

FIXING EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT: EXAMINING IMPROVEMENTS TO FEMA'S DISASTER RESPONSE

(119–28)

HEARING
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, AND
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON
TRANSPORTATION AND
INFRASTRUCTURE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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FIRST SESSION

JULY 23, 2025

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Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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JULY 18, 2025

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 “*Fixing Emergency Management: Examining Improvements to FEMA’s Disaster Response*”

I. PURPOSE

The Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure will meet on Wednesday July 23, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. ET in 2167 of the Rayburn House Office Building to receive testimony at a hearing entitled, “*Fixing Emergency Management: Examining Improvements to FEMA’s Disaster Response*.” This hearing will examine how FEMA fulfills its mission and enhances its operations to ensure that “America is equipped to prepare for and respond to disasters.”¹ At the hearing, Members will receive testimony from Mr. David Richardson, Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Administrator.

II. BACKGROUND

FEDERAL ASSISTANCE FOR DISASTERS

FEMA is the Federal Government’s lead agency in preparing for, mitigating against, responding to, and recovering from disasters and emergencies related to all hazards—whether natural or man-made.² FEMA’s primary authority in carrying out these functions stems from the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Stafford Act; P.L. 100–707, as amended).³ The Stafford Act authorizes three types of declarations: (1) major disaster declarations; (2) emergency declarations; and (3) fire management grant (FMAG) declarations.⁴

PRESIDENTIALLY DECLARED MAJOR DISASTER

When communities are overwhelmed and the “situation is beyond the capability of the State and affected local governments or Indian tribal government and that supplemental federal emergency assistance is necessary to save lives and protect

¹ FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY (FEMA), *About Us*, (last updated Jan. 22, 2025), available at <https://www.fema.gov/about>.

² DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY, FEMA, (last updated June 10, 2024), available at <https://www.dhs.gov/employee-resources/federal-emergency-management-agency-fema>.

³ Stafford Act, Pub. L. No. 93–288.

⁴ *Id.*

property, public health and safety, or to lessen or avert the threat of a disaster.”⁵ the Governor of the affected state may request the President declare a major disaster.⁶ FEMA’s primary Stafford Act programs for disaster recovery in the aftermath of a major disaster are in the Public Assistance Program and the Individual Assistance and Households Program (IHP).⁷ Following a major disaster declaration, FEMA may also provide Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) funds.⁸

The Public Assistance Program, authorized primarily by Sections 403, 406, and 428 of the Stafford Act, reimburses state, tribal, and territorial governments as well as certain private non-profits for repairing and rebuilding disaster damaged buildings and infrastructure.⁹ Additionally, the Public Assistance Program also reimburses for costs associated with debris removal and emergency protective measures undertaken to reduce threats to public health and safety. The Public Assistance Program does not provide direct services to citizens for private property damage. The Federal cost-share for Public Assistance is 75 percent, but may be increased by the President.¹⁰

The IHP is authorized primarily by Section 408 of the Stafford Act. The IHP includes the Individuals and Households Program, Mass Care and Emergency Assistance, the Crisis Counseling Assistance and Training Program, Disaster Unemployment Assistance, Disaster Legal Services, and Disaster Case Management.¹¹ IHP is the primary FEMA program used to assist disaster survivors; it includes housing assistance and other needs assistance. Housing assistance includes money for repair, rental assistance, or “direct assistance,” such as the provision of temporary housing.¹² The limit for IHP assistance adjusted annually for inflation, and the current limit is \$43,600 for housing assistance and \$43,600 for other needs assistance.¹³

Section 404 of the Stafford Act authorizes HMGP, which provides grants based on a percentage of PA funding to state, tribal, and territorial governments to fund mitigation projects that: (1) are cost effective and (2) reduce the risk of future damage, hardship, and loss from natural hazards.¹⁴ The purpose of this grant program is to fund practical mitigation measures that effectively reduce the risk of loss of life and property from future disasters. State, tribal, and territorial governments may use their HMGP funds to assist families in reducing the risk to their homes from natural disasters. The Federal cost share for HMGP is 75 percent and the remaining 25 percent can come from a variety of sources (i.e. a cash payment from the state or local government).¹⁵ HMGP has not been approved on the most recent 18 declared major disasters.

Stafford Act programs are funded by the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF), which is a no-year appropriation against which FEMA can direct, coordinate, manage, and fund eligible response and recovery efforts associated with domestic major disasters and emergencies that overwhelm state resources.¹⁶ Through the DRF, FEMA can fund authorized Federal disaster support activities, as well as eligible state, territorial, tribal, and local actions such as providing emergency protection and debris removal.¹⁷ The DRF also funds the repair and restoration of qualifying disaster-damaged public infrastructure, hazard mitigation initiatives, financial assistance to eligible disaster survivors, and FMAGs for qualifying large forest or grassland wildfires.¹⁸

⁵ FEMA, *How a Disaster Gets Declared*, (last updated July 22, 2024), available at <http://fema.gov/disaster/how-declared>.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ FEMA, *Assistance for Governments and Private Non-Profits After a Disaster*, (last updated Jan. 8, 2025), available at <https://www.fema.gov/assistance/public>.

¹⁰ 42 U.S.C. § 5172.

¹¹ FEMA, *Individuals and Households Program*, (last updated June 4, 2025), available at <https://www.fema.gov/assistance/individual>.

¹² FEMA, *Assistance for Housing and Other Needs*, (last updated June 18, 2025), available at <https://www.fema.gov/assistance/individual/housing>.

¹³ Notice of Maximum Amount of Assistance Under the Individuals and Household Program, 89 Fed. Reg. 84923 (Oct. 1, 2024).

¹⁴ FEMA, HAZARD MITIGATION GRANT PROGRAM (HMGP), (May 22, 2025), available at <https://www.fema.gov/grants/mitigation>.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ FEMA, DISASTER RELIEF FUND: MONTHLY REPORTS, (June 30, 2025), available at <https://www.fema.gov/about/reports-and-data/disaster-relief-fund-monthly-reports>.

¹⁷ FEMA, FACT SHEET: FEMA’S PUBLIC ASSISTANCE PROCESS, (June 7, 2018), available at <https://www.fema.gov/press-release/20210318/fact-sheet-femas-public-assistance-process>.

¹⁸ FEMA, DISASTER RELIEF FUND: MONTHLY REPORTS, (August 29, 2023), available at <https://www.fema.gov/about/reports-and-data/disaster-relief-fund-monthly-reports>.

III. FEMA'S RESPONSE TO RECENT DISASTERS

HURRICANES HELENE AND MILTON

In 2024, FEMA provided assistance for 120 Presidentially declared emergencies and major disasters including: five hurricanes that made landfall, multiple unnamed severe storms, western wildfires, and an active tornado season that impacted many states across the country.¹⁹ However, the most significant disaster of 2024 was Hurricane Helene, which made landfall near Perry, Florida on September 26, 2024, as a Category 4 hurricane.²⁰ As Helene traveled across the Appalachian Region, it resulted in catastrophic flooding, landslides, and tornadoes. Six states (Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina) received a major disaster declaration associated with Helene.²¹ Alabama received an emergency declaration.²² The destruction of Hurricane Helene resulted in 219 storm-related deaths,²³ including 106 in North Carolina alone.²⁴ That makes it the deadliest storm to hit the mainland United States since Hurricane Katrina.²⁵

Just two weeks later, Hurricane Milton formed in the Gulf of Mexico and rapidly intensified to a Category 5 hurricane.²⁶ By the time Milton made landfall near Siesta Key on October 9, 2024, the storm had weakened to a Category 3 hurricane, but it brought a front of deadly tornadoes and storm surges to Florida.²⁷ This was the third hurricane in 13 months to impact Florida's Big Bend region.²⁸

According to the most recent Disaster Relief Fund Report provided to Congress, FEMA has obligated \$10.1 billion for Hurricane Helene and \$3 billion for Hurricane Milton.²⁹ While 2020 still holds the all-time record for Presidentially declared emergencies, major disasters, and disaster declarations related to COVID-19, at 230,³⁰ the size and severity of Stafford Act declarations in 2024 has drawn Congressional attention to FEMA's resource constraints and response challenges.³¹

LOS ANGELES WILDFIRES

Starting on January 7, 2025, a series of 12 wildfires, including the Palisades and Eaton fires, burned more than 40,000 acres across the greater Los Angeles area.³² The wildfires burned for several weeks and were 100 percent contained on January 31, 2025.³³ Twenty-nine people died as a result of the wildfires, and more than 18,000 structures were destroyed.³⁴

¹⁹ FEMA, *Declared Disasters*, available at <https://www.fema.gov/disaster/declarations>.

²⁰ Kate Payne, *Hurricane Helene Kills At Least 44 and Cuts A Swath of Destruction Across the Southeast*, AP NEWS (Sept. 27, 2024), available at <https://apnews.com/article/hurricane-helene-florida-georgia-carolina-e5769b56dea81e40fae2161ad1b4e75d>.

²¹ FEMA, *Hurricane Helene*, available at <https://www.fema.gov/disaster/current/hurricane-helene>.

²² *Id.*

²³ NOAA NAT'L CENTERS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL INFO., *U.S. Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters*, available at <https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/billions/events>.

²⁴ NORTH CAROLINA DEP'T OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERV., *Hurricane Helene Storm Related Fatalities*, available at <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/assistance/hurricane-helene-recovery-resources/hurricane-helene-storm-related-fatalities>.

²⁵ Ana Faguy & Brandon Drenon, *Helene is deadliest mainland US hurricane since Katrina*, BBC (Oct. 3, 2024), available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c1k70rnrp4xo>.

²⁶ Brad Brooks and Leonora LaPeter Anton, *Hurricane Milton Leaves At Least 10 Dead, Millions Without Power in Florida*, REUTERS (Oct. 10, 2024), available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/hurricane-milton-weakens-it-marches-across-central-florida-homes-destroyed-2024-10-10/>.

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ Chelsea Harvey, *Third hurricane in 13 months slams Florida's Big Bend*, E&E NEWS BY POLITICO (Sept. 27, 2024), available at <https://www.eenews.net/articles/third-hurricane-in-13-months-slams-floridas-big-bend/>.

²⁹ FEMA, JUNE 2025 DISASTER RELIEF FUND REPORT (June 24, 2025), available at https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_ocfo_june-2025-disaster-relief-fund-report_06302025.pdf.

³⁰ Adam B. Smith, 2023: A Historic Year of U.S. Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters, NOAA, (Jan. 8, 2024), available at <https://www.climate.gov/news-features/blogs/beyond-data/2023-historic-year-us-billion-dollar-weather-and-climate-disasters>.

³¹ Letter from Sam Graves, Chairman, H. Comm. on Transp. & Infrastructure to Deanne Criswell, Administrator, FEMA (Oct. 11, 2024) (On file with Comm.).

³² CAL FIRE, *2025 Incident Archive*, available at <https://www.fire.ca.gov/incidents/2025>.

³³ *Id.*

³⁴ Minyvonne Burke & Liz Kreutz, *What we know about the victims killed in the California wildfires*, NBC NEWS (Feb. 12, 2025), available at <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/california-wildfires-what-we-know-victims-killed-rcna188240>.

According to the June Disaster Relief Fund Report to Congress, FEMA has obligated \$2.7 billion for the Los Angeles wildfires.³⁵ The scale of devastation has prompted renewed scrutiny of California’s wildfire preparedness and resource management. Public concern intensified after reports revealed that firefighting efforts during the Palisades fire were hampered by water shortages, raising questions about emergency coordination and the adequacy of mitigation planning in high-risk areas.³⁶

TEXAS AND NORTH CAROLINA FLOODS

On Sunday, July 6, 2025, President Trump issued a major disaster declaration for the State of Texas.³⁷ From July 4 to July 7, 2025, heavy rain triggered catastrophic flash floods across Texas Hill Country. At least 130 fatalities have been confirmed statewide and more than 100 individuals still missing.³⁸ Camp Mystic, a summer camp on the Guadalupe River, lost 27 campers and counselors.³⁹ The flash floods raise concerns over inadequate early warning systems, as the affected counties lack community warning sirens in low-lying areas along the riverbank.⁴⁰

At the same time, Tropical Depression Chantal brought prolonged heavy rainfall to eastern North Carolina, particularly impacting Craven, Pamlico, and Beaufort counties. Many areas received over 10 inches of rain in three days, overwhelming small rivers and drainage systems in communities previously impacted by Hurricane Helene.⁴¹ Tens of thousands of people were left without power.

IV. REFORM LEGISLATION

FIXING EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT FOR AMERICANS (FEMA) ACT OF 2025

On May 8, 2025, Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Graves and Ranking Member Larsen released a discussion draft of the Fixing Emergency Management for Americans (FEMA) Act of 2025. This bipartisan legislation proposes comprehensive reforms to FEMA to improve the Nation’s preparedness and response capabilities, accelerate disaster recovery, reduce overall disaster cost, and provide more effective support to individuals and communities impacted by disasters.

The FEMA Act of 2025 would realign the Federal emergency management structure by elevating FEMA to a cabinet-level, independent agency reporting directly to the President. It reforms the delivery of disaster assistance to promote faster, state-led rebuilding of public infrastructure, streamlines support for disaster survivors by clarifying policies and communication, cuts unnecessary bureaucracy and outdated regulations, and enhances the speed and investment of mitigation investments. This legislation also increases transparency and accountability in how disaster funds are allocated and used, ensuring a more efficient, resilient, and cost-effective Federal response.

V. CONCLUSION

The hearing will focus on evaluating how FEMA can become more agile and effective in responding to disasters and examine the Nation’s current state of disaster readiness, response, and recovery under FEMA’s leadership and guidance. The Committee will explore strategies to modernize FEMA’s operations and improve coordination with state, local, tribal, and territorial partners. A key focus will be improving the speed of Federal aid, proactive hazard mitigation, and forward-looking, risk-

³⁵ FEMA, JUNE 2025 DISASTER RELIEF FUND REPORT (June 24, 2025), available at https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_ocfo_june-2025-disaster-relief-fund-report_06302025.pdf.

³⁶ Karla Rendo, *More Pacific Palisades residents join lawsuit against LADWP, city over water supply failure*, NEWS4 LOS ANGELES (Mar. 8, 2025), available at <https://www.nbclosangeles.com/news/california-wildfires/more-pacific-palisades-residents-join-lawsuit-against-ladwp-city-over-water-supply-failure/3649420/>.

³⁷ FEMA, Texas Severe Storms, Straight-Line Winds, and Flooding, (July 6, 2025), available at <https://www.fema.gov/disaster/4879>.

³⁸ Kevin Shalvey, *Texas flooding updates: Death toll reaches 134, search continues for missing*, ABC NEWS (July 15, 2025), available at <https://abcnews.go.com/US/live-updates/texas-flooding-live-updates/?id=123729682>.

³⁹ Sergio Flores and Evan Garcia, *Hopes fade for missing Texas flood victims as death toll hovers around 100*, REUTERS (July 8, 2025), available at <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/search-teams-scour-texas-flood-zone-dozens-missing-78-confirmed-dead-2025-07-07>.

⁴⁰ *Supra* note 38.

⁴¹ Eduardo Medina and Livia Albeck-Ripka, *‘Severe Flooding in North Carolina After Chantal Dumps Heavy Rain’*, NEW YORK TIMES (July 7, 2025), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/07/weather/tropical-storm-chantal-floods-north-carolina.html>.

informed planning. Oversight and accountability measures, as well as the long-term sustainability of the Disaster Relief Fund, will be central to discussions about how FEMA can adapt to meet the demands of a changing emergency management landscape.

