

**THE FUTURE OF FEMA: AGENCY PERSPECTIVES  
WITH ADMINISTRATOR CRISWELL**

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**HEARING**  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AND  
TECHNOLOGY  
OF THE  
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
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## THE FUTURE OF FEMA: AGENCY PERSPECTIVES WITH ADMINISTRATOR CRISWELL

Thursday, July 13, 2023

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT  
AND TECHNOLOGY,  
*Washington, DC.*

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:05 a.m., in room 310, Cannon House Office Building, Hon. Anthony D'Esposito (Chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives D'Esposito, LaLota, Strong, Brecheen, Green (ex officio), Carter, and Goldman.

Also present: Representatives Lawler, Moylan, and Moskowitz.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. The Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee on Emergency Management and Technology will come to order. Without objection, the subcommittee may recess at any point.

The purpose of this hearing is to hear from the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Administrator Deanne Criswell, regarding her vision of FEMA moving forward and to receive an overview of the President's fiscal year 2024 budget request for FEMA.

I now recognize myself for an opening statement.

First, I want to thank you for being here this morning. As someone who has spent his entire adult life as an emergency manager, as a chief of the fire department and NYPD detective, I want to thank you for participating in this hearing and for accommodating the schedule change.

I look forward to hearing your perspective on the future of FEMA, and I appreciate this opportunity to review FEMA's work throughout the country.

As we all know, our Nation has faced historic wildfire seasons, costly hurricanes, and unprecedented emergencies in recent years, which currently includes extensive flooding in New York and Vermont.

When Superstorm Sandy devastated New York, I proudly served as chief of the Island Park Fire Department and distinctly remember the overwhelming damage and immense recovery efforts. With an estimated 100,000 homes damaged or destroyed on Long Island alone, I truly appreciate FEMA's partnership and assistance in helping my community and many communities from sea to shining sea to rebuild and recover.

I know that thousands of Americans are grateful for FEMA's help in their time of need. However, I also know that FEMA has

had its share of challenges while carrying out its mission to help people before, during, and after disasters.

And as Members of this subcommittee, we are tasked with ensuring that taxpayer dollars are used wisely to carry out this mission and that these challenges are properly addressed.

One such challenge is that FEMA has experienced growing responsibilities and expanding mission sets amid severe staffing shortages and existing response and recovery operations.

Since 2020, FEMA has responded to 247 major disaster declarations across the United States of America, all while continuing to manage COVID-19-related assistance whose incident period just closed on May 11 of this year.

Further, FEMA has been tasked with alleviating the impact of President Biden's failures. From resettling Afghan refugees in 2021 to now housing and feeding illegal immigrants, I am worried that FEMA is becoming a de facto "damage control" agency.

Will these added responsibilities hinder FEMA's ability to help disaster survivors in their time of need? That is a question that hopefully we will answer today.

Thanks to Secretary Mayorkas' complacency at the Southern Border, humanitarian crises have taken a toll on cities across this country—and not just in border cities like El Paso, but also in cities like New York and Chicago, where they have asked FEMA to help cover the cost of feeding and housing illegal immigrants.

Even New York City Mayor Eric Adams recently said that the financial burden is "decimating"—decimating—"the foundation of our city."

New York received over \$104.6 million in FEMA funding to help cover the cost of housing thousands upon thousands of migrants in this city because of the dereliction of duty of Secretary Mayorkas and President Biden.

Administrator, I recently sent you a letter outlining concerns with the Emergency Food and Shelter Program—Humanitarian, EFSP-H. As noted in the letter, I requested FEMA provide a briefing to this subcommittee to discuss the issues I highlighted in the letter. I hope our staffs are able to get something on the books soon to accommodate this request.

Unfortunately, it seems that this migrant crisis has no end in sight, and cities will likely continue to ask FEMA for help, further adding to the agency's very full plate.

However, FEMA's focus should be on helping communities with building resiliency to natural disasters, improving recovery programs, and completing existing reconstruction projects.

As our communities prepare for the 2023 hurricane season, how can FEMA simplify the application process for survivors of natural disasters? When will recovery be complete in Puerto Rico? Are we better off today than we were at the time of our last disaster?

These are questions that FEMA and this subcommittee should be and will be tackling.

I sent you a letter on May 31 expressing concerns regarding continued reconstruction projects in Puerto Rico, the vulnerability of communities in Puerto Rico during this current hurricane season, and the concerns outlined in the report by the DHS Office of the Inspector General that FEMA has not safeguarded Federal dollars

from fraud by not complying with the agency's own internal guidelines.

I appreciate the response I received this week and welcome further conversation on those concerns that I'm sure we both have during this hearing.

As we look ahead, it is important that we address these questions to help FEMA stay on course and to prioritize the mission that Congress gave FEMA in the Homeland Security Act of 2002, which is to reduce the loss of life and property and to protect this great Nation from all hazards, including natural disasters, acts of terrorism, and other man-made disasters.

Administrator, I look forward to hearing from you on these issues, and once again thank you for your service to this country and for being here today. I hope that this hearing today will bring clarity on the future of FEMA and how the agency will continue to carry on its mission.

[The statement of Chairman D'Esposito follows:]

STATEMENT OF THE CHAIRMAN ANTHONY D'ESPOSITO

JULY 13, 2023

I first want to begin by thanking Administrator Criswell for participating in this hearing. I look forward to hearing your perspective on the future of FEMA and I appreciate this opportunity to review FEMA's work throughout the country.

As we all know, our Nation has faced historic wildfire seasons, costly hurricanes, and unprecedented emergencies in recent years. When Superstorm Sandy devastated New York, I was serving as chief of the Island Park Fire Department, and distinctly remember the overwhelming damage and immense recovery efforts. With an estimated 100,000 homes damaged or destroyed on Long Island alone, I truly appreciate FEMA's partnership and assistance in helping my community to rebuild and recover.

I know that thousands of Americans are grateful for FEMA's help in their time of need. However, I also know that FEMA has had its fair share of challenges while carrying out its mission to help people before, during, and after disasters. And as Members of this subcommittee, we are tasked with ensuring that taxpayer dollars are used wisely to carry out this mission, and that these challenges are properly addressed.

One such challenge is that FEMA has experienced growing responsibilities and expanding mission sets amid severe staffing shortages and existing response and recovery operations. Since 2020, FEMA has responded to 244 Major Disaster Declarations across the United States—all while continuing to manage COVID-19-related assistance, whose incident period just closed on May 11 of this year.

Further, FEMA has been tasked with alleviating the impact of President Biden's failures. From resettling Afghan refugees in 2021, to now housing and feeding illegal immigrants, I am worried that FEMA is becoming a defacto 'damage control' agency. Will these added responsibilities hinder FEMA's ability to help disaster survivors in their time of need?

Thanks to Secretary Mayorkas' complacency at the Southern Border, humanitarian crises have taken a toll on cities across the country—and not just in border cities like El Paso, but also in cities like New York and Chicago, where they have asked FEMA to help cover the costs of feeding and housing illegal immigrants.

Even New York City Mayor, Eric Adams, recently said that the financial burden is "decimating the foundation of our city." New York received over \$104.6 million in FEMA funding to help cover the costs of housing thousands upon thousands of migrants in the city.

Administrator Criswell, I recently sent you a letter outlining concerns with the Emergency Food and Shelter Program—Humanitarian (EFSP-H). As noted in the letter, I've requested that FEMA provide a briefing to this subcommittee to discuss the issues I highlighted in the letter. I hope that we will be able to find a time to receive this briefing.

Unfortunately, it seems that this migrant crisis has no end in sight, and cities will likely continue to ask FEMA for help, further adding to the agency's very full plate.

However, FEMA's focus should be on helping communities with building resiliency to natural disasters, improving recovery programs, and completing existing reconstruction projects. Are communities prepared for the 2023 hurricane season? How can FEMA simplify the application process for survivors of natural disasters? When will recovery be complete in Puerto Rico? These are the questions that FEMA should be tackling.

For instance, Administrator Criswell, I would like to know FEMA's time line for completing reconstruction projects in Puerto Rico and the vulnerabilities that remain due to lengthy delays for these projects. I appreciated the response I received from Associate Administrator Anne Binke from the Office of Response and Recovery; and I was grateful to read her updates on the island's remaining vulnerabilities, such as Puerto Rico's emergency management staff shortages and power grid instability. However, I hope to hear more about FEMA's plan to safeguard Federal funds and to ensure that recovery projects are completed efficiently—especially since much of the funding has already been obligated and 95 percent of the projects presented by the government of Puerto Rico have already received funding. My hope is that FEMA will coordinate with the government of Puerto Rico to see that these projects are completed.

As we look ahead, it is important that we address these questions to help FEMA stay on course and prioritize the mission that Congress gave FEMA in the Homeland Security Act of 2002—which is to reduce the loss of life and property and to protect the Nation from all hazards, including natural disasters, acts of terrorism, and other man-made disasters. Administrator Criswell—I look forward to hearing from you on these issues. I hope that this hearing today will bring clarity on the future of FEMA and how the agency will continue to carry out its mission.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. I now recognize the Ranking Member, the gentleman from Louisiana, Mr. Carter, for his opening statement.

Mr. CARTER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Before I begin, Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent that Mr. Moskowitz be permitted to sit in the subcommittee and question today's witness.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. Without objection.

Mr. CARTER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good morning, everyone.

I want to start by thanking Administrator Criswell for appearing before the subcommittee today and extending my gratitude to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, FEMA, work force for all the work that you do to help disaster survivors in our communities.

I do not think we can overstate the role of FEMA in the last few years. With its on-going work of COVID-19 and managing increasingly complex, frequent, and intense disasters, one thing I hope we can all agree on today is that, while there's many challenges left at FEMA, we need to support FEMA and its work force to be reliable partners and to help address the many challenges facing our communities.

I'm eager to hear from you today, Administrator Criswell, about the agency's effort in supporting the growth and success of this remarkable work force to ensure that they are prepared for disasters.

Hurricane season began June 1. We've already had three named storms. Although the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration projected a near-normal Atlantic hurricane season, we've already seen 38 major disaster declarations this year, and the hurricane season just started days ago.

As I reflect upon the start of hurricane season, I am concerned about the Disaster Relief Fund, DRF, which, as I understand, could be exhausted before the end of the fiscal year, and even before the traditionally more active portions of the hurricane season.



For this issue, administrator, we need to know how to help so you can do your job—how we can help so you can do your job more effectively. We know these resources are critical.

While FEMA's work force is preparing for emerging disasters, including those brought on by hurricane season, it should not be forgotten that the work force is managing a very, very large portfolio of nearly 1,000 open past disasters, including providing on-going support for Hurricanes Maria, Michael, Ida, Ian, Fiona, and COVID-19.

In New Orleans, we've experienced the extreme weather events of late. Of the 301 hurricanes that have hit the United States since 1851, 62 of them hit my home State of Louisiana, the third-most of any State in the Union.

A grave concern that has arisen due to extreme weather events is flooding and the increasing cost in flood insurance policies.

Louisianians depend on the National Flood Insurance Program, NFIP, to provide affordable insurance coverage. However, FEMA recently established a new Risk Rating 2.0, which prices people out of the program instead of continuing to provide affordable insurance.

For flood insurance costs, Louisiana is expected to see an increase of as much as 130 percent on average to a single family home, phased in over years.

This policy would ensure that hundreds, if not thousands, of Louisianians will be vulnerable during extreme weather occurrences because they simply cannot afford to pay flood insurance.

Families should not have to choose between food on the table and paying a ridiculously high flood insurance premium to a program that is governed by the Federal Government.

Administrator Criswell, I have raised these questions with you, and since our last conversation my concerns on flood insurance cost increases in Louisiana have not changed. I'm disappointed that since our last conversation there's not been any improvements, nor follow-up, from you or your team on this issue.

