

FEMA'S PRIORITIES FOR 2020 AND BEYOND: COORDINATING MISSION AND VISION

(116-59)

HEARING
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, AND
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON
TRANSPORTATION AND
INFRASTRUCTURE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED SIXTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

MARCH 11, 2020

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U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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Ranking Member

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MARCH 6, 2020

SUMMARY OF SUBJECT MATTER

TO: Members, Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management
FROM: Staff, Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management
RE: Subcommittee hearing on “FEMA’s Priorities for 2020 and Beyond: Coordinating Mission and Vision”

PURPOSE

The Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management will meet on Wednesday, March 11, 2020, at 10:00 a.m. in 2167 Rayburn House Office Building, to receive testimony on “FEMA’s Priorities for 2020 and Beyond: Coordinating Mission and Vision” from Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Administrator Peter T. Gaynor.

With the January confirmation of Admin. Gaynor, FEMA once again has a non-interim leader. With his confirmation, the February release of the President’s FY21 budget request, the release of a revised Publication One in November 2019, an updated and streamlined Strategic Plan in March 2018, and continuing demand for Federal disaster assistance resulting from significant disaster activity across the Nation in recent years, the Subcommittee looks forward to receiving the Administrator’s testimony.

As recent hearings have illustrated, the Federal government’s disaster recovery programs and personnel continue to be under pressure to work to help communities recover from several of the costliest natural disasters in the Nation’s history.¹

BACKGROUND

FEMA’S PRIORITIES AND FOCUS—2018–2022

In March 2018, FEMA simplified its mission statement and released its Strategic Plan for 2018–2022.² The new mission statement is “FEMA’s mission is helping people before, during, and after disasters.”³ The 2018–2022 edition of the strategic plan streamlined the five priorities and 16 objectives from the previous edition (2014–2018) to three goals and 12 objectives:⁴

¹ See *An Assessment of Federal Recovery Efforts from Recent Disasters*. Hearing before the Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management. 116th Congress, October 22, 2019. See also *Disaster Preparedness: DRR Implementation and FEMA Readiness*. 116th Congress, May 22, 2019.

² FEMA 2018–2022 Strategic Plan. Available at https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1533052524696-b5137201a4614ade5e0129ef01cbf661/strat_plan.pdf.

³ Id at 6.

⁴ Id at 11.

- Goal 1) Build a Culture of Preparedness
 - Objective 1.1) Incentivize Investments that Reduce Risk, Including Pre-disaster Mitigation, and Reduce Disaster Costs at All Levels
 - Objective 1.2) Close the Insurance Gap
 - Objective 1.3) Help People Prepare for Disasters
 - Objective 1.4) Better Learn from Past Disasters, Improve Continuously, and Innovate
- Goal 2) Ready the Nation for Catastrophic Disasters
 - Objective 2.1) Organize the “BEST” (Build, Empower, Sustain, and Train) Scalable and Capable Incident Workforce
 - Objective 2.2) Enhance Intergovernmental Coordination through FEMA Integration Teams
 - Objective 2.3) Posture FEMA and the Whole Community to Provide Life-Saving and Life-Sustaining Commodities, Equipment, and Personnel from all Available Sources
 - Objective 2.4) Improve Continuity and Resilient Communications Capabilities
- Goal 3) Reduce the Complexity of FEMA
 - Objective 3.1) Streamline the Disaster Survivor and Grantee Experience
 - Objective 3.2) Mature the National Disaster Recovery Framework
 - Objective 3.3) Develop Innovative Systems and Business Processes that Enable FEMA’s Employees to Rapidly and Effectively Deliver the Agency’s Mission
 - Objective 3.4) Strengthen Grants Management, Increase Transparency, and Improve Data Analytics

This strategic plan was developed in the wake of some of the costliest and most devastating natural disasters FEMA has worked to respond to since being established in 1979.⁵ The current plan reflects lessons learned and accomplishments from the prior plan. However, some external stakeholders expressed dissatisfaction with the level of engagement and input from whole community partners in the development of the current plan.⁶

In addition to the updated Strategic Plan, FEMA more recently released a revamped Publication One (Pub 1), a document that FEMA describes as its capstone document to “understand our role in the emergency management community and provides direction for how we conduct ourselves and make decisions each day. The intent of our Pub 1 is to promote innovation, flexibility, and performance in achieving our mission. It promotes unity of purpose, guides professional judgment, and enables each of us to fulfill our responsibilities.”⁷

Pub 1 defines FEMA’s core values as compassion, integrity, fairness, and respect. The stated guiding principles are: accessibility, accountability, empowerment, engagement, flexibility, getting results, preparation, stewardship, and teamwork.⁸

HIGHLIGHTS OF PRESIDENT’S FY21 FEMA BUDGET REQUEST

While briefing the Committee staff on the President’s FY21 budget request, FEMA stressed the following for the coming fiscal year:⁹

- Continuing to advance the priorities outlined in its FY 2018–2022 Strategic Plan and implementation of the requirements of the Disaster Recovery Reform Act and Pub 1;
- Focusing on filling critical gaps in the Incident Management (IM) Workforce to improve force strength, employee qualifications, and overall readiness to respond to disasters throughout the country;
- Prioritizing resources to ensure expeditious and fair review of allegations of misconduct or harassment by employees through our Office of Professional Responsibility; and
- Investing in FEMA’s real property requirements to ensure the Agency can adequately train its workforce, quickly distribute life-saving commodities, and provide effective recovery services to survivors.

Additionally, the FEMA previewed several legislative proposals currently pending with the Office of Management and Budget. These draft proposals include:

⁵ Id at 8.

⁶ <https://adapt.org/press-release-demands-fema-to-cancel-strategic-planning-meeting/>. See also <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/03/15/594140026/fema-drops-climate-change-from-its-strategic-plan>.

⁷ <https://www.fema.gov/pub1>

⁸ <https://emilms.fema.gov/IS822/groups/38.html>

⁹ Ben Moncarz, Acting Chief Financial Officer at FEMA, briefed Committee staff on the President’s Fiscal Year 2021 budget request on February 20, 2020.

- *Public Assistance Federal Cost Share Adjustment Proposal*—would phase out federal support for repairing buildings and equipment; encourages more effective risk management, increased mitigation investment, and decreased federal disaster costs.
- *Assistance to Individuals and Households Federal Cost Share Adjustment Proposal*—would make the states responsible for no more than 25% of all eligible costs; encourages greater state ownership of housing assistance, promotes shared responsibility, and reduces federal disaster costs.
- *25% Non-Federal Cost Match Proposal*—would establish a local match for remaining preparedness grants that currently lack a local share: State Homeland Security Grant Program (SHSGP), Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI), and Transit Security Grant Program (TSGP). This proposal would establish a consistent cost share requirement across all of the preparedness grants.
- *National Security and Resilience Grant Program Legislative Proposal*—a proposed consolidation of existing preparedness grants to a single \$406.9M pot of money to remain available until September 30, 2022, to provide financial assistance on a competitive basis to non-Federal entities to address specific, existing, and emerging threats as identified and prioritized by the Secretary through the Administrator
- *National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) Affordability Proposal*—would establish a targeted means-tested affordability program for policyholders residing in the Special Flood Hazard Area who cannot afford rate increases mandated under current law.¹⁰

It is unknown if or when these legislative proposals will be released publicly, but some reflect issues the Agency has raised in prior years without action on the proposals.

Below are funding tables comparing FY20 enacted appropriations with FY21 Administration proposals for key FEMA programs and Federal assistance:

Disaster Relief and Mitigation ¹¹
(in millions)

| Program | FY 2020 Enacted | FY 2021 Authorized | FY 2021 President's Budget | Diff. of FY 2021 Pres. Budget and FY 2020 Enacted | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|---|----------------------------|---|---------------|
| | | | | \$ | % |
| Disaster Relief Fund (DRF) | \$17,863.2 | Such sums as necessary | \$5,653.3 | -\$12,209.9 | -68.4% |
| Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) | \$0 ^A | Authorized in Stafford Act Sec. 203(i) ^B | \$0.5 ^C | N/A | N/A |
| Total | \$17,863.2 | | \$6,133.1 | -\$12,209.9 | -68.4% |

^{A,B}No money was appropriated by Congress to Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) for FY20, but the Agency utilized the 6 percent set-aside established in Sec. 1234 of the *Disaster Recovery Reform Act of 2018* (DRRA, Division D of P.L. 115–254) to fund PDM grants for the FY19 grants cycle and will do so again for the FY20 cycle, for which a Notice of Funding Opportunity is expected in the late summer/early fall of FY20.

^BTo more permanently address the need for authorization and dedicated funding for Pre-Disaster Mitigation, the *Disaster Recovery Reform Act of 2018* (DRRA, Division D of P.L. 115–254) amended the *Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act* to establish a National Public Infrastructure Predisaster Mitigation Assistance program, funded by a six percent set-aside from the Disaster Relief Fund, based on the estimated aggregate amount of the grants made pursuant to Stafford sections 403, 406, 407, 408, 410, 416, and 428 for major disasters.

^CThis request is to support three FTEs to implement the National Public Infrastructure Predisaster Mitigation Assistance program.

¹⁰Presentation of the Fiscal Year 2021 President's Budget for the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Delivered to House staff on February 20, 2020. Slide deck available upon request.

¹¹Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency—Budget Overview, Fiscal Year 2021 Congressional Submission. Available at https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/federal_emergency_management_agency.pdf

Federal Assistance: Grants¹²
(in millions)

| Program | FY 2020 Enacted | FY 2021 Authorized | FY 2021 President's Budget | Diff. of FY 2021 Pres. Budget and FY 2020 Enacted | |
|---|-----------------|---|----------------------------|---|---------------|
| | | | | \$ | % |
| Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG) | \$355.0 | \$750 ^D | \$344.3 | -\$10.7 | -3.1% |
| Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) | \$125 | \$187.5 ^E | \$0 | \$125 | -100% |
| Emergency Management Performance Grants (EMPG) | \$355.0 | \$950 ^F | \$279.3 | -\$75.7 | -21.4% |
| Flood Hazard Mapping and Risk Analysis Program (Risk Map) | \$263 | \$263 ^G | \$100 | -\$163 | -61.9% |
| High Risk Dam Safety (HHPD) | \$10 | \$40 ^H | \$0 | -\$10 | -100% |
| National Security and Resilience Grant Program (NSRGP) | N/A | Pending Legislative Proposal | 406.9 | \$406.9 | N/A |
| Port Security Grant Program (PSGP) | \$100 | \$400 ^I | 36.3 | -\$63.6 | -63.6% |
| Presidential Residence Protection Assistance (PRPA) | \$41 | Authorization via Appropriations | \$0 | -\$41 | -100% |
| Public Transportation Security Assistance and Railroad Security Assistance (TGSP) ... | \$100 | \$1,100 ^J | 36.3 | -\$63.6 | -63.6% |
| Regional Catastrophic Preparedness Grant Program (RCPGP) | \$10 | Authorization via Appropriations | \$0 | -\$10 | -100% |
| Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grants | \$355.0 | \$750 ^D | \$344.3 | -\$10.7 | -3.1% |
| State Homeland Security Grant Program (SHSGP) | \$560 | Such sums as are necessary ^K | \$331.9 | -\$228.1 | -40.7% |
| Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) | \$665 | Such sums as are necessary ^L | \$426.5 | -\$238.5 | -35.9% |
| Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention Grant Program (TVTP) | \$10 | Authorization via Appropriations | \$20 | \$10 | 100% |
| Total | \$2,949 | \$4,440.5 | \$2,325.8 | -\$623.2 | -21.1% |

^DThe *United States Fire Administration, AFG, and SAFER Program Reauthorization Act of 2017* (P.L. 115–98) reauthorized AFG and SAFER through FY 2023.

^EThe *Housing and Community Development Act of 1992* (P.L. 102–550) reauthorized EFSP.

^FThe *Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007* (P.L. 110–53) reauthorized EMPG.

^GThe *Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020* (P.L. 116–94) extended the National Flood Insurance Program and reauthorized Risk Map through FY 2020.

^HThe *Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act* (P.L. 114–322) authorized the HHPD.

^IThe *Security and Accountability for Every Port Act of 2006* (P.L. 109–357) authorized the PSGP.

^JThe *Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007* (P.L. 110–53) reauthorized TGSP.

^KThe *Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007* (P.L. 110–53) reauthorized SHSGP.

^LThe *Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007* (P.L. 110–53) reauthorized UASI.

FEMA'S CHALLENGES

There are several significant challenges facing FEMA that—combined or alone—could be devastating blows to an organization that had seemingly recovered from the failings of Katrina. Some questioned the effectiveness of the Agency following the devastation in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands in the fall of 2017 following the impacts of Irma and Maria,¹³ and the subsequent resignation of former Administrator Brock Long.

FEMA has tried to reframe and focus its work since 2017: revising its mission statement (“Helping people before, during, and after disasters,”¹⁴); releasing a streamlined strategic plan; and repeatedly stressing that disasters are “federally

¹²Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency—Budget Overview, Fiscal Year 2021 Congressional Submission. Available at https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/federal_emergency_management_agency.pdf.