VI. WITNESS

- Mr. David Richardson, Senior Official Performing the Duties of FEMA Administrator, Federal Emergency Management Agency, United States Department of Homeland Security

FIXING EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT: EXAMINING IMPROVEMENTS TO FEMA'S DISASTER RESPONSE

WEDNESDAY, JULY 23, 2025

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

The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 10:03 a.m. in Room 2167, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Scott Perry (Chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. PERRY. The Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management will come to order.

The Chair asks unanimous consent that the Chair be authorized to declare a recess at any time during today's hearing.

Without objection, so ordered.

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

Without objection, so ordered.

As a reminder, if Members wish to insert a document into the record, please also email it to DocumentsTI@mail.house.gov.

With that in mind, the Chair asks unanimous consent to enter into the record letters from NAMIC and the Western Governors' Association.

Without objection, so ordered.

[The information follows Mr. Perry's prepared statement.]

Mr. PERRY. The Chair now recognizes himself for the purposes of an opening statement for 5 minutes.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. SCOTT PERRY OF PENNSYLVANIA, CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Mr. PERRY. I begin by thanking our witness, Mr. Richardson, for being here today to discuss fixing the emergency management system and improving the Federal Emergency Management Agency's, or FEMA's, disaster response.

Earlier this month, devastating flash floods hit Texas, causing a death toll of more than 130 people, including children from a summer camp. The Coast Guard, FEMA, and other Federal agencies assisted Texas in the search, rescue, and response. President

Trump issued a major disaster declaration, opening further Federal assistance for disaster victims and to assist in the recovery. My condolences and prayers go to the people who have lost loved ones, and to all affected by this disaster. It is unimaginable to those of us who have stood by and watched it.

So far in 2025, there have been 20 disasters resulting in major disaster declarations across 10 States. This does not account for emergency declarations and all the open disasters still on the books going all the way back to Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

I have said this before: I question the increasing role of the Federal Government in disasters, but when the Federal Government responds, it helps no one if assistance is slow, bureaucratic, and cumbersome.

States should be the lead in preparing for, mitigating against, and responding to disasters. When the Federal Government does provide assistance, it should be fast, agile, and targeted in a way that's most effective.

What I believe we can all agree on is this: 20 years from now, in 2045, we do not want to see congressional hearings asking why disasters that happened in 2025 are still open. The longer it takes for communities to rebuild, no matter who is paying, the higher the costs and the more vulnerable those communities are to additional harm from other hazards.

Over the years, Congress has passed reform after reform trying to fix FEMA and get Federal disaster response to work effectively. Quite honestly, little seems to work or have been effective. Congress passes something intended to fix disaster response, but bureaucrats continue to complicate the law with added regulations. This makes the implementation and process more confusing. At times, it seems the process actually gets worse, not better.

The process becomes even more unclear when you add in the numerous Federal agencies that are now involved in disasters. The whole point of FEMA was to carry out the President's authority in disasters and manage the entire Federal Government response. However, we seem to have gotten away from that, and we have many agencies, often with conflicting requirements and rules involved, slowing the process even more.

Today, I hope we can touch on not just what happened in Texas and other recent disasters, but how we can work together effectively to fix our emergency management system. Our constituents, American people, are depending on it; it is our duty. How do we make it work better for the communities hit by the disasters, and how do we also respect the taxpayer?

I appreciate the leadership of the full committee chairman, Sam Graves, and the ranking member, Mr. Larsen, for their work in trying to tackle these issues with their legislation, and we look forward to seeing that very shortly.

With that, I look forward to hearing from our witness.

[Mr. Perry's prepared statement follows:]

Prepared Statement of Hon. Scott Perry, a Representative in Congress from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and Chairman, Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management

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I appreciate the leadership of the Full Committee Chairman, Sam Graves, and Ranking Member Larsen for their work in trying to tackle these issues with their legislation, and we look forward to seeing that very shortly.

**Statement of the National Association of Mutual Insurance Companies,
Submitted for the Record by Hon. Scott Perry**

INTRODUCTION

The National Association of Mutual Insurance Companies (NAMIC) is pleased to provide comments regarding the U.S. House Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management hearing on "Fixing Emergency Management: Examining Improvements to FEMA's Disaster Response."

NAMIC consists of more than 1,300 member companies, including six of the top 10 property/casualty insurers in the United States. The association supports local and regional mutual insurance companies on main streets across America as well as many of the country's largest national insurers.

NAMIC member companies write \$383 billion in annual premiums and represent 61 percent of homeowners, 48 percent of automobile, and 25 percent of the business

insurance markets. Through its advocacy programs NAMIC promotes public policy solutions that benefit member companies and the policyholders they serve.¹ NAMIC members take great pride in being indispensable partners helping rebuild policyholders' communities and lives when they need it most: when they have suffered a loss. We stand ready to partner with policymakers at all levels to reimagine and improve the way America prepares for and invests in emergency management and response.

GENERATIONAL OPPORTUNITY TO TRANSFORM EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AND INSTILL RESILIENCY

While there is general agreement that the Federal Emergency Management Agency of today is not structured to best serve the American people, there is little consensus on the agency's optimal scope or operations. FEMA's past successes and failures should inform rather than define the future of the agency. As policymakers evaluate bold ideas for fundamental reform, practical implementation mechanisms for government officials as well as potential partnerships with the private and non-profit sectors should be thought of as key components in the equation. The federal government sits in a unique position to facilitate coordination between all interested stakeholders, even as primary responsibility and decision-making is appropriately returned to state and local governments. A future federal emergency management agency can also play the most important role of all as a trusted and truthful communicator and champion of both pre-disaster mitigation and post-disaster recovery.

As Congress works with stakeholders and the administration and considers how it may re-think ways that disasters are anticipated and responded to, NAMIC urges the thoughtful and measured consideration of several vital components to any future structure:

STABILITY AND EXPERTISE

To stand the test of time and engender positive change for generations to come, Congress should structure any federal entity tasked with emergency planning and response in a way that stakeholders can rely on for expertise and consistency of treatment. The organization should be structured to maximize steady, reliable, and knowledgeable behavior, focusing on consistent competence without political or partisan interpretations or priorities. Leadership and staff should be expected to bolster capacity and act in a manner that best serves affected communities by supporting rather than commandeering or displacing state and local actors.

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Whether agency leadership reports directly to the President or through another agency, it is imperative that strong and transparent mechanisms are in place to ensure continued commitment to the core mission of serving Americans who have suffered through a declared emergency. Clear communication and education about the chain-of-command and decision-making processes will serve all Americans best. Disaster victims and those that work to help them are most effective when they not only understand processes, but also have understandable ways to provide and receive additional information as needed. For example, consider a FEMA assistance claim denial—a thorough explanation and documented rationale with ample details would be helpful in aiding the victim's subsequent decision-making.

Congressional and Executive oversight of day-to-day operations will also be important. Studies and analysis to inform the efficacy of a new structure and mission for FEMA should be data driven and assess whether the agency is delivering positive results for taxpayers rather than comparing the government to private industry efforts.

UNIFORMITY AND STREAMLINING—INTERNAL

Incorporating ways to streamline disaster response with processes that ensure greater consistency in paperwork for victims and entities aiding them should reduce frustration and confusion, as well as expedite recovery. For example, there would be benefits to publishing upfront what specific information should be provided to administer individual assistance and to process such applications. Today, different FEMA regions sometimes seek different information from individuals and their insurers before processing individual assistance requests; these current practices do not make for a seamless or positive experience for individuals post-catastrophe. The

¹ <https://www.namic.org/about-namic/>

last thing a disaster victim should hear in the wake of their tragedy is that they need a different form to prove a necessary declination from their insurer. Through standardization and straightforward uniformity, a simple upfront established set of expectations (and perhaps a template) may help with getting necessary aid out the door quickly when disaster victims are most in need. Post-disaster claims operations move most swiftly when there can be a level of anticipated consistency.

SPEED AND STREAMLINING—ACROSS AGENCIES

At this time, there are at least seventeen departments and agencies responsible for some element of federal disaster assistance. As Congress moves forward, consolidation and clarifying these components to improve the efficiency and information sharing across efforts would be a worthwhile enhancement. This process review and reimagining should also take into account the most efficient way of communicating with leaders and decision-makers in state and local governments to eliminate the possibility of confusion or inconsistent messages from the federal government.

COORDINATION AND STREAMLINING—ACROSS TYPES OF GOVERNMENT

As Congress contemplates a future with greater empowerment of state and local governments to manage emergencies occurring in their area, it becomes more important than ever that chains of command, responsibilities, and workflow sequences are clear, consistent, and communicated so they can be executed promptly when needed. Requiring specific, written, operational plans and facilitating communication between points of contact across federal, state, and local agencies would be well advised.

MEANINGFUL FRONT-END MITIGATION—BUILDING CODES TO REDUCE RISK

A re-imagined federal emergency response system will be a failure if it does not embrace science-based lessons to incorporate modern approaches for stronger and safer building that reduces risk going forward. Such a commitment to prioritize efficiency through front-end investment to avoid back-end recovery is not only financially prudent but will also prevent struggles for millions of Americans who would suffer under our current paradigm. A prime mechanism for this is the implementation and enforcement of up-to-date statewide building codes, both at initial construction and during post-disaster rebuilding to avoid repeat losses. Modernized building codes are a cost-effective way to protect individuals, families, and communities from risks posed by natural hazards.

As Congress considers how to interrupt cascading negative impacts of disasters on a community, it should leverage and integrate the advantages of upfront investing, with studies showing \$1 spent on mitigation measures can save anywhere from \$6 to \$13 in future losses. The 2024 Allstate-U.S. Chamber report on the community benefits of investing in resilience includes the estimated value of saving jobs and mitigating economic harms, including in the context of potential wildfires.² Further, the National Institute of Building Sciences offers evidence of a strong estimated return on investment by mitigation measures, including building codes.³ Their extensive report puts more resilient construction costs into context through benefit-cost ratios. Because of the value of modifying the buildings to save money over the long term, NAMIC urges that this be a deliberate and major initiative that includes a set-aside for grants as well as for adoption and enforcement of the most up-to-date and strongest building codes fit for a location. This kind of investment not only shows accountability to taxpayers but also serves as strong stewards for both fiscal and preparedness responsibilities.

EFFECTIVE BACK-END EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

Major disasters require thousands of employees to find survivors, set up shelters, process requests for assistance, and distribute recovery information and funds. Particularly in the event of concurrent disasters, there is unique value in a federal coordinating facility to aid in such efforts. Well trained staff, along with efficient processes that avoid historical problems of waste, fraud, and abuse will greatly improve many post-disaster challenges. Another helpful area of focus would be training staff on the notion that the existence of insurance proceeds alone does not mean additional federal support will constitute a windfall for a victim. The time someone is

² <https://www.uschamber.com/security/the-preparedness-payoff-the-economic-benefits-of-investing-in-climate-resilience>

³ https://nibs.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/NIBS_MMC_MitigationSaves_2019.pdf

repairing or rebuilding after a severe natural catastrophe could, in some instances, be an ideal time for a property owner to use federal assistance to incorporate additional hardening to help better withstand future damage and scale mitigation faster, avoiding repeat losses.

INSURERS' LONGSTANDING SUPPORT FOR MITIGATION & RESILIENCE

The property/casualty insurance industry, and specifically NAMIC, has a long history of working to advance such solutions to reduce the effects of increasingly severe weather, particularly following Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The industry helped establish and helps fund cutting-edge research carried out by the Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety (IBHS).⁴ NAMIC, a founding member of the BuildStrong Coalition,⁵ remains instrumental and steadfast in its policy and advocacy support for resiliency and hardening the built environment.

In 2018, President Trump signed the Disaster Recovery Reform Act (DRRA) into law.⁶ The DRRA was a historically significant disaster reform law containing a host of policies designed to significantly boost the nation's pre-disaster funding mechanism, which included the creation of the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Program (BRIC). While NAMIC recognizes that going forward the provisions of the DRRA and the structure/administration of the BRIC program may change, there are certain essential functions that we urge be included as part of the future as the U.S. plans and executes on a more resilient tomorrow.

NAMIC supports government efforts to consistently make pre-disaster funds available for projects that protect people and infrastructure from natural hazards and the effects of extreme weather events that ultimately reduce risk and help avoid losses of lives and property. Indeed, in any government review of disaster aid expenditures, NAMIC encourages agencies and stakeholders to: prioritize preparedness, build and rebuild more resiliently, put an emphasis on commonsense and cost-effective practices, such as individual and community-wide pre-disaster mitigation measures, encourage up-to-date building codes; and bolster retrofit programs to improve the existing housing stock.

THE NEW ERA OF RISK IS NOT COMING—IT IS ALREADY HERE

As we recently advised the Senate Banking, Housing, & Urban Affairs and Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committees, in recent years, property/casualty insurers have found themselves facing an unprecedented confluence of circumstances that has created a more complex and riskier and costlier world for them and their policyholders.⁷ More frequent and severe disasters and more Americans choosing to move into flood or fire-prone counties are combining with other forces and pressures far beyond the control of the insurance industry, as interconnected risks continue expanding on more fronts than ever before.

The presence of more billion-dollar weather disasters is not a matter of politics or opinion, but a matter of math—while the 1980 to 2024 annual average of such storms is 9.0, over the most recent 5 years it has skyrocketed to 23 (CPI-adjusted). In 2023 and 2024, the U.S. experienced 28 and 27 such disasters, respectively, each of which has far reaching economic effects that extend well beyond the immediate area where the storm hit. Earlier this year, the Eaton and Palisades fires devastated communities across southern California, and recent weeks have seen severe hailstorms and related flooding across the Midwest and Southeastern United States, including areas still recovering from last year's Hurricane Helene. In all those instances, insurers continue to play the critical role of trusted financial first responders, working closely with FEMA, state emergency managers, state Departments of Insurance and other relevant officials to help customers begin rebuilding their homes and lives.

Just as the disasters' presence is a matter of fact, so is the value and benefit-cost ratio of mitigation across flood, hurricane surge, wind, earthquake, and wildfire. Put simply, smart investment on the front-end means avoiding damage and reduces the need for spending down the road.

⁴ <https://ibhs.org/>

⁵ <https://buildstrongamerica.com/>

⁶ Sec. 42 USC 5124 et seq. (Division D—Disaster Recovery Reform—within Public Law 115–254) <https://www.congress.gov/bills/115/congress/house-bill/302/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22HR+302%22%5D%7D&r=1>

⁷ <https://www.namic.org/resource/the-future-of-insurance-seeking-solutions-in-a-new-era-of-risk>

* * * * *

CONCLUSION

Among his many accomplishments, Benjamin Franklin was involved in founding the first insurance company in the U.S., a mutual. One of his famous quotes captures the spirit of mitigation that we hope will guide a re-imagined federal emergency management entity: “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” In his time Franklin was referring to preventing and reducing the impact of house fires in colonial-era Philadelphia. While he did not have the current understanding of building science, his words reflect wisdom today.

A fundamental shift in vision and tone is needed to rebuild trust in the federal government’s emergency management capabilities. This should include a comprehensive message around instilling resiliency, streamlining responses, speedier recovery, and stronger rebuilding. NAMIC encourages Congress to take this opportunity to meaningfully bend our nation’s risk curve by prioritizing mitigation at scale in charting the direction for America’s built environment, considering both new and existing structures and their locations/surroundings. Fewer homes destroyed by catastrophes means more stability for families, communities, and markets. We look forward to partnering with all interested stakeholders in these efforts.

Letter and Attachment of July 22, 2025, to Hon. Scott Perry, Chairman, and Hon. Greg Stanton, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management, from Jack Waldorf, Executive Director, Western Governors’ Association, Submitted for the Record by Hon. Scott Perry

JULY 22, 2025.