I hope to hear from you today about how you're working to make flood insurance more affordable, more accessible, and not just become a luxury that only the wealthy can afford.

In addition to managing disasters and flood insurance, FEMA administers the Department of Homeland Security's preparedness grants State and local, which include the Urban Areas Security Initiative and the State Homeland Security Program. These programs assist State and local jurisdictions build and maintain Homeland Security's capabilities to prepare and respond for threats.

As an advocate of UASI and the United States Homeland Security Program, I'm concerned about the agency's budget request for fiscal year 2024, which proposes cuts to UASI and the State Homeland Security Program.

I look forward to speaking with you more on this issue today as we go through testimony.

One area I am pleased with the administration's progress is that we see more of an issue of equity in disaster. The disaster recovery process impacts individuals differently and should be handled as such, but equally across the board for all constituencies regardless

of their ability to be organized or prepared to access these resources.

I commend Administrator Criswell and the Biden administration for incorporating principles of equity in initiatives such as the 2022 to 2026 FEMA Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan prioritizes equity as a fundamental aspect of emergency management.

Furthermore, I am proud to co-chair Ranking Member Thompson's Congressional Disaster Equity and Building Resilience Caucus, which aims to promote equity in disaster preparedness and response and provide a valuable forum to discuss Federal policies that impact underserved communities in disasters.

While some of my colleagues on the other side consider FEMA's equity work to be racial discrimination or take away from the culture of preparedness, those of us working and watching know that storms do not know socioeconomic status, age, race, rural, urban, et cetera.

However, we must take and make sure that Federal policies do not push people further into poverty or limit access to key disaster assistance programs.

I wish equity had been a top conversation during Hurricane Katrina. Undoubtedly, promoting equity in emergency management prior to Katrina would have saved lives and property.

So let me reiterate that I am grateful for FEMA's work on equity and hope to see more done with it in the future. I look forward to hearing from the administrator about how FEMA is addressing the overgrowing threats we face as a Nation and what can Congress do to assist you to do your job better.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

[The statement of Ranking Member Carter follows:]

STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER TROY A. CARTER

JULY 13, 2023

I want to start by thanking you, Administrator Criswell, for appearing before the subcommittee today and extending my gratitude to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) workforce for all the work you do to help disaster survivors and communities.

I do not think you can overstate the role of FEMA the last few years, with its on-going work on COVID-19 and managing increasingly complex, frequent, and intense disasters. One thing I hope we can all agree on today is that while there have been challenges at FEMA, we need to support the FEMA workforce and be a reliable partner to help you address challenges.

I am eager to hear from you, Administrator Criswell, about the agency's efforts in supporting the growth and success of this remarkable workforce to ensure that they are prepared for disasters. Hurricane Season began on June 1, and we have already had three named storms. Although the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) projected a "near-normal" Atlantic hurricane season, we have already seen 38 major disaster declarations this year, and the hurricane season started just days ago.

As I reflect upon the start of hurricane season, I am concerned about the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF), which as I understand could be exhausted before the end of the fiscal year and even before the traditionally more active portion of hurricane season. For this issue, Administrator, we need to know how to help so you can do your job effectively. While the FEMA workforce is preparing for emerging disasters, including those brought on by hurricane season, it should not be forgotten that the workforce is managing a very large portfolio of nearly 1,000 (968 to be precise) open past disasters, including providing on-going support for Hurricanes Maria, Michael, Ida, Ian, Fiona, and COVID-19.

In New Orleans, we have experience with extreme weather events. Of the 301 hurricanes that have hit the United States since 1851, 62 have hit Louisiana—the

third-most of any State. A grave concern that has arisen due to extreme weather events is flooding and increasing costs in flood insurance policies.

Louisianians depend on the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) to provide affordable insurance coverage. However, FEMA recently established the new Risk Rating 2.0 system, which prices people out of the program instead of continuing to provide affordable insurance.

For flood insurance costs, Louisiana is expected “to see an increase of 134 percent on average single-family homes, phased in over years.” This policy would ensure that hundreds, if not thousands, of Louisianians, will be vulnerable during extreme weather occurrences because they cannot afford to pay for flood insurance. Families should not have to choose between food on the table and paying a ridiculously high flood insurance premiums.

Administrator Criswell, I have raised these concerns with you and since our last conversation, my concerns on flood insurance cost increases for Louisianians have not changed. I am disappointed that since our last conversation, there has not been any improvement nor follow-up from you on this issue. I hope to hear from you today about how you are working to make sure that flood insurance does not become a luxury that only few can afford.

In addition to managing disasters and flood insurance, FEMA administers the Department of Homeland Security’s preparedness grants to States and locals, which include the Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) and the State Homeland Security Program. These funds assist State and local jurisdictions build and maintain homeland security capabilities to prepare for and respond to threats. As an advocate for the UASI and the State Homeland Security Program, I am concerned about the agency’s budget request for fiscal year 2024, which proposes cuts to UASI and the State Homeland Security Program. I look forward to speaking more about this issue today.

One area where I am pleased with the administration’s progress and hope to see more is the issue of equity in disasters. Disasters and the recovery process impacts individuals differently. I commend Administrator Criswell and the Biden administration for incorporating principles of equity in initiatives such as the 2022–2026 FEMA Strategic Plan. The strategic plan prioritizes equity as a fundamental aspect of emergency management. Furthermore, I am a proud co-chair of Ranking Member Thompson’s Congressional Disaster Equity and Building Resilience Caucus, which aims to promote equity in disaster preparedness and response and provide a valuable forum to discuss Federal policies that impact underserved communities in disasters.

While some of my colleagues on the other side consider FEMA’s equity work to be “racial discrimination” or takeaway from the culture of preparedness, those of us watching know that storms do not know socio-economic status, age, race, rural, urban, etc.; however, we must make sure that Federal policies do not push people further into poverty or limit access to key disaster assistance programs.

I wish equity had been a topic of conversation during Hurricane Katrina. Undoubtedly, promoting equity in emergency management prior to Katrina would have saved lives and property. So let me reiterate that I am grateful for FEMA’s work on equity and hope to see you do more.

Mr. D’ESPOSITO. Thank you, Ranking Member Carter.

Other Members of the committee are reminded that opening statements may be submitted for the record.

[The statement of Ranking Member Thompson follows:]

STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER BENNIE G. THOMPSON

JULY 13, 2023

I want to thank the FEMA workforce for working so hard to achieve their mission of helping people before, during, and after disasters. FEMA has been particularly active in Mississippi over the last year—helping with the Jackson water crisis and the devastating March 24 tornadoes, which killed 22 people in the State and left catastrophic damage throughout my District. The FEMA workforce has been there, ready to help at every step since the tornado, and we appreciate it.

Unfortunately, these kinds of disasters are becoming more frequent and severe due to climate change. While some of my colleagues on the other side may not believe in climate change, the hard truth is that climate change is worsening disasters, causing death and destruction, and destabilizing markets. Last Monday, the world experienced the hottest day ever recorded globally. I hope that we can have

an honest conversation about the role of climate change in our collective preparedness and response efforts.

These disasters are even affecting Americans' ability to buy insurance. In recent weeks, State Farm, AllState, and Farmers have announced they are leaving the home insurance market in California and have cited "growing catastrophe exposure" as a reason. In Florida, homeowners are struggling to buy storm coverage because several insurers have already pulled out of the State. Unlike insurance companies, FEMA cannot pack up and leave a market when storms get to be too much. With all its responsibilities, the FEMA workforce faces its own challenges including low morale, low retention, harassment, and a lack of diversity. According to a report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), while FEMA has increased its workforce over the years, it remains nearly 6,000 employees short of its staffing goals. I hope we can discuss how Congress can be more helpful as the agency works to resolve its workforce challenges.

On a positive note, I am pleased that the Biden administration has made equity a priority in disasters. Those of us knowledgeable about disaster response are familiar with the inequitable response to Hurricanes Katrina, Harvey, Sandy, and Maria, where marginalized communities were left vulnerable, often with tragic consequences. Low-income communities, rural areas, racial minorities, Tribes, individuals with disabilities, seniors, and children experience the most devastating impacts of disasters.

Ensuring equity in disasters is critical to helping all of our constituents when disasters strike.

That is why in May, Representatives Carter, Titus, Higgins, and I formed the Disaster Equity and Building Resilience Caucus along with 19 other Members. The Caucus aims to examine how disasters exacerbate existing inequities and how disaster response often amplifies and entrenches long-standing social and economic disparities. And we want to be engaged on how to address those problems. While aiming to build equity within emergency management, we must not forget about building equity within contracting services, which is crucial during the recovery process.

Throughout the years, I have witnessed first-hand how small, local, minority-owned businesses are left out of the contracting process. I look forward to hearing from Administrator Criswell about the progress FEMA has made on this issue and what more can be done.

I also look forward to hearing how FEMA is enhancing public safety by administering critical Department of Homeland Security Grants, which includes the Non-profit Security Grant Program (NSGP). As a strong supporter of the NSGP, I am thankful that the President's budget request for fiscal year 2024 includes \$360 million for the program, which is a \$55 million increase.

The NSGP is integral to securing nonprofit organizations at high risk of terrorist attack, and it deserves our strong support. Additionally, FEMA improving its execution of the program is critical to the program's growth and ability to address threats.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. Without objection, the gentleman from New York, Mr. Lawler, and the gentleman from Guam, Mr. Moylan, are permitted to sit on the dais and ask questions of the witnesses for this subcommittee hearing.

I am pleased to have a very distinguished witness before us today, and I ask that the administrator please rise and raise her right hand.

[Witness sworn.]

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. Thank you very much.

Let the record reflect that the witness has answered in the affirmative.

Thank you again for being here.

I would now like to formally introduce our witness.

Ms. Deanne Criswell is the 12th administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. In this position, Administrator Criswell manages a work force of more than 22,000 individuals and oversees FEMA's mission of helping people before, during, and after disasters.

This is not a small feat, considering since the administrator's confirmation in April 2021 there have been over 120 major disaster declarations.

Prior to becoming the FEMA administrator, Ms. Criswell served as the commissioner of the New York City Emergency Management Department where she led New York City's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, Ms. Criswell served for over 20 years in the Colorado Air National Guard.

Thank you for your service to our country, and as a proud New Yorker, thank you for you and your service to the great State of New York.

I thank the witness for being here today.

I now recognize Administrator Criswell for 5 minutes to summarize her opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF DEANNE CRISWELL, ADMINISTRATOR,  
FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY**

Ms. CRISWELL. Chairman D'Esposito, Ranking Member Carter, and the Members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to join you today to discuss the future of FEMA.

FEMA has a powerful mission statement spelled out in just seven words: Helping people before, during, and after disasters.

There is no question that this mission has grown more challenging over the last decade, and I saw this first-hand from the vantage point of my previous position as the commissioner of New York City Emergency Management, and I see it with crystal clarity from the vantage point of my current role.

From atmospheric rivers in January, to tornadoes and wildfires in December, we can no longer speak of a disaster season. We now face intensified natural disasters throughout the year, often in places that are not used to experiencing them.

In December 2021, we announced a Strategic Plan that has three cross-cutting objectives.

Our first goal is to instill equity as a foundation of emergency management, to ensure that all disaster survivors receive the assistance for which they qualify for under the law.

This requires recognizing that vulnerable communities, vulnerable individuals in our country, can have more difficulty accessing this assistance.

For example, we took a hard look at our Individuals and Households Assistance Program and implemented several improvements through a "people first" approach.

In some rural areas of the country, homeowners have handed down their property to their heirs informally over the generations, and there may not be recorded deeds to their homes.

