



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Joint Hearing Statement of Emergency Management & Technology Subcommittee Ranking Member Tim Kennedy (D-NY)

Exploring the Use of Unmanned Aircraft Systems Across the DHS Enterprise

April 1, 2025

Just last week, Secretary Noem stated on national television that “We are going to eliminate FEMA.” This, disturbingly, received immediate praise from President Trump.

Reportedly, Secretary Noem is in active discussions with FEMA leadership about dismantling the agency by October 1—a reckless move that could leave millions of Americans vulnerable to the impacts of natural disasters like hurricanes, winter storms, wildfires, tornadoes, and floods - and without any federal assistance.

It is deeply concerning that today’s hearing isn’t solely focused on holding this Administration accountable for its plans to dismantle the only federal agency solely dedicated to assisting Americans in the aftermath of disasters. I encourage my Republican colleagues, many of whom have had disasters hit their districts, to take action to prevent this administration from doing irreparable harm to the American people by dismantling FEMA.

While today’s hearing is about drones, the unfortunate reality is that the Trump White House continues to create obstacles that jeopardize the very programs we are discussing. The Department of Homeland Security’s Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) has played a crucial role in integrating unmanned aerial systems into national security and emergency response efforts. However, the reckless mass firings by Elon Musk and President Trump have hindered S&T’s workforce and its capacity to innovate and lead.

At the same time, the administration’s freeze on federal grants, which is being carried out in violation of court orders, has left communities and first responders unable to secure the vital funding needed for acquiring and deploying drone technology.

Grant funding from the Department of Homeland Security has been instrumental in funding local law enforcement seeking to adopt drone technology. However, under Republican House leadership, we have seen a 10% reduction in DHS grant programs in FY24, followed by similarly inadequate funding levels in FY25.

This has significantly hampered local agencies' ability to acquire critical technologies like drones. This is especially impactful for Western New Yorkers, where emergency services—law enforcement, fire departments, and other agencies—rely on federal grant funding to deploy drone technologies in disaster response.

First responders in my community rely on drones for critical missions. For instance, late last year, Buffalo Police used drones during extremely cold temperatures to locate and rescue a man who had become disoriented in the snow, bringing him to safety. Without adequate funding, local agencies may be unable to respond to future emergencies like this one as effectively as they could. Ensuring our local agencies

are equipped and funded is not just a matter of policy but a commitment to the safety and resilience of our communities.

I look forward to discussing today how we can promote responsible law enforcement use of drones to equip our first responders with the tools they need to protect and serve effectively.

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[Media contact](#)