¹³2017 Hurricane Season FEMA After-Action Report. Available at <https://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/167249>

¹⁴<https://www.fema.gov/about-agency>

supported, state managed, and locally executed.”¹⁵ That said, several hurdles exist to effectively converting these priorities into realities:

- *Senior leadership vacancies (HQ and Regions)*: Two of FEMA’s three Presidentially appointed, Senate-confirmed (PAS) leadership positions remain vacant: Deputy Administrator and Deputy Administrator for Resilience. Additionally, there are several vacancies and/or acting career and political Senior Executive Service (SES) positions across key offices at headquarters and FEMA’s ten regional offices.
- *Disaster workforce shortfalls*: The Agency has seen significant churn in the various cadres of disaster workforce employees. While there have been systemic issues in recruiting to fill these positions across administrations, there still do not appear to be any measurable gains to recruit and retain enough personal to meet the Agency’s projected needs.¹⁶ A forthcoming GAO examination requested by this Committee is expected in the coming weeks.¹⁷
- *Inconsistent policies*: FEMA is working to reform and standardize how Project Worksheets are developed for the Public Assistance (PA) program, to better align recoveries from region to region, but challenges remain. The Agency is now utilizing the PA National Delivery Model and the corresponding Grants Manager and Grants Portal systems for all ongoing recoveries, but there has been a learning curve as state, local, tribal, and territorial grantees and subgrantees use the new systems.¹⁸ FEMA has also centralized pieces of this process at three Consolidated Resource Centers in California, Texas, and Puerto Rico in an effort to lessen inconsistencies from one disaster to another.¹⁹ While these efforts are laudable and welcomed, there remains concern from disaster-impacted communities experiencing conflicting guidance from FEMA, and frustration with misalignment with other federal disaster recovery programs.
- *Harassment in the workplace*: Following high-profile allegations of sexual misconduct of a former Chief Component Human Capital Officer, former Administrator Brock Long announced in July 2018 the establishment of a new Office of Professional Responsibility (OPR).²⁰ OPR was established in 2019 and is in the process of hiring staff to fully execute its mission.²¹ Additionally, OPR is now investigating issues such as information technology policy infractions in addition to more serious harassment cases.
- *Puerto Rico/Virgin Islands recoveries*: Two and a half years after the 2017 hurricanes Irma and Maria, recovery funds are still slow to reach these U.S. territories in the Caribbean. As for the 2020 earthquakes that have struck Puerto Rico, the Governor’s request for a disaster declaration under the Stafford Act for permanent repair work was denied. Further, despite the FEMA Administrator having the authority and ability to do so following the President’s initial disaster declaration, FEMA has yet to approve this outstanding piece of the Governor’s initial request.²²
- *DRRA implementation*: FEMA continues work toward full implementation of the Disaster Recovery Reform Act (DRRA, Division D of P.L. 115–254), with significant attention being paid to the establishment and initial round of funds for the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program, which is the Agency’s re-branding of the Predisaster Mitigation (PDM) program following Congress’ establishment of a dedicated funding stream for PDM.

WITNESS LIST

- The Honorable Peter T. Gaynor, Administrator, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), U.S. Department of Homeland Security

¹⁵“FEMA: We are not the first responders”. Available at <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2018/05/31/fema-supports-puerto-rico-government-editorials-debates/35556537/>.

¹⁶GAO–19–617T—“EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT: FEMA Has Made Progress, but Challenges and Future Risks Highlight Imperative for Further Improvements”. Available at <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-19-617T>

¹⁷May 9, 2018 request letter to GAO Comptroller General from then Ch. Shuster and then RM DeFazio. Available upon request.

¹⁸FEMA Public Assistance Delivery Model Fact Sheet. Available at https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1534520496845-4b41646e3d8839c768deb3a7f4ded513/PADeliveryModelFactSheetFINAL_Updated_052418.pdf.

¹⁹Id.

²⁰July 30, 2018 Statement by FEMA Administrator Brock Long on the Results of a Recent Internal Investigation. Available at <https://www.fema.gov/news-release/2018/07/30/statement-fema-administrator-brock-long-results-recent-internal>.

²¹FEMA’s Director of the Office of Professional Responsibility, Lauren Kaufer, briefed the Committee on January 17, 2020.

²²44 CFR 206.40(c).

FEMA'S PRIORITIES FOR 2020 AND BEYOND: COORDINATING MISSION AND VISION

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 11, 2020

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PUBLIC
BUILDINGS, AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT,
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:04 a.m. in room 2167, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Dina Titus (Chairwoman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Ms. TITUS. The subcommittee will come to order.

I ask unanimous consent that the chair be authorized to declare recesses during today's hearing.

Without objection, so ordered.

I also ask unanimous consent that the Members not on the subcommittee be permitted to sit with the subcommittee at today's hearing and ask questions.

Without objection, so ordered.

Today we are going to examine the priorities of the Federal Emergency Management Agency and its vision for addressing the challenges the agency faces in meeting its strategic priorities.

I want to first welcome our new ranking member, Mr. Katko from New York State. We are delighted to work with you. We also sit together on the Homeland Security Committee, so many of those issues overlap. So I see a lot of opportunities for collaboration. We met personally, talked about some of our priorities, and we look forward to a great relationship going forward.

I also now want to welcome our guest, who is the Administrator for FEMA, Mr. Peter Gaynor, and also a colleague, Mr. Cicilline, who knows Mr. Gaynor and would like to introduce him. So I now recognize Mr. Cicilline.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the ranking member and the chair of the full committee for giving me this opportunity.

Mr. Gaynor served as my emergency management director for the city of Providence when I served as mayor from 2008 to 2014. His talent was then identified by our Governor, Governor Raimondo, who took him and hired him as the emergency manager and director for the State of Rhode Island from 2015 to 2018. And he was then named the Deputy Director of FEMA, and then ultimately, the Director of FEMA, and confirmed twice by the United States Senate. He served our country for 26 years as a United States Marine.

But I can tell you my own personal experience is that, as an emergency management professional, he is really spectacular. And, in fact, he took the city of Providence, which was a fairly disorganized emergency management operation, and made it the first city in America with an accredited emergency management agency. That is just one example of the extraordinary work that he did, and earned the deep respect of all of the partners, both in the city and the State, and someone I know who will continue to carry out this great work ethic, and professionalism, and dedication to the mission of emergency management.

And I learned yesterday that he was testifying before this subcommittee, and I am really grateful that you are giving me the opportunity to make the introduction. I can say, of all the many people I have worked with in my 25 years in public life, Pete Gaynor is at the top of the list, in terms of his professionalism, his expertise, his commitment to the public mission of emergency management, and I really appreciate the opportunity to share those thoughts with the committee, and thank you.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Cicilline. We appreciate that, and we look forward to working with Mr. Gaynor. We are glad now that he is no longer “acting.” We need that leadership at the head of FEMA, especially during these trying times.

FEMA is supposed to be led by three presidentially appointed, Senate-confirmed public servants, but here we are with only one, so there is a lot of responsibility that is falling on your shoulders. Usually we think that it is the Senate’s fault that things don’t get done, but that is not the case with FEMA. The White House hasn’t even nominated anyone to fill the other two positions.

This void in management at FEMA has come at a time when we are navigating several major disaster declarations and a pandemic with potentially devastating impacts all across the country. So strong leadership is essential at every level within FEMA.

There is also shared concern in this subcommittee that FEMA’s workforce is stretched thin, and you noted as much in your written testimony. We want to talk more about how we can address that. It is clear we need some solutions to improve recruitment and retention at FEMA so that the agency can effectively respond to the needs of communities in the wake of disasters.

It should go without saying that the Government must address the needs of all Americans in disaster recovery. However, some of our most vulnerable populations are being neglected or shamefully overlooked by existing FEMA programs. Committee staff have met with advocates from the disability and low-income communities regarding their frustration with FEMA’s attention, or lack thereof, to their needs in times of recovery. After years of progress on this front in response to the failures we saw in Hurricane Katrina, these communities fear that we are backsliding. We will discuss these issues, too, I am sure, further on in today’s hearing.

I appreciate how much you have embraced the Disaster Recovery Reform Act and the long-term benefits it will have, not only for the well-being of our people in times of disaster, but for the resilience of our public buildings and private homes. In the wake of disaster we should be building back better than what existed before.

That is why I was proud of the bipartisan work of this committee in passing H.R. 5756, the Resiliency Enhancement Act, cosponsored by Congresswoman Plaskett of the U.S. Virgin Islands and Congresswoman González-Colón of Puerto Rico.

Finally, I am certain that members of this committee will be interested in hearing updates on FEMA's involvement in the effort to prevent the spread of the coronavirus in the U.S. I know there are some developments just happening last night and this morning in the Senate, and we would like to have you address those, if this is the time for expanding the Stafford Act to cover coronavirus.

At the State, local, Tribal, and Territorial level, public health officials are working with their emergency management counterparts to boost public preparedness, safety, and education. To date, FEMA has not been part of the coordinated effort to these ends, as it was in 2000 in response to West Nile outbreak, and we would like to talk about that.

So I will close by saying we certainly recognize the challenges you face, Mr. Administrator, and we are here to help, because we want you to be successful in this job. Our communities need for you to be successful in this job. We look forward to working with you.

[Ms. Titus' prepared statement follows:]

Prepared Statement of Hon. Dina Titus, a Representative in Congress from the State of Nevada, and Chairwoman, Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management

Today we will examine the priorities for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and its vision for addressing the challenges the agency faces in meeting its strategic priorities.

I want to start by recognizing and welcoming our new Ranking Member, Mr. Katko of New York State.

We also serve on the Homeland Security Committee, which has some overlapping jurisdiction, so I see great opportunities for collaboration.

Our Subcommittee is responsible for a wide variety of issues and agencies, and produces more legislation than any other in this Committee.

I look forward to keeping these efforts on track and working with you and your staff.

This morning we are joined by FEMA Administrator Peter Gaynor who for the better part of the last year served in an acting role until he was confirmed earlier this year.

FEMA is supposed to be led by three presidentially-appointed, Senate-confirmed public servants. Yet, here we are, and you're the only one confirmed.

Here in the House, we often like to point to the lack of action in the U.S. Senate, but in this situation that's not the case.

The White House hasn't even nominated anyone to fill the other two positions. And this void in management at FEMA comes at a time when we are navigating several major disaster declarations and a pandemic with potentially devastating impacts all across the country.

Strong leadership is essential at every level within FEMA.

There is also shared concern in this Subcommittee that FEMA's workforce is stretched thin, and you note as much in your written testimony.

It's clear that we need solutions to improve recruitment and retention at FEMA so that the agency can effectively respond to the needs of communities in the wake of disasters.

It should go without saying that the government must address the needs of all Americans in disaster recovery. However, some of our most vulnerable populations are being neglected—shamefully overlooked by existing FEMA programs.

Committee staff have met with advocates from the disability and low-income communities regarding frustration with FEMA's attention to their needs in times of recovery.

After years of progress on this front in response to the failures we saw in Hurricane Katrina, these communities fear that we are backtracking.

We will discuss these concerns further during today's hearing.

I appreciate how much you've embraced the Disaster Recovery Reform Act and the long-term benefits it will have, not only for the well-being of our people in times of disaster, but for the resilience of our public buildings and private homes.

In the wake of disaster, we should be building back better than what existed before.

That is why I was proud of the bipartisan work of this Committee in passing H.R. 5756, the Resiliency Enhancement Act sponsored by Congresswoman Plaskett of the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Congresswoman González-Colón of Puerto Rico.

Finally, I'm certain that Members of this Committee would be interested to hear an update on FEMA's involvement in the effort to prevent the spread of the coronavirus in the United States.

At the state, local, tribal, and territorial level, public health officials are working with their emergency management counterparts to boost public preparedness, safety, and education.

To date, FEMA has not been part of this coordinated effort as it was in 2000 in response to the West Nile outbreak.

I'll close by saying that we recognize the challenges you face, Mr. Administrator, and we are here because we want you to be successful in this job. Our communities need you to be successful in your job.

Ms. TITUS. I will now recognize the ranking member for an opening statement.

Mr. KATKO. Thank you, Madam Chair, and I appreciate that. And I appreciate the opportunity to serve on this committee and this subcommittee.

And I want to echo your sentiments that we had a very good meeting before we came in here the last couple of days, talking about how we can proceed in a bipartisan manner. That seems to be the hallmark of this subcommittee, and it is a hallmark of what we do on the Homeland Security Committee, as well. So I am quite confident that we are going to be able to work well together and do good things together. We both are blessed with excellent staffers, as well, on this subcommittee. So I am excited for what the future brings for us on this subcommittee.

And I am happy to talk to you again, Mr. Gaynor. I want to thank you for coming to my district last year to talk about and look at and survey for yourself some of the disaster issues we have.

And when we had those discussions last year—I think you will recall, and we had them recently again—I voiced some of my concerns about FEMA, not so much how it is managed, but some of the Byzantine rules you have to go through to try and get disaster relief. What is considered as a disaster in upstate New York may pale in comparison to disasters elsewhere, but they are disasters, nonetheless, and I want to give you two quick examples.

One was Moravia, New York. They had a flash flood after torrential rain came down, and it basically wiped out the town's sewer and water systems, and roadways, and all kinds of damage. For them, it was catastrophic. For FEMA it was a blip on a screen, and they didn't get any money.

Something more severe happened recently that you were up in Lake Ontario for, and that was Plan 2014. That was implemented at the very end of the Obama administration, and it radically changed the regulation of water on Lake Ontario, and water levels on Lake Ontario for the first time in 70 years. In those ensuing 70 years, lakefront properties were developed, economic vitality became key for those counties on the lakeshore properties.

In fact, one of the counties, 50 percent of their tax revenue comes from lakeshore properties. And they have been devastated 2 out of the last 3 years since Plan 2014 has been implemented. And again this year, they are expecting catastrophic water levels, probably worse than the other 2 years.

So, again, it may not rise to the level of a big disaster for a place like New York City, but it is devastating for people in upstate New York. And when you have hundreds of millions of dollars of damages, and then you have to tell your constituents, “You don’t qualify under FEMA,” it is very frustrating. So I look forward to talking with you and developing programs that are going to help that.

While we are working to get changes to Plan 2014, it is critical we also work to recover and mitigate against future flooding, and find ways to help communities outside the major urban areas that may not meet the damage threshold for a Federal declaration. Key issues relate to support for preliminary damage assessments, and clarifying how severe localized impacts of disasters are considered in the declaration process.

Last year I introduced H.R. 4358, the Preliminary Damage Assessment Improvement Act, that would help clarify the support FEMA provides on damage assessments. I hope we can act on that legislation soon on this subcommittee.

I also look forward to working with members of this committee on how we can further improve the declaration process for disasters with localized impacts. From a broader standpoint, it is critical for us to focus on how we can approach disaster response and recovery in an innovative and commonsense way that makes sense for local communities hit by disasters and for the Federal taxpayer. I believe it can be done, and I am confident, with your leadership, we can get there.

I appreciate the progress being made on reforms we enacted in the Disaster Recovery Reform Act. However, as we are learning, more reforms and streamlining are needed to ensure communities can recover faster and smarter. Time is money, and the longer it takes for communities to rebuild, the higher the cost, not only for those communities, but also for the Federal taxpayer. So it serves no one when recovery drags on. We must find ways to do things differently to help speed up the process, and I am confident that you are the person to do that.

The DRRRA was a good step in cutting through some of the red-tape, but more is needed. I look forward to hearing from FEMA—from you, Mr. Gaynor—and working with members on the committee, on ensuring our emergency management system works effectively for communities preparing for, responding to, and recovering from disasters.