Under our previous policy, a flood survivor in Appalachia or a tornado survivor in Mississippi would have faced difficulty accessing FEMA assistance without formal proof of ownership. We changed our policy and now accept alternative forms of documentation.

Since we implemented these changes in August 2021, tens of thousands of homeowners and renters have received FEMA assistance that might have been denied previously.

We also changed how we calculate the threshold for property losses to qualify for our Direct Housing Program, which ensures more precise damage evaluations regardless of size or the damage of the home.

The old rules disadvantaged homeowners with more modest homes. The new calculation methodology is more accurate in providing assistance that is proportionate to the damage that is sustained.

Our second strategic goal is to lead the whole of community in climate resilience. FEMA is not just a response and recovery agency. What we do to prepare for disasters is often as important, or more important, than what we do after disaster strikes.

Congress' investment in mitigation programs to make our Nation more resilient has been robust. We have seen this through your support of the development of our BRIC Program, Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities. To date, for BRIC alone we have announced nearly \$4 billion in grants for hazard mitigation projects.

We also appreciate the strong bipartisan support for the STORM Act Revolving Loan Fund through which FEMA is providing seed funding to States and Tribes to establish hazard mitigation revolving loan funds.

In implementing these and other mitigation programs, we are also providing technical assistance to knock down the barriers that communities with limited capacity face when seeking this mitigation funding.

Our third strategic goal is to promote and sustain a ready FEMA and a prepared Nation.

On the work force front, between 2015 and 2021 alone FEMA experienced a 165 percent increase in the number of staff who deployed to disaster operations for over 30 days.

Our FEMA Reservists are the majority of our disaster response work force, and we are very grateful that Congress approved the CREW Act last year, which now extends USERRA labor protections, greatly improving our ability to recruit and retain these efforts.

Readiness also requires we preposition resources to ensure we can respond more quickly and effectively. For example, in preparation for the 2023 hurricane season, FEMA has 11 times the amount of water, 12 times the amount of meals, 8 times the number of tarps, and more than twice the number of generators staged on Puerto Rico compared to when Hurricane Maria hit in 2017.

Just as we must be prepared for natural disasters, we must also be prepared for terrorist attacks. For our fiscal year 2024 budget, our budget request includes a \$55 million increase in the Nonprofit Security Grant Program.

I look forward to discussing more our suite of preparedness grant programs with you.

From my time as commissioner of New York City Emergency Management, I understand, as all of you do, what disasters mean from the local stakeholder perspective.

From my current position, I see the unwavering dedication of our FEMA work force to supporting people across our Nation before,

during, and after disasters, facing what is for many of them the worst day of their lives.

Our FEMA work force demonstrates the best of our country, and I am committed to supporting the work force in every way possible, and I ask for continued support from each of you in this effort.

Thank you again, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Criswell follows.]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DEANNE CRISWELL

JUNE 13, 2023

Chairman D'Esposito, Ranking Member Carter, and Members of the subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to discuss the future of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). We value this committee's support and oversight of our agency, and I look forward to our conversation today.

FEMA has a powerful mission statement, spelled out in just seven words: helping people before, during, and after disasters. That mission statement is our North Star, and it reflects a deep and abiding commitment to our Nation, its people, and public service by our FEMA workforce.

There is no question that the field of emergency management has grown more challenging over the last decade. I saw it from the vantage point of my previous position as commissioner of New York City Emergency Management—and I see it with crystal clarity from the vantage point of my current role. Emergency Managers—at every level of government—are being asked to do more, respond more, and solve more complex problems.

In 2010, there were 108 declared disasters for FEMA to support. Just 10 years later, that number increased to 315—including the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We can no longer speak of a “disaster season”—we now face intensified natural disasters throughout the year, often in places that are not used to experiencing them. Our mission has not changed, but our operating environment has. With that, comes the challenge of ensuring that everyone who qualifies for FEMA assistance is able to access that help.

In December 2021, we announced a strategic plan that has three crosscutting objectives to help us meet FEMA's mission. Our first strategic goal is to instill equity as a foundation of emergency management, to ensure that all disaster survivors receive the assistance for which they qualify under the law. This requires recognizing that vulnerable individuals and communities in our country could have more difficulty accessing that assistance. As an agency, we must have a “people first” focus, and eliminate the barriers to individuals and communities accessing our programs.

For example, we took a hard look at our Individuals and Households Assistance program (IHP) and implemented several improvements through a people-first lens. In some rural areas of the country, homeowners have handed down their property to their heirs informally over generations, and there may not be recorded deeds to their homes. Under our previous policy, a flood survivor in Appalachia or a tornado survivor in Mississippi would have faced difficulty accessing FEMA assistance without formal proof of ownership. We changed our policy, and now accept alternative forms of documentation such as Department of Motor Vehicles registration and utility bills, while still taking steps to guard against potentially fraudulent claims. Since we implemented these changes in August 2021, FEMA has helped tens of thousands of homeowners and renters receive assistance they might have been denied under the old system simply because they lacked traditional documentation.

We also changed how we calculate the threshold for property losses to qualify for Direct Housing, which ensures more precise damage evaluations regardless of the size of the damaged home. The old rules disadvantaged homeowners with more modest homes, who might have suffered comparable damage to larger homes, but were receiving less assistance. The new calculation methodology is more accurate in providing assistance that is proportionate to the damage sustained. Bottom line, our priority is to make sure all survivors get the assistance for which they qualify under the law.

Our second strategic goal is to enhance the Nation's ability to anticipate, prepare for, and adapt to future climate conditions. FEMA is not just a response and recovery agency. Through close collaboration with Federal, State, local, Tribal, and territory governments, community-based organizations, and the private sector, FEMA is positioning itself as a true resilience agency. We must recognize the changing climate and ensure that we are prepared for the challenges it brings us and will con-

tinue to bring. What we do to prepare for all hazards is often as important as what we do after disaster strikes.

Congress' investment in mitigation programs to make our Nation more resilient has been robust. We have seen this through your support of the development of the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities or "BRIC" grant program in 2018, and through the appropriation of \$6.8 billion in funds to FEMA in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) in 2021. To date, for BRIC alone, the administration has announced nearly \$4 billion in available funding to States, local communities, Tribal Nations, and territories to undertake hazard mitigation projects and reduce the risks they face from disasters and other natural hazards.

We also appreciate the strong bipartisan support for the Safeguarding Tomorrow through Ongoing Risk Mitigation (STORM) Act Revolving Loan Fund, which authorizes FEMA to provide seed funding to States and Tribes to establish hazard mitigation revolving loan funds. These revolving loan funds will give local governments another tool to finance projects to reduce their risks from natural hazards and disasters. In implementing these and other mitigation programs, we are working to eliminate the barriers that small, rural, and other communities with limited capacity face when seeking mitigation funding. By providing technical assistance, we are helping these communities better understand the requirements of the program and the application process.

Additionally, FEMA is implementing a national strategy to incentivize the adoption of disaster-resistant building codes to strengthen buildings against intensifying disaster impacts. For example, in Florida, buildings built to newer codes consistently fared better during Hurricane Ian than older buildings. Investments in hazard resistant building codes over the last 20 years have saved lives, reduced property losses, and been shown to save \$11 for every dollar invested.

Our third strategic goal is to promote and sustain a ready FEMA and a prepared Nation. Between 2015 and 2021 alone, FEMA experienced a 165 percent increase in the number of staff who deployed to support disaster operations for more than 30 days, and an unprecedented 346 percent increase in the number of days FEMA personnel were deployed to disaster operations annually.

We are very grateful to Congress for passing the Civilian Reservist Emergency Workforce (CREW) Act last fall. Our FEMA reservists are the vast majority of our disaster response workforce, and the CREW Act extends Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) protections to them, which will improve our recruitment and retention efforts. I've been to many disasters since that bill was signed into law and I continually run into reservists who are already benefiting from this legislation.

We must also expand our approach to agency readiness and to national preparedness. To effectively manage disasters and administer recovery programs, we must first understand the environment in which we are working. With \$1.3 million appropriated by Congress for fiscal year 2023, FEMA is creating a steady-state disaster response analytics division, which will help build our geospatial capabilities, improve our ability to characterize incidents, and conduct analysis that enables us to provide a more effective and efficient response.

FEMA is taking proactive steps to make sure we are well-positioned to respond to the 2023 Atlantic Hurricane Season. We have made tremendous progress over the last few years in our ability to preposition resources to ensure we can work with our State, local, Tribal, and territorial partners quickly and effectively. For example, FEMA had 9 times the amount of water, 10 times the number of meals, 8 times the number of tarps, and 3 times the number of generators staged on Puerto Rico ahead of the 2022 Atlantic Hurricane Season as compared to when Hurricane Maria hit the island in 2017. A more forward-leaning posture to support immediate critical needs after a disaster is a key progression toward a more ready FEMA and a more prepared Nation.

Just as FEMA must be ready to respond to natural disasters through our preparedness efforts, we must equally be ready and equipped to respond when terrorist attacks occur. Last year, the Congregation Beth Israel synagogue in Colleyville, Texas, experienced a horrific incident of targeted violence, which reminds us that threats to the homeland no longer occur only in high-population areas. During my visit to Colleyville, I met with the Rabbi and the congregants and saw first-hand how this devastating event impacted not only the community but their individual lives as well. They also shared how the funding they received from the Nonprofit Security Grant Program greatly benefited their efforts to recover and to protect themselves from future attacks. In fiscal year 2024, our budget request includes a \$55 million increase in the Nonprofit Security Grant Program. This vital grant supports local communities through target hardening, physical security enhancements, and other



activities for nonprofit organizations that are at high risk of a terrorist or other extremist attack.

This subcommittee has oversight of this and other FEMA preparedness grant programs, and I look forward to discussing the suite of those grant programs with you today.

From my time as commissioner of New York City Emergency Management, I understand—as you do—what disasters mean from the local stakeholder perspective. From my current position, I see the unwavering dedication of our FEMA workforce to supporting people across our Nation before, during, and after disasters, facing what is, in many cases, the worst tragedy of people’s lives. Our FEMA workforce demonstrates the very best of the United States of America, and I am committed to supporting the FEMA workforce in every way possible. I ask for continued support from each of you.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I look forward to your questions.

Mr. D’ESPOSITO. Thank you, Administrator Criswell.

Members will be recognized by order of seniority for their 5 minutes of questioning. An additional round of questioning may be called after all Members have been recognized.

I now recognize myself for 5 minutes of questioning.

Administrator, last year the Department of Homeland Security established the Southwest Border Coordination Center to, “coordinate planning, operations, engagement, and interagency support.”

The President’s fiscal year 2024 budget request includes \$4.7 billion, with a “b”, for the Southwest Border Contingency Fund to respond to migration surges along the Southwest Border.

Given that Secretary Mayorkas has repeatedly stated that there is not a crisis at the Southwest Border, why is FEMA being included in the Southwest Border Contingency Fund?

Ms. CRISWELL. Congressman, Chairman, first, I just want to clarify for the record that FEMA is not an immigration agency. We do follow Congressional direction in the program that we do have that supports the Emergency Food and Shelter Program for humanitarian efforts and now the Shelter and Services Program, SSP.

We do support the President’s budget, and we did participate in the development of that request, which does include, as you stated, \$4.7 billion for the DHS Border Contingency Fund.

Depending on the conditions and the dynamic nature of the border, what that contingency fund also provides is up to \$800 million that could be available to FEMA to support our Shelter and Services Program. This would be the same level as fiscal year 2023.

Mr. D’ESPOSITO. OK. Thank you.

On to sort-of a different topic. On May 15, a bipartisan group of 51 Members of Congress, including myself and Majority Leader Steve Scalise, sent a letter requesting a briefing and documents related to the National Flood Insurance Program’s Risk Ratings 2.0.