The Honorable SCOTT PERRY,
Chairman,
Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives, 2165 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC 20515.

The Honorable GREG STANTON,
Ranking Member,
Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives, 2165 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC 20515.

DEAR CHAIRMAN PERRY AND RANKING MEMBER STANTON:

In light of the Subcommittee’s July 23, 2025, hearing, Fixing Emergency Management: Examining Improvements to FEMA’s Disaster Response, attached please find Western Governors’ Association (WGA) Policy Resolution 2024-05, Disaster Preparedness and Response. The resolution communicates Governors’ policy recommendations for improving the efficacy of Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) disaster assistance to save taxpayer money and expedite response and recovery efforts.

I request that you include this document in the permanent record of the hearing, as it articulates Western Governors’ collective and bipartisan policy on this important issue.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. Please contact me if you have any questions or require further information.

Sincerely,

JACK WALDORF,
Executive Director, Western Governors’ Association.

Attachment

WESTERN GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION
POLICY RESOLUTION 2024-05
DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

A. BACKGROUND

Major disasters, emergencies and extreme weather events are devastating to the people, property, economy, and natural environment of the communities in which they occur. The outcomes of disasters and emergencies can often be far reaching, and the public costs of disasters and emergencies have increased significantly in recent years. Governors hold the sole authority to request federal assistance when a disaster overwhelms state and local capabilities, and the federal government plays a critical role in pre-disaster risk mitigation, disaster response, and long-term disaster recovery. The first category—proactive risk reduction activities—has a very high return on investment, especially in the context of modern, climate-influenced disasters such as wildfire, extreme heat, or atmospheric rivers. The latter two categories, disaster response and recovery, tend to create a significant financial burden on individuals and communities, and this burden may be disproportionately borne by people who are facing pre-existing financial challenges. Effective disaster response and recovery is essential not only to mitigate current disasters, but also prevent additional ‘cascading disasters’ in the aftermath of the initial event. The COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the need for close coordination between federal, state, territorial, local and tribal governments in emergency management. Inter-agency coordination can serve to streamline the provision of disaster assistance, which in turn can help to reduce barriers to access and improve post-disaster outcomes.

B. GOVERNORS' POLICY STATEMENT

1. Governors need maximum flexibility to respond to disaster and emergency circumstances that may evolve quickly over the course of a disaster through the initiation of recovery. Therefore, Congress and federal agencies should expeditiously remove any barriers limiting a Governor and their executive branch agencies' ability to save taxpayer money and expedite response and recovery efforts while safeguarding lives, property, and the environment. Western Governors recognize that planning processes and disaster and emergency protocols are important aspects of emergency management, but Governors also need significant freedom to adapt those plans to changing circumstances during the evolution of a disaster or emergency.
2. Federal, state, territorial and tribal efforts to prepare for, mitigate against, respond to, and recover from emergencies and disasters must ensure programs and response efforts are inclusive, equitable, accessible, and representative of the affected communities. Development of federal disaster programs, policies, and procedures should be mindful of underserved and underrepresented communities while also addressing all survivors' post-disaster needs.
3. Western Governors encourage Congress and federal agencies to reassess the structure and administrative mechanisms of disaster mitigation grant programs to establish the most effective means of determining the necessity and delivery of federal disaster assistance. This should involve eliminating duplicative processes and establishing consistent standards for federal grant programs, including the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), the State Homeland Security Program, the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Program, and the Emergency Management Performance Grant Program (EMPG).
4. When managing disaster declarations, state and local governments coordinate billions of dollars in federal grants through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). To help offset administrative requirements of these grants, FEMA regulations allow recipients to utilize a percentage for management costs. These management costs, however, are limited to each specific disaster and regulations do not allow grantees to economize by managing workloads across all open disasters. Western Governors urge Congress to direct FEMA to allow grantees to utilize management costs across all open disasters, which will build recovery and mitigation capacity, incentivize disaster close-out, and reduce the costs of disasters.
5. Federal agencies conducting disaster recovery and assistance, as well as the programs which they administer, should receive adequate and consistent fund-

ing and allow Western Governors and their designated executive branch agencies to have critical input on where those funds are needed most. The lack of speed, certainty, and consistency in deployment of federal disaster funding is a hindrance to coordinated recovery efforts and effective utilization of public funds.

6. EMPG funds are the primary funding source for local emergency managers, and funding for this program has ostensibly decreased due to inflation. Congress should increase EMPG funding to expand state and territorial capacity to provide technical assistance and expedite reimbursement for FEMA public assistance applicants.
7. Stafford Act declarations generally respond to rapid-onset catastrophes that cause severe damage in a particular area over a defined incident period. Damage from slow-onset, compound, or cascading disasters is difficult to quantify, and assistance for these disasters has historically been limited. Congress should amend the Stafford Act to support disaster response, recovery, and mitigation associated with slow-onset, compound, or cascading disasters. Specifically, Congress should amend the major disaster declaration definition to include slow-onset or other comparable terms, establish a new type of declaration and corresponding disaster assistance authorities for slow-onset and ongoing incidents, and require FEMA to develop a means to assign damage that is not limited to a discrete incident or incident period. Additionally, Congress should require FEMA to modify or extend the incident period under certain conditions.
8. FEMA requires that requests for major disaster declarations be submitted within 30 days of the incident end date. This requirement establishes an arbitrary timeline that does not reflect the reality of cascading disasters. In cases such as wildfire, drought, winter storms, or atmospheric rivers, damage can continue to accumulate and compound well after the 30-day window has passed, preventing accurate damage assessments and timely requests for a disaster declaration. FEMA should extend the application period for a disaster declaration to 60 days and permit extensions up to 90 days, if warranted. FEMA should provide a determination on the declaration request within 60 days from the request's submission. Doing so would accelerate the deployment of all federal disaster assistance while minimizing uncertainty for states, territories, and disaster survivors.
9. FEMA should provide additional resources to support its regional offices' capacity and coordination with states and territories. Each regional office must develop an understanding of local resource concerns and other local factors to help ensure timely, high quality damage assessments and closeout packages that properly compensate communities for some of their most significant losses.
10. Many rural western communities have less concentrated populations than eastern states, making it difficult for western states and territories to qualify for Individual Assistance, Public Assistance, and Fire Management Assistance Grant (FMAG) declarations. Additionally, certain criteria, such as considering Total Taxable Revenue of the entire state when evaluating whether to provide a major declaration for a localized event, makes it virtually impossible for large states to receive a declaration. Federal processes used to evaluate the need for access to disaster aid programs should be reconsidered. Federal agencies should reexamine the standards used to determine the provision of Individual Assistance to homeowners and the access to federal aid needed for recovery from disasters and emergencies that affect western states and territories. The historically underfunded U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service's Emergency Watershed Protection Program should be revisited and strengthened.
11. Western Governors recognize that as the first responders to a disaster or emergency, states, territories, local governments, and tribes have better information about local conditions and needs in the response and immediate recovery phases of a disaster or emergency. FEMA and other applicable federal agencies should work directly with individual states and territories through Governors or their designees to jointly identify disaster risks and methods by which such risks may be addressed.
12. Federal agencies should provide state, territorial, local, and tribal government officials with accessible and clear information on available federal resources and programs and the most effective utilization of those resources in disaster recovery. WGA has worked with federal partners to improve interagency coordination on post-wildfire restoration work, including a roadmap of assist-

ance available to communities affected by wildfire and identification of “navigators” to help communities prioritize post-wildfire restoration needs. Western Governors urge the federal government to prioritize the funding of community navigator efforts for All-Hazards events and other post-disaster restoration needs.

13. Following a Stafford Act major disaster declaration, FEMA assigns a Federal Coordinating Officer (FCO) who is representing the federal interagency resources available following a disaster. Once the Joint Field Office closes and the disaster management operations transition to the regional level, the Regional Administrator is responsible for all remaining activities. It is crucial that the FCO and the FEMA Regional Administrator have a strong relationship and coordinate closely to ensure effective disaster management operations. Another critical role for FEMA disaster personnel is the Public Assistance Program Delivery Manager (PDMG), who is the primary FEMA point of contact for applicants on their disaster projects. PDMGs are currently deployed from all areas of the state and may have vastly different knowledge on various types of disaster damage. Requiring PDMGs to be deployed regionally would improve consistency and subject matter knowledge, which would benefit applicants and FEMA alike.
14. Some western and midwestern states are at risk of catastrophic earthquakes, and mitigation assistance beyond that currently administered by FEMA is needed. Mitigation funds tied to FMAG declarations assist fire-ravaged communities, and the FMAG and Hazard Mitigation Post Fire Grant programs should be continued.
15. Western Governors recognize that community resilience is key to ameliorating the effect of many disasters and emergencies, and that damages could be avoided or minimized if resources were directed to pre-disaster mitigation efforts. Hazard mitigation and risk reduction are the most cost-effective ways to protect lives, property, infrastructure, and the environment from the effects of natural and human-caused hazards. Federal legislation should reconsider the important role of pre-disaster mitigation that reduces the risk and minimizes the effects of disasters and emergencies. When possible, pre-disaster mitigation should be incentivized at the state and local levels. Mobilizing and pre-staging disaster response resources is one strategy for mitigating the potential damages from an anticipated disaster, and FEMA should allow these activities to be eligible under HMGP. If the key to minimizing the effect of disasters and emergencies is pre-disaster mitigation, then steps need to be taken to reduce or minimize the cost share that is associated with many, if not all of these grants. Finally, infrastructure planning should include consideration of risk reduction measures for known hazards and address the dynamic hazard profile created by a changing climate.
16. Western Governors encourage the Administration to consider actions to increase communication and cohesion of federal agencies in disaster and emergency response. The Administration should consider placing a federal agency in the lead role to coordinate communication between and cohesion of federal agencies in disaster and emergency response. Strengthening federal emergency management processes to promote single, comprehensive points of contact and universal intake processes for individuals would streamline state-federal coordination and help ensure that individuals are not burdened by federal program administrative processes. Federal agencies are encouraged to enter into data-sharing agreements. Western Governors support the adoption of a universal intake application for disaster assistance across federal programs. Western Governors also support the consideration of a national emergency management strategy to provide consistent lines of communication between federal, state, territorial, local, and tribal governments.
17. Western Governors recognize the need for clear, consistent, accurate and timely communication about the scope and scale of disasters and emergencies, both between all levels of governments and between governments and their constituents. Clearly articulating what is known and what is not known about a disaster or emergency is critical to developing and executing an effective response from governments, promoting public confidence in those response actions, and empowering citizens to make informed decisions about their safety and welfare.
18. Extreme weather and wildfires pose significant risks and challenges to communities, public health and safety, and livelihoods. Additionally, they create potential liability for electric companies, regardless of the cause of the wild-

fire. The threat of significant liability can destabilize the financial health of electric companies, threatening their ability to continue operations. However, demands for additional clean electricity continue to rise. Keeping electric companies viable is essential to our energy needs and future economic development within our states. Western Governors recognize, that unlike other natural disasters, wildfires create pose an exceptional liability risk for electric companies, placing them in a position that jeopardizes their ability to provide essential power services amid hotter and longer fire seasons. Western Governors urge Congress to collaborate with regulators, policymakers, and stakeholders to explore collaborative approaches to address the potential for large liabilities associated with wildfires. These approaches should consider that utility companies are not structured to meet the required risk diversification, solvency, or other conditions traditionally associated with insurance products.

19. Federal agencies should consider reducing or eliminating cost share requirements in instances where those requirements expose states to burdensome financial liabilities. For example, Other Needs Assistance, a subset of Individual Assistance provided by FEMA, has a 25 percent state cost share. Adding or expanding benefits under the umbrella of Other Needs Assistance increases state costs with no mechanism to relieve these costs for large-scale disasters.

C. GOVERNORS' MANAGEMENT DIRECTIVE

1. The Governors direct WGA staff to work with Congressional committees of jurisdiction, the Executive Branch, and other entities, where appropriate, to achieve the objectives of this resolution.
2. Furthermore, the Governors direct WGA staff to consult with the Staff Advisory Council regarding its efforts to realize the objectives of this resolution and to keep the Governors apprised of its progress in this regard.

This resolution will expire in June 2027. Western Governors enact new policy resolutions and amend existing resolutions on a semiannual basis. Please consult <http://www.westgov.org/resolutions> for the most current copy of a resolution and a list of all current WGA policy resolutions.

Mr. PERRY. The Chair now recognizes the ranking member, Mr. Stanton, for 5 minutes for his opening statement.

Mr. STANTON. Mr. Chairman, before I begin my testimony, I ask for unanimous consent that the committee observe a moment of silence to honor the 135 lives lost in the Texas floods, and to pray for the safe return of those still missing.

Mr. PERRY. Without objection, so ordered.

[A moment of silence.]

Mr. STANTON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. For the sake of time, I ask unanimous consent to submit for the record news accounts corroborating the details I am about to provide in my opening statement.

Mr. PERRY. Without objection, so ordered.

[The information follows Mr. Stanton's prepared statement.]

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. GREG STANTON OF ARIZONA, RANKING MEMBER, SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Mr. STANTON. Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing and focusing our mission to the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Every Democrat on this panel accepts that challenge, and I hope we can work together in a bipartisan way to get this done.

The news out of Texas is heartbreaking. On July 4, flash floods swept through Kerrville and nearby communities, claiming 135 lives, including 37 children. We have learned the faces and stories of the victims: young girls whose dreams were stolen; camp staff

who gave their lives leading children to safety; a father who punched through the window to save his family before bleeding to death from his injuries; and two little sisters swept away together, later found holding hands. So many grieving neighbors and families on the ground who have been working around the clock in response to this disaster. To those brave women and men, we see you, we thank you, and we will not forget your heroism.

Meanwhile, the Acting FEMA Administrator, David Richardson, before us today, was missing in action. For the first 48 hours, the most critical window for search and rescue, he never visited the National Response Coordination Center. For more than a week, he stayed away from Texas. And for 10 days, he made no statement about this tragedy, not a word of sympathy or reassurance to the public. When he appeared finally in Texas on July 12, it felt like a box-checking exercise to quiet his critics. He stayed only a few hours. But in his rush, Mr. Richardson failed to check the most important box: basic human decency.

This tragedy forces some incredibly hard questions: Did the FEMA Administrator fulfill his legal duty? Did he fulfill his moral duty? Did the Administrator sitting before us do everything that he could to save lives?

The FEMA Administrator is the primary Federal coordinator for disaster response. That means anticipating needs, acting proactively, and moving resources swiftly, even without waiting for a specific State request. FEMA's own National Response Framework demands proactive search and rescue. These reforms were put into place after Hurricane Katrina, when Federal failures cost lives. Yet nearly 20 years later, history has tragically repeated itself.

Secretary Noem required her personal sign-off on every contract above \$100,000. That bottleneck delayed urban search and rescue teams for more than 72 hours. By the time many urban search and rescue teams reached Texas, no one had been found alive for days. Days.

On July 5, less than 24 hours after the tragedy, FEMA's call center contract expired because of this \$100,000 sign-off policy. The result? The vast majority of calls from survivors went unanswered. Families desperate for shelter and aid were met with silence. Can you imagine losing a family member, losing your home, and having your call go unanswered when you are looking for a lifeline?

Yet, on July 11, with over 100 people still missing and search teams still working to find people, President Trump and Secretary Noem called it "the best FEMA response ever," all while this administration was working to dismantle FEMA, the very agency whose workers were still risking their lives to save others. According to CNN, FEMA's search and rescue chief resigned in frustration over the Texas response. DHS bureaucratic hurdles cost his team critical time and, likely, lives.