[Mr. Katko’s prepared statement follows:]

Prepared Statement of Hon. John Katko, a Representative in Congress from the State of New York, and Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management

I look forward to working with you, Chairwoman Titus, on critical issues of this Subcommittee as Ranking Member. I know traditionally this Subcommittee has worked in a bipartisan fashion and I hope we can continue that tradition.

I want to welcome FEMA Administrator Gaynor and congratulate him on his confirmation in January. I also want to thank him for visiting my district as acting administrator last year to survey the Lake Ontario flood damage. The International Joint Commission's Plan 2014 has caused high water levels along Lake Ontario resulting in devastating flooding in my district in New York. While a presidential declaration was issued in 2017, there was no declaration for the 2019 flooding. It may not rise to the level of a big disaster for New York City, but the flooding was devastating for people in Upstate New York.

And we continue to deal with flash flooding. While we are working to get changes to the Plan 2014, it is critical we also work to recover and mitigate against future flooding and find ways to help communities outside of the major urban areas that may not meet the damage threshold for a federal declaration. Key issues relate to support for preliminary damage assessments and clarifying how severe localized impacts of disasters are considered in the declaration process.

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I look forward to hearing from FEMA Administrator Gaynor and working with him and Members of this Committee on ensuring our emergency management system works effectively for communities preparing for, responding to, and recovering from disasters.

Mr. KATKO. And with that, Madam Chair, I yield back.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, and I now recognize the chairman of the committee, Mr. DeFazio.

Mr. DEFazio. Thank you, Madam Chair. Thanks for holding this hearing.

Mr. Administrator, thank you for being here today. Congratulations, I guess, on taking the job, and being confirmed. It is a very difficult job, as we all recognize.

I took the committee down to Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands a few weeks ago. In particular, the FEMA person in the Virgin Islands was very impressive. I guess it is his second tour of duty there. Puerto Rico is still a work in progress, I think, but I think FEMA is trying to get things on track. I couldn't tell whether some of the problems had to do more with the Government of Puerto Rico, or what the concern was, but I think they were going to finally start doing some housing reconstruction this month. And they say it is going to ramp up quickly. They have still got 24,000 blue tarps there.

And then we went over to the other side of the island, which is a different story. I mean, not only do they still have hurricane impacts, but the earthquake was quite devastating. For one thing, there are schools where the hurricane shelters—hurricane season is 3 months away, and the schools are collapsed. And most of the public buildings, too, are unusable, because they were pretty much all 1960s, 1970s vintage before we came up with more modern techniques that—and realized the extent.

One thing, though—and hopefully you will address that here—is that we still don't have approval for permanent repair assistance. I met with a group of the mayors over in Ponce, but they represented the whole earthquake zone. And, you know, that is a concern, because the public buildings have to be reconstructed, and—well demolished, then reconstructed, and the schools and—I don't know what exactly is holding that up.

And another observation would be people are having trouble with records again, particularly property records. And we adopted, after the hurricane, a self-certification document that FEMA used, but it isn't yet being used, or wasn't as of a few weeks ago in the earthquake zone. And I would hope that we can just dust off that form, and get these people the assistance they need more quickly.

With that, I look forward to hearing your remarks.

And also, I don't know if you will address this, or—it may come up in questions—what sort of planning is going on, since FEMA has played a key role, historically, in coordinating among agencies in, you know, SARs and some other things, whether that same role is being played today in the Federal Government.

[Mr. DeFazio's prepared statement follows:]

Prepared Statement of Hon. Peter A. DeFazio, a Representative in Congress from the State of Oregon, and Chairman, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Thank you Chair Titus, and thank you Administrator Gaynor for being here today.

As you know, this Committee is responsible for jurisdiction over all of FEMA's Stafford Act authorities, but also over Federal management of emergencies writ large.

I've unfortunately been here to see FEMA during some its worst moments, but also, during some of its best.

Last month, I led a delegation to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Two and a half years after hurricanes Irma and Maria devastated both, noticeable Federal recovery efforts leave a lot to be desired.

But my delegation got the sense from your local partners in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands that their FEMA counterparts were willing and committed to their full recoveries.

And, it's worth noting that we've noticed the uptick in approved Federal recovery assistance flowing to commonwealth and the territory.

I also want to note for the record that it's been nearly eight weeks since a magnitude 6.4 earthquake struck southern Puerto Rico, and you have still not approved permanent repair assistance. I am also troubled to hear that survivors are having to go through a similar rigamarole as what happened in the wake of the 2017 hurricanes when it comes to registering for Individual Assistance—it's bureaucratic, cruel, and unnecessary. FEMA developed a self-certification document two and a half years ago in Puerto Rico, and it should just be using it again this time around.

That said, I am pleased that you've accepted your promotion to this thankless role and that the Senate has confirmed you. As you know, you're only as good as your most recent disaster, so I expect you'll be leaning forward.

We have strong expectations that you will continue to advance full implementation of the Disaster Recovery Reform Act. We're looking forward to a robust new pre-disaster mitigation program later this year, as former Deputy Administrator Kaniewski previewed for us last May.

So, you've certainly got your work cut out for you.

We look forward to your testimony today, but also to this Subcommittee working with you as a partner to ensure you have all the authorities you need to execute on your mission of helping people before, during, and following disasters.

Thank you again.

Mr. DEFAZIO. With that, Madam Chair, I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I now recognize the ranking member of the committee, Mr. Graves, for an opening statement.

Mr. GRAVES OF MISSOURI. Thank you, Madam Chair, and I also want to thank Administrator Gaynor for being here today. And I also want to thank the Administrator for meeting with me and other members of the committee earlier.

Ensuring there is ongoing communication is very helpful for Members whose districts have obviously been impacted by disasters.

FEMA has a lot on its plate, and I know we have got more than 640 open disasters dating back to 2000. With 2017 to 2018 being record years for disasters, we have to find some innovative ways to speed up recovery and get people and communities back on their feet more quickly. Otherwise, FEMA resources are going to continue to be stretched thin, which slows that recovery process even more.

But redtape and bureaucratic requirements that may have been intended to save taxpayers' dollars, I think, actually cost the taxpayers more. And when FEMA resources are spent to claw back a few thousand dollars from an individual who applied for those funds in good faith, and may have spent those funds to repair their home, I think it costs more to collect those funds, or claw them back, and it also revictimizes those disaster victims.

And that is why I introduced the bill, Preventing Disaster Revictimization Act, which requires FEMA to waive those debts for victims in instances where the agency was at fault. And I very much appreciate the committee unanimously approving that bill last month.

But there are many more examples where current law in practice simply doesn't make sense, they increase costs, and they do slow recovery. And I hope to work with you, Administrator Gaynor, and the other members of the committee, on additional reforms to improve this process.

There is also a lot more in your portfolio, including preparedness and response. And I hope today we can also hear a little bit about FEMA's unique role with respect to coronavirus. While currently HHS is in the lead, should there need to be a declaration pursuant to the Stafford Act, by law, the Administrator is going to report and advise the President directly.

This requirement in law was a change after Hurricane Katrina to ensure the President is advised directly by the Government's emergency management expert. And while we hope such an emergency declaration is not needed, it is important that FEMA is at

the table now, so that, should it be needed, there is a seamless transition to FEMA as that lead agency.

But again, I want to thank Administrator Gaynor for being here, and I look forward to your testimony.

[Mr. Graves of Missouri's prepared statement follows:]

Prepared Statement of Hon. Sam Graves, a Representative in Congress from the State of Missouri, and Ranking Member, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

I want to thank FEMA Administrator Gaynor for being here today. I also want to thank the Administrator for meeting with me and other Members of the Committee. Ensuring there is ongoing communication is helpful for members whose districts have been impacted by disasters.

FEMA has a lot on its plate with more than 640 open disasters, dating back to 2000. With 2017 and 2018 being record years for disasters, we have to find innovative ways to speed up recovery and get people and communities back on their feet more quickly. Otherwise, FEMA resources will continue to be stretched thin—slowing recovery even more.

Red tape and bureaucratic requirements that may have been intended to save taxpayer dollars may actually cost the taxpayer more. When FEMA resources are spent to claw back a few thousand dollars from an individual—who applied for those funds in good faith and may have spent those funds to repair their home—it costs more to collect those funds and revictimizes the disaster victim.

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I hope today we can also talk about FEMA's unique role with respect to the Coronavirus. While currently HHS is in the lead, should there need to be a declaration pursuant to the Stafford Act, by law, the Administrator would report and advise the President directly. This requirement in law was a change after Hurricane Katrina to ensure the President is advised directly by the government's emergency management expert. While we hope such an emergency declaration is not needed, it is important that FEMA is at the table now so that should it be needed, there is a seamless transition to FEMA as the lead agency.

I want to thank Administrator Gaynor for being here today and look forward to his testimony.

Mr. GRAVES OF MISSOURI. And with that I would yield back the balance. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. TITUS. And I would now like to welcome our witness, the Honorable Peter T. Gaynor, who is the new Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, known as FEMA.

We thank you very much for being here today and for meeting with us. We look forward to your testimony.

Without objection, the witness' full statement will be included in the record.

And since your written testimony has been made a part of the record, the subcommittee requests that you limit your oral testimony to 5 minutes.

So, Mr. Gaynor, the floor is yours.

**TESTIMONY OF HON. PETER T. GAYNOR, ADMINISTRATOR,
FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY (FEMA), U.S.
DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY**

Mr. GAYNOR. Well, good morning, Chairman DeFazio, Chairwoman Titus, Ranking Members Katko and Graves, and distinguished members of the subcommittee. My name is Pete Gaynor, and I am the FEMA Administrator. It is an honor to appear before you today to discuss FEMA's strategic goals that will best serve the American people in 2020 and beyond.

Interwoven into our priorities is an understanding that emergency management is about putting people first, both the disaster survivors we serve and the individuals who serve them. The principles within our strategic goals for 2020 were designed with lessons learned from recent historic disasters which have tested our Nation's ability to respond to and recover from multiple concurrent disasters.

Recovery from these historic disasters continues today, even as we pivot to prepare for emerging threats facing our homeland. Resiliency is at the heart of America's heritage, and I remain confident in FEMA's ability to respond to any disaster, as well as support the efforts to contain and mitigate COVID-19.

Experience has demonstrated that one of the most effective ways to support FEMA's mission is by building a culture of preparedness before disasters take place. Developing resilient communities reduces both loss of life and economic disruption. Every dollar invested in mitigation is estimated to save the American taxpayer \$6 in future spending. It is for these reasons that building a culture of preparedness is the first goal within FEMA's strategic plan.

As a former emergency manager at the State and local level, I am mindful that all levels of Government share a fundamental responsibility for disaster preparedness. In 2020, I am directing the agency to focus on advancing shared responsibility across FEMA's mission space.

One of the most important ways to increase our preparedness for disasters begins with standardized building codes, which are designed to protect lives and property. State, local, Tribal, and Territorial governments must play a leading role in incorporating and enforcing disaster-resilient designs within our communities. Presently, less than half of U.S. jurisdictions have adopted the latest disaster-resilient building codes.

FEMA will also continue to promote shared responsibility for preparedness by implementing the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities grant program, also known as BRIC. This year, FEMA was able to make \$250 million available through BRIC to support pre-disaster mitigation programs designed to protect community lifelines and build more resilient infrastructure. As we move towards full implementation in October of this year, BRIC will continue to allow for larger and more consistent investments in preparedness.

One of the most important considerations for building codes and mitigation projects is the risk of catastrophic flooding. Flooding is the most common and costly natural disaster in the United States. Ninety-eight percent of the counties across the country have experienced a flooding event. Mitigating these risks to protect people and

property is not only a moral imperative, it is prudent fiscal policy. The investment in pre-disaster mitigation across the country has resulted in \$100 billion in avoided losses over the past 40 years.

In 2020, FEMA is focused on ensuring Americans are protected from floodwaters, both physically and financially. Flood insurance is the first line of defense. Managing risk through insurance helps families recover faster after disasters, and reduces the overall cost for taxpayers by lowering applications for assistance programs. In response to the 2019 flooding season alone, FEMA paid \$1.1 billion for 33,000 validated claims. Yet, despite these advantages, only 33 percent of the people living within the special flood hazard areas carry flood insurance. FEMA hopes to coordinate with Congress to make flood insurance more financially accessible to all Americans to close the insurance gap.

But to fully build a culture of preparedness, we must seek to incentivize external partners to proactively adopt better risk management practices by reducing Federal support for repetitive post-disaster repairs.

FEMA's second goal is to ready the Nation for catastrophic disasters. This includes low- and no-notice incidents, which can overwhelm governments at all levels and threaten national security. Our Nation's readiness largely depends on the emergency management professionals who execute FEMA's mission. I have had the opportunity to see our dedicated employees across the country first-hand, and I believe that we must support FEMA professionals as they support the American people.

Therefore, it is vital that we remain laser-focused on supporting our workforce by ensuring that our culture is reflected in our core values. FEMA will continue to ensure expeditious and fair review of allegations of misconduct through our Office of Professional Responsibility. We will also continue to prioritize that our workforce and leaders better reflect the diverse nature of our country.

The final goal in our strategic plan is to reduce the complexity of FEMA. FEMA must be adaptable to meet the needs of disaster survivors, and we must ensure that assistance programs are accessible by making them easier to navigate. Recovery funds currently come from 17 different Federal agencies, and FEMA does not want to burden survivors by adding the complexity of an already intricate system.

One of the most effective ways to reduce the complexity of emergency management is to reduce the overreliance on the Federal Government in the first place, and to better empower States and municipalities with the tools they need to manage smaller scale disasters. We are eager to work closely with Congress to increase this shared responsibility across the Nation. Whether it is increasing preparedness, readying the Nation for catastrophic disasters, or reducing the complexity of FEMA, increasing the shared responsibility of emergency management at all levels of Government is critical to our success. Emergency management works best when it is locally executed, State managed, and federally supported.

I would like to thank the lawmakers here today for providing FEMA with the resources to build a prepared and more resilient Nation, and thank you for the opportunity to testify. And I look forward to any questions you may have today.

[Mr. Gaynor's prepared statement follows:]

Prepared Statement of Hon. Peter T. Gaynor, Administrator, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), U.S. Department of Homeland Security

INTRODUCTION

Good morning, Chairwoman Titus, Ranking Member Katko, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Pete Gaynor, and I am the Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). It is an honor to appear before you today to discuss FEMA's evolving role in the emergency management community and our strategic priorities to best serve the American people in 2020 and beyond.