To date, your agency has not produced any responsive documents, and even though we anticipated receiving a briefing last month, your staff now indicates they may not provide the briefing, citing on-going litigation.

On-going litigation is not a basis for refusing to provide a briefing to Congress.

When can you anticipate that your staff will provide the responsive documents and the requested briefing?

Ms. CRISWELL. Chairman, I will certainly follow up with my staff when we return back to the office.

Mr. D’ESPOSITO. Thank you.

Ms. CRISWELL. I need to understand their point, but it's not acceptable that we haven't gotten back to you, and I'll make sure that we take care of that when we get back there.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. Thank you. I appreciate that.

During the prior Congress, when Democrats controlled the House, FEMA produced documents at least 27 times to the Select COVID Subcommittee. Many of those productions had multiple subparts and were produced on a regular basis.

Really the question is, we need to make sure that that May 15 request receives the same attention that it did for requests prior. So I just ask that when you get back to the office, if you could follow up with that, we'd really appreciate it.

Ms. CRISWELL. You have my commitment on that, Chairman.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. Thank you very much.

I have a couple minutes left.

So I also serve on Transportation and Infrastructure, and we had a hearing in May when I asked Deputy Administrator Hooks about the dwindling Disaster Relief Fund.

Mr. Hooks estimated that the DRF would be facing a shortfall by the end of this summer, so just really, I guess, a month or a month-and-a-half away.

In your estimation, when will the DRF run out of money?

Ms. CRISWELL. Chairman, we recently submitted our report to Congress on the balance of the funds for the end of June, or through the end of June, and right now we anticipate a shortfall toward the mid and end of August.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. OK. Now what are the plans moving forward with that shortfall to still protect vulnerable coastal communities like Long Island?

Ms. CRISWELL. The Disaster Relief Fund, as we continue to go into the last quarter, is always a very dynamic situation, and the balances continue to change.

We are monitoring it very closely and working with the administration on a very continuous basis so we can understand when we are going to approach a potential deficit and what tools we might have to implement to ensure that we will always have the funding available to respond to events like we just saw in Vermont.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. OK. Thank you.

I'm going to yield back my time. I now recognize Ranking Member Carter for 5 minutes for any questions that he may have.

Mr. CARTER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Administrator Criswell, under Risk Rating 2.0, FEMA said its goal is to build equity and to ensure that rates are based on individual risk. However, this methodology is not building equity in Louisiana.

In April in this committee, Secretary Mayorkas testified before the full committee. I mentioned to the Secretary my concerns with Risk Rating 2.0 methodology, and he stated, and I quote: "We're reviewing our grants program to ensure that, again, that they leave no community disenfranchised. We are reviewing and need to continue to review Risk Rating 2.0, given the concerns that you have expressed."

Administrator Criswell, can you explain where FEMA is in reviewing Risk Rating 2.0, which is flawed and will devastate families, in Louisiana at least? Many others will likewise be devastated.

What steps are you taking to ensure that the flaws within the methodology are fixed and thoroughly explained to the public?

Ms. CRISWELL. Ranking Member Carter, I really appreciate the opportunity to have a more in-depth discussion with you on this that we had recently, and I appreciate the concerns that you raise.

I think, again, the most important thing that I want to get across about Risk Rating 2.0 is that it now bases the flood insurance premiums on what each individual's unique flood risk is.

As we talk about our approach to disaster response and recovery and equity, we want to recognize that each individual has their own unique experience. We're taking that same approach with Risk Rating 2.0 and recognizing that every homeowner has a unique risk with their home.

We've already had at least 20 percent across the Nation of individuals that their risk rating—their risk premium has gone down. This demonstrates that they were subsidizing higher-value, higher-risk homes across the country.

Ranking Member, I have committed to you and I will continue to commit to you on how we can better communicate what these risks are, and also the work that we have started to try to incorporate what an affordability framework would look like for those individuals that are kind-of caught in the middle, as you and I discussed, where they have a lower-risk home but a high—a lower-value home but high risk and their rates are exceeding what their capacity is.

We continue to work with you on solutions to help that group of individuals.

Mr. CARTER. I appreciate that, Administrator. I will double down and push just a little bit at the sense of urgency.

Every day that goes by, people are having to make a very tough decision: Can I afford to stay in the home that I own, that I have purchased, and now I find myself in a retirement situation where my dollars are fixed?

Now potentially individuals are finding themselves in a situation where they have an insurance premium for flood insurance that's greater than their house note was when they had a mortgage.

What ends up happening in the absence of a mortgage where a person is forced to have insurance, people go without it. The risk that is involved with a person potentially meeting a peril and not having coverage in the twilight of their lives—you know where this is going.

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes.

Mr. CARTER. So the sense of urgency.

I appreciate that you guys are looking at it. I appreciated that Secretary Mayorkas said that they were looking at it and recognize that there needs to be some tweaks. I would just hasten that we really, really push up the time frame.

This is real life. People's lives are at risk. People's ability to maintain their homesteads are at risk. I would just implore that you guys continue pushing but push a little faster, a little harder,

to give some relief, not just to recognize but to have a plan of relief for the community.

I've got one last question. I'm sorry, I'm blowing through my time.

Last week the world recorded its hottest 3 days on record. This week the world has seen flooding in New York's Hudson Valley, Vermont, Japan, China, and India.

It's hard to deny that there is such a thing as climate change. Yet just in April this year, April 26 border mark-up, one of my colleagues at a mark-up described climate change as a hoax.

Administrator Criswell, is climate change a hoax, as one of my colleagues described it, or is it a considerable threat to our Nation and our environment?

Ms. CRISWELL. Ranking Member Carter, I consider climate change one of our most significant threats in the future and the crisis of the generation that we're living in right now.

As I spoke in my testimony, we have seen atmospheric rivers batter the coast of California in January, wildfires, tornadoes hit communities in December. We no longer have a disaster season.

Our focus at FEMA is to make sure that we can help people better understand what their risks are going to be, not just today but 5 or 10 years from now, and how we can help them with our mitigation programs to reduce the impacts of those risks.

Mr. CARTER. My time has expired. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. The gentleman's time has expired.

I now recognize my good friend, fellow Long Islander, fellow New Yorker, Mr. LaLota, for 5 minutes.

Mr. LALOTA. Thank you. I want to thank my good friend, NYPD veteran and Chairman of this committee D'Esposito, for hosting this important meeting today.

And for you, ma'am, for being here. I understand you deployed a couple times to the Middle East post-9/11, and I want to thank you for your service as well.

I represent the First Congressional District of New York, the east end of Long Island. We're surrounded by water on three sides, and we're no stranger to natural disasters.

We've experienced some of the most significant storms over the past couple of decades, including Hurricanes Sandy, Irene, Maria, Ida, Michael, and Tropical Storm Isaias, just to name a few.

These storms have done immense damage to my constituents' property, whether it was flooding in their homes, a tree that maybe fell on top of their car, losing power for a few weeks at a time, or the worst-case scenario, loss of life.

Historically, the United States has invested far too little in the Federal disaster mitigation efforts. As recently as fiscal year 2015, under President Obama, the Federal Government spent just \$30 million across the entire country for pre-disaster mitigation purposes, despite spending billions in emergency post-disaster funds.

That changed several years later in 2018 under President Trump when he signed the Disaster Recovery Reform Act, which created FEMA's new and enhanced Pre-Disaster Mitigation Program—the BRIC Program—that was set to disburse billions across the country for pre-disaster mitigation for communities.

So my question, administrator, is there's been three rounds of funding so far totaling over \$4 billion. Where is the money? How much of that has gone directly to affected communities? What's the hold-up over at FEMA?

Ms. CRISWELL. Congressman, thank you for the question. The BRIC Program is truly one of our hallmark programs that allows us to help these communities reduce the impact that we're seeing from severe weather events.

I think one of the best things about this program is, in its legacy program, the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Program, we had a Federal limit of \$5 million. We can't do much with mitigation for \$5 million.

This program gives us a \$50 million Federal cost share, which gives us the ability to do community-wide projects.

As for specifically on where the money is going, I'd be happy to schedule a briefing with you on the projects that we have already approved and where funding will go and to help these communities.

We continue to release our Notice of Funding Opportunities every year, we'll have another one coming out later this year, to continue to get this critical funding into the hands of these jurisdictions so they can make the needed improvements ahead of these disasters.

Mr. LALOTA. I'd welcome the opportunity for my office to work with yours on ways that Congress can be helpful to that end. My understanding is, the money invested earlier on typically gets a larger ROI than the things that we spend—the money we spend to react to disasters.

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes.

Mr. LALOTA. So this is a great endeavor that taxpayers, property owners, and everybody in between should want to have happen, and I'd welcome the opportunity to work with you.

Switching gears just a little bit with a minute or 2 left.

I appreciate that FEMA has been receptive to the concerns raised by the New York delegation throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. However, while the public health emergency has ended, hospitals in my district and across New York are still expending tremendous time and scarce resources to see they are fully and fairly reimbursed by FEMA for COVID-19-related expenses.

My question is, as the agency's focus shifts to preparing for natural disasters and other potential threats, what is your agency doing to ensure that outstanding applications for reimbursement of COVID-19-related expenses are indeed addressed?

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes. The COVID-19 incident period is the longest incident period in our agency's history, again, just closing on May 11.

We continue to prioritize the reimbursement requests from hospitals, and, in fact, in New York, we have created a task force to work specifically with them so we can continue to support the costs that they incurred to help make sure that they were keeping people safe throughout the pandemic.

We treat all of our disasters the same, and COVID-19 is the same as all of our other major disaster declarations. We have dedicated personnel working across the country to make sure that we're treating all of the requests for reimbursement that come in equally.

Mr. LALOTA. So the money has been laid out. The money has been spent. FEMA has generally said that they will reimburse. Now the task force for it. What expectation can I tell my constituents to have with respect to the timeliness of all that work?

You have a task force on hand. That's good. We appreciate that attention. What can I tell them as far as when they can get the reimbursement they were told they were going to get?

Ms. CRISWELL. I think the best thing would be, if they're having struggles with getting reimbursement, let us work with them. It requires documentation, and sometimes we just have to work with them to get the appropriate paperwork to submit so we can do the reimbursement. If you have a jurisdiction that's having a specific issue, we'd be happy to work with them directly.

Mr. LALOTA. My understanding is they've submitted most if not all of the paperwork and that they're merely waiting on the bureaucracy in Washington, which I understand isn't specific just to your agency.

But, nevertheless, can you tell me, a week, a month, 6 months, a year? What can I tell them is the appropriate amount of time to wait for an application that is complete and in order that is in your agency's hands?

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes. If they have submitted everything and we didn't have any additional questions, it shouldn't take that much time. So, again, I'd have to understand the unique situation or their specific instance. I'm happy to work through that with them.

Mr. LALOTA. Thanks. I appreciate it, and I look forward to working with you.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. The gentleman yields back.

I now recognize Mr. Strong from Alabama.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Administrator Criswell, thank you for being here with us today.

You know as well as I do that Alabama is no stranger to natural disasters and FEMA.

I want to thank you for your attention to the recovery efforts and for making the trip to Alabama to survey the damage first-hand. Thank you.

Administrator Criswell, since 2021 we have seen FEMA divert precious time, resources, and manpower to deal with this administration's border crisis. This includes by diverting funds intended for American families struggling with hunger and homelessness to illegal aliens and by developing FEMA's personnel to quickly expand safe and appropriate shelter and provide food, water, and basic medical care for migrants illegally arriving in the United States.

This all comes at a time when the agency is severely understaffed. A May 2023 GAO report found that FEMA faces a staffing shortfall of approximately 6,200 employees.

