COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

Beyond the Storm: Assessing FEMA's Mission Readiness

November 19, 2026

FEMA exists for one fundamental reason: to help the Nation prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters. Whether it is a hurricane, wildfire, flood, or terrorist attack, communities across this country depend on FEMA to provide the resources, expertise, and Federal coordination necessary to protect lives and help them rebuild. But under the Trump administration, FEMA's ability to fulfill that mission has been repeatedly undermined.

Rather than strengthening FEMA, the Trump administration has spent much of the last two years weakening FEMA's workforce, playing political games with disaster relief funding, and making it harder for communities to access the very funding Congress made available to ensure that communities can withstand all types of disasters. Mr. Administrator, you were fired from the Agency in May 2025. And while you have since been nominated and confirmed, I am troubled that your résumé reflects no substantial emergency management experience. The last time FEMA was led by an administrator with no emergency management experience was during Hurricane Katrina—and the results were catastrophic.

After Hurricane Katrina and the staggering losses from that storm, we put specific qualifications for the FEMA administrator into law. And with your confirmation, Mr. Hamilton, we are watching history repeat itself. To add insult to injury, prior to your FEMA appointments you promoted misinformation and disinformation about Hurricanes Helene and Milton. You should not have this job.

My concerns about your qualifications are magnified as I observe the state of FEMA under your leadership. The mass exodus of FEMA employees began on your watch, Mr. Administrator. A Government Accountability Office (GAO) report released in August found that more than 4,300 FEMA employees separated from the agency in fiscal year 2025, a 55 percent increase from the previous year. And the losses have continued. GAO found that another 2,545 employees separated between October 2025 and May 2026. And more than half of FEMA's most senior and experienced employees have departed the Agency.

We have seen program after program at FEMA be diminished under your leadership. You broke the law when you canceled the mitigation program known as the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities or BRIC—which set back progress on critical disaster mitigation projects and may cost lives. You are pushing requirements on preparedness grants that have nothing to do with protecting the American public. Mr. Administrator, at a time of elevated threats to our Nation, you are making it increasingly hard for first responders, emergency managers, and nonprofits to access grants like the Urban Area Security Initiative, the State Homeland Security Program, and the Nonprofit Security Grant Program.

I have heard reports that counterterrorism money owed to communities from Fiscal Years 2025 and 2026 are on hold because of you. States and cities are having to sue to get what's owed to them. Let me

assure you that Congress never intended for the Trump administration or any administration to take counterterrorism funding that was established after 9/11 to protect communities and hold it hostage to political demands. As courts have noted, you do not have the authority to manipulate this funding for political gain. This is shameful and dangerous.

On your watch, disaster relief funding is being politicized and communities are being left to suffer after disasters, all because they did not vote for President Trump. And in North Carolina, President Trump went even further, suggesting that additional Hurricane Helene recovery funding could depend on the outcome of the state's Senate race. President Trump has taken longer to approve major disaster declarations than any president since the modern disaster declaration process was established in 1989, and Democratic-led states have been denied at a higher rate and been made to wait longer for FEMA's help.

After the media called out political bias in the disaster declarations last month after Texas and Florida received assistance right before the election, you then made it harder for the public to track the denials and stopped including pending disaster declaration requests in FEMA's Daily Operations Briefing. At a time when disaster assistance decisions are facing serious questions, the public should have more transparency, not less. You continue to travel across the country describing a future in which State and local communities would get less support from FEMA, even though they are already stretched thin, and by law only receive FEMA's assistance when their capabilities are exhausted.

While you are telling the public that they should expect less help from FEMA, you were reportedly pursuing jets that would primarily be used to transport you and other senior FEMA officials. Mr. Administrator, why do you need private jets if FEMA is cutting back on disaster declaration support? This is part of the same old playbook with the Trump administration—taking from average American families while officials fly around in private jets. We deserve leaders at FEMA that make better choices.

Mr. Administrator, I want to note that your testimony celebrates FEMA's response to August storms in Indiana. I am stunned that you think what happened in Indiana was a success when disaster survivors, largely communities of color, didn't have power two weeks. That attitude is completely unacceptable and further evidence that you have no idea what serving the public at FEMA truly means. Did you like seeing families and children without power? Because I did not. Communities in this country should have power, and when they do not, the Federal government should not slow walk help and then give themselves a pat on the back.

The mismanagement of FEMA under the Trump administration is something Committee Democrats have been tracking this entire Congress, and next Congress we will continue our oversight work and look for opportunities to pass legislation that will lead to a more reliable, transparent, and effective FEMA.

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