I am proud to be part of an agency that, every day, helps communities before, during and after disasters, and I firmly believe FEMA has the best mission in the Federal Government.

This job is about people—the disaster survivors we serve and the individuals who serve them.

The nation is counting on us to accomplish our mission and we will do so in accordance with our core values of compassion, fairness, integrity, and respect. In the winter of 2019, FEMA re-introduced our capstone doctrine, *Publication 1*, which outlines this ethos. This document, in conjunction with our Strategic Plan for 2018–2022, serves as the roadmap for the future of the Agency.

The guiding principles and priorities within these documents were designed with lessons learned from the rapid succession of historic disasters in recent years which have continued to test our Nation's ability to respond to and recover from multiple concurrent catastrophes.

Recovery from these historic disasters continues to this day, even as we pivot to prepare for the evolving threats facing our homeland—both natural and otherwise. In order to accomplish our mission, no matter what type of disaster takes place, it is imperative that the American people have the highest level of trust and confidence in FEMA's capabilities. This agency is often the last line of hope when a disaster strikes and cripples a community. We must be able to perform the delivery of lifesaving, life-sustaining resources on that community's worst day. With the gravity of this undertaking in mind, FEMA continues to champion our Strategic Plan, focusing on three key goals for the entire emergency management community: first, to Build a Culture of Preparedness; second, to Ready the Nation for Catastrophic Disasters; and, third, to Reduce the Complexity of FEMA. Our top priorities for 2020 are guided by these strategic goals.

PART 1: BUILD A CULTURE OF PREPAREDNESS

Building Codes

FEMA's mission is helping the American people before, during, and after disasters. One of the most effective and fiscally responsible ways to begin is by building a culture of preparedness before these disasters take place. Developing resilient communities ahead of an incident reduces both the loss of life and economic disruption, and every dollar invested in mitigation is estimated to save the American taxpayer six dollars in future spending. It is for these reasons that building a culture of preparedness is the first goal within FEMA's Strategic Plan.

Experience has demonstrated repeatedly that emergency management practices are most effective when locally executed, state managed and federally supported. FEMA cannot accomplish this mission alone. It requires mature and strong partnerships at the State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial (SLTT) levels. All levels of government, along with the private and non-profit sectors, share a responsibility for disaster preparedness. In 2020, I am directing the Agency to focus on advancing shared responsibility across FEMA's mission space.

One of the most fundamental ways to bolster our preparedness for disasters begins with standardized building codes designed to protect lives and property. Presently, only 30 percent of U.S. jurisdictions have adopted the latest disaster resistant building codes. In order to address this vulnerability, FEMA will continue to encourage robust code enforcement and provide the information or training needed to help convey the value of standardized, up-to-date building codes. In congruence with this priority, FEMA is hiring more Subject Matter Experts and engineers to work with

and contribute technical or engineering expertise to FEMA Headquarters, Regions and external stakeholders.

To provide local partners with financial support for preparedness projects, FEMA will continue to implement the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program. We would like to thank Congress for providing the legislative tools to create BRIC from Section 1234 of the Disaster Recovery Reform Act of 2018 (DRRA). Within its first year, FEMA was able to allocate \$250 Million through BRIC to support community pre-disaster mitigation programs designed to protect lifelines and build more resilient infrastructure. As the program continues to mature, BRIC will continue to allow for larger and more consistent investments in preparedness that aim to reduce future costs to the Disaster Relief Fund. The current target date for Notice of Funding Opportunity is August 2020.

Furthermore, over the course of the coming year, FEMA's Building Code Specialists will develop a national strategy for the adoption and enforcement of disaster resistant building codes through a state, local, tribal, territorial and partner-driven collaborative effort. As empowered by Congress in Section 1235(b) of DRRA, FEMA will use this initiative to identify national consensus-based codes and standards that resiliently incorporate hazard-resistant designs.

One of the most important building code considerations is the risk of catastrophic flooding. As millions of American families unfortunately have experienced firsthand, flooding is the most common and costly natural disaster in the United States. Indeed, 98 percent of counties have experienced a flooding event, and flood waters continue to pose a greater potential for damage than any other natural disaster. Mitigating these risks to protect people and their property is not only a moral imperative, it is a prudent fiscal policy. The local adoption of minimum standards has resulted in \$100 billion in avoided losses over the last 40 years.

Considering the frequency and high costs of disasters such as flooding, FEMA is exploring ways in which to financially incentivize state and local partners to proactively adopt better risk management practices by rethinking the federal share of the financial burden. We hope to work closely with our congressional partners to improve Public Assistance programs as well as to identify ways to reduce federal support for the repair of buildings or equipment in order to encourage more leaders at the state and local level to proactively increase mitigation investment and ultimately decrease federal disaster costs.

Closing the Insurance Gap

Another top preparedness priority for FEMA in 2020 is to ensure that Americans living within flood hazard areas are protected financially as well as physically. History has demonstrated that individuals, communities, and businesses that transfer their flood risk through insurance recover faster and more fully after a disaster. Approximately 40 percent of Americans do not have enough cash savings to cover a sudden unexpected expense and replacing their losses after a catastrophic event can force individuals to take on debt loads that prove disastrous in their own right. Insurance will help them to fill that financial void when a disaster occurs and better rebuild their lives in its aftermath.

Furthermore, while insurance benefits those directly affected by a disaster, it also reduces the need for federal disaster assistance and lowers the overall costs for American taxpayers. Despite the advantages, only 33 percent of Americans living within Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHAs) currently carry flood insurance policies, which is why closing this insurance gap remains a top strategic priority for FEMA. We hope to work closely with our congressional partners to improve the affordability of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) in order to ensure that all Americans are financially prepared for flooding. Specifically, we have proposed the establishment of a targeted means-tested affordability program for policyholders residing in the SFHA who cannot afford rate increases mandated under current law.

In addition, in order to help incentivize state and local communities to prioritize adequate insurance coverage and smart land management, FEMA plans to propose phasing out Public Assistance for public buildings. While the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF) supports survivors in the immediate aftermath of a major disaster declared under the Stafford Act, this federal support only serves as a temporary safety net for immediate needs and does not provide for complete financial recovery. Financial preparedness, including having an insurance policy on personal and public properties, is critical to helping rebuild a home, replace belongings, and restore order to a family and community.

Disasters are becoming costlier. Direct average annual flood losses have quadrupled from approximately \$4 billion per year in the 1980's to roughly \$17 billion per year between 2010 and 2018. In order to further incentivize state level investments that mitigate against these rising costs, FEMA plans to propose legislative

opportunities to promote shared responsibility for assistance to individuals and households. Specifically, we hope to work with our lawmakers to readjust the federal contribution and make states responsible for no more than 25 percent of all eligible costs in housing assistance after a disaster such as floods.

Incentivizing increased adoption of minimum standard building codes and closing the flood insurance gap is a fundamental strategic priority for FEMA in 2020 as we work to build a culture of preparedness.

PART 2: READY THE NATION FOR CATASTROPHIC DISASTERS

The second goal in FEMA's Strategic Plan for 2020 and beyond is to ready the nation for catastrophic disasters. Catastrophic disasters, including low- and no-notice incidents, can overwhelm the government at all levels and threaten national security. They are life-altering incidents for those impacted, causing a high number of fatalities and widespread destruction.

Catastrophic disasters disrupt lives and hurt our communities—physically and emotionally. Readiness is critical for FEMA and our partners to ensure that the response and recovery missions are appropriately executed and successful.

Expanding and Supporting our Workforce

The Nation's readiness depends on emergency management professionals who execute the mission on behalf of the Federal Government and SLTTs. This requires a scalable and capable National incident workforce that can adapt and deploy to a changing risk landscape, greater integration with our partners at all levels, and the ability to communicate and coordinate effectively in every situation. It is for these reasons that FEMA is focused on filling critical gaps in the Incident Management Workforce with applicants possessing enhanced qualifications to improve force strength and increase our readiness to respond to disasters throughout the country. Incident Management personnel are expected to maintain a constant state of readiness and preparation, and the agency is committed to regularly exercising and utilizing this workforce.

FEMA is also committed to ensuring that our expanding workforce is empowered to succeed in their mission. As outlined in our capstone doctrine, *Publication 1*, FEMA personnel are expected to collaborate with colleagues and assist survivors under the auspices of our core values: compassion, fairness, integrity, and respect. In order to ensure that our emergency management professionals are unhindered within the workplace and able to focus on the life-saving missions at hand, FEMA continues prioritizing resources to ensure expeditious and fair review of allegations of misconduct through our Office of Professional Responsibility.

I have seen firsthand the dedication our employees exhibit—from FEMA Corps members, to our incident workforce, local hires, reservists, and full-time employees. It is vital that we remain equally devoted to supporting our employees and ensuring that our work culture reflects our core values. It is my firm belief that if we take care of and empower the people of FEMA, then these steadfast public servants will be ready to deliver meaningful and much needed assistance to our citizens when they need it the most after a disaster. I was recently able to meet with one such employee in Puerto Rico who personifies this commitment to service. Mr. Luis Lozano, a Telecommunications Manager within our Joint Recovery Office, risked his own life to pull an unconscious stranger from a smoke-filled vehicle.

FEMA is not perfect. We must accept responsibility for our shortcomings and seek out solutions so our mistakes will not be repeated. However, for any failure we may have, I can show you countless success stories, large and small, that have made a difference in bettering the lives of disaster survivors and furthering the readiness of the Nation.

PART 3: REDUCE THE COMPLEXITY OF FEMA

The third overarching goal for FEMA is to reduce the complexity of our organization and the services we provide. FEMA must be a modern agency that can adapt to both the public and government's priorities, while creating and using innovative solutions for the emergency management mission. A simplified FEMA streamlines survivor experiences, simplifies processes and policies for disaster staff, and improves stewardship of federal taxpayer dollars.

FEMA is committed to simplifying our processes and putting survivors first. We are looking at ways we can streamline our assistance programs to make FEMA's programs as clear and easy as possible for survivors and grantees to navigate.

Reducing administrative and bureaucratic burdens will allow survivors and communities to receive federal assistance quicker. Throughout the Federal Government, there are several programs that offer assistance to survivors. Presently, FEMA ad-

ministers more than 40 financial assistance programs, issuing thousands of grant awards each year worth billions of dollars. We are working with our partners to improve some of these activities to ensure survivors can better navigate these various programs. For example, FEMA is consolidating and updating all FEMA Individual Assistance (IA) policies and program guidance to simplify and streamline information about IA programs. Through the Individual Assistance Program and Policy Guide created in 2019, FEMA has produced a single reference resource for all IA programs on behalf of SLTT partners assisting survivors in post-disaster recovery.

This drive to simplify the process is exemplified within FEMA's Grants Management Modernization Initiative and is another strategic priority for the agency in 2020 and beyond. The Grants Management Modernization (GMM) Program is a FEMA-wide initiative to modernize and consolidate existing FEMA grants management systems and business processes into one single IT Platform with one common grants management life cycle to better support the agency's mission. We will continue to prioritize this program in 2020.

FEMA's commitment to reduce complexity, uniformly administer grants, and ensure the proper controls for its grant programs will improve the Agency's ability to support survivors and communities. By increasing transparency and prioritizing analytics, FEMA is taking the steps necessary to keep pace with a rapidly changing world, streamline its processes to stay ahead of emergencies, and deliver swift, effective assistance in times of greatest need.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would like to thank Congress and the President for providing FEMA with the resources to help people before, during and after disasters while allowing us to strive for our vision of a prepared and more resilient Nation. Every disaster is unique with its own set of challenges, yet in the spirit of constant improvement, we are exploring how to incentivize investments that reduce risk and reduce disaster costs at all levels.

As we examine and further develop these initiatives, we will find that some can be accomplished by existing authorities Congress has already provided to us. There will also be some challenges that cannot be solved by administrative action alone. As we identify these opportunities to improve the Agency, we will work with this committee and the rest of Congress to ensure we move forward in close partnership. I look forward to working in concert with you to accomplish our shared goals in service of the American people.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on behalf of the dedicated employees of FEMA and share the priorities of this Agency in 2020 and beyond. I look forward to answering any questions that you may have.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Administrator, for being here. We appreciate your testimony. We are now going to move on to Member questions. Each Member will be recognized for 5 minutes, and I will start by recognizing myself.

Administrator Gaynor, you discussed the need to grow and retain your national incident management workforce. We are spending millions of dollars to train these folks, only to see them then leave their jobs. Based on the briefings we have received over the last year, any gains FEMA made in growing its workforce have been offset by relatively equal numbers of people who are leaving.

You have been at the agency and at this kind of work for a long time. I wonder if you have some plans, what you are thinking about, keeping these public servants from leaving after they learn the skills to deal with disasters.

And have you explored seeking similar return-to-work protections that Americans interested in serving in disasters could have, similar to the National Guard and military reserve, so when they go off to duty, when they come back, they have a guaranteed job, something like that?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am. Thank you for your question.

First I would like to say that I think I have the greatest workforce in Federal Government, along with the greatest mission in

Federal Government, helping people before, during, and after disasters.

We have been focused on making sure that we attract and recruit the best qualified individuals from across the country to come and join our mission, as well as retain all those great employees that come here to participate in providing disaster assistance to disaster survivors across the country in all sorts of different circumstances.

This has been one of my first goals, even as the Deputy Administrator at FEMA, and continues to be my goal today, to make sure that we have a diverse, ethical, integrated workforce from the beginning. And so I have a number of different initiatives going on within our mission support branch to focus on retention and retaining, career path, and—again, we retain—we put a lot of money and invest a lot of money into our workforce, and it is our number-one priority. Without people, you know, it makes it extremely difficult for me to deliver any kind of mission. So this is my first priority.

Ms. TITUS. That is great. We often see pictures and hear stories of heroes during times of disaster, and we hate to lose them, or not get them in the first place because they are afraid they will lose their job, and then what will they go home to.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am.

And for US&R, I think we would love to have a conversation with Congress about moving that forward.

Again, the large majority of my workforce are reservists, about 12,000. And these are the people I count on every day to leave their homes, go to the field, and, again, provide that disaster assistance to our disaster survivors. So, again—

Ms. TITUS. Well—

Mr. GAYNOR [continuing]. A critical part of our workforce.

