



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Subcommittee Hearing Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

Future of FEMA: Agency Perspectives with Administrator Criswell

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 24th 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 Nonprofit Security Grant Program (NSGP). As a strong supporter of the NSGP, I am thankful that the President's budget request for FY 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.

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