

Opening Statement of Ranking Member J. Luis Correa (D-CA)

Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency Hearing

Employee Misconduct: How Can FEMA Improve Integrity of its Workforce

Thursday, July 27, 2017

The Federal Emergency Management Agency workforce has a critical responsibility — to support citizens and first responders as they face some of the most crippling natural disasters this country has seen.

FEMA employees frequently risk their lives for the good of the country at a moment's notice.

To me, the FEMA workforce exemplifies and personifies the very basis for the newly crafted DHS mission statement — *With honor and integrity, we will safeguard the American people, our homeland, and our values.*

Speaking at the Aspen Institute just last week, Secretary John Kelly commended the patriotism, dedication, and focus of the DHS workforce as they protect the nation, even in the face of a sometimes dangerous mission.

Therefore, I am confused and concerned with the focus of today's hearing, as evidenced by the hearing title insinuating the FEMA workforce has a widespread integrity problem.

Today's hearing stems from a GAO report released last week that concluded FEMA should improve the manner in which it documents and communicates policies related to employee conduct, a task that is administrative in nature.

This recommendation by GAO is certainly not controversial or problematic.

Employees, whether full-time, part-time, or temporary, should know and understand an agency's policies regarding misconduct as well as the availability of rights to challenge or appeal an adverse decision.

While misconduct must be addressed wherever it occurs in the workforce, nowhere in its report does GAO assert that FEMA has an integrity or misconduct problem that requires improvement.

In fact, the report makes clear that allegations of misconduct made against FEMA employees reflects less than 2% of the entire FEMA workforce.

Additionally, one of the FEMA employee categories highlighted in the report, Surge Capacity Force members, has recorded ZERO instances of misconduct according to FEMA Office of the Chief Security Officer officials.

The second class of FEMA employees highlighted in the report, Reservists, are at-will, intermittent employees.

These employees are not hired under Title 5 and do not receive the same protections of a union contract and the right to appeal adverse actions such as suspensions or terminations, which undoubtedly impacts data related to cases of employee misconduct.

Instead of focusing an undue amount of attention on misconduct at FEMA, this Committee should be focused on the number one problem plaguing the DHS workforce — MORALE.

Overall, FEMA is ranked 284th of 305 agency subcomponents, which means the agency index scores fall well below the average.

What is encouraging is FEMA employees do, in fact, feel mission-driven and connected to the work they do.

However, the FEMA workforce expressed dissatisfaction with agency leadership, the fairness of performance reviews, and opportunities for professional development.

Research shows that effective leadership is the key driver of employee satisfaction.

In order to improve employee morale, it is critical for FEMA to provide robust training to new supervisors, motivate and engage employees, and recognize high performers.

I am proud that this Congress, this Committee passed legislation focused on improving morale and employee engagement at the Department – legislation that was co-sponsored by every single Democratic member of this panel.

Today, I look forward to discussing with the witnesses how this Committee can continue to lift up the over 22,000 full-time, part-time, and volunteer FEMA employees and help improve morale.

I would also like the FEMA workforce to know that while the current administration seems to devalue the incredibly important work that you do, your contributions have not been ignored.

We are proud of the dedicated, hardworking men and women of FEMA and thank you for your service.