscal impacts.
February 3, 2021

To: Honorable Schumer, Honorable McConnell, Honorable Peters, and Honorable Portman,

The Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) role is vital to the safety and security of our nation. It is imperative that the leader of this organization understands the challenges we face and the public and private sectors’ roles in mitigation, planning, response, and recovery. To succeed at a whole community approach, we must have someone who understands its complexity and who can properly support implementation.

We write today to encourage the swift consideration of New York City Commissioner Deanne Criswell as the next FEMA Administrator. Our nation faces urgent pandemic challenges and other disasters – wildfires, earthquakes, tornadoes, winter storms, hurricanes, civil unrest, terrorism, etc. – will not wait for us to get organized. Delaying the confirmation of the next FEMA Administrator will put our nation at unnecessary risk during this critical time.

Big City Emergency Managers (BCEM) strongly supports Commissioner Criswell as the next FEMA Administrator. Her prior work in the fire service, FEMA, the private sector, and as the current head of New York City’s Emergency Management agency – one of the largest such emergency management organizations in the country – has provided her the experiences and relationships necessary to lead during these trying times. Commissioner Criswell is one of only a few individuals in this country that have the in-depth background and understanding our nation needs to effectively run FEMA.

Please move quickly and without hesitation to confirm the next FEMA Administrator.

Sincerely,

Mark Sloan
Chair, Big City Emergency Managers
Coordinator
Harris County Office of Homeland Security
and Emergency Management

Ron Prater
Executive Director
Big City Emergency Managers
February 26, 2021

The Honorable Gary Peters, Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security and
Governmental Affairs
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rob Portman, Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security and
Governmental Affairs
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Peters and Ranking Member Portman:

On behalf our over 300 members including firefighters, emergency responders, emergency managers, insurers, engineers, architects, contractors, and manufacturers, as well as consumer organizations, code specialists, and many others committed to building a more disaster resilient nation, the BuildStrong Coalition offers our support for the nomination of Ms. Deanne Criswell to serve as Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). We request that you expeditiously consider and approve this nomination that is essential to the nation’s ability to prepare for, respond to, recover from, and mitigate against disasters.

Criswell has spent her career in emergency management at the local, state, and federal levels, and she realizes that the effective management of crisis and disaster is a shared responsibility from all levels of government, the private sector, and individuals. She was a firefighter for 21 years; served in the Air National Guard including deployments to Kuwait, Qatar, Afghanistan, and Iraq; managed the Office of Emergency Management for the City of Aurora, Colorado; served as a Federal Coordinating Officer and lead for one of the National Incident Management Assistance Teams for FEMA helping manage devastating disaster; and is currently serving as the Commissioner of the City of New York Department of Emergency Management. She has coordinated major disaster response and recovery throughout her career, including advising top officials, leading strategic change, and steering transformational planning.

She brings exceptional technical expertise and the experience necessary to successfully lead the Agency and the Federal Government’s emergency management efforts in this Administration. Criswell is one of the most respected figures in the emergency management community, with a proven ability to communicate effectively and deftly manage responses to the most complicated incidents, including New York City’s response to COVID-19. We are confident she will remain committed to fostering partnerships, collaboration, and coordination with all those involved in the management of and policy making related to disasters while fostering and promoting the principles and ideals of equity and inclusion.

We believe Criswell is uniquely qualified to help navigate FEMA thought this extremely challenging period. She will be a valuable asset to the agency’s role in coordinating the federal efforts in response to COVID-19 and laying the groundwork for a strong national recovery. Further, we believe she is the right candidate for the job of addressing the rising frequency, severity, and costs of climate impacts and shifting hazards, and one who understands the importance of mitigation and resilience so that we, as a country, can reduce the loss of life and property in the next disaster. She recognizes the need for a strong FEMA Administrator that respects the need for transparency and collaboration, and she has shown her commitment to advancing FEMA as an organization, emergency management as a discipline, and resilience as a philosophy.
The BuildStrong Coalition and its members stand ready to support the new administrator on confirmation. We hope you will lead your colleagues to act quickly on the confirmation of Deanne Criswell to ensure that FEMA has the necessary leadership for ongoing COVID-19 activities, as well as to ready our nation as we head into hurricane season, wildfire season, and toward other catastrophic disasters.

Sincerely,

Jimi Grande
Chairman
BuildStrong Coalition

Phil Anderson
President
BuildStrong Coalition
March 3, 2021

Chairman Gary Peters

Ranking Member Rob Portman

Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee
350 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Peters and Senator Portman,

We are writing this letter to express our support for a swift confirmation of President Biden’s nomination of Deanne Criswell as incoming Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). As we have seen in 2020, we are facing increased frequency of disasters across the country from wildfires and floods; not to mention the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. These compound crises need prompt and steady leadership from the federal level.