In the report, FEMA officials attributed this staffing deficiency to additional responsibilities the agency has been saddled with.

One can conclude that the border mission is one such responsibility that you have been saddled with. It could all be alleviated if this administration would just secure the Southern Border.

I understand that DHS as a whole is facing staffing shortages, but pulling FEMA and other agencies away from their primary

mission isn't a solution, especially when the mission is a vital resource for those in my district.

My question for you is, when Alabamians are working to recover from a natural disaster—hurricane, tornado—and desperately are waiting for FEMA trucks to roll in and give them some relief, when they're wondering when help is coming, what do you want me to tell them?

Because I'm having to tell them that FEMA's limited staff is busy serving illegal aliens and will get to them later just doesn't cut it.

Ms. CRISWELL. Congressman, again, FEMA does not have an immigration mission. Our mission is to help people before, during, and after these severe weather events that we continue to see. That is our focus.

As the GAO report pointed out, some of the staffing shortfalls, the majority of that is within our Reservist work force.

Again, I really appreciate the bipartisan support of passing the CREW Act, which gives us the opportunity to recruit and retain similar to our Department of Defense counterparts that have USERRA protection. This is a critical tool for us to make sure we can build up that Reservist work force.

I can assure you, Congressman, that our focus is always on helping people that have been impacted by these severe weather events. It will remain our focus. They will not see a shortfall in our ability to come in and help them.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you. I thank you for your commitment.

I also want to recognize that this oversight committee has Members with a large background in law enforcement. We've got police officers here, homicide investigators, 39 years as a firefighter, serving in every position from a ranger to assistant fire chief. I think that offers a lot in this committee.

I want to thank those that serve here on both sides of the aisle. We've got folks that were 9-1-1 dispatchers, firefighters. I worked for Huntsville Med Flight. You just go down that list.

I've also worked 4 or 5 natural disasters, including the tornadoes of 2011 where 350 homes were totally destroyed practically in my backyard, thousands of homes with major damage, 9 of my neighbors lost their life. In record time we removed more than 500,000 cubic yards of debris.

It was a great relationship with FEMA. The Southeast was totally destroyed in a matter of days. But I'll tell you this right here: We learned from every event.

The one thing that I do want to say is that FEMA cannot—we've got to focus on readiness. I think that it's at a great point, because our next natural disaster is a matter of days away.

I thank you for your service.

I'd like to yield back any remaining time that I've got to Representative Moylan.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. The gentleman yields back.

I now recognize another fellow New Yorker, Mr. Goldman.

Mr. GOLDMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Administrator Criswell, thank you for being here today.

I want to focus, as the Representative from New York City in the district that includes the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, we in

New York City are incredibly proud of the efforts that the city is making to welcome and support migrants who are escaping horrific conditions in their own countries to seek the American Dream as so many have done throughout our history.

We, of course, are a country of immigrants. I certainly am a descendant of a grandmother who escaped anti-Semitism in Russia and came through Ellis Island. So this is something that most of us who represent New York feel great pride in.

It is incredibly burdensome on the city right now, and I want to focus a little bit on what FEMA can do not only to alleviate the financial burden on New York City and New York, which has in recent months, since the rolling off of Title 42, seen an increase in the number of newly-arrived migrants as the influx of migrants crossing the Southern Border has dramatically been reduced.

To me, there seem to be two issues that FEMA has direct oversight over.

The first is an emergency declaration, and I want to discuss that with you in a minute.

The second, of course, is the Shelter and Services Program.

New York has received a little over \$100 million from that program. I would just make a strong, strong plea to recognize that those cities who have welcomed, supported, provided shelter, housing, health care, vaccines, shots, and assistance in making sure that those seeking a better life are able to do that, and, in fact, quite importantly, contribute significantly to our economy.

What is the process that FEMA is going through right now to evaluate how to distribute the Shelter and Services Program money?

Ms. CRISWELL. Thank you for the question, Congressman.

Just to give a little background on the program, we had the Emergency Food and Shelter Program for humanitarian efforts that Congress directed funding toward a few years ago. Over this past year, that program has now transitioned into what is called a Shelter and Services Program.

Under the EFSP—Humanitarian program, the funding was given to FEMA and then transferred to a board because it's part of an existing program we have that supports some of the homeless efforts across the country.

That board made the determination on the funding that would be eligible for reimbursement, mostly at that point in time from jurisdictions at the Southern Border that were taking care of migrants.

As we transition into the Shelter and Services Program, we are moving into a grant-directed program versus a board-distributed program. With that, we are using existing data and giving an allocation to jurisdictions based on the data we have on the encounters that they're experiencing, the costs that they've stated that they're experiencing, I mean, doing a direct allocation.

The purpose behind the direct allocation is so we can expedite the amount of money going out there, instead of going through a longer grant program like some of our other programs.

This was the first iteration of this when New York received just over \$100 million in June, and that's the direction that we'll continue to go with the Shelter and Services Program.



Mr. GOLDMAN. My understanding is that there has been significant reimbursement from the Shelter and Services Program to localities on the border, and there continues to be.

But I am concerned that FEMA is reimbursing cities, towns, localities on the Southern Border who are shipping migrants to New York City against—potentially against their will.

There are many that are coming into New York because they want to be there, but there still remain about 20 percent who are being bussed to New York and to other northern cities against their will.

I would ask you, as the administrator for FEMA, to stop reimbursing those towns who are bussing migrants against their will. I believe that is money that should be better spent elsewhere and they should not be incentivized to do so.

I hope we have another round. I see my time is up. I yield back to the Chairman.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. The gentleman yields back.

I now recognize Mr. Brecheen from Oklahoma for 5 minutes.

Mr. BRECHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Administrator, thank you very much for being here.

FEMA is well known to Oklahomans. We just had 560,000 homes hit with a severe weather event. Then last winter I was on the ground in McCurtain County where we had a tremendous impact of a tornado.

[Chart.]

Mr. BRECHEEN. In the chart behind me, over the last decade FEMA has increased disaster-related spending in a manner that is quite significant. It's like year over year from 2013, like a 9 percent increase, way above most other agencies.

So for someone that is very concerned with our runaway deficits and the fact that we'll overspend by \$1.5 trillion this year, which was the size of our gross national debt in 1983, just 40 years ago, we'll overspend by in 1 year what it took us 200 years to get to just 40 years ago, in 1983, trying to make our dollars go farther.

The larger graphic—it may be hard for you to see this. I may be blocking your line of sight. But this is something you know well. It's the normal budget. Then we have to come in and backfill to the blue. That's the supplemental.

But over here in the smaller graphic what you'll see is that's kind-of the historic look of FEMA on this very small chart. So where these arrows point to the top here, we can't—the numbers are so high, we can't get above for a good visual.

So it really showcases that in the last decade-plus we have—FEMA's budget has really been tremendous. That makes me want to transition to something, that someone might go to the thought of what President Biden said in 2023 where he said that extreme weather caused by climate change leads to stronger, more frequent storms, more intense droughts, longer wildfire seasons.

You had said a minute ago: I see climate change as one of our most significant threats. So I think it's important for us to look at the science. I'm going to disagree with you, but I don't want to disagree based upon an opinion.

Let's look at the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, because I want to push back on the thought that cli-

mate change is causing this, because then it gets to the point of maybe we need to look at efficiency to a greater level.

So if you look at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, what you'll actually find is, if you look at what the United Nations, not often seen as very conservative, the United Nations—I'm quoting from them—their Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, in regard to hurricanes, came to a conclusion.

It states: There's no consensus on the role of human activity on changes of Atlantic hurricane activity. The IPCC also determined since 1900 there's been no trend in the amount of landfall events in the United States.

Tornadoes. Scientists have incredibly low confidence in understanding their capability to attribute climate change to conductive storms, thunderstorms, which produce tornadoes. That's the National Academy of Science.

Floods. The IPCC, the United Nations committee tasked with looking at climate change, estimates the total amount of flooding around the world. No clear picture on whether flooding is getting more or less frequent, much less if human activity is involved.

Regarding inland flooding, they say there is a, "lack of evidence and low confidence regarding the sign of a trend in magnitude or frequency of floods on a global scale."

Extreme temperatures. Wildfires. I want to go back to what the President was referencing. Just a few years ago, climate alarmists claimed that continuing "business as usual," presumingly meaning humans continuing to engage in activities that emit greenhouse gases, would warm the world 4 to 5 degrees Celsius.

They are now admitting that new reports support the prediction that the world's temperature may rise only half as much, which would mean 2 or 3 degrees over the next century.

In regard to human influence, a large temperature increase from about 1 degree Fahrenheit occurred from 1880 to 1940, long before human influence had that type of impact, before mechanization to a great level.

Some consider this temperature increase to be recovered from the Little Ice Age, spanning from 1600 to 1850, and the U.N. panel I keep referencing admitted the plausibility of this, and if true, this indicates there has been no net warming at all in the past century due to greenhouse gases.

So I just—we have to look at the science and the international community who's saying—there's this constant messaging and theme. The United Nations is saying it's not there. There's no consensus world climate change in this regard.

So I just respectfully challenge—and I know you serve this President—I respectfully challenge, with limited funds, with a budget request that wants \$3.9 billion more for climate resiliency programs, for us to look at ways to be much more efficient with our taxpayer monies.

I've got one—if you'll just indulge me—I've got one quick question for you.

In your opinion, does the removal of AM radio in some cars—it's kind-of been a topic of discussion in the recent time frame—weaken your ability, through the national public warning system, to reach Americans in times of crisis?

Ms. CRISWELL. It's a very good question, Congressman. AM radio is one of the most dependable ways that we can reach individuals across this country to get warnings out there. I do believe that if we remove AM radio from our vehicles, we're just taking away a very stable and reliable source for us to get that information out there.

AM radio is integrated into our emergency alert and warning system, and I think it would have a significant impact.

Mr. BRECHEEN. Thank you for your time. I yield back.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. Thank you. Mr. Brecheen's time has expired.

I now recognize Mr. Moylan from Guam for 5 minutes.

Mr. MOYLAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank also the Members of the subcommittee for giving me this chance today to participate.

Administrator Criswell, I represent Guam, and my home was recently rampaged by Super Typhoon Mawar. FEMA was on the ground prior to the storm hitting Guam, and thanks to your agency's efforts, no one died as a result of the devastating typhoon. So thank you, FEMA, for helping in my community recovery in this process. Thank you.

Administrator Criswell, we were talking earlier, but what's the status, again, please remind me, what is the status of FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund? We're being told that the fund runs empty as early as next month. Is that the case?

Ms. CRISWELL. Our current projections on the Disaster Relief Fund is that we will go into a deficit at some time mid- to late August.

Mr. MOYLAN. OK. So if the Disaster Relief Funds were to run out, what would that mean for those in my community who have already been approved for certain disaster programs and families waiting to hear about the status of their applications for relief?

Ms. CRISWELL. We have many tools that we can implement to ensure that we always have enough funding to be able to support the life-saving and life-sustaining activities.

We are closely monitoring the balance within the Disaster Relief Fund, and my goal is to make sure that we have enough to continue to support the life-saving efforts that are on-going in Guam, as well as support any new incidents that might arise between now and the end of the fiscal year.

Mr. MOYLAN. All right. Thank you.

Administrator Criswell, S. 2029 has been introduced in the Senate by Senators Rubio, Scott, and Wicker, and I'm co-leading H.R. 4295 with Rep. Moskowitz, which is the House companion, that aims to replenish the Disaster Relief Funds in the tune of \$11.5 billion.

Can we count on you for your support of these measures? What efforts have you been pursuing to replenish these funds?

Ms. CRISWELL. We appreciate the interest of Congress in the ability to continue to support our efforts to respond and recover from disasters. Throughout this, the last several months, we have been having an increased focus on recouping dollars that have been obligated but have not been needed.