Ms. TITUS. Well, great, we look forward to working with you on that.

My second question—and this is something I noted in the opening statement—is I am concerned about what appears to be backsliding with FEMA's work with people with disabilities. The Office of Disability Integration and Coordination was established a decade ago, but the administration seems to be pulling back in their efforts with the community.

The ODIC is absent from the weekly national disability stakeholders' calls, they are consistently absent in any discussion related to emergency. And the emergency preparedness report released last fall, which guides FEMA's mission, makes zero mention of people with disabilities.

Could you speak to these concerns, and give some assurances to us, as well as the 61 million Americans who have a disability, that you are not forgetting them, and that you do see them and their challenges?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am. The Office of Disability Integration and Coordination works directly for me. The Director and I have traveled numerous times to make sure that we are connecting with that community.

I have a sister who has a disability, so this is at the top of my priority list, making sure that we serve everyone, to include those with access and functional needs.

The office has conducted numerous outreach to dozens of different stakeholders in the community: Wounded Warrior Project; our National Council on Disability; National VOAD, who represents 70 or 80 different volunteer organizations. I believe that our outreach is comprehensive.

We also have the ability to send disability-integrated employees to disaster sites to make sure that we are taking care of those disaster survivors who need it the most.

I would be happy to provide you or any member of the committee a brief from my team on all the things that we are doing to improve the connection between disaster services to those with access and functional needs.

Ms. TITUS. Well, I think that would help reassure folks. But also, maybe you could direct the Office of Disability Integration and Coordination to get on those national stakeholder calls, and that would be an improvement, as well.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you. I now recognize the ranking member for 5 minutes.

Mr. KATKO. Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate that. I am going to kind of give you a fact pattern, and then maybe we can work from that fact pattern, because I think it would be instructive here.

I mentioned Plan 2014 in my opening statement, but I just want to kind of give you a couple of examples that have happened. Since Plan 2014 has been implemented, there has been catastrophic flooding on Lake Ontario 2 out of the first 3 years of its implementation.

Sodus Bay makes up 50 percent of the tax revenue for Wayne County, or other shoreline properties. And they have been dramatically affected. And the town of Sodus Bay really is going to be—literally, going to be under water this year. And there are multiple restaurants, marinas that are probably going to not survive, financially.

Same with Fair Haven next door. Greene Point Marina, for example, has been in existence for 115 years, is on the verge of going out of business because they have suffered over \$4 million worth of losses and damages from these two flooding acts.

Put your face on this, too. Bill and Karen Dunn, they bought a house in 2017 on Lake Ontario that had not had flooding in 90 years, and 2 out of the 3 years their house has been under water. And they are not wealthy people.

And this is going on across 200 miles of Lake Ontario shoreline. And, to date, zero FEMA funds are going there because of the technical rules, if you will. And I know I have talked to you about this, and I am—not to accuse you, I am just saying I want to know how we can fix this and think about this. And you add into what happens in those smalltown disasters—we are really a blip on the screen for FEMA, but for those small towns, they are catastrophic disasters, like I mentioned with Moravia.

And I know the Disaster Recovery Reform Act directed FEMA to give greater consideration for localized impacts of disasters and declarations. And I know you have pushed out some guidance to

your regions. But, from a practical standpoint, how is localized impact giving greater weight?

And what are the shortcomings now?

What can we do, moving forward, to try and get a better handle on this?

And if it needs legislation, tell me what we need.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir. So, as it relates to flooding, and whether it is in your district or across the country, really, the best defense against flooding is insurance: 1 inch of water is \$25,000 in damage.

And if I can give you an example from Hurricane Harvey in Houston—and we have a couple different programs that we offer in disasters. One of them is Individual Assistance. And the cap for Individual Assistance is about \$34,900. That is the max you can get. And the other program is in NFIP, National Flood Insurance Program. The cap on that is \$250,000 for the structure, and another \$250,000 for the content.

So in Harvey, very few people max out in IA, very few. The average IA check that we sent to disaster survivors was about \$6,000, average. If you had flood insurance, the average check that you got from the insurance company, NFIP, was about \$119,000. And again, the difference is dramatic. Will \$6,000 be helpful in a flooding event? Absolutely. But will it help you repair or build your house back? It will be a difficult stretch. But if you had \$119,000, it is a good start to getting your life back.

So I would just implore everyone—again, this is the insurance gap that I talked about. Flood insurance is your best defense. The average cost for an insurance program is about \$700 across the Nation. And you can get that through your local insurance adjuster. So it doesn't matter—

Mr. KATKO. Does that go up if there is continuous flooding that is evident?

Mr. GAYNOR. Say that one more time, sir.

Mr. KATKO. Does that go up, the premiums go up, if there is continuous flooding happening?

Mr. GAYNOR. Again, I think you would have to call your insurance broker—

Mr. KATKO. OK, we will check that out, OK.

Mr. GAYNOR [continuing]. To kind of get the details about where you live, and what your risk is. I mean I don't want to give any specifics on it, because it is, I think, house by house. But again, essentially, it is the best defense.

When it comes to localized impacts, we have six things we look at. And we want to give greater weight to localized impacts, but that doesn't necessarily mean it—like localized—greater weight on localized impacts wins every time. I mean there is a tension between localized impact and the capacity of a local community or a State or a county—

Mr. KATKO. OK, applying what you know about Lake Ontario and what has been happening up there, do you foresee possibly seeing a different result of what they have had so far, which is basically nothing?

Mr. GAYNOR. For an award?

Mr. KATKO. Yes.

Mr. GAYNOR. Well, again, sir, it is based on damages and eligibility and, you know, we do this—it is called a pre-disaster assessment on damages.

Mr. KATKO. Yes, just—I am getting ready to run out of time, so I just want to interrupt you real quick.

There is, literally, hundreds of millions, if not billions of dollars' worth of damages on this shoreline that can be proven, but they don't fall into the FEMA bucket. And that is our concern. That is the point I am trying to get at.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir.

Mr. KATKO. And so what can we do about that?

Mr. GAYNOR. There are 19 different Federal agencies that have probably 90 different disaster programs. I would be happy to work with you and your staff to see is there another program other than FEMA that fits into that problem set that we can help with.

Mr. KATKO. Thank you. I yield back.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you. We will work on that.

I now recognize the chairman for 5 minutes.

Mr. DEFAZIO. Thanks, Madam Chair.

Mr. Administrator, I raised the issue of the Individual Assistance and self-certification consequent to what I had heard in Puerto Rico. And you had developed this process previously, but it isn't being currently applied for the earthquake victims.

So what is the rationale to change back to the more difficult process?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir. I was just in Puerto Rico after the new year, and we are using self-certification, the same process that we used in Maria. There is no difference. I asked that specific question to make sure that we didn't create a new program. It has been in use since days after the earthquake struck. And again, I have had direct contact with my leadership down there on this topic.

Mr. DEFAZIO. OK, well, we heard some things to the contrary when we were down there, and if you could just maybe reach back out again, particularly—

Mr. GAYNOR. I will—

Mr. DEFAZIO [continuing]. As relates to the earthquake—

Mr. GAYNOR. I will follow up.

Mr. DEFAZIO. Yes.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir.

Mr. DEFAZIO. That would be good.

Also, the chancellor of Germany said today she expects, according to her experts, that 70 percent of the people in Germany will get the COVID-19. And there is, really, no reason that—you know, if that does happen in Germany, it is likely to happen here.

And I am just wondering what kind of disaster pre-planning, continuity for FEMA itself is being done now in anticipation that we might have a national disaster declaration. We certainly have a number of States already that have declared disasters.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir. And if I can divide it into a couple of different buckets—

Mr. DEFAZIO. Sure.

Mr. GAYNOR. So we are in support of HHS. They are the lead in this COVID-19 disease. And so we have, from the beginning, been providing interagency coordination, planning, analysis on a number

of different things that we have a specialty in. So we have been in support from day one. I have about 30 people that work every day in support of HHS.

When it comes to inside FEMA, I have three priorities that I have given the workforce from the beginning. Number one is preserve and protect the force. I need to protect my workforce because my number two priority is to be able to deliver my mission-critical missions in a degraded COVID-19 environment. So make sure we have enough people to execute our mission-essential functions. And then lastly, number three, is support HHS and anything they need for their attack on squashing COVID-19 across the country. Those are the three priorities that we operate on today.

We have members of the task force that are in consultation with them daily about what they need. And so it changes every day. It is fluid, it is dynamic. And, I know the administration is looking at all tools at their disposal to do battle COVID-19.

Mr. DEFAZIO. OK, thank you.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you. I now recognize Mr. Graves.

Mr. Graves?

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Administrator, thank you for being here. I appreciate the opportunity to meet with you again. And as I told you last time, I am not sure how many people I would wish that job on. That is a tough job that you have stepped into, and you have inherited an awful lot of disasters that are going on, as the ranking member noted earlier.

I want to flag a few things for you.

Number one, the Disaster Recovery Reform Act that became law in 2018, and a bipartisan bill that many members in this committee worked on, it had a provision in there related to rebuilding of schools and other public facilities. In the Stafford Act it says that each facility that floods—"facility that floods"—is to have a \$500,000 deductible.

The way that FEMA has applied that is they have applied that \$500,000 facility—which I view as being in a school—they have applied it to a storage shed, they have applied it to a gymnasium, they have applied it to the elementary school building, they have applied it to the middle school building, they have applied it to the high school building, they have applied it to the cafeteria. So, all of a sudden, what would have been a \$500,000 payment that I think Congress intended in Stafford, has become, who knows, an \$8 million payment.

Many of our schools get their funds from property taxes. Properties have been destroyed during the floods. So you can just see this whole cascading effect.

So in that bill Congress enacted a change that made it clear it was \$500,000 per facility, period, for a school, for a jail, whatever it is. That was law over a year ago. We have schools that still have not been rebuilt from our August 2016 flood because FEMA has not changed their rules. They have not implemented this law that was put in place over a year ago.

So we have children that are being affected. We have schools that are doubling up. We have temporary buildings. We have

schools that are literally in the same shape they were in before, because they can't afford to rebuild them, because they can't afford the deductible.

Could you please make this a priority, and fix this? The law is crystal clear. I think the law was clear before; now it is even more clear, if that is possible. Would you please make this a priority and get this fixed as soon as possible?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir. And I will look into the specifics of how we have applied it, and the actual—you know, right down to the local and county and State level. I don't know enough detail about how we are actually applying it, but you have my commitment that I will get you feedback, and we will compare what the law says and how we are applying it. And we will work towards—

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. Thank you.

Mr. GAYNOR [continuing]. So that we—

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. Administrator, I don't think there is any argument over what the law says. Actually, Congress has stepped in and done the same thing in the past for past disasters, whenever FEMA has applied—and again, in my opinion—inappropriately applied Stafford. So there is nobody who should be reinventing the wheel. You can cut and paste what you have done in the past, and just apply it here.

The second issue is—because I am burning time here—the second issue, we also included a provision in there that, I think, was very well-thought, bipartisan support, that says that FEMA should get together with the Federal Highway Administration and develop standards for evacuation routes. And the reason is because, in the event of disasters, we have found that many of our evacuation routes are inundated or otherwise impassable.

Now, you think about that for a minute. If our evacuation routes are impassable, that is a big deal. In our August 2016 flood the interstate barrier between the east and west lane actually served as a levee—we needed levees, not there—which exacerbated flooding to the tune of 6 and, in some cases, maybe as high as 8 feet higher inundation on the north side of the interstate. It actually created victims, because the people couldn't get off the interstate. They were stuck on these little interstate islands. We had to fly helicopters to drop food and supplies to them. It was ridiculous.

So we put a provision in and said, hey, get with Federal Highway Administration, develop the right standards.

Nothing has been changed on this interstate. Nothing. Would you please look into this, and make this a priority? There was some very tenuous guidance that was issued that didn't even come close to hitting the mark on this. So would you please look into this, and make sure that this works?

Mr. GAYNOR. I will, sir.

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. All right, and last question. I am going to guess that, if you did work and you didn't receive a paycheck for a couple of years, that would probably make it very difficult on you—I don't know if you are married, but—your spouse, your family. We have contractors in Louisiana that have done work in the Virgin Islands. Look, I know we can point fingers at everybody, we can point fingers at the companies, we can point fingers at the USVI Government, you can point fingers at me. I don't care.

Administrator, this is not OK. You are losing your disaster response capabilities across the United States. You are going to be limited to having two big companies left, and they are going to gouge you on prices. This is not in your interest. Would you please step in and provide some leadership and address this?

I yield back.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you. I now recognize Representative Holmes Norton for 5 minutes.

Ms. NORTON. I very much appreciate this hearing, Madam Chair.

Administrator Gaynor, I looked at your strategic plan. It covers 4 years. I looked at your so-called "Publication 1". You call it a capstone document. Given the extreme weather—and some of it has been discussed here, and they, of course, amount to floods and fires and hurricanes and earthquakes—there was no mention of the climate change that may be the cause of these increases, and the seriousness.

So I need to know whether you recognize what is happening across the country and across the world as significantly different from what FEMA has experienced before, and that climate change is real.

Yes, sir?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am. Just to be clear on "Publication 1," "Publication 1" is really focused on the people of FEMA, and that is kind of the purpose of that document.

So when it comes to climate change, you know, we are, at FEMA, committed to respond to any disaster, no matter the cause. But that doesn't say we don't embrace a changing climate. Every mitigation plan in the United States at the State level is required to address changing conditions. They need to change the extreme environment, they need to address infrastructure, they need to address demographics to make sure that we address it.

You can look at the past 75, 80 years—and I will just pick hurricanes—they are more frequent, they are more intense, they are more costly, they are more deadly. And we understand that. And for my role here at FEMA—and this is the same concept I have had as a local and at State—we will—we embrace all of those things.

And I am not going to argue with the science of it. My, really, job is to make sure that the Nation—I am prepared to deliver those disaster resources to the Nation, no matter the cause.

And so I am going to get graded on my response to a disaster. And you can name any one of them. And that is what we are focused on. However, we embrace all of those things to make sure that we have good planning, that we invest in pre-disaster mitigation. We realize that we cannot sustain the cost of disasters like we have seen in 2017 and 2018.