Deanne Criswell is well poised to provide this needed leadership. She has been New York City’s first female Emergency Management Commissioner since 2019. In this position she led the citywide responses to the COVID crisis as well as potentially hazardous storms, power outages, and large fires. Before this, she spent five years at FEMA during the Obama Administration, leading disaster recovery across the country.

As we have seen throughout the pandemic, disasters such as hurricanes and wildfires do not wait. This is why the Senate must make Criswell’s confirmation a priority so she can get to work ensuring a cohesive rapid response to the continued crises and whatever else we may face.

Sincerely,

Brock Long
Former FEMA Administrator, 2017-2019

David Paulison
Former FEMA Administrator, 2005-2009

Craig Fugate
Former FEMA Administrator, 2009-2017

James Lee Witt
Former FEMA Administrator, 1993-2001
March 18, 2021

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Gary C. Peters
United States Senate
Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Chairman Peters, and Ranking Member Portman:

On behalf of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), I am pleased to offer our support for the nomination of Dawnne R. Crowell to serve as the Administrator of the United States Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Throughout her career, Ms. Crowell has worked closely with state, local and tribal law enforcement, and has a strong understanding of the complex and unique challenges agencies face in the preparation for, and response to, emergencies and major disasters.

The IACP recently had the opportunity to meet with Ms. Crowell to gain a better understanding of her priorities. During this meeting, Ms. Crowell demonstrated her deep understanding and continued support for issues of importance to the policing profession, such as continued funding for vital assistance programs through FEMA, the importance of enhanced communication and coordination between fire and police, and pandemic response challenges.

The IACP strongly urges the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, and the members of the United States Senate, to swiftly confirm the nomination of Dawnne Crowell.
March 4, 2021

The Honorable Gary Peters
Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Dirksen Senate Office Building 340
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rob Portman
Ranking Member, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Dirksen Senate Office Building 340
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Peters and Ranking Member Portman:

The U.S. Council of the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM-USA), the nation’s largest emergency management professional association with approximately 5,000 members across the country, is pleased to strongly support the nomination and confirmation of Deanne Criswell to be the next Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). IAEM-USA represents the profession dedicated to protecting America’s local communities from all hazards and threats, natural and man-made.

The Committee is certainly aware of Ms. Criswell’s sterling credentials as an emergency management professional. She has more than 25 years of leadership experience assisting and supporting local and state governments as they build robust emergency management programs to support risk threat and management. She also understands and respects the symbiotic relationship between state and local emergency managers and the role each plays in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from disasters.

In her current position as Commissioner of the New York City Emergency Management Department, Ms. Criswell is tasked with managing one of the most demanding and complex emergency management operations in the profession. She has thrived in that role and has proven she is capable and ready to step up and take charge at FEMA.

Of great importance to IAEM-USA, Ms. Criswell recognizes the value of all the emergency preparedness, response, and mitigation grants administered by FEMA in building capacity at the state and local levels. She recognizes that creating a culture of preparedness falls on state and local emergency managers and requires federal support if implementation of that goal is going to be successful. In short, Ms. Criswell understands and respects the role of FEMA as a partner with state and local stakeholders.

In closing, Deanne Criswell has impeccable credentials, and IAEM-USA strongly believes she is the right person for the job. We strongly recommend her to the Committee, and we urge a speedy confirmation.

Sincerely,

Judson Freels, CEM
President
U.S. Council
International Association of Emergency Managers
March 22, 2021

The Honorable Gary Peters  The Honorable Rob Portman
Chairman  Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security &  Committee on Homeland Security &
Governmental Affairs  Governmental Affairs
United States Senate  United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510  Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Peters and Ranking Member Portman:

On behalf of the approximately 12,000 members of the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), I would like to endorse Deanne Criswell to be Administrator for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). We believe that Commissioner Criswell is well-qualified to lead FEMA during these challenging times.

Commissioner Criswell was appointed Commissioner of New York City’s (NYC) Emergency Management Department in 2019. She is responsible for oversight of NYC’s efforts to plan and prepare for emergencies; educate the public about preparedness; coordinate emergency response and recovery, and disseminate information. She managed the city’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as other emergencies, including extreme summer heat, large fires, and power outages.