So we've been able to make sure that we are pushing, as far as we can, the impact that these disasters are having on the balance within the Disaster Relief Fund.

It's a very dynamic process. Some of the costs that are coming in from some of the disasters that we had anticipated aren't as high, which has reduced what we think the total deficit will be from what we thought it might have been a few months ago.

It's a very dynamic situation based on the current needs—needs in Guam, current needs that are going on in Vermont, other disasters.

So we're working very close with the administration to make sure that we have enough funding to make sure we can support those life-saving and life-sustaining operations.

Mr. MOYLAN. Thank you.

Also Guam's population includes migrants from the Compact of Free Association, or COFA, nations. Unfortunately, many of these families were not only adversely impacted by the recent storm, but many also don't qualify for FEMA's disaster programs.

Assisting these families will soon be the responsibility of the local government, and FEMA provides some options to assist these families, especially those who continue to reside in shelters 50 days after the storm hit the island.

Ms. CRISWELL. FEMA is just one part of the team that supports disaster recovery, and we do know that there are individuals that are eligible for our programs based on their citizen status.

But we are committed to bringing in our nonprofit partners and other agencies to make sure we can work with individuals' unique needs and help them find the resources and develop a path to their recovery.

Mr. MOYLAN. Thank you.

For my final question, I've been hearing from some of my constituents that there were a large number of denials for FEMA's claims made by Guam residents.

Can you confirm that this has nothing to do with the current funding levels of the agency? By that, also, what are the most common causes of denials?

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes, it absolutely has nothing to do with the current funding levels of the agency. The most common cause—and typically they're not denials. They're more of a request for additional information. Maybe we need some documentation about their occupancy, their—the residence where they live, paperwork that demonstrates and proves that they either own or live in a place. Oftentimes it's just getting that documentation.

We're happy to make sure that we can continue to reach out. Again, all individuals have unique circumstances.

We have started since my time in this position to perform what we're calling enhanced applicant services, where we do proactive outreach to those that we have asked for more information or have been denied, so we can help better understand what their unique situation is. I'll make sure that my team is doing that in Guam.

Mr. MOYLAN. Thank you, Administrator Criswell.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. Thank you. The gentleman's time has expired.

I now recognize a friend from Florida, no stranger to emergency management, Mr. Moskowitz.

Mr. MOSKOWITZ. Mr. Chairman, thank you. Thank you for allowing me to waive on to the committee.

Madam Administrator, thank you for joining us today.

As the only former emergency management director in Congress, I can tell you, I thoroughly appreciate not just what you do, but the 20,000-plus people at FEMA do.

Lord knows, based on all of the events that we have had over the last several years, COVID or excluding COVID, the burnout rate at FEMA, because it just—it never stops for these people. Whether it was people in my EOC or folks that you deploy around the country, they're away from their families, serving the country, helping communities respond, and then helping communities recover.

So one of the things that—and I've talked to previous administrators about this, and you don't have to comment—is that I think, Mr. Chairman, it's time actually that the FEMA administrator go back to being a Cabinet position.

I think that it's time that we put back what was there before 9/11 and that the FEMA administrator have a direct report to the President of the United States.

Because, as we've seen, whether it's on the West Coast, on the East Coast, in the middle of the country, on the Gulf of Mexico, FEMA is busier and busier than ever, and that's going to continue.

So one of the things I want to first talk about is how the DRF is running out of money. So I filed a bill with my colleagues across the aisle, bicameral, with Senator Scott and Senator Rubio, to make sure that we can replenish the DRF, because we shouldn't have to wait for the money to run out in the middle of hurricane season. We should be proactive.

One of the things I want to talk about where I think FEMA can improve is in temporary housing. I think—and I'd love to hear your comments on this, Madam Administrator—I think FEMA has struggled for a long time how to run a housing program.

So I'd love to hear your thoughts on should we be block granting that to the States and letting the States run those housing programs, similar to block grants that happened with citrus or timber in Florida after Hurricane Michael and Hurricane Irma.

Ms. CRISWELL. Congressman, I think that we see across the country that there are housing challenges in our blue sky days, and these housing challenges are only exasperated during the time of a disaster.

I think one of the best things that we can do is work with our communities where we know that they're going to have these challenges and help them with pre-disaster housing plans and how we're going to be able to work together as a Federal, State, and local government to support these housing initiatives.

I'm happy to say that we currently have an initiative under way in partnership with HUD with four States, with New Jersey, Louisiana, Montana, and Washington, to do just that, to work with these communities and help them build these plans so we can implement housing faster.

I don't disagree, there is a lot of improvement that needs to be made within the way that we can help these communities get back on their feet and into homes faster.

I'm very hopeful that this program is going to give us some ways forward and some best practices, as we've seen some of the creative ways that they have been implementing already to the different disasters that we've had over the last couple of years.

Mr. MOSKOWITZ. Yes, and potentially less expensive. I mean, look, you work with all 50 State emergency management directors. You know their programs. You know who they are. There's a question of whether or not FEMA could deploy the dollars and let the States run some of those programs, because I think some of the States can do it faster.

I want to talk about COVID really quickly, Mr. Chairman, because FEMA really came in and saved the day.

As someone who ran a COVID operation, ran it for someone across the aisle—so we did it on a bipartisan basis, as I was the emergency manager for Governor DeSantis—I can tell you that FEMA's efforts in both administrations, in the Trump administration and in the Biden administration, I mean, without FEMA's logistical support of the other agencies, I don't know that the Federal response from a logistical standpoint would've been as good.

Because, look, they have the experience in fires and tornados and hurricanes. So when we were opening up testing sites and vaccine sites, how to run that logistical operation, how to get those resources deployed, how to do all that.

I just want to thank FEMA. I want to thank all the people who work at your agency. I always believe people in emergency management, quite frankly, are taken for granted, because during blue skies no one cares about us. They don't want to invest in us. But when gray skies happen and they need us, then all of a sudden they expect us to perform.

That's another thing that I think that the Federal Government can do better in. I think it's time that we invest more dollars into FEMA on a proactive basis to be working on better mitigation programs. It's shown that mitigation dollars save us money on the back end.

So with that, Mr. Chairman, thank you for allowing me to waive on to the committee, and I yield back.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. Thank you, Mr. Moskowitz. Thank you for your service to so many first responders and others.

I now want to recognize another fellow New Yorker who's had boots on the ground with flooding in his district, Mr. Lawler, for 5 minutes.

Mr. LAWLER. Thank you, Chairman D'Esposito, for allowing me to waive on to committee, and to address you, Administrator, on the serious and, unfortunately, timely hearing.

This past weekend the Hudson Valley was hit with horrific flash flooding, homes were destroyed, residents had to be evacuated. Unfortunately, one woman lost her life in Orange County. Roads and bridges and culverts were washed away, brand-new businesses destroyed.

So I spent Monday, all day, touring the damage with local and State officials, and it's clear to all of us that the recovery effort will

take a great deal of time and resources. On first glance, we're talking about tens of millions of dollars worth of damage across the Hudson Valley, including Rockland County, Westchester County, Putnam County, Dutchess County, and Orange County.

Governor Hochul has declared a state of emergency for those counties, so the entirety of my Congressional district is part of the state of emergency that was declared. However, she has not yet asked for a major disaster emergency declaration as far as I know. Is that correct?

Ms. CRISWELL. Not to my knowledge yet.

Mr. LAWLER. OK. Can you walk me through the process? She has declared a state of emergency. What are the next steps to get FEMA's aid?

Ms. CRISWELL. Great question.

I spoke with Governor Hochul as they were going through the immediate impacts that they were seeing from this flooding event. Their first focus is always on, are there any immediate life-saving needs that we need to move resources in? Fortunately, even though there is the unfortunate loss of life, there were no other immediate life-saving needs.

So the next step is to assess the damage. I committed to her that we would have teams out there quickly to begin assessing damage. I mean, we also have—

Mr. LAWLER. Are the teams out there now?

Ms. CRISWELL. I'd have to get back to you to see if she has actually requested them. I don't know.

Mr. LAWLER. OK.

Ms. CRISWELL. But we also have started to use geospatial imagery. So we're already gathering imagery to expedite our assessment process. We're finding that we can get a lot of the data that we need to support a request if the Governor asks for one through some of this imagery.

So we'll continue to work with her to understand what the damages are.

Mr. LAWLER. What is the dollar threshold that New York needs to meet to get the major disaster emergency declaration?

Ms. CRISWELL. There definitely is a dollar threshold. I don't know it off the top of my head. My team can certainly get—

Mr. LAWLER. Is it roughly about \$36 million, to your knowledge?

Ms. CRISWELL. I'm just not—I'm just not sure.

Mr. LAWLER. OK.

Ms. CRISWELL. But that's the part that we have to validate. We have to validate that it exceeds the capacity of the State and local jurisdictions. We will work with her to get all of the data that we need to support any requests that she might have.

Mr. LAWLER. OK.

First and foremost, our first responders did a phenomenal job. Obviously it's tragic that there was the loss of one life.

It could've been a lot worse. I was out during—in district when the flash floods were coming, and it came on quickly. I mean, we're talking 9-plus inches in a very short period of time and a lot of damage of which the following day, after the rain had stopped, I mean, was still a lot of standing water, flowing water. So it was a real impact across the district.

I would obviously strongly encourage that if the Governor has not requested the teams yet that you please follow up with her expeditiously so that we can get the teams out there to survey all of the damage. My understanding is roughly about \$36 million State-wide. Each county has specific thresholds. Rockland County is about \$1.5 million; Putnam County is about \$400,000; Westchester County is over \$4 million.

So certainly from my preliminary view, we have tens of millions of dollars worth of damage. We had a municipal town hall got flooded. So there is a lot of damage both to municipal property as well as personal property, homes, cars, et cetera.

I would just ask that FEMA move as expeditiously as possible when the Governor does make the request, and that President Biden approve the major disaster emergency declaration once the Governor makes that request, and FEMA do everything they can to help all of our residents recover quickly.

Unfortunately, in New York, we've been through this many times. We have a lot of rivers, lakes, ocean that certainly impacts us any time there's a storm. So anything that you can do to expedite this process is greatly appreciated.

Ms. CRISWELL. We'll continue to partner with the Governor's team.

Mr. LAWLER. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. Thank you. The gentleman's time has expired.

Ms. Criswell, I just ask that if your office and your team can keep an open line of communication with Congressman Lawler—

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO [continuing]. That would be extremely helpful.

We're going to begin a second round of questioning, so if anybody wants to stick around. I recognize myself for 5 minutes.

We've recently been made aware of meetings that have been taking place at the White House about Federal long-term recovery efforts. According to what I have heard, there's a desire by some in the White House to consolidate and coordinate Federal post-disaster recovery efforts out of the National Security Council.

Although I am open to hearing more about the plan, I am skeptical about the approach and have serious concerns about how this could be effective.

Can you confirm that these discussions have been taking place?

Ms. CRISWELL. Mr. Chairman, recovery is a very complicated process, and we are always looking for ways that we can improve that process.

We have been in conversations with the National Security Council about ways that the recovery process can be improved. I would say that it really relies on two things: the capacity of State and local jurisdictions, those that have the longest and hardest recoveries are those that have the least capacity, and how can we continue to improve that capacity; but also the ability of our Federal partners to make sure that they have the ability to stay engaged and support these communities throughout their process.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. OK. Now, are you in favor of taking recovery functions from FEMA and giving it to other Federal agencies?

Ms. CRISWELL. FEMA's core mission is and will always be recovery. We were founded on the principles of helping these commu-



nities' recovery. We've evolved into a response agency, and we're really approaching our ability to do resilience more than ever.

