



# COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Hearing Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

### *Examining FEMA's Readiness to Meet its Mission*

June 29, 2021

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Today, FEMA faces historic challenges as it seeks to carry out its mission to support citizens and first responders as we prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards. I look forward to hearing from Administrator Criswell about FEMA's readiness to meet its mission, and what Congress can do to assist.

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