Prior to her current position, Commissioner Criswell served as the leader of one of FEMA’s National Incident Management Teams and as a federal coordinating officer. She was the primary federal representative responsible for leading the agency’s response to and recovery from disasters, such as severe flooding in North Dakota, hurricanes in South Carolina, and fires in Colorado. She also served as the head of the Aurora (Colorado) Office of Emergency Management, where she coordinated transitional housing and family reunification efforts in response to receiving 2,000 evacuees from Hurricane Katrina. Commissioner Criswell also served 21 years as a firefighter and deputy fire chief with the Colorado Air National Guard. She has a Master of Public Administration from the University of Colorado – Denver and a Master of Science in homeland security from the Naval Postgraduate School’s Center for Homeland Defense and Security.

Commissioner Criswell has a deep knowledge of the issues facing FEMA. She brings both a national and local perspective, which will be helpful because all disasters start with a local response. She also has experience working for FEMA and can address issues like its reimbursement processes, interstate mutual aid issues, and management of response and recovery from major disasters. She also is familiar with the response to all hazards, including both natural disasters and the threat of terrorism.
The IAFC believes that Commissioner Criswell has the experience to be an excellent FEMA Administrator, and the knowledge to lead the agency as it faces an evolving number of challenges. We look forward to working with you to ensure her confirmation in an expeditious manner.

Sincerely,

Fire Chief Kenneth W. Stuebing, BHSc, CCP(f)
Acting President and Chairman of the Board

kI
February 22, 2021

The Honorable Gary Peters, Chairman
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rick Scott, Ranking Member
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Peters and Ranking Member Scott:

On behalf of the state emergency management directors of all 50 states, territories, and the District of Columbia, the National Emergency Management Association (NEMA) requests you expeditiously consider and approve the nomination of Deanne Criswell for Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

With Criswell as Administrator, we believe FEMA will be able to move forward in effectively tackling its diverse mission set, which covers a vast array of needs, including: supporting the ongoing COVID-19 response, strengthening resilience in the face of a changing climate and evolving hazards, responding with a rapid and effective recovery following disasters, and enhancing community and individual preparedness nationwide. Her past experiences at FEMA clearly demonstrate her commitment to a risk-based, equitable approach to emergency management and we believe she will serve as a partner and ally to state and local officials.

FEMA at its best leverages its authorities and position as the federal lead for disaster response and recovery to mitigate suffering in the wake of a disaster, but does not do so in a vacuum. State and local jurisdictions are the heart and soul of any response, and Criswell’s experiences at both the federal and local levels will ensure that she prioritizes coordination within and across the federal emergency management support to state and local needs.

There are many challenges facing FEMA such as reducing the complexity of disaster assistance programs, improving data sharing for better response, improving and facilitating coordination across the federal interagency, and building a more robust capability for national resource management and supply chain coordination. Equally important is the imperative that FEMA serve for a more diverse workforce and create a more inclusive culture that demands for equity, inclusion and respect rather than homogeneity and discrimination. The increasing complexity of its response and the ongoing pandemic challenge those essential functions and Criswell’s leadership and experience make her uniquely positioned to lead FEMA into the future.

Your leadership in ensuring a swift and successful confirmation of Deanne Criswell will allow the agency to continue addressing its critical missions to vital during our nation’s most challenging moments. We stand ready to assist her once she is confirmed and we look forward to working with her.

Sincerely,

Sina Mostek
NEMA President
Director, Ohio Emergency Management Agency
March 8, 2021

The Honorable Gary Peters  The Honorable Rob Portman
Chairman  Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security Committee on Homeland Security
& Government Affairs & Government Affairs
United States Senate United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510 Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Peters and Ranking Member Portman:

We write on behalf of the nation’s mayors to urge the Senate to quickly confirm Deanne Criswell as Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. FEMA is critical to the nation’s response to COVID-19 and it is critical to our response to the many extreme weather events and other disasters that have plagued our nation in recent years. This is a time when our nation and our cities can ill afford to have the position of FEMA Administrator vacant.

There can be no doubt that Deanne Criswell is eminently qualified to be FEMA Administrator. She is an emergency management professional who is currently the commissioner of the New York City Emergency Management Department, previously held a similar position with the City of Aurora, Colorado, and served as a firefighter for 21 years. She also has served as a member of the Colorado Air National Guard and was deployed to Kuwait.

In addition to her experience and expertise, Ms. Criswell will bring a refreshing, city perspective to an Agency that is used to dealing with state governments, something that we believe will benefit us all. The nation’s mayors urge you to hold her confirmation hearing as soon as possible and to move her nomination quickly through Committee so that it can be voted on by the full Senate.

Sincerely,

Greg Fischer  Tom Cochran
Mayor of Louisville  CEO and Executive Director
President

[signature]

[signature]