Again, I thank Congress for passing the DRRRA that allowed us to set aside 6 percent of disaster costs for pre-disaster mitigation. That changes the dynamic in the country, saying that we are going to invest in pre-disaster mitigation before a disaster happens. That is my tool to address some of those concerns that you have.

Ms. NORTON. Well, that is—your answer is important because, obviously, what we are experiencing today is a difference in quality

and in quantity of what we have ever experienced. So you are going to be the capstone agency. There is no way to get around who the Nation will look to, so I appreciate what you said.

Now, the Nation's Capital, which I represent, is located on two rivers, the Anacostia and the Potomac, and has experienced very severe flooding. I mean flooding even on our main avenues, where the Archives are, where the most important businesses are. I am very pleased in your testimony, while you didn't mention the words "climate change," you did talk about resistant infrastructure. You did talk about catastrophic flooding.

What is FEMA doing to prepare for urban flooding where you may have whole cities under water, or important parts of cities like the Nation's Capital?

What is FEMA doing to prepare for that kind of catastrophe that could face, not only the Nation's Capital, but many other cities which are located on the banks of rivers?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am. I think we are addressing all kinds of flooding. When people think of flooding, they think of a hurricane and, you know, Houston that floods. But again, in my opening statement, 98 percent of the counties in America have flooded. So it is just not coastal communities, it is any community that really—

Ms. NORTON. Is that new, that virtually every community has flooding? Is that new in the United States?

Mr. GAYNOR. We kind of say laughingly that if it rains, it floods. Just because you are not on a coast doesn't mean that you won't flood.

And so one of the things we ask individuals, homeowners, is assess your risk where you live. Are you at risk of flooding?

And if you are at risk of flooding, do you have flood insurance? Again, it is the best defense against flooding. It will get you back to normal quicker than a FEMA Individual Assistance program where, again, the average in Hurricane Harvey was only about \$6,000. I would rather give you that check for \$250,000 because you insured your home, and maybe another \$250,000 because you insured the contents of your home. That is how we really want to make a difference in the United States, is close that insurance gap so people are best protected.

The FEMA headquarters is in a rented building in Washington, DC. We are in a commercial building. Across the street from me is the Education Department. Because my building is commercial, it is insured. The building across the street from me is a Federal building which is not insured. So, again, we really need to take a hard look at what we insure in America, to include homes.

What are we doing to address local problems? I would be happy to connect with the DC local emergency managers to see what—how they are doing it, because it really is—again, back to shared responsibility, they have a mission to make sure that, in this certain specific case, that they reduce or minimize flooding in Washington, DC. So I would be happy to connect the both of you to see what they are doing in tangible terms to prevent that from happening.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. TITUS. We now recognize Miss González-Colón for 5 minutes.

Miss GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN. Thank you, Madam Chair, and good morning to Mr. Gaynor.

And first of all, I want to say thank you for always answering my calls, my texts regarding many of the issues regarding Puerto Rico and the two previous disasters, Hurricane Irma, Hurricane Maria, and now the earthquakes at the southwestern part of the island. So, I mean, for me, it is important every time we do have cases, as you may know, that you are always there. So I appreciate that. It has made a big difference.

I was taking notes of Chairman DeFazio's comments in terms of the roundtable we had with the mayors in Puerto Rico when the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure went there, as well as many other Members of Congress. And many of them are still wondering when the major—approvals for start to permanent works, mitigation programs are going to happen. Can we have the current rate of Maria projects, Hurricane Maria projects approval, in terms of municipalities in the State government? Do you have that information?

Mr. GAYNOR. I just missed—are we talking about Maria or earthquake—

Miss GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN. Maria, Maria.

Mr. GAYNOR. And I just—

Miss GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN. Hurricane Maria. OK, many of the mayors in Puerto Rico, the municipalities, are still asking when the major projects are going to be approved. So I am asking if you do have a rate of approval of those major projects.

Mr. GAYNOR. Again, I was down, I met with you and the Governor of Puerto Rico, the staff of COR3, and my leadership down there, Alex Amparo, on many of these topics. It is—and we met with mayors, as you all know.

And part of our goal was to make sure—and there are many small projects that we want to get on the street. Our goal was to get 200 small projects a month approved. And we are—last month I think it was 211. It will grow. And those small projects directly impact the 78 municipalities on Puerto Rico. It will help those mayors show progress and recovery. We are committed to making sure that we keep that pipeline open, and get those small projects into those communities where it will make a big difference. Not really big projects, but projects that make a difference in a small community anywhere in Puerto Rico.

So, again, it is one of my priorities, and it is a priority of Mr. Amparo's, to make sure that we deliver on what we said.

Miss GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN. Thank you. And maybe not for now, but if you can, submit to the committee data regarding the approval and disbursement on emergency funds still pending, as well as approval for start of permanent work and mitigation project spending. And if we do have that rate of all the projects that are being approved, not just the small projects, but the main projects, because that is still one of the concerns.

I do know that the new Governor requested a change for the alternative procedure. And, my question is, is the new model now fully implemented on the island? Is that better, in terms of taking cases more easily?

New delivery model. I think you need to turn on your mic.

Mr. GAYNOR. It is on.

Miss GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN. OK, perfect.

Mr. GAYNOR. We are committed to that model. It works in Puerto Rico. We didn't have it from the beginning, we kind of did it mid-stream. But I think now it shows results.

And I always smile when a mayor knows the exact process in that. I think in Puerto Rico they call it the snake—where their projects are, what phase they are in, and when they can expect it to, again, be a tangible result at the end of that process.

It has been a long slog in Puerto Rico, and I get that. And recovery is never fast enough for disaster survivors, and it is not fast enough for us.

I think we have made major headway in the past 6, 8 months on policy, process, rules. And you will see here shortly major projects be approved and on the street. We have done all the work, we have done all the scoping, we have settled on all the rules about how we are going to treat all these different sectors, whether it is the electrical sector, or health, or education. All those rules have been agreed to. And now you will see that model put out results. And I think that is what we are all looking for.

And again, we are committed to the recovery in Puerto Rico.

Miss GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN. Thank you. Do you see that happening before the third anniversary of Maria in September of this year, major projects being expedited or beginning?

Mr. GAYNOR. I do. I do. I think you will see the first major projects shortly. Yes, ma'am.

Miss GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. TITUS. Now I recognize Representative Johnson for 5 minutes.

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. Thank you. Administrator Gaynor, the President's fiscal year 2021 proposed budget cuts the Disaster Relief Fund by over \$12 million, an almost 70-percent decrease from DRF's fiscal year 2020 allocation. How would the proposed budget cut affect FEMA's ability to carry out a culture of preparedness, ready the Nation for catastrophic disasters, and streamline the complexity of the agency?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir. I think the cut is reflected in FEMA receiving a supplemental, either in the budget year or the previous budget year, that made us redo the math.

Today I have \$42 billion in the DRF. We are healthy when it comes to having enough money to deal with all the disasters that are on the books, and all the disasters or—the next coming hurricane season. We have enough money in there to respond to and recover from a number of disasters that we are working on, or a disaster that may beset us in the next year.

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. Thank you. President Trump's budget also calls for a \$163 million reduction to the Flood Hazard Mapping and Risk Analysis Program. Since flooding is the most common and most costly disaster to repair from, how would the agency plan to execute flooding mitigation plans in lieu of such drastic cuts?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir. And again, I think the cut is just reflective of how much progress we have made on flood mapping. We have 100 percent of the highest risk flood areas in the United States mapped. We have about one-third of the entire catalog mapped of

the United States. There is another third that are at low risk, areas that have no people in them, or have no risk of flooding that would impact either facilities or individuals. We will work through that. And then we have another third that we have to map.

I think we have sufficient funding to do mapping over the next couple of years. We actually map about 20 percent a year. And so maps get refreshed every 5 years. So we do 20 percent of the catalog every year, and then every 5 years the entire catalog is updated.

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. Sure. So——

Mr. GAYNOR. We could always do more, but right now I think we made good headway.

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. But is——

Mr. GAYNOR. We digitized the majority of these maps today——

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. Well, is it your testimony that \$163 million cut from the Flood Hazard Mapping and Risk Analysis Program would not hurt your efforts?

Mr. GAYNOR. I think part of it is——

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. Is that your testimony?

Mr. GAYNOR. I think, for us, it is a capacity issue. I think, for the amount of work we have in front of us, the amount of people who are assigned to it, the amount that we have today is sufficient.

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. Well, let me ask you this question, sir, and thank you.

As I know you—well, one of the most prevalent issues facing the agency currently is an understaffed workforce. In response to Chairwoman Titus' question you stated that you seek to create a diverse, ethical, and integrated workforce. Can you expound on how you plan to achieve this objective, and explain why you believe that a diverse workforce is important in enabling FEMA to accomplish its mission?

Mr. GAYNOR. Well, if I answer the last one first, because we need to reflect what the country looks like. And so having a diverse workforce is important to us.

This past October—and one of the Members referenced “Publication 1,” which is, “We are FEMA,” and it really is about who we are, what we do, how we deliver our services, and what we believe in. And so I have doubled down on our core values of compassion, integrity, respect, and fairness. That is how I want every employee to operate. If you use those core values to operate in sometimes a complex, difficult, challenging environment, you will never make a wrong mistake, or have a wrong solution.

We need to invest more in our incident workforce. Today I have enough personnel to respond to anything in the United States. We have a challenge on the recovery side. Again, I think Member Graves referenced 640 open disasters dating as far back as the year 2000. So there are a lot of open disasters. Last year flooding was prevalent across the Midwest. About 70 brandnew disasters last year. So we need to do a better job in, again, telling people who we are, so they want to join our ranks.

Again, I believe I have the best mission in the Federal Government, helping people before, during, and after disasters. I need to attract those kind of people to come to FEMA so I can deliver those services to the American people. We are working hard at it, to

make sure that we double down on how we recruit, where we recruit, and how we retain people. It is important to our mission. We can't do it without people. And that is the bottom line.

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. Thank you, sir.

I yield back.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you. Now I recognize Mr. Palmer for 5 minutes.

Mr. PALMER. I thank the chairman.

Administrator Gaynor, this is an issue that I had brought up, I think, on the Oversight and Reform Committee, and I want to revisit here, about the FEMA trailers. And there was an Associated Press report from December 2017 that detailed FEMA's management of trailers leased to disaster victims, and noted that the Federal Government spends up to \$150,000 for these mobile homes, which are used for about 18 months, and then auctioned off for considerably less than what FEMA pays for them.

Since this report initially came out—and I assume you are familiar with that report—has FEMA made any changes to, first of all, the process by which they procure these mobile homes?

And they are not your fancier mobile homes, to start with. That price seems rather high, but—and your disposition of them afterwards.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir. We are cognizant of the cost of all sorts of disaster supplies or materials.

Mr. PALMER. I have only got a little bit of time, so I want to really drill down on this.

So what concerns me is I understand that there would be some issues with storage or parking these things after you use them, but does it make sense to pay \$150,000 for a housing unit, and then auction it off for prices below \$10,000?

Mr. GAYNOR. Sir, there is a certain cost of doing business in emergency management. So we buy supplies. We buy water. We buy food. We buy housing units to have, to be ready. And in some cases you may not have enough, and you have to go out to the market to buy more. And so you—sometimes you—

Mr. PALMER. OK.

Mr. GAYNOR [continuing]. Pay a premium. But our mission is to deliver.

Mr. PALMER. I understand, but—and I am trying to help you. This is not—just from a practical perspective, that if you paid this for these mobile homes and they are used for 18 months, you know, does it make sense to have an inventory, or does it make sense to go out and have to pay a premium for these, when you could probably buy a more upscale unit for less?

I am trying to figure out if there is a way that we can manage this, and not cost the taxpayer so much money.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir. The root of this problem, I think, is post-disaster housing across the United States, so just not California or other places. Post-disaster housing is an issue. We are working with States and counties and localities to help improve post-disaster housing, because it will minimize the use for these trailers and mobile housing units.

I think, for me, these are the last-resort kinds of things that we want to implement.

Mr. PALMER. Right.

Mr. GAYNOR. I think no one wants to move into a travel trailer after living in a, you know, 2,000-square-foot home. We want to put those disaster survivors in something—

Mr. PALMER. That is not what I am asking. And maybe I need to put this in writing. I am just trying to figure out, does it make sense to pay \$150,000 for a unit, use it one time for 18 months, and then auction it off for less than \$10,000? Does it make sense to inventory those and refurbish them so that they can be used again?

And—first of all, so that you are—you have some level of preparedness the next time you need something, instead of having to go out and pay these high prices.

Also, in regard to debris removal, Alabama suffered a horrendous swarm of tornadoes on April 27, 2011. My hometown of Hackleburg, Alabama—the F5 was named the Hackleburg tornado—was wiped out. And FEMA's report said that there was about 10 million cubic feet of debris that was removed. Some of us think that it was a good bit more.

Before I was in Congress, I ran a think tank, and I was looking at this. FEMA apparently—it almost looked like a single-source bid for debris removal, and it was about \$40 per cubic yard, when—I know some of the counties refused to go along with that bid. The State has to pay, I think, about 25 percent of that cost. And they were doing it for \$10 to \$15 a cubic foot. If your estimate of 10 million cubic feet is correct, that would have been \$400 million; \$100 million of that would have come from the States.

When you do debris removal, do you have multiple companies that you go out for bid for, or is there one or two companies that you rely on all the time?

Mr. GAYNOR. So we don't do debris removal.

Mr. PALMER. I know. You bid it out.

Mr. GAYNOR. No. Well, we reimburse for debris removal. So—

Mr. PALMER. Correct.

Mr. GAYNOR. So the contract for debris removal—if we just want to keep it simple—from a State point of view, the contract is between the State and the contractors or the vendors that they hire. So they have to follow Federal procurement laws to make sure that they do it correctly, to make sure that it is eligible, and reasonable costs. And only then do we reimburse.

But we have no contract between debris removal vendors. That is strictly between, in this case, the State and the vendors that they select.

Mr. PALMER. Is the Army Corps of Engineers involved in this process?

Mr. GAYNOR. You can use—

Mr. PALMER. Someone—

Mr. GAYNOR. You can—

Mr. PALMER [continuing]. Gave them this contractor, and led many of them to believe that they needed to go this route at \$40 a cubic yard, when I know for a fact that they were—the counties who refused to do that were getting it done for \$10 to \$15 a cubic foot. I mean a cubic yard.