This committee has a duty to uncover why FEMA failed to meet its obligations and ensure no community ever faces these failures again. So, I look forward to questioning Mr. Richardson about these stunning breakdowns in leadership and how we fix them.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

[Mr. Stanton's prepared statement follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Hon. Greg Stanton, a Representative in Congress
from the State of Arizona, and Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Eco-
nomic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing and focusing our mission to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Every Democrat on this panel accepts that challenge, and I hope we can work together in a bipartisan way to get it done.

The news out of Texas is heartbreaking. On July 4, flash floods swept through Kerrville and nearby communities, claiming 135 lives, including 37 children.

We have learned the faces and stories of the victims: young girls whose dreams were stolen, camp staff who gave their lives leading children to safety, a father who punched through a window to save his family before bleeding to death from his injuries, and two little sisters, swept away together, later found holding hands.

So many grieving neighbors and families on the ground have been working around the clock in response to this disaster. To those brave women and men, we see you, we thank you, and we will not forget your heroism.

Meanwhile, the acting FEMA Administrator, David Richardson, was missing in action. For the first 48 hours . . . the most critical window for search and rescue . . . he never visited FEMA's National Response Coordination Center. For more than a week, he stayed away from Texas. And for ten days, he made no public statement about the tragedy. Not even a word of sympathy or reassurance to the public.

When he finally appeared in Texas on July 12, it felt like a box-checking exercise to quiet his critics. He stayed only a few hours. But in his rush, Mr. Richardson failed to check the most important box: basic human decency.

This tragedy forces a hard question: did the FEMA Administrator fulfill his legal duty? Did he fulfill his moral duty? Did the Administrator sitting before us do everything he could to save lives?

The FEMA Administrator is the primary federal coordinator for disaster response. That means anticipating needs, acting proactively, and moving resources swiftly, even without waiting for a state request. FEMA's own National Response Framework demands proactive search and rescue. These reforms were put in place after Hurricane Katrina, when federal failures cost lives. Yet nearly 20 years later, history has tragically repeated itself.

Secretary Noem required her personal sign-off for every contract over \$100,000. That bottleneck delayed Urban Search and Rescue teams for more than 72 hours. By the time many reached Texas, no one had been found alive in days. Days!

On July 5, less than 24 hours after the tragedy, FEMA's call center contract expired because of this \$100,000 sign-off policy. The result? Seventy percent of calls from survivors went unanswered. Families desperate for shelter and aid were met with silence. Can you imagine losing a family member, losing your home, and then not having your call unanswered when you're looking for a lifeline?

Yet on July 11, with over 100 people still missing and search teams working behind them, President Trump and Secretary Noem called it "the best FEMA response ever." All while their administration was working to dismantle FEMA, the very agency whose workers were still risking their lives to save others.

And according to CNN, FEMA's search and rescue chief resigned in frustration over the Texas response. DHS bureaucratic hurdles cost his team critical time and likely lives.

This committee has a duty to uncover why FEMA failed to meet its obligations and ensure no community ever faces these failures again. I look forward to questioning Mr. Richardson about these stunning breakdowns in leadership and how we fix them.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

**News Coverage of the July 4, 2025, Texas Hill Country Floods, Submitted
for the Record by Hon. Greg Stanton**

[Editor's note: The information is retained in committee files and is available online at the House of Representatives document repository at <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/PW/PW13/20250723/118485/HHRG-119-PW13-20250723-SD002.pdf>.]

Mr. PERRY. The Chair thanks the ranking member. The Chair now recognizes the ranking member of the full committee, Mr. Larsen, for 5 minutes for his opening statement.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. RICK LARSEN OF WASHINGTON, RANKING MEMBER, COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Thank you, subcommittee Chair Perry and Ranking Member Stanton, for convening today's hearing on FEMA.

The importance of this hearing can't be overstated with the recent tragedy in Texas, as it was a devastating reminder that disaster preparation response is a life or death matter. To quote former FEMA Administrator Pete Gaynor, "Emergency management is locally executed, State-managed, and federally supported." The system was created so the Federal Government can step in when local capacity and capability to respond to disasters has been overwhelmed. This is how emergency management has worked since President Carter created FEMA by Executive order in 1979.

And now the current administration has stated its desire to eliminate FEMA as it exists today and have States lead disaster response. But States already lead disaster response; that is how disaster response works. Dismantling FEMA does not empower States, it just slashes the Federal safety net that serves as a backstop for critical phases of emergency management. This will not streamline disaster response, and will unnecessarily inflate the impact and cost of deadly disasters.

And it appears so far that 434 of 435 Members in the House of Representatives agree that FEMA should not be eliminated, an outstanding majority for this body. Every congressional hearing on FEMA as well this year has concluded that FEMA should continue, and I expect that this hearing will reach the same conclusion.

Now, despite clear congressional intent to the contrary, here are just some of the actions the administration has taken to disrupt and dismantle FEMA since taking office: allowed DOGE unlawful access to FEMA's systems, including databases with disaster survivors' private information; directed FEMA to eliminate all climate change-related activities and terminology; fired 200 probationary workers and pressured over 2,000 more to quit or accept early retirement packages; halted all FEMA work related to resilient building codes and construction standards; stopped enforcement of the Federal flood risk management standard, putting taxpayers back on the hook to rebuild infrastructure that is likely to flood again; canceled FEMA's pre-disaster mitigation program known as BRIC, despite clear evidence that these investments in mitigation pay for themselves many times over; ignored statutory deadlines to facilitate FEMA disaster preparedness grants; mandated a wasteful and inefficient manual review of all grant disbursements, freezing over \$100 billion in payments; ordered every grant and contract over \$100,000 to be personally approved by Secretary Noem before disbursement; and ended the door-to-door canvassing to help survivors register for Federal aid after disasters.

Now, the culmination of these efforts paints a scary picture that this country is not ready for disaster season. In 2017, Hurricanes

Harvey, Irma, and Maria stretched the system. A similar hurricane season this year would break the system.

So, after reading your testimony, Mr. Richardson, I am glad to hear that we both agree that FEMA should exist. That is why I have worked with Chairman Graves to draft the Fixing Emergency Management for Americans Act, or the FEMA Act. Our bill will: restore FEMA to being an independent, Cabinet-level agency; create a new Public Assistance Program that gives incentives to States to prioritize resilience and rebuild quickly; improve FEMA's Individual Assistance Program for disaster survivors by creating a universal application for Federal assistance, making it easier for survivors to access resources for basic needs and housing; and restructure FEMA's mitigation programs to make funding accessible with greater speed and reliability.

It does many other things, and it is based on bipartisan work of this committee and has bipartisan proposals from folks on this committee and off of this committee.

We will be introducing the bill this week after months of painstaking review and incorporation of stakeholder feedback. We are not waiting for the FEMA Review Council—we don't need to wait for a FEMA Review Council—we've been reviewing FEMA for a long time, and that's why the FEMA Act is getting introduced.

So, I look forward to moving this legislation through the committee and to the House floor before—hopefully—having it passed by both houses of Congress and signed into law.

That is the process of making major changes to Federal Government agencies.

Today, we are going to have a serious discussion on the current state of the Nation's disaster readiness posture, and there will be some tough questions, Mr. Richardson. But please don't think we are asking them because we want you or FEMA to fail. We want you and FEMA to succeed. We desperately want and need you to succeed so Americans are safe from disasters. So, thank you for being here. I look forward to your testimony, and I yield back.

[Mr. Larsen of Washington's prepared statement follows:]

Prepared Statement of Hon. Rick Larsen, a Representative in Congress from the State of Washington, and Ranking Member, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Thank you, Subcommittee Chairman Perry and Ranking Member Stanton, for convening today's hearing on FEMA.

The importance of this hearing cannot be overstated; the recent tragedy in Texas was a devastating reminder that disaster preparation and response is a life or death matter.

To quote former FEMA Administrator Pete Gaynor, "emergency management is locally executed, state-managed, and federally supported."

The system was created so the federal government can step in when local capacity and capability to respond to disasters has been overwhelmed.

That is how emergency management has worked since President Carter created FEMA by Executive Order in 1979.

Now the current Administration has stated its desire to eliminate FEMA as it exists today and have states lead disaster response.

But states already lead disaster response. That is how disaster response works! Dismantling FEMA does not empower states. It just slashes the federal safety net that serves as a backstop for critical phases of emergency management.

This will not streamline disaster response, and it will unnecessarily inflate the impact and cost of deadly disasters.

And, it appears so far that 434 of the 435 members in the House of Representatives agree that FEMA should not be eliminated. An outstanding majority for this body.

Every congressional hearing on FEMA this year has concluded that FEMA should continue.

I expect this hearing will reach the same conclusion.

Despite clear Congressional intent to the contrary, here are just some of the actions the Administration has taken to disrupt and dismantle FEMA since taking office:

- Allowed DOGE unlawful access to FEMA systems including databases with disaster survivors' private information;
- Directed FEMA to eliminate all climate change related activities and terminology;
- Fired 200 probationary workers and pressured over 2,000 more to quit or accept early retirement packages;
- Halted all FEMA work related to resilient building codes and construction standards;
- Stopped enforcement of the federal flood risk management standard, putting taxpayers back on the hook to rebuild infrastructure that is likely to flood again;
- Canceled FEMA's pre-disaster mitigation program known as BRIC despite clear evidence that investments in mitigation pay for themselves many times over;
- Ignored statutory deadlines to facilitate FEMA disaster preparedness grants;
- Mandated a wasteful and inefficient manual review of all grant disbursements, freezing over \$100 billion in payments;
- Ordered every grant and contract over \$100,000 be personally approved by Secretary Noem before disbursement; and
- Ended door-to-door canvassing to help survivors register for federal aid after disasters.

The culmination of these efforts paints a scary picture that this country is not ready for disaster season.

In 2017, Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria stretched the system—a similar hurricane season this year would break the system.

After reading your testimony, Mr. Richardson, I am glad to hear that we both agree FEMA should exist.

That is why I have worked with Chairman Graves to draft the Fixing Emergency Management for Americans Act.

Our bill will:

- Restore FEMA to an independent cabinet level agency;
- Create a new Public Assistance program that gives incentives to states to prioritize resilience and rebuild quickly;
- Improve FEMA's Individual Assistance program for disaster survivors by creating a universal application for federal assistance—making it easier for survivors to access resources for basic needs and housing; and
- Restructure FEMA's mitigation programs to make funding accessible with greater speed and reliability.

It does many other things, and it is based on bipartisan work of this Committee and has bipartisan proposals from folks on this Committee and off of this Committee.

We will be introducing the bill this week, after months of painstaking review and incorporation of stakeholder feedback. We're not waiting for the FEMA Review Council—we don't need to wait for a FEMA review council—we've been reviewing FEMA for a long time, and that's why the FEMA Act is getting introduced.

I look forward to moving this legislation through Committee and to the House floor before, hopefully, having it passed by both houses of Congress and signed into law.

That is the process of making major changes to federal government agencies.

Today, we are going to have a serious discussion on the current state of the nation's disaster readiness posture.

There will be some tough questions, Mr. Richardson, but please do not think we are asking them because we want you or FEMA to fail.

We all desperately want and need you to succeed so Americans are safe from disasters.

Thank you for being here, and I look forward to your testimony.

Mr. PERRY. The Chair thanks the ranking member. The Chair now welcomes our witness, Mr. Richardson.

And thank you, sir, for being here.

Briefly, I would like to take a moment to explain our lighting system for our witness and for everybody else in the room, in case you are wondering. There are three lights in front of you. Green means go, yellow means you are running out of time, and red means to conclude your remarks.

I would also encourage you just to make yourself familiar with where the microphone switch is, so—and have the mic up to your mouth so we can hear you.

The Chair asks unanimous consent that the witness' full statement be included in the record.

Without objection, so ordered.

The Chair also asks unanimous consent that the record of today's hearing remain open until such time as our witness has provided answers to any questions that may be submitted to him in writing.

Without objection, so ordered.

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

Without objection, so ordered.

As your written testimony has been made part of the record, sir, the subcommittee asks that you limit your oral remarks to 5 minutes.

With that, Mr. Richardson, you are recognized for 5 minutes for your testimony.

TESTIMONY OF DAVID RICHARDSON, SENIOR OFFICIAL PERFORMING THE DUTIES OF FEMA ADMINISTRATOR, FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Mr. RICHARDSON. Chairman Perry, Ranking Member Stanton, Mr. Larsen, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am the senior official performing the duties of the Administrator of FEMA.

Before I go on, I would be remiss if I didn't recognize the tragic loss of life in New Mexico and Texas after the recent flooding. I was on the ground in Kerr County and saw the devastation firsthand. I am a father, and my heart sank when I heard so many children perished in Texas. My heart goes out to all of those who have lost loved ones. That said, I am honored to be asked by Secretary Noem to assume my current position at FEMA as we work to implement President Trump's vision of ensuring the American people get immediate, effective, and impartial disaster response and recovery.

The President and the Secretary have called on FEMA to return to its statutory mission, and I am taking steps to do exactly that. Consistent with their guidance, I have conducted a thorough mission analysis of FEMA and directed the agency to focus on three initial operational priorities: safeguarding the American people; return primacy to the States; and strengthen State, local, Tribal, and Territorial capability to respond and recover from disasters.

First, FEMA must refocus on survivor-centric response and recovery. FEMA needs to remove cumbersome processes for quicker recovery so Americans return to their homes and communities and rebuild faster. We must find the most innovative and creative methods available to deliver assistance to every American who qualifies for it, while also communicating faster, more clearly, and through more modern means.

Second, FEMA needs to return to a model where disaster response and recovery are locally led and State-managed, with Federal support available when needed. As the President has said, sometimes FEMA gets in the way, and FEMA should never get in the way. The original intent of FEMA was to help State, local, Tribal, and Territorial partners build their disaster resilience, response, and recovery capabilities, and to provide resources when they are overwhelmed by the scope of the disaster. FEMA has lost sight of its original intent, but under the leadership of the President and the Secretary, we are returning to this mission focus.

Moving forward, we will continue to encourage increased State and local investment and ownership of disaster activities. By doing so, we will be better postured to eliminate processes that create delays, backlogs, and survivor frustration, while also increasing coordination with State and local officials.

And third, we must bolster our partners' operational readiness to support our homeland for the risks of today as well as the threats of tomorrow. This means returning authority and responsibility to the States, and improving our programs, and leveraging technology to deliver that support that communities and survivors need when they need it. The more we build our partners' resilience, the more prepared our Nation will be.

By emphasizing these operational priorities, we have narrowed FEMA's focus to what it should have been all along: making sure that resources are brought to bear to help communities on their worst day. We are focused on cutting through redtape and ensuring that when Federal assistance is warranted, we deliver assistance to survivors rapidly, regardless of the political affiliation, race, or creed. But these are just the initial steps.

The President has appointed Secretary Noem and Secretary Hegseth to lead the FEMA Review Council, which is conducting a comprehensive review of the agency. The council is dedicated to reimagining, not just reforming, FEMA. To that end, I will ensure that FEMA is fully cooperative with the Review Council. We respect the independence of the council's review, and will welcome its recommendations. I am confident that the council will offer the President actionable recommendations for a more efficient Federal disaster response which is refocused on serving Americans during their darkest days.

Additionally, the President has issued several Executive orders to streamline Government, and Secretary Noem and I are committed to ensuring that those Executive orders are carried out both in letter and spirit.

Finally, I am a long-time public servant. I served in the United States Marine Corps as a ground combat officer, leading Marines in deployments to Afghanistan, Iraq, and Africa. Before FEMA, I served as the Assistant Secretary for DHS's Countering Weapons

of Mass Destruction Office twice. As long as I am in this role, I will ensure FEMA remains singularly focused on the core mission.