I think creating any opportunity to improve recovery is something that we have to better understand what the needs and the issues are from those that we are helping at the State and local level.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. I just think that we need to keep an eye on creating more Federal layers of bureaucracy. Obviously, many of the questions that we've had here today falls into that exact situation, and it seems by adding more layers only makes some people's jobs more difficult, probably including yours.

Ms. CRISWELL. There are lots of layers of bureaucracy at times.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. So just one last question about this.

Are you aware of any outreach by the White House or the administration to groups such as the National Emergency Management Association or the National Governors Association on this proposal?

Ms. CRISWELL. I do know that during our last National Emergency Management Association meeting that was here in the Washington, DC, area, we had an opportunity to provide—members of the National Security Council—to provide an update. They have since followed up with a letter requesting further coordination. FEMA's happy to continue to support that level of coordination.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. Great.

Just moving on to sort-of grant programs for a second, because I know that's important to many of us sitting up here.

I think one of the focuses that we've had on this subcommittee is to make sure that FEMA grant funding makes its way to smaller entities. You take a district like mine, and I know many of us up here are serviced by either many first responder agencies, sometimes volunteer. Sometimes those groups don't have the ability or the resources that they need to even understand how to apply for such grant funding.

What is FEMA doing currently to help with outreach, to make sure that we can reach those communities, those institutions that are smaller?

I mean, we'll take the New York area, for example. When you hear of FEMA funding you hear—and, listen, I'm a proud alum, and I've had a great career in the NYPD, but you hear money going toward there when there are so many smaller police departments, law enforcement agencies, first responder agencies that perhaps aren't getting what they need or don't even have—meet the threshold to get that funding because they haven't gotten it before.

Ms. CRISWELL. Yes. Our grant programs have done such an amazing job of increasing the capacity and the capability and the level of preparedness across the Nation. But I do still see challenges in making sure that we're building capacity across the Nation as our threats are changing post-9/11.

We are really increasing our level of stakeholder engagement and outreach and streamlining the way that our communities can apply for this assistance.

I think a great example is our Nonprofit Security Grant Program that goes to those institutions that face this new threat of domestic terrorism upon them.

We did an incredible amount of outreach to let them know that these programs were available. We streamlined the process for them to apply. We saw significant increase in the number of applicants.

There's still need out there, and we're reaching those people that have that need. We're committed to continuing to get out into these communities so we can understand where the gaps are and build capacity.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. Yes. This committee has really tried to become a partner in that. I know at the beginning of the 118th Congress we did an on-line meeting with all of our colleagues to talk about the Nonprofit Security Grant Program, how they can push it out to their communities.

I know in my district and others up here have utilized on-line presentations to speak to stakeholders and let them understand exactly how it is that they could prepare themselves and apply for these grant programs.

But, like Mr. Strong said, you have a lot of different people up here from a lot of different backgrounds, whether it's the military, whether it's the fire service, whether it's law enforcement, whether it's finance and private work. There are so many individuals up here that want to reach their community.

Let us be a partner with you, please. I mean that with complete sincerity. Let's make sure that those lines of communications are open, because it's some of those smaller communities, some of the ones that are in need the most that really could use the help, and we want to make sure that we deliver what we have to them.

Ms. CRISWELL. Mr. Chairman, I really appreciate that support and that partnership. It takes all of us to make a difference.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. Let's do it together.

My time is expired. I now recognize Mr. Carter for 5 minutes.

Mr. CARTER. Mr. Chairman, thank you.

I would ask unanimous consent to enter into the record these bipartisan reports on climate change, which speak to the reality and the risk that exist.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. Without objection, Mr. Ranking Member. Thank you.

[The information follows:\*

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\*The *Department of Defense Climate Risk Analysis* has been retained in committee files and is available at <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Oct/21/2002877353/-1/-1/0/DOD-CLIMATE-RISK-ANALYSIS-FINAL.PDF>.



# CLIMATE CHANGE RISKS TO NATIONAL SECURITY

SEPTEMBER 2022

## THE BIG PICTURE

Both the Department of Defense's (DOD) global network of military installations and U.S. civilian infrastructure face climate change and extreme weather-related challenges. Climate change can also increase instability that affects U.S. security interests. GAO previously identified the significant fiscal risk that climate change poses for the U.S. government, with billions of dollars in estimated liabilities. However, climate change also poses national security risks.



Figure 1: Selected Climate Effects on National Security

	<p><b>FLOODING</b></p> <p>Fort Irwin in California, which provides live-fire training to soldiers, experienced severe flash flooding in 2013 that caused a loss of power and significant damage to base infrastructure. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers reported that the flooding caused more than \$65 million in damages.</p>
	<p><b>MELTING POLAR ICE</b></p> <p>On the Alaskan coast, thawing permafrost, decreasing sea ice, and rising sea level have led to increased erosion affecting radar sites providing early warning and communication.</p>
	<p><b>MIGRATION TRENDS</b></p> <p>In January 2019, we reported that the effects of climate change may alter migration trends, and some experts and U.S. agencies noted this could contribute to instability and result in national security challenges.</p>
	<p><b>RISING SEA LEVELS</b></p> <p>Norfolk Naval Shipyard in Virginia, which repairs and modernizes Navy warships, has had increased flooding as relative sea levels have risen. The installation annually averages three to five significant high tides and one hurricane.</p>
	<p><b>CATASTROPHIC STORMS</b></p> <p>Hurricane Michael devastated Tyndall Air Force Base in Florida, shutting down most base operations for months and causing severe damage to operational infrastructure that supports training pilots for deployment to Air Force combat units. In February 2020, an Air Force official estimated that rebuilding the base would cost about \$3.6 billion.</p>
	<p><b>UTILITIES</b></p> <p>We reported that climate change could affect drinking water and wastewater infrastructure. In 2021, we noted that climate change was expected to have far-reaching effects on the electricity grid, on which both DOD and civilian agencies depend. These effects include decreases in the production and efficiency of transmission of electricity and could cost billions of dollars each year.</p>

Source: GAO (Informants). | GAO-22-105830

United States Government Accountability Office

## ACTIONS TAKEN

DOD and civilian agencies have taken various actions to address climate risks to national security-related infrastructure, including in response to GAO recommendations. For example:

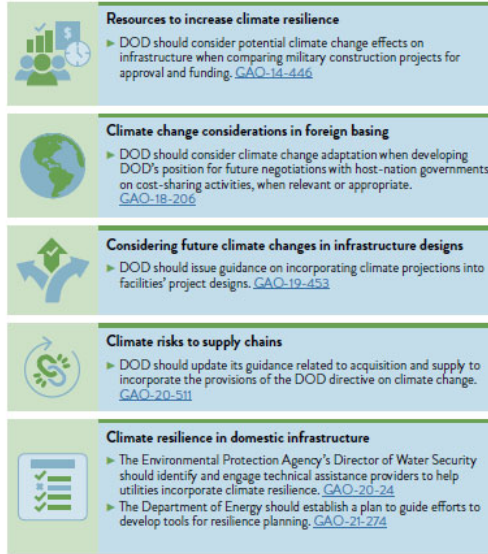
- ▶ In 2021, DOD issued a Climate Adaptation Plan that outlines a strategic framework and lines of effort to address climate vulnerabilities, such as developing resilient infrastructure and supply chains.
- ▶ In 2020, DOD provided guidance to its installations on how to use a site-specific database of sea-level rise projections in planning and project design.
- ▶ In 2020, the Environmental Protection Agency updated a tool it developed to assist water sector utilities in assessing climate-related risks to utility assets and operations.
- ▶ In 2020, the Department of State established a Climate Security and Resilience Program, which is assessing specific risks from climate change and natural hazards to overseas U.S. embassies, consulates, and staff housing.
- ▶ In 2015, the Department of Energy partnered with 18 electric utilities to help them plan for climate change.

GAO-22-105830 National Security

**GAO RECOMMENDATIONS**

GAO has made numerous recommendations to help improve the nation's climate resilience and reduce national security risks, including key recommendations below.

**Figure 2: Key Policy Questions and GAO Recommendations as of July 2022**



Source: GAO. | GAO-22-105830

**CONCLUSIONS**

Agencies have taken steps to implement our recommendations, but more work remains. GAO's recommendations that DOD and civilian agencies have not yet implemented point to ways the U.S. government can continue to improve its resilience to the effects of climate change.

These recommendations include considering potential climate change effects when comparing defense infrastructure projects for approval and funding, issuing guidance on incorporating climate projects into facilities project designs, considering climate change in acquisition and supply, and assisting civilian utilities with climate resilience efforts.

Taking steps to implement these recommendations will help both DOD and civilian agencies increase their resilience to the national security threats associated with climate change.

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Sources: U.S. Navy/W. Wilson Gower photos.

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U.S. Navy, U.S. Air Force/Staff Sgt. R. Conroy: [ram@atocck.adobe.com](https://www.flickr.com/photos/ram@atocck.adobe.com/);  
(Figure 1 photos, respectively).



Mr. CARTER. Thank you.

FEMA has increased its staffing since 2017. However, even with the increase in staffing, FEMA still has some 6,000 people short of its staffing goal of 17,670, which FEMA hopes to achieve by 2026.

Can you speak to how FEMA plans to increase hiring and retention to meet the staffing goals? How are you working with FEMA to make it more desirable that people will want to come and work for the agency?

Ms. CRISWELL. Ranking Member Carter, our staff are amazing. We are responding to disasters year round in a way that we haven't before, and we are asking a lot of them.

We are really focused on what we can do, first, to retain the work force that we have, and that includes rolling out new ways to help them map a career progression so they can see where they can go and how they can continue to advance.

Updating our National Response Coordination Center so it has more utility for them, so they have the resources and the tools to do their jobs better.

Doing exit interviews, but also stay interviews, to understand why people are actually staying at the agency, so we can implement those measures and help make an environment that people want to stay and continue to work at FEMA.

I think those are some of the key areas that are really going to make a difference.

As we continue to recruit, we took a hard look recently at the shape of our organization and where we can perhaps change our shape so we can get more entry level personnel into our agency and grow them through the emergency management enterprise, and I think that will also make a big difference.

But, again, the majority of those vacancies really lie within our Reservist work force and using the CREW Act as a way to have a recruitment tool to go out and get specialized individuals that just want to come out and work for a couple of weeks or a month.

I think this is going to be a really powerful tool for us to increase the numbers that we have, specialized in certain areas that can go into communities and help those communities as they start their road to recovery.

Mr. CARTER. Let me add to the chorus of appreciation from the Members that's been expressed today for the great work that the men and women of FEMA do. We know that it's far better than it used to be. We know that there's a lot of work yet to be done. But we should always pause and recognize progress.

So I want to publicly thank you and your team for the yeoman's effort in the incredible task that you have at hand as we continue to make it better, more accessible, easier for people to utilize and have boots on the ground in advance of, during, and after the storm to make sure all those needs are addressed.

Finally, contracting questions.

FEMA has faced long-standing contracting challenges for disaster response goods and services. Small and minority-owned businesses have the capabilities in almost every disaster to rebuild their communities, but they're consistently left out of the conversation or considered as a last resort at least.

By the time the tier system works down from the top tier prime to the lowest tier actual worker, there's very little opportunity that's left on the bone.

How are you ensuring that minority-owned businesses and other disadvantaged businesses are getting a fair shake at being a part of the rebuild with the skill sets that they have in their own communities?

It's painful to watch trucks drive away with surrounding license plates knowing that in the very community that's been impacted resources are there to provide services.

Ms. CRISWELL. I really appreciate that question, and I think that there is a lot of area for growth for FEMA in this respect.

One of the conversations that we've had are about creating more industry days to help more minority-owned institutions, minority-owned businesses come in and understand what the requirements are going to be and how to work through the process.