So that may not be something that you have looked into, but, you know, we keep looking at all these disasters in the—and Madam Chairman, the cost keeps going up and up and up. And I am all for getting in there and helping people. I really am. But I think we need to maximize every dollar to get it to the people that need it.

And also the tremendous burden that is imposed on States, we need to be aware of that, because they are not the—it is not just the Federal Government, it is the States, as well.

I appreciate your indulgence, and I yield back.

Ms. TITUS. I now recognize Mr. Garamendi for 5 minutes.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Thank you. The gentleman is quite correct. It is the regulations that basically require the hiring of a company that has previously done it.

In California, in one of the fires, it was a Tennessee company that came all the way to California to do it at a very, very high cost. And this does need to be looked into. Thank you for raising that question, and we will follow through.

Administrator Gaynor, thank you for being here, and taking all of this, these questions. We have heard from many communities in my area that the financial recovery projects, the permanent work, they cannot afford the upfront cost. Waiting for reimbursement from FEMA is just an impossible situation, and often they just let it go.

In the 2013 Sandy Recovery Act, Congress established the so-called section 428 alternative procedures under FEMA's Public Assistance program, allowing your agency to fund major disaster recovery projects, so-called permanent work, up front, in exchange for the State accepting a binding cost estimate for the project. However, many localities facing these cash flow problems following disasters do not participate in the section 428 alternative procedures.

My question to you, does FEMA agree that section 428 is underutilized by the States?

And why might that be the case?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir. Well, it is not mandatory, I think, is the first case. It is not mandatory that you use it. However, we champion section 428 wherever we go. And it is a better way to do business. And really, it is the difference between section 428 agreeing on a fixed cost, and the traditional way is actual costs. And I can give you an example.

There is a disaster in the South that we are still working on. And it is from Katrina, it is 14 years old. It is still open. I am still paying on actual costs, because with the actual costs there is no incentive to actually close a disaster or speed the project, right? Because the Federal Government will pay the entire bill on that. Section 428 is fixed cost. We are—like building a house, you agree on the cost of that house, and if it runs over, then—and again, I just use the State—the State is on the hook for that overage. But if it is under, you get to use that money for other projects.

And I think that—and again, that is a great incentive to speed recovery and to save taxpayer dollars.

Mr. GARAMENDI. You have that right. And by raising the issue of cost—you and I had this discussion beforehand—if we were to move more aggressively in this, and you had a cost estimate up front, it was agreed that that would be the cost the county or the

State would then proceed, that then would allow the FEMA to make periodic payments, for example, when the contract was signed, 10 percent, and then when some of the work was done, periodic payments. And at the end, you do the audit and get it done.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir.

Mr. GARAMENDI. I really would urge you to move in that direction, and provide for these periodic upfront costs. It might be better for everybody, and your 14 years at Katrina would not happen again.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir.

Mr. GARAMENDI. So please give that your consideration, and we will work with you to accomplish that.

And by the way, I have a piece of legislation that would urge you to do it even more, and that is H.R. 6071. Write that one down. We are coming to you to get it done.

Wildfire mitigation, a clarification on it. Presently, you can relocate buildings that are in a hazard area. Would you please confirm that FEMA's current interpretation of the Federal regulation that allows you to do this, to relocate destroyed facilities due to the risk of wildfire or other hazards, not just floods?

Presently, you seem to be focused on floods and not applying this relocation alternative to fires. Tell me that is not the case.

Mr. GAYNOR. Well, I am not going to give you a definitive answer, because I would have to go research it. But I think, when you think about mitigation, we would not want to, just in a general sense, rebuild in the same place the same structure as we previously had.

So, you know, section 428, combined with mitigation, I think we want to build smarter, build up to current code standards, and, you know, look in the environment that we are building in.

So I owe you an answer about how we apply that when it comes to wildfire.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Yes. I will look forward to your responses to both of these over time.

Mr. GAYNOR. Thank you, sir.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Thank you for your work.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you. I now recognize Ms. Mucarsel-Powell.

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for having this hearing.

Congratulations on the appointment, Mr. Gaynor. I want to start just by asking you if you recall a letter that I sent to you in July that deals specifically with flood insurance. I wanted to get information on the National Flood Insurance Program and FEMA's new initiative of Risk Rating 2.0. I expressed my strong concerns that FEMA's new risk pricing model that is being developed currently is not fairly being communicated with local municipalities, and being transparent to the public.

And I did ask several questions, and you have mentioned that everyone should be under a flood insurance plan. And one of my questions is what steps are you taking to ensure that all homeowners with a federally backed mortgage are enrolled in flood insurance?

So I want to know—I have been waiting for months—if you recall the letter, and if you have any answers to those questions today.

Mr. GAYNOR. I can't say that I have personally seen that letter. What is the date on it?

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL. It was directed to you July 11th, 2019.

Mr. GAYNOR. It seems overdue to me. We try to get back pretty quickly on letters from Members.

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL. I would appreciate that.

Mr. GAYNOR. I will look into that.

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL. Thank you.

Mr. GAYNOR. And, you know, we took a pause on rates, because we wanted to make sure we did it right, because there is lots of sensitivity across the Nation about the premium, and against risk.

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL. Exactly.

Mr. GAYNOR. We want to make sure that—

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL. Which is why I think it is important to be communicating with the local communities, because they are extremely concerned, and they want to understand what process you are following as you establish the new Risk Rating 2.0 plan.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am. And again, this hasn't been updated to since the 1970s.

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL. Yes.

Mr. GAYNOR. And we are eager to actually, you know, move this along so it actually reflects risk.

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL. Thank you, Mr. Gaynor.

Now, you were talking about making sure that people have flood insurance. And just to give you an idea, most people assume that people that are living in coastal communities are extremely wealthy, and that is not the case. We have hardworking Americans living in my district along the Keys, and also in Miami-Dade County. And in the Keys their average annual premium is \$2,278 a year, so much higher than what you stated of \$700 a year. And it is definitely a concern, as you start developing premiums under the Risk Rating 2.0.

So I wanted to ask you, what steps are you taking right now to ensure affordability under this new plan that you are formulating?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am. So, again, it goes back to risk. And I will try to keep it simple. So if you live on the water, you would assume that you probably have the highest risk of something bad happening to your home. If you live right on the beach, and the ocean is right there, you probably have the highest risk.

Some of our maps don't reflect that in a really elegant way. We have these hard-drawn lines where, once you go over a certain line, the risk really drops off a cliff, and that is not reasonable. And so we want to make sure that—if you have the highest risk, you should probably pay the highest premium. And then, as you work your way to less riskier locations, that you have lower premiums.

And again, our maps don't help us get there. But one of our goals is to make those maps graduated so it really reflects reality. We are looking at what does it cost to rebuild a house—

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL. That is good to hear. Mr. Gaynor, I am going to cut you off because I have so many questions. Thank you so much. We definitely have to meet after this hearing—

Mr. GAYNOR. Absolutely.

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL [continuing]. To discuss that issue more.

But also, you are saying that you have enough money, that you are not really concerned. We had Hurricane Irma back in 2017. It is going to be almost 3 years this summer, and we are still waiting to get the reimbursements for my community.

Just to give you an idea, the city of Key West is still waiting on \$3 million to be obligated. The city of Homestead, waiting on nearly \$12 million. Florida City, \$4 million. Miami-Dade County alone is waiting for over \$100 million.

While I thank you for the funding that we have received after my requests, I just need to hear from you that we are going to be receiving those reimbursements quickly, because we are now entering another hurricane season. This was a hurricane category 4. Scientists are talking about categories 5, 6, and higher. And I am very concerned that we are not prepared once again. And we haven't even gotten those reimbursements.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am. My staff will go connect with you, and specifically what reimbursements are you waiting for.

But typically, we reimburse the State, and the State actually does all the validation of the projects, making sure, again, they are eligible, making sure they are reasonable, making sure all the documentation is there. And then—

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL. The State hasn't received those funds yet. So it is still sitting at FEMA.

Mr. GAYNOR. I will—

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL. And last, because my 5 minutes are up, and I am very concerned that we are not following all the appropriate procedures, and policies, and all the different Federal agencies to prepare for coronavirus.

And so I want to ask, specifically, what conversations have you personally had with the Secretary of Health and Human Services as we are entering into this outbreak here in the United States?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am. I have personally not had any conversations with—

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL. You have not had a—

Mr. GAYNOR. But that doesn't mean—

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL [continuing]. Seat at the table in these—you have not been at the table, discussing what you need to do for emergency response?

Mr. GAYNOR. The Secretary of Homeland Security and his Deputy have been at the table on the task force. We are in support of HHS. So at the staff level, that is where my focus is right now, on making sure that I support the Secretary in all the things that he needs support for.

So again, interagency coordination, planning, analysis, all those things that we are really good at, we are supporting him right now.

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL. And you have all the supplies you need to provide assistance to areas that would be hit by this outbreak from one day to the next? Are you ready?

Mr. GAYNOR. So when you say supplies, what do you mean?

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL. Meds, tents, food, water.

Mr. GAYNOR. So we have warehouses across the country with all sorts of commodities for all sorts of—it is an all-hazard approach.

So we have commodities from coast to coast. We have commodities on Puerto Rico. We have——

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL. You are ready?

Mr. GAYNOR [continuing]. On Hawaii——

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL. Do you feel ready?

Mr. GAYNOR. We are ready every day——

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL. Is FEMA ready?

Mr. GAYNOR. FEMA is ready every day, because every day——

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL. That is what I want to hear.

Mr. GAYNOR. And the simplest term is earthquake day, right? It could happen tomorrow. So we are ready. We are ready to support HHS, who is in the lead for the COVID-19. And until that changes, we will remain in support.

Ms. MUCARSEL-POWELL. Thank you, Mr. Gaynor.

Mr. GAYNOR. You are welcome.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you. I now recognize Mrs. Fletcher for 5 minutes.

Mrs. FLETCHER. Thank you, Chairwoman Titus. Thank you for holding this hearing.

Thank you, Administrator Gaynor, for being here and taking the time to testify today. You have already touched in your testimony a little bit about the area I represent, and some of the complications we saw after Hurricane Harvey.

I represent Texas, the Seventh Congressional District in Houston. And my district had some of the most affected areas during Harvey and in the response. And I know, from that experience and from being here, that FEMA personnel are stretched thin, are managing responses across the country, especially during Harvey. We had wildfires, we had other hurricanes. It was a tremendous effort. And we know that we ask the agency to do a lot, and often with limited resources, and appreciate the good work that FEMA did in our community and across the country.

That said, I think that most of us on this committee still see room for improvement, as I think you do, as well, in how we respond to natural disasters. And often the recovery is just slower than we need it to be.

In our experience—and I kind of want to touch on some of the things my constituents have told me were particular challenges for them, because what I would like to see—and I think the purpose of this hearing is to talk about ways we can improve and streamline disaster response.

And, you know, we have already done legislation that has gone through this committee to try to help with some of the challenges that we have seen. But the greatest concern that I hear from my constituents is that we just haven't made enough progress in preparing for future storms, and that there are a lot of confusing processes in the disaster recovery process.

So I am hopeful that implementation of DRRA will lead to more resilient communities and processes before catastrophic events happen. But I would like you to touch on a couple of things, and I have only got a few minutes left, so I am just going to put them out there. And if you can address these, that would be great.

One, can you talk a little bit about how FEMA plans to incentivize investments and reduce risk from a pre-disaster perspective?

And right now, the other thing that really seems to be a challenge to me that we are working on—and I would love your perspective on—the disaster response and disaster preparedness are currently split between a variety of agencies. I wrote down earlier you said 19 agencies and 90 different disaster programs. So that is often incredibly confusing for the disaster victims who are trying to navigate it, often with limited resources after a storm.

So what do you see as the largest gaps when it comes to communicating and coordinating with those agencies, whether it is the SBA, or HUD, or even the Army Corps, following a disaster?

And what tools do you need that you currently lack to close some of those gaps? What can we provide that could help close those gaps?

If you could just address kind of that general topic for the next couple of minutes, that would be great.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am. So the first question about how do we incentivize better behavior, I guess, when it comes to being prepared—and I will go back to what I touched on before, is investment in pre-disaster mitigation.

We have had a number of catastrophic disasters since 2017 and 2018. It is bad, but, you know, it could be worse. And we hope that never happens.

But I think the passage of DRRA allowed us to set aside 6 percent of all disaster costs to do pre-disaster investment or pre-disaster mitigation. That is a game changer, in my point of view. We are going to actually take money before disaster happens, and invest that in making our infrastructure more resilient.

And the money in the new program, BRIC, Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities, is aimed at community lifelines. These are seven community lifelines that, if any of these are interrupted like telecommunications, energy, if any of those are interrupted, life changes in that community.

And so, can we invest this money, this pre-disaster money, in making those things more resilient? So when a disaster happens, we bend but we don't break, and we snap back to some better result than if we had not invested in pre-disaster. So that is the best thing that we have done, locally.

But that is just not a Federal responsibility, that is a share responsible.

Mrs. FLETCHER. Sure.

Mr. GAYNOR. So I would encourage localities and States and counties and Tribes and Territories to invest in their own pre-disaster mitigation programs, because, again, this whole thing works best when localities and States, Tribes, and Territories all work together.

Mrs. FLETCHER. Sure, and I think that goes to the coordination point. So with the time we have left, can you talk a little bit about coordinating among the Federal agencies, and helping—

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am.

Mrs. FLETCHER [continuing]. Victims get the help they need?

Mr. GAYNOR. You know, if I think about coordination today, I think about Puerto Rico and the, you know, big disaster, and many different full-time Federal agencies down there working together, combining all their resources together to drive that outcome-driven recovery. Right? Not just using FEMA money for a certain project, and using HUD money for a certain project, but trying to figure out how do we leverage all this great Federal money and opportunity into a better outcome. We are doing it in Puerto Rico. We are doing it in other places across the country. We need to be better at it.

You know, and one is we are working with HUD to—how do we close the gap on temporary housing repairs and permanent housing repairs? That time in between is too long, it is not fully integrated. And we want to change that. So any help on any of those topics, I would enjoy help in making it less complex and speed recovery.

Mrs. FLETCHER. OK. Well, thank you. I see that I have gone over my time. So I encourage you to continue to coordinate, and I really encourage you to look at the experience of recovery from the perspective of the disaster victim in trying to help that coordination. And we are going to do what we can to try to help that, as well.