This subcommittee has an important voice in this process of change, and I look forward to working with the committee on the FEMA of tomorrow. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today, and I look forward to your questions.

[Mr. Richardson's prepared statement follows:]

Prepared Statement of David Richardson, Senior Official Performing the Duties of FEMA Administrator, Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Chairman Perry, Ranking Member Stanton, and Members of the Subcommittee: thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

I am the Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

I was honored to be asked by Secretary Noem to assume my current position at FEMA as we work to implement President Trump's vision of ensuring that the American people get an "immediate, effective, and impartial response to and recovery from natural disasters." The President and the Secretary have called on me to return FEMA to its statutory mission, and I am taking steps to do exactly that.

Consistent with their guidance, I have conducted a thorough mission analysis of FEMA Headquarters and regional offices, and directed the Agency to focus on three initial operational priorities:

- Safeguard the American people;
- Return primacy to the states; and
- Strengthen state, local, tribal, and territorial capability to respond and recover from disasters.

First, FEMA must refocus on survivor-centric response and recovery. We should never let the bureaucracy of Washington, D.C. delay timely and effective delivery of lifesaving or life-sustaining assistance. FEMA needs to cut red tape and remove cumbersome processes for quicker recovery, so that people can return to their homes, and communities can rebuild faster. We must find the most innovative and creative methods available to deliver assistance to every American who qualifies for it, while also communicating faster, more clearly, and through more modern means.

Second, FEMA needs to return to a model where disaster response and recovery are locally led and state-managed, with federal support available when needed. As the President has said, sometimes FEMA gets in the way, and we should never get in the way. The original intent of FEMA was to help state, local, tribal, and territorial partners build their disaster resilience, response, and recovery capabilities, and to provide resources when they are overwhelmed by the scope of a disaster. FEMA lost sight of this original intent, but under the leadership of the President and the Secretary, we are returning to this mission focus. Moving forward, we will continue to encourage increased state and local investment and ownership of disaster activities. By doing so, we will be better postured to eliminate processes that create delays, backlogs, and survivor frustration, while also increasing coordination with state and local officials.

And third, we must bolster our partners' operational readiness to support our homeland for the risks of today and the threats of tomorrow. This means returning authority and responsibility to the states and improving our programs and leveraging technology to deliver the support that communities and survivors need, when they need it. The more we build our partners' resilience, the more prepared our nation will be.

By emphasizing these operational priorities, we have narrowed FEMA's focus to what it should have been all along: making sure that resources are brought to bear to help communities on their worst day. We are focused on cutting through red tape and ensuring that, when federal assistance is warranted, we deliver assistance to survivors rapidly, regardless of political affiliation, race, or creed.

But these are just initial steps. The President has appointed Secretary Noem and Secretary Hegseth to lead the FEMA Review Council, which is conducting a comprehensive review of the Agency. The Council is dedicated to reimagining, not just reforming, FEMA. To that end, I will ensure that FEMA is fully cooperative with the Review Council. We respect the independence of the Council's review and will welcome its recommendations. I am confident that the Council will offer the Presi-

dent actionable recommendations for a more efficient federal disaster response, which is re-focused on serving Americans during their darkest days.

Additionally, the President has issued several Executive Orders to streamline government, and Secretary Noem and I are committed to ensuring that those executive orders are carried out in both letter and spirit.

Finally, I believe in public service. I served in the Marines Corps as a combat officer, leading my Marines during deployments to Afghanistan, Iraq and Africa. Before FEMA, I served as the Assistant Secretary for the DHS Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction Office, where I worked to effectively fulfill my mission. I bring that same mindset of service to my current position. As long as I am in this role, I will ensure FEMA remains singularly focused on the core mission.

This Subcommittee also has an important voice in this process of change, and I look forward to working with the Committee on the FEMA of tomorrow.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today, and I look forward to your questions.

Mr. PERRY. The Chair thanks the gentleman for his testimony. We will now turn to questions. The Chair recognizes himself for 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. Richardson, last week, Members received a briefing from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Coast Guard, and the Army Corps of Engineers on the ongoing response to the Texas floods. And I know we are still in the response mode, with over 130 fatalities and 100 people still missing, tragically.

However, we do not know when the next disaster is going to happen. And so, I know that we are looking for after action reports, but I think I need to turn to some of the questioning, or at least the testimony today, because it countervails what we heard last week directly from FEMA from Mr. Turi, when I asked him particularly about response times to the call center.

Now, we understand from Mr. Turi that when there is a disaster occurring, that disaster is the one that receives precedence. So, you might be getting calls into the call center from across the country, but the ones outside the disaster response area are put kind of behind the ones that are a priority, which is the disaster that is occurring now. And in that case, wait times were significantly reduced, based on what we are hearing from the ranking member here.

And look, we just want to have the correct information. We don't want to say that anybody is distorting the truth, but we have got to make decisions on the correct information. So, the information we got from Mr. Turi countervails what we are hearing right here in the committee today. And so, I am hoping you can elucidate as to what you know about the call center response time.

We also know that people from around the country that call and don't receive an immediate pickup from the call center hang up. But those are still counted as calls into the response center, and they are aggregated into the response time.

As well, we also heard that FEMA did not receive a request from the State until Monday. So, there was no request prior to Monday for FEMA to get involved in the disaster response recovery effort.

And so, I would like you to elucidate, if you could, any of that information that we received from Mr. Turi last week.

Mr. RICHARDSON. So, thank you for your question, Chairman Perry.

First, to the call center. So, any time that there is a disaster, we surge support to the call center to address those calls, and that is

what we did. And so, the disaster happened on Friday, and then there was Saturday and Sunday. And for most people, they don't call into the call center over the weekend. They would call in on Monday. And indeed, we had the surge support available all weekend. And when they came in on Monday, of course, there was a surge.

Now, as Mr. Turi very likely told you, all calls were answered within 3 minutes, and no calls beyond 10 minutes. So, it was from 3 to 10 minutes. And the vast majority of phone calls were answered and the questions were addressed.

Now, regarding the—I think the next part of the question is the support on the ground in Texas on—was it—you said Monday, correct?

Mr. PERRY. Well, that is what we understand from—

Mr. RICHARDSON [interposing]. Yes.

Mr. PERRY [continuing]. Mr. Turi is when FEMA received the request from the State of Texas. FEMA doesn't—

Mr. RICHARDSON [interrupting]. That is correct.

Mr. PERRY [continuing]. Just doesn't go unrequested. As the Federal Government—

Mr. RICHARDSON [interrupting]. That is correct.

Mr. PERRY [continuing]. The requirement is to wait for the State to request, and then be prepared to respond.

Mr. RICHARDSON. So, Texas—first of all, on the deck in Texas on the 4th of July, there was a national urban search and rescue team. We have 28 of those teams all over the country. One of them is in Texas. So in College Station, Texas, that FEMA-funded, FEMA-trained, and FEMA-equipped asset was already on the deck on 4 July. And there was also a Federal coordinating officer at the EOC, Emergency Operations Center, in Austin.

And regarding the request on Monday, that is correct. So, the disaster declaration didn't come in until Sunday, and then Monday, they requested and the support was there within 24 hours.

Mr. PERRY. Within 24 hours. Is there a standard by which is set for FEMA on—the response time is 24 hours? It seems—from my standpoint, that seems like a long time to wait, so just tell me if there is a standard.

When we had a medevac call in Iraq, as the commander of the task force, if the aircraft wasn't airborne within 8 minutes of the call, it was a call directly to the Secretary of Defense. What is the response time, if you know, required for FEMA on such a response?

Mr. RICHARDSON. Thank you for the question. Once again, they get there as quickly as possible. Those two teams came from, I believe it was, Tennessee. No, it was Missouri and Colorado. And they get there as soon as possible, because they have got to move—

Mr. PERRY [interrupting]. I understand, but—so my time has expired, but is there a minimum response time? I am just asking for purposes of trying to make things better. So does FEMA have a minimum response time once the request is made to respond, like within an hour or within 24 hours? What is the—

Mr. RICHARDSON [interrupting]. Well, they respond immediately, and as soon as they get the word, they move. So, they respond immediately—

Mr. PERRY [interrupting]. But there is no requirement that you know of? There is no requirement?

Mr. RICHARDSON. They get there as fast as possible. I don't know if there is an hour number—

Mr. PERRY [interposing]. Okay.

Mr. RICHARDSON [continuing]. But they get there as fast as possible.

Mr. PERRY. If you could get back to the committee with that information, that would be helpful.

With that, my time is expired—

Mr. RICHARDSON [interrupting]. I will.

Mr. PERRY [continuing]. And the Chair now recognizes the ranking member, Representative Stanton from Arizona.

Mr. STANTON. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I, too, was at the briefing that you were at, and it sounds like you and I share our disappointment in FEMA staff for pointing the finger at Governor Abbott, and blaming Governor Abbott and his team for a late request for urban search and rescue help in this horrible disaster.

But as Mr. Richardson, I am sure, knows, under Federal law, under the National Response Framework, FEMA does not wait for a request from the local government. Under the National Response Framework, Federal law requires FEMA to anticipate the needs of States in disasters to coordinate proactively, and not to wait on the State's request for positioning resources.

Mr. Richardson, were you aware that this is Federal law for you to act proactively, and not to wait for a request from Governor Abbott to pre-position resources?

Mr. RICHARDSON. Thank you for the question, Mr. Stanton.

The capability, indeed, was pre-positioned. And that is why I mentioned Texas Task Force 1. It was pre-positioned in Texas and ready to go. Once again, that is a federally trained, federally equipped—and they were—

Mr. STANTON [interrupting]. Mr. Richardson, I have got to cut you off, because I have a short bit of time.

You need to talk to your staff, because your staff was pointing the finger at Governor Abbott and saying the lack of urban search and rescue proactivity was based upon a late request from the Governor's office. My belief—and it sounds like your belief—is that the requirement for you, as the FEMA Administrator, is in light of the weather reports and how bad it was going to be, was to pre-position those urban search and rescue folks in advance. And I believe that FEMA has failed in that mission because there could have been a lot more urban search and rescue there—they weren't there until 72 hours after the tragic incident.

How many times have you met with President Trump since you have assumed this role?

Mr. RICHARDSON. I have not met with President Trump.

Mr. STANTON. How many times have you spoken with President Trump, one on one, in your current capacity?

Mr. RICHARDSON. I correspond with the President on a regular basis.

Mr. STANTON. Where were you on July 4 and July 5 of this year?

Mr. RICHARDSON. On July 4, I was on vacation.

Mr. STANTON. When did you return from your vacation?

Mr. RICHARDSON. I returned the next day.

Mr. STANTON. So, on July 5, you returned to Washington, DC.

Mr. RICHARDSON. I spent the entire vacation in my vehicle, speaking on my phone to either the State of Texas or DHS coordinating for the events in Texas.

Mr. STANTON. Were you on the first plane back to Washington, then, from your vacation?

Mr. RICHARDSON. I was in my truck, with my two boys and myself. I was in my truck. I remained in my truck the whole time.

Mr. STANTON. When did you first learn of Secretary Noem's \$100,000 sign-off policy?

And did you warn her or anyone at DHS about the potential for delays in FEMA's ability to respond as a result of that policy?

Mr. RICHARDSON. The Secretary signs anything that comes across her desk nearly immediately, without undue delay. And I never had a concern about the \$100,000 memo. It never concerned me. I have never seen it cause any undue delay.

Mr. STANTON. The \$100,000 sign-off policy did not delay your ability to proactively put forward resources, urban search and rescue resources in place as soon as you knew how bad the flood was?

Mr. RICHARDSON. Under President Trump's leadership and Secretary Noem's leadership, their exceptional leadership, the support that was so critical to the people and the State of Texas on their worst day was on target, on time. And that is what they told me. That is what the President said. That is what the Secretary said. Texas got what they needed when they needed it.

Mr. STANTON. So, your lack of visibility in the hours and days and even week after this horrific flood that cost so many lives is shocking. Secretary Noem was very present. You were not.

Did President Trump, Secretary Noem, or any official at the White House direct you to stand down during this crisis?

Mr. RICHARDSON. I was in constant communication with the State of Texas, DHS, and the White House, handling the disaster immediately when I found out. And I remained so for the entire time. Constant communication with the emergency manager in the State of Texas, Nim Kidd, as well as region 6, as well as communication with the White House and Secretary Noem. I was on full duty, full-time.

Mr. STANTON. Mr. Richardson, you were nowhere near Texas at the critical moments in the search and rescue, and you did not even show your face for more than a week after the flood. You are the Administrator of this critical agency. You are the leader, but you did not lead as you are required to by Federal law. But worse, you seem uninterested to learn what went wrong and how to respond better.

Do the victims and survivors in Texas deserve an apology?

Mr. RICHARDSON. What happened in Texas was an absolute tragedy. It is hard to fathom. I went to Texas, I flew over. It was an absolute tragedy. My heart goes out to the people in Texas.

Mr. STANTON. That was——

Mr. RICHARDSON [interrupting]. I know that there was——

Mr. STANTON [continuing]. That was intended as a yes-or-no question, and I will appropriately take that as a no.

Mr. Chairman, this wasn't just incompetence. It wasn't just indifference. It was both. And that deadly combination likely cost lives. I yield back.

Mr. PERRY. The gentleman's time has expired. The Chair now recognizes Representative Ezell from Mississippi.

Mr. EZELL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Richardson, for being here, and thank you for meeting with me earlier last week. We discussed numerous FEMA issues the other day.

For years, the agency has struggled to respond effectively to disasters both before and after they occur. A couple of months ago, one of the county managers from North Carolina testified before this subcommittee and reflected on the fact that FEMA did not even pick up the phone when tragedy struck.

Within my own district, as we have discussed, projects still linger after Katrina. We are coming up on the 20th anniversary next month, 20 years after the deadly hurricane, and my office is still battling with FEMA over issues from that hurricane.

Mr. Richardson, what measures is FEMA taking to finally close out the Katrina projects?

Mr. RICHARDSON. There is a great emphasis on closing out the FEMA projects. It is one of my discoveries during the full mission analysis at FEMA that we have a long way to go on closing out all the open disasters. In fact, just this morning, I was briefed on the open disasters. And that's one of the challenges we find with FEMA, that there are too many bureaucratic processes in place for closing out the disasters.

Mr. EZELL. Are you are going to work on cutting out some of those bureaucratic issues?

Mr. RICHARDSON. Indeed I am, sir, and I would be glad to collaborate with you, come see you, and talk you through how we are doing that.

Mr. EZELL. Thank you. Kind of switching gears here just a minute, last Congress, I asked Administrator Criswell to consider the flood map provided by locals in my State. I am encouraged by the positive feedback from that. And I want to continue on with the conversations about that between FEMA and the stakeholders in Mississippi.

A more informed consumer base armed with clear signals about their flood risk would lead to better insurance participation, stronger risk pools, and encourage flood mitigation investments that reduce flood insurance premiums and help the taxpayer. How is FEMA modernizing NFIP to meet the need for property level risk flood management?

Mr. RICHARDSON. So, the national flood insurance is a challenge. Floods are the most damaging disaster that we have, and that is what costs billions of dollars a year.

So, what I can say is that we are looking at ways to modernize, and I don't want to get ahead of the FEMA Review Council because I know that the FEMA Review Council is also looking at ways to modernize the flood insurance program so that we can all benefit from it. Right now, as I mentioned, it is very expensive, but we always pay out the premiums at FEMA.

Mr. EZELL. Thank you. Mr. Richardson, many States depend on preparedness grants for approaching disasters. Currently, we are

in hurricane season, as you well know, and these grants are vital for preparation and mitigation.