You have my commitment to continue to find ways and strategize with you on ways we can bring those types of organizations, these small businesses, and really the heartbeat of America, to help us accomplish our mission.

Mr. CARTER. Administrator Criswell, we do in LA-02, in my district in Louisiana, we do a series of what we call curbside pop-ups where we take government to the people throughout my entire State, throughout my entire district, to demonstrate that government can come to the people, that government can be a part of the solution and not sitting in an ivory tower somewhere far away.

I would love to partner with FEMA to do doing business with FEMA, for small businesses to figure out how to access resources, how to become a vendor or supplier of goods or services to the Agency.

Equally as important is to have job fairs. I know in Louisiana there are a lot of people that would like a good Federal job. If there are openings, we'd love to figure out how we can help you vet to bring more quality people into the work force.

My time has expired, so I will yield back.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. The gentleman's time has expired.

I now recognize Mr. LaLota from New York for 5 minutes.

Mr. LALOTA. Thank you, Chairman.

Administrator, I have served in elected and appointed positions in village, county, and State government, and I personally appreciate that FEMA has been an essential partner in providing assistance to local governments and Long Island residents in their greatest time of need. I very much appreciate what FEMA has done and continues to do for affected communities across the United States.

However, I'm concerned that FEMA might be stretched too thin, that effectiveness may wane as their mission sets have significantly increased over the past several decades, especially during and after the pandemic.

As you mentioned in your testimony, Administrator, the number of declared disasters which FEMA has supported in the last 10 years has increased by 191 percent.

Also in your testimony you stressed how FEMA is positioning itself as a resilience agency, which I believe will be extremely valuable and important in responding to and preparing for disasters in the future.

Administrator, I know you mentioned in your testimony a few programs which bridge the gap between responding to disasters and creating resilient communities, and I'd like you to go into greater detail on those points.

How does FEMA plan on balancing becoming a "resilience agency" while also responding to a number of—record number of disasters over the past decades? To that point, are there better ways which States and local governments can work with FEMA to maximize those resilience objectives?

Ms. CRISWELL. That's a really great question, and I appreciate the opportunity to talk about what we're doing there.

We are responding to more events, which means the recoveries themselves also are more complex. We have to get ahead of that curve. We have to start working with communities before disasters and blue sky days to better understand what we can do to reduce the impact but also build their readiness and their resilience.

Through our resilience part of our organization we're taking a place-based approach, where we're bringing in all of the services that FEMA has and bringing it to communities that we have identified through our own data that have the greatest needs, have the greatest capability gaps, to help them start to build those resilient programs and plans.

One example is through our BRIC Program where I directed the team to do direct technical assistance. In the first year, we only had 8 communities apply. We're going to have over 46 this year. It's through the outreach that we have done to communities that are the most underresourced but the most vulnerable to help them develop plans and apply for this pre-disaster mitigation funding to help them build more resilience.

We're also in the process of implementing a program called Community Disaster Resilience Zones—this is directed by Congress—to also give us the opportunity to increase the Federal cost share for these communities, but we think it's going to be much bigger than that. It's going to give us the opportunity to partner with all of our other Federal agencies to really focus a whole-of-government approach into some of these most vulnerable communities.

Mr. LALOTA. Great. Thanks. Thanks for being with us here today. But more importantly, thank you for your work, before, during, and after our communities' most trying times.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. The gentleman yields back.

I now recognize Mr. Goldman from New York for 5 minutes.

Mr. GOLDMAN. Thank you again, Mr. Chairman.

I want to briefly address some of the comments that you did not have an opportunity to respond to from my distinguished colleague from Oklahoma about the impact of climate change on natural disasters around the country and around the world.

You have stated in your opening remarks that in 2010 there were 108 declared disasters for FEMA to support, and just 10 years later that number had tripled to 315, including response to the COVID pandemic.

I just want to give you an opportunity to respond to some of the, I think, distorted statements that my colleague made about climate change and the impact it's had on FEMA and natural disasters.

Ms. CRISWELL. Congressman, what I can say is what I've seen over the 2 and a little bit, few months, years that I've been in this role. We are responding to more events. We're working with our communities that are having more impacts and longer recoveries, more complex recoveries, from the nature of these events.

We're seeing the dynamics of them change. Hurricanes are not just wind events like they used to be; they're significant water events with excessive rainfall and storm surge that's causing destruction that we didn't see from a hurricane that might have hit the same area a decade previously.

We're seeing atmospheric rivers where you then merge an atmospheric river with decades of drought and then wildfires that create damages that any of those incidents on their own wouldn't have created.

So we're seeing this convergence of different climate events come together and cause damage that we would have never anticipated.

We have to continue to work and model what we think the potential impacts are of the convergence of all of these different events—what is it going to be in 10 years?—so we can put the right measures in place to help communities understand their risk, but more importantly, begin to reduce the impacts of that risk through mitigation programs.

Mr. GOLDMAN. Well, and I would note that over the past couple weeks we've had several of the hottest days on record for Earth. So the notion that our climate is not burning up seems very far fetched given the actual data.

As my colleague Mr. Lawler pointed out, with tremendous flash flooding in the Hudson Valley, from 10 inches of rain in a very short amount of time to wildfires in Canada, whose polluted air drifted down all the way to Washington, DC, and made New York City with the worst air quality in the world that we had never experienced before.

So it is quite clear when you look on the ground that this is an issue, and I appreciate that you are addressing it.

I want to turn back to New York City and the migrant crisis that we were talking about before.

The Stafford Act defines an emergency as any occasion or instance for which Federal assistance is needed to supplement State and local efforts to save lives and to protect property and public health and safety.

It is my view, as a former lawyer, I guess current lawyer, that the migrant crisis is a threat to public health and safety in New York City and that an emergency declaration—that it would qualify for an emergency declaration under the Stafford Act, which is different than the major disaster declaration that Mr. Lawler was referring to.

I would like to understand what benefits FEMA could provide to New York City if an emergency declaration is declared by the administration.

Ms. CRISWELL. The way the Stafford Act is implemented and the emergency declarations, they are designed to support that imminent threat to life-safety and life-sustaining operations.

When I look at Vermont, Vermont received an emergency declaration because they were in active life-saving mode. It allows us to move resources in quickly to make sure that there is no loss of life.

As we look at the support that New York continues to provide to support migrants, it does not meet that immediate and imminent threat to save lives. That is why the Shelter and Services Program is suited specifically to support those on-going needs that these communities have to provide that on-going shelter.

Mr. GOLDMAN. I would point out that there are instances in the past where emergency declarations have been declared when there is not the type of natural disaster that is occurring in Vermont,



and I would urge you and the Department to review those other precedents that I believe would apply.

I guess the last question—if you’ll indulge me, Mr. Chairman—is whether you have had any discussions with the White House or further up in the Department about New York and the possibility of approving an emergency declaration.

Ms. CRISWELL. We have not had a request for an emergency declaration. I have spoken with Mayor Adams about what his needs are, and our conversations with the Department and the Secretary have strictly focused around the program that we do implement, which is the Shelter and Services Program.

Mr. GOLDMAN. Well, once again, I’d urge you to continue to have those conversations. I do think it can apply, and I think that the crisis is very real, and it is very important to get the administration’s support beyond the Shelter and Services Program on a going-forward basis.

I thank you for your indulgence, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.

Mr. D’ESPOSITO. The gentleman’s time has expired.

Mr. Ranking Member.

Mr. CARTER. Mr. Chairman, I’d like to also ask unanimous consent to enter into the record this letter from the American Federation of Government Employees, AFL–CIO, relative to the Government employees and work shortage.

Mr. D’ESPOSITO. Without objection, it will be entered into the record.

[The information follows:]

LETTER SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY HONORABLE TROY A. CARTER

*July 13, 2023.*

The Honorable ANTHONY D’ESPOSITO,  
*Chairman, House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Emergency Management and Technology, House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515.*

The Honorable TROY CARTER,  
*Ranking Member, House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Emergency Management and Technology, House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515.*

DEAR SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIRMAN D’ESPOSITO, RANKING MEMBER CARTER AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE: On behalf of the American Federation of Government Employees, which represents over 750,000 Federal and D.C. government employees including employees at the Federal Emergency Management Agency, I write to provide AFGE’s perspectives for the “Future of FEMA” hearing in the House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Emergency Management and Technology. To reinforce strong recruitment and retention of FEMA employees and ensure the agency can succeed at its mission, FEMA must prioritize hiring of full-time employees under Title 5 authority. The emergency workforce at FEMA should primarily be hired and work under Title 5 authorities so that the public receives well-trained, qualified, and accountable emergency workers.

AFGE National Local 4060 continues to work in collaboration with Administrator Criswell on a variety of issues. The FEMA workforce serves and protects the American public during national disasters, including floods, tornadoes, hurricanes and fires. With the consistent nature of national disasters, FEMA employees work significantly longer hours and endure taxing workplace conditions. The FEMA workforce is too small and therefore the employees who work at FEMA are strained. Recruitment and retention could be improved if FEMA prioritized hiring more full-time equivalent employees to support the current workforce for what has become a non-stop disaster season. An increase in FEMA’s permanent workforce under Title 5 would improve working conditions for all employees. It is essential for Congress to allocate resources for more Full-time Equivalent (FTE) positions at FEMA to ensure the agency can provide the best possible service to the American public.

FEMA hires some employees under Title 5 authority and others as temporary or term employees. Title 5 authority employees are hired after a rigorous and competi-

tive merit-based examination process. FEMA employees who are covered under Title 5 are afforded full civil service protections. One of the protections includes being represented by a union and the ability to raise grievances and concerns about working conditions. Employees hired under Title 5 authority can appeal adverse actions either through grievance and arbitration procedures in their collective bargaining agreements (where applicable) or through access to the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB). The union can support them in instances of mistreatment in the workplace to ensure these employees can swiftly return to the important work of serving the American public and making victims of national disasters whole again.

Stafford Act employees, on the other hand, are hired for temporary or term appointments and make up a significant portion of the FEMA workforce. They are employed “at will” which means they risk being terminated at any time for any reason. They have no due process protections if they experience mistreatment at work. In a 2017 study by GAO Stafford Act employees were described as “having poorly defined or nonexistent disciplinary processes and no rights of appeal for adverse actions.” “At will” workers lack the protection of a union contract and the right to appeal adverse actions such as suspensions and terminations. Stafford Act employees who are harassed, discriminated against, or mistreated by a manager, are not able to seek help from the union and are often afraid to report incidents of harassment and discrimination.

AFGE recommends that Congress authorize FEMA to hire more full-time employees under Title 5 authority to ensure more FEMA employees are properly supported by their union, well-trained, and can adequately protect the public from national disasters. For questions or more information please contact Fiona Kohrman at [fiona.kohrman@afge.org](mailto:fiona.kohrman@afge.org).

Sincerely,

JULIE N. TIPPENS,  
*Legislative Director.*

Mr. D’ESPOSITO. I want to thank you for being here this morning. I mean what I said sincerely. You have a great group. We may disagree on many policies, but I think we all agree that the focus of emergency management is to be better off today than you were the last time that emergency took place. I will wholeheartedly agree that, regardless of the political affiliation of anyone up here, we all believe in that.

So please use our subcommittee as a resource. Let us help you. Let us be a vehicle to get your information out and to really help those that are in need. Whether they’re in the big cities or the smallest of communities, we all represent individuals that need help, want help, and are looking for help. So I hope that we can work together in the future.

The Members of the subcommittee may have some additional questions for the witness, and we would ask the witness to respond to these in writing.

Pursuant to Committee Rule VII(D), the hearing record will remain held open for 10 days.

Without objection, this subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:37 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

