



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

Future of FEMA: Perspectives from the Emergency Management Community

March 4, 2025

The topic of today's hearing is, unfortunately, very timely. Disasters are striking harder and more often - from wildfires, floods, tornadoes, and hurricanes to extreme snow and ice storms, we have seen hundreds of lives taken and communities devastated nationwide. From California to Kentucky to Florida, to South Carolina, to New York, the need to strengthen our preparedness, response, and recovery efforts has never been more critical. Preparedness, response, and recovery efforts must be strengthened, and that starts with skilled emergency managers. Congress must support them at every level.

Yet, I'm deeply concerned about the Trump Administration's attack on FEMA and the dedicated public servants in emergency management at every level. President Trump has threatened to dismantle the agency, fired 200 employees, and pushed out 800 more under Elon Musk's unfunded resignation scheme. This is a reckless, dangerous move that undermines disaster response when we need it most. These brave public servants, attempting to help communities ravaged by destruction, are being fired without cause. It is shameful, it is despicable, and it is wrong.

And, unfortunately, the Majority has chosen not to include any representatives from FEMA to attend this hearing and to testify today about what is truly happening on the front lines. Currently, there is no transparency from this administration on how FEMA, an agency with such a critical mission, can operate while being dismantled—one employee at a time. Even while the Trump Administration continues to downplay the critical role of emergency managers, the truth is that for decades, FEMA has come to the aid of the American public time and time again. And they have done so while being understaffed and underfunded.

In addition to the direct attacks on FEMA, President Trump is chipping away at and weakening the agencies that provide support to FEMA, like the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Reportedly, the Trump Administration has fired approximately 800 probationary employees at NOAA, while another 500 resigned—severely undermining critical weather forecasting and climate monitoring services.

Such mass exoduses from essential agencies not only weaken our disaster response and preparedness capabilities but also jeopardize public safety and economic stability. Let me be clear: the American people cannot afford to let President Trump and Elon Musk take a chainsaw to the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

I've seen firsthand how critical FEMA is on a number of occasions, but in 2022, my community was ravaged by Winter Storm Elliott. During the week of Christmas in 2022, a category 4 extratropical cyclone created crippling winter weather conditions including blizzards, high winds, snowfall, and record cold temperatures across the northeast. This catastrophic storm claimed 47 lives in my community. This tragedy overwhelmed our entire community in the days, weeks, and months following, from mourning the loss of loved ones, friends, and community members to putting the pieces of lives and homes back together.

Following the storm, President Biden ensured that Federal assistance was provided, but this devastating blizzard highlighted outdated FEMA policies that left gaps in support. Currently, FEMA has a Snow Assistance and Severe Winter Storm Policy that provides the criteria for assistance following an extreme snowstorm.

However, snow assistance requires a record or near-record snowfall over 1-3 days, validated by the National Weather Service and compared to historical data. For example, where other storms are judged on the amount of damage they cause, a snowstorm must be the worst a community has ever experienced to qualify for assistance.

Federal assistance for extreme snowstorms must be on par with other natural disasters. That's why I introduced the SNOW Act to expand disaster assistance for snowstorms, ensuring communities get the help they need. Specifically, my bill:

- Removes the outdated snowfall methodology and the statewide total damages requirement if the affected response zone and/or region as determined by State emergency service agencies
- Unlocks Individual Assistance for snow disasters, providing monetary relief for families who experience substantial damage to their homes
- Unlocks all categories of Public Assistance for snow disasters, such as assistance in removing debris, rebuilding roads and bridges, rebuilding and maintaining public utilities, and melting agents for ice on roads
- Adds snow removal equipment under FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program
- Raises the federal cost share to 90% federal and 10% state and local IF the affected areas are rural or below the real median household income according to the Census Bureau.

Make no mistake about it, there is work to be done to improve FEMA, but dismantling its experienced workforce is reckless and dangerous. As climate change fuels more frequent and severe disasters, our focus must be on strengthening FEMA's ability to respond—not weakening it. It is more crucial than ever to have a robust response system. The growing threats we face demand it.

While a lot of today's conversation is likely to focus on natural disasters, FEMA does more than disaster response; it provides critical preparedness grants for communities nationwide. Yet, the White House froze these funds, forcing courts to intervene. Even after a judge's order, reports indicate that many grants remain blocked, jeopardizing emergency readiness. This is not just bureaucratic red tape—it puts lives at risk. This funding, frozen by the administration, supports first responders and emergency managers in keeping us all safe.

In my district, we know firsthand how vital the preparedness grant resources are. In just a few short months, we will be commemorating the third anniversary of the racist, white supremacist terrorist attack that robbed the lives of 10 innocent souls on May 14, 2022.

That day, our first responders—our police, firefighters, EMS, and so many others —bravely rushed into harm's way, putting their lives on the line to protect others. They give so much for the well-being of our communities, so the very least we can do is ensure they have the funding and support they need.

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