Mr. Chairman, I request to submit for the record a letter from Representative Davidson and Representative Landsman to Secretary Noem and Mr. Richardson.

Mr. PERRY. Without objection, so ordered.
[The information follows:]

Letter of July 16, 2025, to Hon. Kristi Noem, Secretary, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and Hon. David Richardson, Senior Official Performing the Duties of FEMA Administrator, Federal Emergency Management Agency, from Hon. Greg Landsman and Hon. Warren Davidson, Submitted for the Record by Hon. Mike Ezell

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES,
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
WASHINGTON, DC,
JULY 16, 2025.

The Honorable KRISTI NOEM,
Secretary,
U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 300 7th St SW, Washington, DC 20024.

The Honorable DAVID RICHARDSON,
Senior Official Performing the Duties of FEMA Administrator,
Federal Emergency Management Agency, 500 C St SW, Washington, DC 20024.

RE: Frozen Public Safety Grants

SECRETARY NOEM AND MR. RICHARDSON:

We write to request further information regarding the ongoing delay on Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Notices of Funding Opportunities (NOFOs) for critical public safety programs, including the Emergency Management Performance Grant program (EMPG), the Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) and State Homeland Security Program (SHSP). These are significant public safety grants for cities and states across the country. Urban, suburban, and rural jurisdictions are greatly assisted every year by this grant funding.

The Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25) Continuing Resolution (P.L. 119–4) includes a 60-day deadline for the release of NOFOs for the authorized and funded grant programs. To date, no FEMA programs have been noticed. Furthermore, we have heard from constituent public safety and emergency management agencies that they anticipate no NOFOs being released for FY25.

Programs like the Emergency Management Performance Grant program, Urban Area Security Initiative grant, and State Homeland Security Program grant address public safety and disaster preparedness initiatives in communities across the State of Ohio and every other state in the country. EMPG supports state and local level emergency management programs, UASI supports community emergency response and cybersecurity programs, while SHSP augments law enforcement and first responder capabilities during emergencies. For example, Ohio's fusion centers—particularly those that serve Cincinnati and surrounding, less populated counties—enhance cooperation and intelligence sharing among various law enforcement agencies and receive critical support from these FEMA programs that keep all Southwest Ohioans, and all Americans, safe.

These delays in the FY25 grant process will significantly delay the disbursement of these critical funds. Therefore, we request information and/or a response on the following:

- 1) Why have NOFOs for FY25 grants not been released despite the 60-day deadline?
- 2) Is there a specific executive order or OMB directive precluding disbursement of these funds? If so, what is being done to remedy the issue and when can applicants expect to receive funding again?

We appreciate all relevant context and information that the department can provide on this issue. Without these funds, urban, suburban, and rural communities in all 50 states may be significantly less prepared for natural disasters, preventing

violent attacks, and responding to emergency situations in a timely manner. As such, we respectfully urge you to release FY25 NOFOs.

Sincerely,

GREG LANDSMAN,
Member of Congress.

WARREN DAVIDSON,
Member of Congress.

Mr. EZELL. Mr. Richardson, can we expect the Notices of Funding Opportunities for fiscal year 2025 grants to be released? They are currently 68 days behind their past due date.

Mr. RICHARDSON. I have good news. As we speak, notice of fundings are going out the door.

Mr. EZELL. Great. Boy, that is really good news.

Lastly, Mr. Richardson, have you been able to read through the bipartisan work product the committee has introduced on FEMA reform? And what is your opinion of the reform draft?

Mr. RICHARDSON. Indeed, I have. Can you repeat the last part of the question, Mr. Ezell?

Mr. EZELL. Have you been able to read through the reform we have asked? And can you give us your opinion about the draft?

Mr. RICHARDSON. So, I read through the draft. And because I have done my own thorough mission analysis at FEMA, I am pretty familiar with the language in your draft. And there were a couple of things I saw. Although it didn't address mission creep necessarily, what I did see was that it was restricted to the statutory missions of FEMA, which is good, because what I discovered during the mission analysis, there is a lot of mission creep.

A couple of other things I saw in there. There was a large emphasis on coordination. I think part of the mission creep at FEMA is that there are boots on the ground where we should be doing more coordination.

I do believe I saw something in there on continuity, which is outstanding, and then I think there could be better survivor interface, and that is also something that was in the draft language.

Mr. EZELL. Okay. Thank you, sir, and I appreciate you being here today.

And Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. PERRY. The Chair thanks the gentleman. The Chair now recognizes the ranking member of the full committee, Representative Larsen from Washington.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Richardson, your testimony says that you have been asked to "return FEMA to its statutory mission," and you mentioned that a couple of times. So, I have a list here compiled by the Congressional Research Service of the 518 actions that the law mandates FEMA needs to do. And currently, FEMA doesn't follow all these laws. It's 518 statutory missions.

And this is kind of a crazy question, but can you commit today that you will fulfill the promise in your testimony to return FEMA to its statutory mission and implement all the mandates in this list?

Mr. RICHARDSON. So, the answer is I did—we did a whole mission analysis at FEMA, which comes up with just—not far from the statutory tasks that you have there. And what we did—and I can commit to—is that we developed eight mission-essential tasks that we have to do by statute. We have only done the initial analysis,

but what I can commit to is we, until otherwise directed, will continue to carry out the mission-essential tasks for the Federal Emergency Management—

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON [interrupting]. Well, I think it is fair to say that there are probably eight categories of missions, and I don't think FEMA only does eight things. And I think what these 518 actions that are in law that says FEMA has to do that are your mandates are worth going over.

So, I want to be sure we enter this in the record, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair?

[No response.]

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. I will take care of it.

The next thing I want to ask is you noted that the original—

Mr. PERRY [interrupting]. Without objection, so ordered.

[The information follows:]

FEMA Statutory Authorities, Structural Protections, and Selected Delegations as Compiled by the Congressional Research Service, Submitted for the Record by Hon. Rick Larsen

[Editor's note: The information is retained in committee files and is available online at the House of Representatives document repository at <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/PW/PW13/20250723/118485/HHRG-119-PW13-20250723-SD003.pdf>.]

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Thank you.

Your testimony says the original intent of FEMA was to help State, local, Tribal, Territorial partners build their disaster resilience, and that FEMA “must bolster our partners’ operational readiness to support our homeland for the risks of today and the threats of tomorrow.” Here’s the thing. There are three, really kind of basic, three missions of FEMA: pre-disaster mitigation, immediate response, and recovery. It sounds to me like the administration really wants to do response and recovery, and leave sort of the preparation to lower the damage from disasters, leave that to State and local governments—that is the pre-disaster mitigation bit—which is why the administration canceled billions of dollars in BRIC money—Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities—money and pulled that back.

But it does seem that you aren’t helping communities prepare for their worst day if we are not helping them—if we are not including in the recovery bit the ability to build for that worst day so the impact of the worst day is less than it could have been. And that is pre-disaster mitigation assistance.

I am thinking specifically of a lot of things in my State, one in particular, the \$85 million grant that was 4 years in the making for the county at Grays Harbor. I can get you the details on it. But this is not a county that is going to find \$85 million in the couch cushions to be able to do that work. And there are places all over the country that need Federal assistance for pre-disaster mitigation in order to prepare for the likelihood that something is coming in the future. It could be floods in my area, it could be earthquakes in my area, it could be wildfires and so on.

But the administration is sort of saying, no, States and locals need to do that, when they don’t have the money to do that. We

are the backstop. We need to be helping States and locals prepare for this, and paying for this with appropriate review so that the disaster we respond to is less than it could have been.

And so, I mean, do you think that FEMA has no responsibility to help local governments and State governments prepare for that worst day? Because that is what it sounds like.

Mr. RICHARDSON. What I think is that—I think—I believe you are referring to mitigation, correct?

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Yes, yes.

Mr. RICHARDSON. Okay.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Yes.

Mr. RICHARDSON. Okay. What I believe and what FEMA believes is mitigation is very important. And I think you know what the return on investment for—

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON [interposing]. Absolutely.

Mr. RICHARDSON [continuing]. Mitigation—

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON [interrupting]. Seven to one, or—

Mr. RICHARDSON [continuing]. Mitigation, it is like, yes, seven to one, or six to one, I don't really remember.

However, under Secretary Noem's outstanding leadership, as well as the President's outstanding leadership, FEMA is responsible to ensure there is proper oversight of the grant funding for mitigation.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Well, here is the point on that, and I appreciate that. I don't think their leadership has been outstanding on that, and that is my job to be critical and to be complimentary when things are—when both circumstances avail themselves to that.

But on pre-disaster mitigation, on helping communities prepare, I don't think they have done outstanding leadership. They have actually cut the money to zero to help our State and local governments prepare for that worst day so the worst day is less than it would have been.

And we may not have been specific in the FEMA Act to include that. We are looking at changes to make as part of the FEMA Act. It doesn't mean we are against disaster mitigation assistance, because we already have that. What you are all choosing to do is to not do what you can do.

Now, the law doesn't say you have to fund the BRIC program; it authorizes you to fund the BRIC program and DRF. But not funding the BRIC program is actually making the worst day the actual—really the worst day, as opposed to investing in ensuring the worst day is less than it could have been.

I have just really got to hit home on that, and we are really going to push hard on you all, the administration, so that their leadership can be outstanding. I want it to be outstanding. I don't think it is right now.

I yield back.

Mr. PERRY. The gentleman's time has expired. The Chair now recognizes Representative Kennedy.

Dr. KENNEDY OF UTAH. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Richardson, for being here. I wanted to start off with a disaster that is unfolding in the State of Utah right now, a fire that currently is—the Deer Creek Fire has burned more than

17,000 acres, and we have over 580 firefighters and personnel on the line right now in the State of Utah. There are helicopters, dozers, and engines that are backing up these individuals trying to help with that. But I want to recognize their courage and thank FEMA for stepping in to help early with a Fire Management Assistance Grant. That is really important to us, and that Federal support actually can make all the difference as we deal with the wildfires not only in the State of Utah, but throughout the West.

That said, serious challenges remain. In 2024, Utah expected to spend \$12 million on wildfire suppression, and instead, we spent \$28 million by late August. And FMAG reimbursements from previous fire seasons are still delayed for us, leaving the State to front the costs.

Thanks to your leadership and the Utah State Legislature, we are now operating with the unified Wildfire Suppression Fund that supports prevention and post-fire recovery. It is a forward-looking, State-led model that gives Utah the flexibility to act quickly and invest wisely. Utah needs Federal partners who help us move faster, not slow us down in these circumstances. I have a few questions regarding that.

So the first question is, working with the Utah Legislature, we have got this Wildfire Suppression Fund that is designed to manage all phases before, during, and after the fire. How is FEMA supporting that kind of State-led model, especially for major incidents like the Deer Creek Fire and smaller fires like Emilia and Rye Draw?

Mr. RICHARDSON. Thank you for your question.

So, the way we manage that is not only through FEMA, but also through the regional administrator, and they work very closely with the States on those issues.

I am very aware—and my heart goes out to the people of the fires. I get briefed on that nearly every day, so, I see them. And so, that is kind of how we handle that at the—normally at the regional level. And the regional managers, they will contact me. We are in close communication and we work through any issues that happen. But that generally happens at the regional level, which is the—it is how it should be, because that is the closest to—

Dr. KENNEDY OF UTAH [interposing]. Great.

Mr. RICHARDSON [continuing]. The State.

Dr. KENNEDY OF UTAH. Good. Thank you very much for that.

As to these reimbursements, the assistance grants reimbursements, Utah is still waiting for FMAG payments from past fire seasons. What is FEMA doing to speed that up to help these States that have spent a lot of money to suppress these wildfires, often that are on Federal lands?

Mr. RICHARDSON. Sir, you are asking me how we are speeding up the FMAG process?

Dr. KENNEDY OF UTAH. Yes, how do we speed up the FMAG process?

Mr. RICHARDSON. So, I am not real familiar with exactly how we do the FMAG. What I would like to do is go back to my office and see—

Dr. KENNEDY OF UTAH [interrupting]. Please do.

Mr. RICHARDSON [continuing]. Exactly how it is done, and then we will bring to you some recommendations, if I—

Dr. KENNEDY OF UTAH [interrupting]. Yes, and anything we can do to help with that, with recommendations on your part or our part. The reality is this is in the State, but the Federal lands are often implicated, which leads me to my final question.

If I have any time remaining, I will yield that to my chair.

But the Deer Creek Fire currently is crossing county and State lines as well as Tribal lands. And what systems is FEMA using to support real-time coordination as we deal with various jurisdictions associated with these fires which don't respect boundaries?

Mr. RICHARDSON. So, are you asking me what technology we are using?

Dr. KENNEDY OF UTAH. Technology or methods that we will use as these fires cross various jurisdictions, including State lines, county lines, and Tribal lands.

Mr. RICHARDSON. Once again, I am going to have to get back with my staff, and I will circle back with you.

Dr. KENNEDY OF UTAH. Please do, thank you very much.

Mr. RICHARDSON. Because I don't know the exact answer to that.

Dr. KENNEDY OF UTAH. Mr. Chair, I will yield time to you if—I have got about a minute left, so please—

Mr. PERRY [interrupting]. The Chair thanks the gentleman.

Mr. Richardson, in previous questioning, it was implied that FEMA is, I think, uncaring. And many of us on either side of the aisle here have certainly plenty of, I think, justified criticism of FEMA. But in regard to the Texas flood and the search-and-rescue effort, it was my understanding in the briefing last week that the Governor requested the Coast Guard—indeed, close by, one unit located in Houston—neither unit could get to the site of the flooding and actually do a search and rescue or recovery operations due to weather. And as a matter of fact, one of the members of the Coast Guard has been highly decorated for his actions on the ground there.

Can you—look, like I said, we just want to make sure that we level-set here and we understand what happened, what FEMA's role was, what FEMA was prepared for but what was actually used by the Governor. If FEMA was stationed onsite but the Governor didn't want FEMA there because he wanted to use the Coast Guard because of a pre-existing relationship or because of capability or location, that is important to know now. Can you provide or shed any light on that issue?

Mr. RICHARDSON. Definitely. Thank you for the question. So, let's back up.

So, from the second that I found out about the horrible disaster in Texas, what I was doing was coordinating, okay? From where I was, I was coordinating to ensure that these assets were being applied to the disaster.

Now, Texas Task Force 1, which is a FEMA paid-for and equipped asset, was working also with the State emergency manager, but they also have a direct relationship with the Coast Guard, CBP, public health, and the Texas National Guard. So, there were other forces on the ground that were either Federal forces like Texas Task Force 1, which is a national, and then there

were also other DHS assets. And through Secretary Noem's extraordinary leadership, my coordination, we made sure they were available to the Emergency Operations Center.

Mr. PERRY. I appreciate the answer. The time of the gentleman is long expired, and I want to respect everybody on the committee. The Chair now recognizes the Delegate from Washington, DC, Ms. Norton.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Richardson, the Potomac River is the only source of drinking water for the Nation's Capital, which I represent. The Army Corps of Engineers produces the drinking water for the Nation's Capital. And the Army Corps only has 1 day of backup water supply. This poses a significant risk to the residents of the Nation's Capital, the operations of the Federal Government, national security, and regional economy.

What steps, if any, has the Federal Emergency Management Agency taken to prepare for the possibility that the Potomac River could become unusable for drinking water at any moment, whether through man-made or natural events?

Mr. RICHARDSON. Ms. Norton, thank you for your question, and the first time this came to my attention was yesterday afternoon. And before I left the office, I asked my staff, I said, "We need to get together information so that I can go sit down with Ms. Norton and walk through this, and we need to know all the issues."

So, if you would allow me to come and talk you through this and figure out how we are going to address this, I would appreciate it.

