



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hearing Statement of Emergency Management & Technology Subcommittee Ranking Member Troy Carter (D-LA)

Future of FEMA: Agency Perspectives with Administrator Criswell

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 ongoing 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 1st, 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 ongoing 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 Louisianans 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.

#

Media contact: Adam Comis at 202-225-9978