Thank you so much, Madam Chairwoman. I yield back.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you. We now recognize Mr. LaMalfa for 5 minutes.

Mr. LAMALFA. Thank you, Madam Chair, for allowing me to help keep you company here in the committee today. And thank you, Administrator Gaynor, for appearing in front of us.

First of all, I want to say thanks, heartfelt thanks, to how much help FEMA has been in northern California over three different disasters in the last 3 years, really, starting with the Oroville Dam spillway situation, which could have been a lot worse, but, indeed, required an amazing amount of cleanup and restoration of the infrastructure there. Then the Carr Fire west of Redding, California, in the north, and the Camp Fire, as we know, from the Paradise area in northern California. So you have been extremely helpful on that.

There are just a few nuances I am going to go over with you on how some things can be executed.

So going to the Carr Fire situation, which—a lot of that happened on the Whiskeytown National Recreation Area, a park west of Redding, and a particular lake there called Rainbow Lake nearby.

And the particular issue we are talking about is something called the Messelbeck Dam. The issues there start with the fire that wiped out so much vegetation on the national park there, and the debris that subsequently, with the record rainfall we had—which in itself was a disaster, some of the effects of the rain were a disaster—swept much sediment into the lake and the outlets there that would help to keep the lake level, you know, the pipes and devices there to keep—to monitor—keep the lake level as they see fit. A lot of sediment there.

It had been fairly well maintained, but was overwhelmed by all this. So FEMA was asked if they could help with the clearing of some of that silt and sediment in order to make those functional. And my understanding is, on two different occasions, they have denied that application for the assistance from the 2019 rainstorms

subsequent to the fire, claiming they didn't have the information on the sediment levels before the disaster, and that maintenance has been done.

So what we do have is information from our State experts at CAL FIRE, who, a lot of times, work hand in hand with—about the conditions that were there of the maintenance of the project, the maintenance of those drains and such.

So my question is, why does FEMA disagree with local experts on that, State experts on that?

And then how would a small community service district like is up there in the place called Igo and Ono, how in the world would they ever be able to take care of all that sediment after a fire, being a small district?

And so I will stop there, and see what do you think of those thoughts.

And then there is also a question on the 60-day period after a disaster, too.

How would a local district do that?

Why would FEMA disagree with the assessment by the State CAL FIRE organization?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir. I do not know the specifics of that particular project or that particular issue. I would be happy to get with my staff, get with Bob Fenton, who is the—

Mr. LAMALFA. Yes, I have worked with him, yes.

Mr. GAYNOR [continuing]. Regional administrator, and look into that, and give you and your staff feedback about decisionmaking. And I would be happy to speed that along and get it done here in the next couple days.

Mr. LAMALFA. I appreciate that, because, again, it is very important. There is really no way the local service district could do that. And it is—you could have a situation where the dam—I mean, I guess we are lucky, in a way, we have had almost a drought this year. But the dam could overtop with the inability to regulate the flow that way.

So also on the Whiskeytown and the Carr Fire situation, a private site had been cleared around there for tree and debris and such, and they had a contract do that. But there was also nearby a public building, a public facility, which was a police station and park ranger's office, also very important to that operation. FEMA only did the work on the private building. They would now have to send a second contractor a second time to do cleanup on a public site, rather than one that—when they were there, 40 yards away, doing a private facility.

Why wouldn't they do all in one, when they have the opportunity, when they see—especially since it is a public building right nearby? Why would they not do—

Mr. GAYNOR. Again, sir, I don't know the details, but I would be happy to get back to you on some of that decisionmaking.

Mr. LAMALFA. OK, because that would be a cost-saving measure and a time-saving one, as well, because they end up doing both.

OK, lastly, when we are looking at fire disasters, it doesn't appear that FEMA has been quite as geared towards dealing with forest fire disasters, wildfires, as maybe, unfortunately, versed on hurricanes and floods and things of that nature. So burnt trees,

they are still standing, but will be a hazard. In my view, they should be counted as a debris that would be in an area that FEMA should be looking really hard at. Delayed damage from sediment, as we talked about with the Carr Fire in Redding and Whiskeytown, and then into the watersheds around the Camp Fire and Redding should be looked at more closely, too.

I do have to give you kudos for the clearing that was done at the Paradise, Magalia, and the Concow areas up there on clearing out the lots where buildings had burned down and there is a lot of toxic material in a footprint of a building. So FEMA made the decision to do that just because it was important, and pay for 90 percent of it. So that was very important, and much appreciated by the community there.

But other sediment issues and other issues having to do with wildfire recovery, I would just ask FEMA to work with us more on having a definition on how you deal with the post-wildfire disaster problems in—you know, other than—unfortunately, your specialty lately has been a lot of hurricanes, a lot of floods, too.

And I say that with all appreciation for the efforts you have made in the area, and I know you have a lot to worry about, you are stretched pretty thin. But these are just things I think we can fine-tune, and I would love to have that opportunity to work with you more on that. OK?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir. We will get back to you on all those things.

Mr. LAMALFA. OK. Thanks very much.

Mr. GAYNOR. Thank you.

Mr. LAMALFA. Thanks for your time.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you. Apparently, while you have been sitting here, Mr. Administrator, your Atlanta office has found evidence of someone exposed to coronavirus, and has closed down for 2 weeks with people teleworking, waiting to hear from more guidance from HHS.

Have you gotten any word about that?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am. So late last night—this is a suspected case of coronavirus, no test results back yet. But out of an abundance of caution—back to my priorities to preserve the force—it really coincided with what we are doing today across the agency. We are actually doing an agencywide connectivity telework drill today. So fortunately, it fell into that. So most employees were either going to telework today, or work from alternate locations.

And again, we want to make sure that I preserve the force, so I can deliver those mission-essential functions.

So it happened in region 4 today. It is going to happen in other locations across the country. It is going to happen here in Washington, DC. And my staff and I have been working to make sure that we have a balanced response to some of these challenges we are going to have. Again, fluid, dynamic, you know, the first instance is not like the second instance.

And so this is again—I have my leadership working on it right now to make sure we adapt to the changing circumstances and we make good decisions.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you.

Ms. Plaskett, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. And thank you, Mr. Gaynor, for being here. Of course, thank you for your service.

Before coming to FEMA—and I know you have an incredible task on your hand, so many people relying on your agency immediately after storms, after disasters. And that is a heavy burden I know that you have, but I think you are very able for the job, and we are grateful to have you there.

I wanted to ask you a couple of questions. One was about, first, I understand now that the Virgin Islands has been put under a Federal Coordinator that is working with Puerto Rico.

Can you tell me what was the reason for—because, initially, we were told that we would not have a Federal Coordinator, that we were doing things appropriately. And now we have a Federal Coordinator underneath Puerto Rico. And while my sister, Jenniffer González-Colón, knows that I love Puerto Rico, they are our nearest neighbor, they are a behemoth in comparison to us, and can suck a lot of resources and attention that we would otherwise have gotten.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am. So I had visited both Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands. I went down to the U.S.—

Ms. PLASKETT. We are America's paradise. They are Puerto Rico, you know, Land of Sun.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am. I don't want to get into that—

Ms. PLASKETT. But we are the paradise.

Mr. GAYNOR [continuing]. Into that argument.

I go around the country to see how disaster recovery is progressing. When it came to the U.S. Virgin Islands, I had many discussions with the Governor and his staff, Adrienne Williams, director of recovery, about the speed of recovery. And I wasn't satisfied that it was going fast enough.

And I have a deep bench when it comes to Federal Coordinating Officers. And one of my top FCOs is Bill Vogel. He was down there right after Maria.

Ms. PLASKETT. Sure.

Mr. GAYNOR. And we—

Ms. PLASKETT. And he is back now.

Mr. GAYNOR. He is back now.

Ms. PLASKETT. We are happy to have him there.

Mr. GAYNOR. And he is doing tremendous. And we made some really great headway. We were held up on education, trying to move education—

Ms. PLASKETT. Sure.

Mr. GAYNOR [continuing]. Schools, get kids back in schools. We moved that along in a big way. And again, it is about leadership, and it is about making sure we have the focus on it.

Ms. PLASKETT. So why don't we have our own Federal Coordinator, and not sit underneath Puerto Rico, if your bench is, in fact, deep?

Mr. GAYNOR. Because I think Mr. Amparo, who is in charge of recovery for Puerto Rico, is also trying to deal with the earthquake. And I think, you know, just again, we weren't expecting the earthquake.

Ms. PLASKETT. Sure.

Mr. GAYNOR. And so he is—I think he is stretching a lot of different ways, both in Maria recovery and now, as we proceed in the earthquake recovery. It is prudent, I think, a prudent leadership move, to move Mr. Vogel to USVI—

Ms. PLASKETT. And so he would be considered our Federal Coordinator, not underneath Puerto Rico, but reporting directly to Washington?

Mr. GAYNOR. Oh, no. I think there is an administrative report to Mr. Amparo for the Caribbean.

Ms. PLASKETT. So I guess my question is, if Mr. Amparo is caught up with Puerto Rico and its massive not only hurricane recovery and rebuilding, but also earthquake, why not have Bill Vogel be a Federal Coordinator for the Virgin Islands and report directly to you, or to whomever?

Mr. GAYNOR. I mean, I think, typically, the way it works across the country is the FCOs report to the regional administrator. So Mr. Von Essen out of region 2 in New York City, he is the one that coordinates all those things at the region. So that is, typically, the way we do it across the country.

Ms. PLASKETT. OK. Well, you talked about schools just a moment ago. And one of the issues that we have now with a school that—we had a mobile unit placed on the island of St. Croix, where I live, in Frederiksted. The Arthur Richards middle school, which was completely destroyed, has now a Sprung structure, a mobile unit.

We also have an elementary school, Alexander Henderson Elementary School, there. There are massive odors coming from there, and the school has had to be shut down. I don't know if you are aware of this. The builder of that school, AECOM, has said that it is not under warranty anymore, and they have no responsibility, although the complaints were initially told to them well before the warranty was out.

Can I get your support in having some discussion with AECOM to address this issue? Our children, our teachers, have had to leave the school for periods of time, days at a time, because of this. And it is very concerning.

Mr. GAYNOR. So I will talk to the Governor or Ms. Williams about their contract with AECOM.

Ms. PLASKETT. Great.

Mr. GAYNOR. And I will do that this week.

Ms. PLASKETT. Great. Thank you. I know the legislature, our local legislature, is very concerned about this.

The other thing I wanted to talk about—I am almost running out of time—is with regard to fixed-cost estimates. You know that March 20th is the deadline when we have to have all of our fixed-cost estimates in place for all projects funded through the alternative procedures in the Virgin Islands. If the March 20th deadline is not met, and is not extended by FEMA, the consequences may be significant. Projects in the Virgin Islands that are not funded through the alternative procedures program cannot take advantage of the unique assistance provided to the islands by Congress.

That March 20th deadline is right around the corner. Do you know how many projects have been completed by the Virgin Islands, and how many are outstanding?

Mr. GAYNOR. I don't know. I try to stay out of that, you know, the——

Ms. PLASKETT. OK. Well, I can tell you that over 300 projects have not been completed as yet. And that March 20th deadline is coming.

I understand from the Virgin Islands that they are working on submitting a request for an extension. Can you explain to us, or understand what is causing the delay in this?

And because of that, will an extension be granted?

Mr. GAYNOR. So I don't know of the specifics of the delay. You know, we believe that deadlines drive progress. And so we try to keep to those deadlines as much as possible. We try to work with our partners on USVI and other partners across the country on making sure that we drive recovery as hard as we can. I will look into what is the major holdup.

Again, we work with our partners because this is, again, this is a partnership between the Federal Government, the Territory, and our other partners, making sure we move that recovery along as fast as possible. I will look into the issues and get back to——

Ms. PLASKETT. Well, I am sure you will be getting a letter from the Governor, because there is no way that we are going to meet that March 20th deadline when my understanding is that maybe we have a couple dozen projects, fixed-cost projects, done.

I know that there is limited availability of local resources, unique structural changes that need to be done in the Virgin Islands. This is a new standard that we are giving to Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico to build as it should be, as opposed to as is.

Mr. GAYNOR. Right.

Ms. PLASKETT. But I do not want the Territory short-changed on this game changer for us, in terms of becoming more resilient through the funding that Congress has had. And it would be imperative for you to extend that deadline for us to meet these projects.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you so much for your indulgence, Madam Chair. I yield back.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you.

Mr. Administrator, I just have one last question before we close.

I mentioned this in my opening statement, that there are supposed to be three of you, the Administrator and two Deputy Administrators. We don't have two Deputy Administrators, but you have recently created what is called a Chief Operating Officer. And if you look at the description of that position, it is the same as a Deputy Administrator. And we are just wondering if you did this to try to get around the Senate approval process, or what your thinking is.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am. No, I did not try to do this to get around the Senate.

You know, for me, it is a practical solution. And the practical solution is picking the right people for the right job, for the right place, and try to keep the train moving in the right direction.

We will work with the administration on identifying nominees. But until then, Ms. Comans, who is the Chief Operating Officer, will kind of drive the internal bus of FEMA, all the things that are

important to people, IT solutions, procurement, all those things that are how we run an efficient business.

And when the administration makes a nomination, and that person gets confirmed, that COO position will sunset. But for me, right now, it is about keeping stability, making sure I select the very best people that I have in FEMA. I have some wildly talented people, both politicals and career. And in this case, this is a decision to make sure that we keep moving forward on all things that are important to FEMA, and all the things that are important to the Nation.

Ms. TITUS. I appreciate that, but you are responsible for the continuity of Government. We just don't want you setting a bad example that now other agencies follow as an attempt to short-circuit the process.

Mr. GAYNOR. I try to set a good example every day.

Ms. TITUS. We appreciate that.

Well, thank you very much for spending your morning with us. I thank you. You answered some questions, allayed some fears, and promised to coordinate with us both on individual projects and bigger reform issues like recruitment and retention. So thank you very much.

Are there any further questions from members of the committee?

Seeing none, I would like to thank you again for your testimony.

And I would ask unanimous consent that the record of today's hearing remain open until such time as our witness provides answers to any questions that may be submitted in writing.

I ask unanimous consent that the record also remain open for 15 days for any additional comments and information submitted by Members or the witness to be included in the record of today's hearing.

Without objection, so ordered. If no other Members have anything to say, the subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:47 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]