Ms. NORTON. Very much, I would appreciate your coming.

Do you believe that human activity, particularly the burning of fossil fuels, is the primary cause of climate change?

Mr. RICHARDSON. Thank you for the question, Ms. Norton.

What I believe is, I am sitting in the chair of the FEMA Administrator. I believe that we will address disasters, regardless of their origin.

Ms. NORTON. Well, do you believe that the frequency and severity of natural disasters in the United States are increasing?

Mr. RICHARDSON. What I believe is, regardless of whether they are increasing or not, that FEMA is there to assist the American public, the Nation, in disaster response and recovery, regardless of the origin or regardless of the frequency.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you very much, and I yield back.

Mr. PERRY. The Chair thanks the gentlewoman. The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Texas, Representative Babin.

Dr. BABIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate it.

And also thank you, Administrator Richardson, not only for being here, but also for your service as a marine. Thank you so much.

The tragic events that took place during the flood in the heart of the Texas Hill Country has shaken us all very, very deeply. But for me and many families in my district, this hit pretty close to home. The Hill Country is home to Camp Mystic, Camp Stewart, Camp Waldemar, Heart O' the Hills, and many other cherished summer camps. The children at these camps were heavily impacted by the flooding.

My family's connection to these camps spans generations. As a matter of fact, my father-in-law and my brother-in-law were there

in the 1930s and 1960s. I was a teenage counselor myself in the 1960s. My own granddaughter had just returned from Camp Mystic's first term earlier this summer, and another one of my granddaughters was planning on attending Camp Mystic, as well, in the second term, but unfortunately—or should I say fortunately—she had a torn meniscus, and we had to cancel. I have had four grandsons attend Camp Stewart just a few miles down the road, and there are so many more people not related necessarily by blood but who feel like camp family to me. It was a cultural thing that went for many, many generations.

The entire State mourns the loss of long-time camp director Jane Ragsdale, a woman who poured her heart into shaping generations of young lives, including my own daughters and granddaughters. No words can really, truly capture the grief and heartbreak that so many of us feel, but we owe it to these families and future generations to ensure that this never happens again.

We must learn everything we can from this tragedy. We must act. And that is why the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, which I chair, will be conducting a thorough review of the circumstances surrounding this event, and it is also why reauthorization of the Weather Act must prioritize improving weather communication, strengthening coordination with local officials, and accelerating technological innovation.

Communities must have every single advantage when severe weather hits. NOAA and the National Weather Service must be equipped to fulfill their core mission: protecting life and property. The National Weather Service has been found to have done their job. They were not understaffed. The truth of the matter is they did what they needed to do.

Administrator Richardson, as you know, heavy rains and flash floods are not uncommon in Texas, especially in my own district over on the east side of the State, where we have had seven disaster declarations in 10 years. But the scale and suddenness of this particular event in Kerr County, Texas, demand urgent attention.

And here on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, where we work closely with FEMA on long-term planning and disaster mitigation, I look forward to working with you and your team to identify gaps, streamline interagency communications, and support smart, data-driven solutions. Whether it's investing in flood mapping, modernizing warning systems, or expanding public education, we have got to work together to prevent another tragedy. This flood has changed lives forever. We owe it to every single family, camper, counselor, first responder to make sure that their pain leads to progress.

I don't have—well, I have got a little time left, so, I want to ask you—I have a question. What steps will FEMA take to ensure that something like this will never happen again?

And how can we in Congress support your efforts to strengthen preparedness and response capabilities?

Mr. RICHARDSON. Thank you for your question.

Dr. BABIN. Yes, sir.

Mr. RICHARDSON. And once again, the events in Texas, the tragic—I mean, we have all heard descriptions of it, seen descriptions of it. It was absolutely horrible, and our hearts go out to the great

State of Texas and all the people. I have got two boys, and I just—when I flew over the Guadalupe River and saw Camp Mystic, my heart, which had already sank, sunk further.

But this is how we kind of work this. This is locally led, State-managed, and federally supported. So, what we do is, we work as closely as we can with the emergency managers in Texas and the local communities. And through mitigation grants and resilience and those type of efforts, we work with them to build the best emergency management system we can have.

And as you saw in Texas, under the Secretary's leadership and the President's leadership, it worked very, very well. Under Nim Kidd's guidance, it is—that is a model of how it works. And I can tell you that Texas is in good hands, and we want to use Texas as a model for how it is done.

I spoke to—immediately when I found out about the disaster, I was on the phone the Friday, Saturday, and Sunday almost constantly speaking to Nim Kidd, the region, and that crew there, and that is why that was—the partnership between FEMA and the State and the local was the reason why that was handled so well and why, although it is a tragedy, it was a model for how to respond to a disaster.

Dr. BABIN. Okay.

Mr. PERRY. The gentleman's—

Dr. BABIN [interrupting]. Thank you.

Mr. PERRY [continuing]. Time has expired.

Dr. BABIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. PERRY. The Chair thanks the gentleman. The Chair now recognizes Representative Friedman from California.

Ms. FRIEDMAN. Thank you, Mr. Richardson, for being here today. I represent parts of Los Angeles, which, of course, was devastated by huge megafires recently. I am very appreciative of FEMA's efforts on the ground.

What we have discovered is that currently, FEMA bars providing assistance to disaster victims who have received individual charitable donations like through their church or through a GoFundMe page. They are finding that FEMA is deducting that amount. So, I introduced a bill, Don't Penalize Victims Act, to ensure that charitable donations are not considered a duplication of benefits by FEMA. People aren't raising money to give it to FEMA. They are raising money to give it to victims to help them rebuild their lives.

I would like you to say that you are willing to work with us on this, and that you will support these efforts as they move forward.

Mr. RICHARDSON. I would be glad to work with you, and what I would like to say is there should be no politics in emergency management. I would be glad to work with you, and glad to look into it.

Ms. FRIEDMAN. Thank you, and now I would like to continue on some of the questions that have been asked about FEMA's response to the horrific flooding in Texas. And as a mom whose daughter has gone to a Girl Scout camp and been up in wild areas, that whole incident really broke my heart. So, my heart goes out to everybody in Texas that was affected.

The New York Times reported last week that on July 7, 3 days into the emergency response effort, FEMA call centers responded

to less than 20 percent of the calls coming in from disaster victims for help. That means more than four out of five calls went unanswered, and I can just imagine the frustration of people looking for loved ones, dealing with damage, dealing with incredible tragedy to find out that their Government just wasn't answering the phone.

Secretary Noem, however, claimed on "Meet the Press" that the New York Times piece was "fake news," so, I would like to clear this up for the record. Isn't it accurate that 80 percent—at least—of the calls that went to FEMA call centers on July 7 went unanswered?

Mr. RICHARDSON. When the tragedy struck, we knew there would be a——

Ms. FRIEDMAN [interrupting]. It is a pretty simple yes-or-no question. They either answered the calls or they didn't answer the calls on July 7.

Mr. RICHARDSON. When there was a spike in calls, FEMA was there to answer the calls. The majority of the calls were answered at the call centers.

Ms. FRIEDMAN. Well, that is not what the report says. The report says that on July 5, as the floodwaters were starting to recede, FEMA received 3,027 calls from disaster survivors and answered 3,018 of them, which is over 99 percent. Contractors report call center companies answered the vast majority of the calls. That evening, however, Ms. Noem did not renew the contracts with those four companies and hundreds of contractors were fired, according to the documents and the person briefed on the matter. The next day, July 6, FEMA received 2,363 calls and answered 846, or roughly 35.8 percent, according to those documents. And on Monday, July 7, the agency fielded 16,419 calls and answered 2,613 of them, which is only 15.9 percent. That is shown by official documents. And FEMA officials were incredibly frustrated by the lapse in those contracts, and it was taking days for Ms. Noem to act.

A little while ago you said that part of your job, you felt, was to remove—you called them bureaucratic—closing out bureaucratic procedures. To me, having someone, one person only, having to sign off on every contract of \$100,000 or more is the definition of bureaucracy. And in this case, it led to thousands of victims not having their calls answered by their Government. Their Government wasn't there when they reached out for help in their darkest hour.

So, are those numbers fake? Are you telling me that those are fake numbers, or are they verifiable and did Ms. Noem misspeak when she said that it was fake news?

Mr. RICHARDSON. What I can tell you is the vast majority of phone calls were answered. There was never a lapse in the contract.

Secretary Noem, under her leadership, she is concerned about due diligence and making sure the American people get what they deserve——

Ms. FRIEDMAN [interrupting]. So, in your mind——

Mr. RICHARDSON [continuing]. With their tax dollars.

Ms. FRIEDMAN [continuing]. 15.9 percent of calls being answered is the vast majority? That is the vast—that is your—so is that the benchmark now we are looking for, for FEMA to answer their calls,

15 percent or, in one case, 35 percent in a day in the middle of this disaster, this huge disaster?

Mr. RICHARDSON. I would have to agree with Secretary Noem. That is fake news. The majority of the calls were answered. There was never a lapse in contract.

Ms. FRIEDMAN. Well, that is absolutely not what the reports from these companies of the disaster say. They give specific numbers of calls that went unanswered, and I don't see how you can deny these reports.

But I will yield my time back.

Mr. PERRY. The Chair thanks the gentlelady. The Chair now recognizes Representative Onder from the State of Missouri.

Dr. ONDER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes, thank you, Mr. Richardson, for being here with us today.

Missouri experienced severe storms and flash flooding earlier this year on May 23, and we didn't receive a disaster declaration until last night. My constituents were frustrated by how long it takes to get temporary housing and debris removal assistance support from FEMA. Why does it take so long to make these determinations, and what is being done to cut the time to get help in these situations?

Mr. RICHARDSON. So when the determinations come in, we review them. We work with the regions, primarily.

As far as specifics of each one of the declarations, I would like to get back to you. I will go back home, look into it, I will figure it out and I will come back to you and give you any specific details, because I think you are looking for specific information in a certain declaration, correct?

Dr. ONDER. Yes, or what is the process of issuing these declarations.

Mr. RICHARDSON. The declarations come in, there is a set of criteria, and then we make a recommendation on that criteria.

Once again, it is eligibility-based, so there is criteria and we have to take a look at the criteria and make sure—for example, from the first second I found out about the horrific events in Texas, I got on the phone, and I was speaking to the emergency manager there. And we were talking about how the declaration was going to come in, how it was going to be crafted. So there is some pre-work that is done—right in the middle of the disaster, normally—and then there is some administrative work that needs to be done at the regional level. And then it comes to FEMA.

But it is normally worked out very early, if they meet the criteria or not, because we all kind of have a pretty good idea of what it is, and then we've got to get it down on paper. And that is what I spent a lot of time on the 4th of July—or really, the 4th and the 5th with Nim Kidd, because theirs came in, I believe it was just after midnight on Sunday, so it came in very quickly from Texas. And then the criteria, we took it and we turned that around within just a couple hours.

Dr. ONDER. Very good. And you emphasized the need to cut red-tape and remove cumbersome processes to speed up disaster recovery. Can you walk us through specific internal FEMA policies or procedures that you have streamlined to speed up delivery of assistance?

Mr. RICHARDSON. Yes, so one of the things that I recognized immediately—and part of it was due from being the Assistant Secretary at CWMD prior, part of it was doing mission analysis. What I discovered is there were three or four contract shops around FEMA. So we consolidated that, okay, because that makes it a lot faster. If you consolidate, you have got the same people, you are keeping track.

And then the other thing we do is we make sure that we have got a team that tees those contracts up for me to sign, and we have certain ones that have to come to me. So what we have done is we have reduced the number of hands, so to speak, that touch those. We also consolidate it so we know where they all are exactly. So it is actually working pretty good now, and that is what we have done.

Dr. ONDER. And you have said that FEMA needs to return primacy to the States. For States like Missouri, what would that look like? What kind of shift in operational authority and flexibility to State and local managers might we see?

Mr. RICHARDSON. Well, it wouldn't necessarily be—it probably has to do more with training and coordination. So, the coordination is the key piece, how the coordination is done.

One of the challenges that FEMA has is when the region comes into the State, even though we run TTXs all the time—I think I was involved in at least seven or eight TTXs, all the way from Guam to the Virgin Islands—and one of the things I talked to the folks in the after action about was what gaps in capability they had.

So, if the States can become adept at identifying their gaps, and if they can communicate that to the region, that is part of it. So, they know what their shortfalls are, they have pre-identified them so that we can pre-position assets. That is the key. And the State—once again, States like Texas are kind of a model, and they did that very well, as demonstrated in the events of the flood.

Dr. ONDER. Very good. Thank you.

I yield back.

Mr. PERRY. The Chair thanks the gentleman. The Chair now recognizes Representative Figures.

Mr. FIGURES. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Richardson, for being here with us today.

I represent the Second Congressional District of Alabama, which begins in Mobile. It is where I am from, where I was born, where I was raised. And with the exception of probably Congressman Ezell from Mississippi, I don't know that there is another member on this committee that has actually been through more FEMA-responded disasters from hurricanes throughout the entirety of my life. So, it is important to me that FEMA is ready, is prepared, because it is not a matter of if we get hit by a hurricane, it is a matter of when we get hit, and how severe the damage will be, and what FEMA's role will have to be in responding to that.

We are approaching the 20-year anniversary of Katrina, and a lot of focus on Katrina is on New Orleans, but there was an entire realm of the east side of that storm that decimated parts of Mississippi and Alabama, as well. And so, this is a time where people

are focused on some negative history as it relates to FEMA and FEMA's response.

And as I sit here, the question that I just have to ask—because if we get hit by a hurricane or when we get hit by a hurricane—and fortunately, there is not a bad response, but if there is a bad response from FEMA, I don't want to sit here and the answer is, "I am sorry." I don't want you to be sorry. I want you to be careful. I want you to be prepared. I want you to be ready.

So, in light of what just happened in Texas, where a family of five from Mobile—a grandfather, a grandmother, their son, his wife, and their 5-year-old daughter—were camping there in the Hill Country, and all of them, with the exception of their son, died—and so, this is something that is resonating in my district right now. What is—and I am in no way insinuating that that was FEMA's fault, but what lessons have you learned in the response to Texas that you will apply going forward, particularly through this hurricane season?

Mr. RICHARDSON. Thank you for your question.

So, a lesson learned from Texas is essentially how Texas had forces pre-positioned. For example, there are 28 national urban SAR units. One of them was in Texas. And it is not that it is a lesson learned, but what we did is we confirmed how effective that is. And under Secretary Noem's leadership, we also confirmed how effective it was for the Emergency Operations Center in Texas to be able to communicate with CBP, as well as Coast Guard. So all those DHS assets were already there. So pre-positioning is something that we have confirmed is a solid practice.

And I think one of my lessons learned—and I think this is an important one—obviously, communication. Nim Kidd and I were in communication, I was in communication with Secretary Noem. Coordination, pre-positioning, planning. But the lesson that I particularly learned was personal relationships. I had come to know the emergency manager in Texas, Nim Kidd, and it helped a lot. From the second I heard about the disaster, Nim and I—

Mr. FIGURES [interrupting]. Well, I don't want to cut you off, but I want to preserve my time. But is there anything you think FEMA did wrong in its response to the Texas floods that we can rectify and do differently next time?

Mr. RICHARDSON. I can't see anything that we did wrong, and I think the President and the Secretary now acknowledge that, and so does Governor Abbott by saying how well we did.

So, what we would like to do is we would like to take the strengths that we did in Texas, and we are going to share them with other States, and we will work on them in tabletop exercises to make sure that they—

Mr. FIGURES [interrupting]. So is—

Mr. RICHARDSON [continuing]. Do it as well as Texas.

Mr. FIGURES [continuing]. Is it your testimony here today that FEMA's response to the Texas flood was—it was a perfect game, it was perfect?

Mr. RICHARDSON. Well, nothing is perfect. However, I will say that it was a model, particularly at FEMA, the region, and the State level, that continuity, it was a model of how disasters should be handled. And that is thanks to the President's guidance, the

Secretary's guidance, Governor Abbott, the State Emergency Operations Center in Texas, the emergency manager, as well as the region 6 manager.

Mr. FIGURES. Well, one thing I would encourage is it is important to see leadership there on the ground when it happens. So, if this happens in Mobile, we certainly want to see you on the ground, certainly within a reasonable time of when it happens.

The last thing I will say is I know notice of fundings for FEMA grants just went out, or are in the process of going out, the Notice of Funding Opportunities, but they are 68 days late. And so, my concern is making sure that you guys have the resources and the commitment to actually review the incoming applications in a manner where we will not end up in an excessively delayed state when it comes time to actually awarding the funding opportunities.

And with that, I yield back.

Thank you, Mr. Richardson.

Mr. PERRY. The Chair thanks the gentleman. The Chair now recognizes Representative Fong from California.

Mr. FONG. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Administrator, for being here and for your leadership. A few questions.

I represent a lot of rural communities in the Central Valley of California. We have been dealing with floods and fires for a very long time. The Borel Fire recently was the largest fire that ever hit Kern County, and I was wondering. Rural communities have a challenge of capacity. And of course, coming from a large State, a lot of times the per capita indicator doesn't help rural communities. I was wondering, from your perspective, have there been conversations about creating a county-level or a ZIP Code-level threshold so that resources can go help these communities rebuild?

Mr. RICHARDSON. Could you repeat the last part of the question again?

Mr. FONG. Is there a way to help communities, rural communities, rebuild when the tragedies and the fires and the floods, they don't hit the major disaster declaration?

Are you guys looking at ways to adjust the per capita indicator to allow for more rural community rebuilding after a disaster?

Mr. RICHARDSON. So, I got your question, thank you for the question.

So the question is about rural areas and meeting the threshold. What I will say to that is that—and I don't want to get ahead of the FEMA Review Council, but the President wants for the country better emergency management. And it is reasonable to believe that that piece that you are just speaking to would be a part of that, because as—I don't personally come from a rural community, but my parents come from a rural community, and I spent a lot of time in rural communities. My best friend is a hog farmer in eastern North Carolina. I know what rural communities are. So, it is reasonable that that would be considered in something in the future, yes.

Mr. FONG. Sure. I would certainly love to partner with you on that and your council. It is in an area where rural communities just don't have the capacity when a fire hits, significant impact to that community. And they may need resources, but they just may

not hit the threshold of a major disaster declaration, and so we want to ensure that we rightsize the response.

Mr. RICHARDSON. You have my commitment that I will engage with you, and we can kind of look at it and get your ideas.

Mr. FONG. Thank you very much. I want to follow up from the questions that my colleague from Utah asked.

We also dealt with floods. My community in Tulare County had to endure and to kind of front a lot of the resources to help rebuild. FEMA has a somewhat—before you—more of a complicated, complex assistance work through the complexity of the assistance programs. Is there a way to simplify the reimbursement process and maybe expand the advanced payments process to help rebuild roads, rebuild bridges that may have been washed away from, like, a flood?

Mr. RICHARDSON. So, once again, thanks for your question. And when my team did the mission analysis when we first came aboard, it was kind of phase 1 of the mission analysis. And now we are breaking down each one of the mission-essential tasks. Now we are getting to those things you are talking about right now. And once again, I will share that with you when the time comes.

Mr. FONG. Sure, and your team has been very helpful since the new administration has come in, I think, kind of working through the complexity. So I think you are going to hear a lot from a lot of the rural areas. Small communities, they don't have the technical assistance capacity to work through everything. And the back and forth constantly adds as a layer of bureaucracy that maybe we can cut through.

Mr. RICHARDSON. Yes, it is a very important issue.

Mr. FONG. And then, in terms of incentivizing investments to mitigate before disaster strikes, has FEMA and your team looked at how to better incentivize investments in areas of limited resources?

Mr. RICHARDSON. We are working on that now. This will be part of the discussion, the wider discussion that we can have, if you give me some time on that.

Mr. FONG. Perfect. And I just want to extend an invitation for you to come to my community. We would roll out the red carpet for you if you ever come to California.

And with that, I yield back.

Mr. RICHARDSON. I would love to come.

Mr. PERRY. The Chair thanks the gentleman. The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from California, Mr. Garamendi.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

This committee has for a long time been concerned about FEMA, the way it runs and operates. There have been major efforts by the committee as a whole and by the subcommittee. I am thinking back on much of the work done by Mr. Graves before he left Congress.

Going forward, the question of whether FEMA is going to survive or not remains open. In the first week in office, Mr. Trump, President Trump, talked openly about getting rid of FEMA. In March, Secretary Noem said, we are going to eliminate FEMA. In June, Trump said FEMA could be eliminated as soon as December, saying he wanted to wean off FEMA and bring it back to the State level. It is not just those words—which are not fake news, by the

way—it is also what has actually happened. One-third of the staff at FEMA has been eliminated in the DOGE process.

So, there are serious concerns, at least by me and I suspect by other members of the committee, about the future of FEMA. Is it even going to exist? Can you commit to us today that FEMA will exist in the future, will be able to carry out its functions under the law and under the needs of this Nation, or do you not know?

Mr. RICHARDSON. Thank you for the question. What I could commit to is that the President wants a better emergency management for the American people, and that is a noble goal. The President is a noble man, and that is what he wants. He wants a better emergency management capability.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Does that mean FEMA is gone and there will be something new and different?

Mr. RICHARDSON. So, in his wisdom, and with Secretary Noem and Secretary Hegseth as guide, the President has appointed a FEMA Review Council, okay, that is going to give him recommendations.

Mr. GARAMENDI. So, the answer is blowing in the wind. We do not know and you cannot confirm that it is the policy of the administration to maintain FEMA. I understand that. Let me move along here.

One-third of your staff is gone, 2,000 employees have departed for multiple reasons. Some of them fired, others of them taking early retirement.

It took 9 days for you to arrive in Texas following the disaster there. Is that the normal going forward? It took 3 days for your team to arrive, 9 days for you to arrive. Is that the new normal?

Mr. RICHARDSON. So, as I promised the people of Texas, they would get what they needed, on time and on target. And I talked to the emergency manager in Texas, and I asked him, “What is the best thing I can do for you?”

And he said, “Remain on the ground and make sure that we get what we need on time.” So, I remained in Washington, DC—

Mr. GARAMENDI [interrupting]. So—okay.

Mr. RICHARDSON [continuing]. Kicking down the doors of bureaucracy.

Mr. GARAMENDI. I got it.

Mr. RICHARDSON. That is where I remained.

Mr. GARAMENDI. So, the top leadership of FEMA is not expected to respond to emergencies across the Nation. Instead, you are going to remain in your offices here in Washington, DC. I got it.

Mr. RICHARDSON. I did go to Texas, and I went to Texas to confirm with the people of Texas that I had delivered on my promise.

Mr. GARAMENDI. We will see if that delivery is real or not.

The next series of questions has to do with disaster mitigation—that is, getting ahead of the disaster. You just heard from Mr. Fong about his request for funding to reduce the fire risks in his area. Certainly, that exists in my area, in the bay area. However, that program was terminated. Even though it was started in 2018 by President Trump in his first term, it is now eliminated.

So, is it the policy of FEMA to rebuild that program to get ahead of the disasters and to fund disaster mitigation before it happens? What is the policy of the Department?

Mr. RICHARDSON. You are speaking of the building resilience, correct?

Mr. GARAMENDI. That is correct.

Mr. RICHARDSON. So, it was started in 2018, but under the Trump administration, that program began to be used for things like bike paths and shade at bus stops.

Mr. GARAMENDI. So, instead of eliminating——

Mr. RICHARDSON [interrupting]. That is——

Mr. GARAMENDI [interrupting]. So, instead of dealing with those specific, rather small funding programs, you decided to eliminate this entire program. Is that correct?

Mr. RICHARDSON. Well, that program, BRIC, is under litigation. I can tell you about the past, but I can't tell you anything about the future for that program. But it was being used for bike paths——

Mr. GARAMENDI [interrupting]. That is not the question. What is the future? Is the BRIC program—it is terminated. Is it the intention of FEMA to restart it, or are we simply not going to pay attention to an effort to reduce the potential for a disaster? What is——

Mr. RICHARDSON [interrupting]. So, resilience is a top priority of FEMA. But that program, once again, there is litigation surrounding that program, and I am not at liberty to speak of it.

Mr. PERRY. The gentleman's——

Mr. GARAMENDI [interrupting]. We don't——

Mr. PERRY [continuing]. Time has expired. The Chair thanks the gentleman.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. PERRY. The Chair now recognizes Representative Rouzer from North Carolina.

Mr. ROUZER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And Mr. Richardson, thank you for your service. It is not an easy job that you have, by any means, but a very, very important job. Just to finish that line of questioning—or your answer, rather, you mentioned BRIC, the BRIC program was funding bicycle paths, and then what else? You got cut off. I was just curious what else you were going to say.

Mr. RICHARDSON. So, there were bicycle paths, it was trees surrounding bus stops. These grants have been used for a lot of rather—what I would call—odd things. For example, we put people up in the Roosevelt Hotel, or illegal immigrants up in the Roosevelt Hotel with some of the grants. That wasn't necessarily a wise thing to do. We also have funded projects that made DEI ambassadors for the New York City Police Department.

Mr. ROUZER. Yes, so, not exactly mitigation efforts.

Mr. RICHARDSON. Right. During the Biden administration, it seems like there—a lot of the grants sound good, and then you dig into them, and they are not so good. I have got a note here on a handful of them, but—so yes, if you are housing folks in the—or illegal aliens in the Roosevelt Hotel, that is probably not the best use——

Mr. ROUZER [interposing]. Yes.

Mr. RICHARDSON [continuing]. Of the American taxpayers' money.

Mr. ROUZER. Yes, okay.

Mr. RICHARDSON. It looks good on the surface, but when you get into it, it's not.

Mr. ROUZER. I got the answer there. Let me move on to my questions before I run out of time.

So, the Review Council, when does FEMA anticipate the Review Council will finalize and share its recommendations for Congress, do you have an idea of a timeline on that?

Mr. RICHARDSON. The FEMA Review Council is working now. And there is—in the late fall, I believe that is when they plan to give their recommendation to the President.

Mr. ROUZER. Thank you for that.

Hurricanes Matthew and Florence, they affected my district pretty significantly. Matthew was in 2016, Hurricane Florence was in 2018. In 2018, Brock Long was the Administrator. And I have to say in both of those storms, the FEMA response was very, very good. But we still have—those cases are still open, they have not yet closed. In other words, there is still need there. There is still reimbursement that is waiting to be signed—or I am not sure where it is in the bureaucratic process. And of course, those storms were 7 and 9 years ago, respectively.

Can—or let me just put it this way—can you get me a report on exactly what is left to be finished up on as it relates to those two storms? Not right now, but soon after this hearing, when you can?

Mr. RICHARDSON. Yes, thank you for the question. Each day, I get a snapshot of the open disaster claims, and it is shocking to see how many of them are still open. And no doubt, we need to reduce the number of open declarations. And yes, I can get back with you, and I would be happy to get back with you on that.

Mr. ROUZER. Yes. Is that an issue of resources, or administrative time, or what is the holdup there? Or regulatory burden of some sort?

Mr. RICHARDSON. My gut feeling is it is just how it has developed over time. Probably at one point, a handful of people touched it, and by this point, there are many more people than necessary to touch that.

Mr. ROUZER. Okay, one last thing, Hurricane Helene. It didn't hit my district, but it did hit my friend and colleague, Chuck Edwards and Virginia Foxx, really, really hard, their districts in western North Carolina. Obviously, you have—and every storm is different, every locale is different. In western North Carolina you have a lot of private roads. FEMA traditionally doesn't help out with private roads, but if those private roads don't get rebuilt, you can't get debris and other items that are necessary for recovery. And I think that has been one of the big issues for western North Carolina.

Chuck Edwards had tried to get some clarifying language included as part of the CR. That didn't work out. But flexibility in terms of addressing need—because, again, not every place is the same—I think is crucially important. Is that a line of thought that you all are pursuing at all?

Mr. RICHARDSON. The question involves private roads, and thank you for the question again. Right, private roads are an issue, particularly, for some reason, in North Carolina. And we are working for a way where we can resolve that, and try to provide a resolu-

tion to that. And I will keep in contact with you and make sure you kind of stay abreast of that.

Mr. ROUZER. Well, until that aspect is handled, it is just hard for that area to make any kind of substantial recovery. That is the bottom line. And it is somewhat unique to western North Carolina, which speaks to the need for flexibility when you are dealing with these disasters and response.

Mr. RICHARDSON. My heart goes out to the people of North Carolina and that whole region, Tennessee, western Virginia, that had to suffer that tragedy.

Mr. ROUZER. Thank you, sir.

I yield back.

Mr. PERRY. The Chair thanks the gentleman. The Chair now recognizes Representative Gillen.

Ms. GILLEN. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Richardson, for being here today.

So, as Acting Administrator of FEMA, you oversee the agency's preparedness grants, including the Nonprofit Security Grant Program. And as I am sure you are aware, synagogues, churches, yeshivas, and many other houses of worship across our country, and certainly in my district on the South Shore of Long Island, rely on these grants to keep their congregants, their worshipers, and our residents safe.

And right now, we are facing a huge spike in antisemitism and other threats, and these critical grants are more important than ever for my constituents and, I am sure, for many other folks across the country. And I am grateful that FEMA recently awarded some of the emergency supplemental funding that was allocated for fiscal year 2024. However, the agency still has not opened applications for fiscal year 2025 funding which Congress had approved back in March.

So, Mr. Richardson, fiscal year 2025 is coming to a close soon, and synagogues and houses of worship, churches in my district are wondering when you might open the application for the fiscal year 2025 Nonprofit Security Grant Program so we can make this \$275 million available for this really important need in my district and across the country.

Mr. RICHARDSON. Yes, and thank you for the question, and I believe those grants are very, very important. And we have spent a lot of time in the last couple of months moving forward and doing due diligence on those.

But I do have good news there. There are NOFOs going—I can't speak to that grant specifically, but there are NOFOs going out as we speak.

Ms. GILLEN. Okay, great. And can my office follow up with you about these specific grants? Because they are so important in my district.

Mr. RICHARDSON. Please do. And one of the things we want to do is we want to make sure we get those notice of fundings out so the districts have a chance to apply and get back with us. So yes, please do.

Ms. GILLEN. Okay, great. And also with respect to these grants, I have heard from a lot of pastors and rabbis that the funding is okay to be used for infrastructure, but not actually for personnel.

And so, a lot of our synagogues and houses of worship are looking to expand the scope of appropriate uses for this funding to include perhaps security personnel to stand guard at the synagogues, particularly during the High Holy Days or during worship services. And is that something that we could work with your office on to try to maybe expand the scope of funding?

Mr. RICHARDSON. Yes, I understand the question. Thank you for the question. Yes, please do. I need to look into the details of the grant, but I am sure there is some way we can work around that.

Ms. GILLEN. Okay, great. Thank you. And finally, in May, FEMA opened applications for fiscal year 2024 SAFER grants to help hire, recruit, and retain firefighters. And I wrote to fire departments across my district, encouraging them to apply for these grants, and I am really pleased that the Oceanside Fire Department in my district, which operates with volunteer service members, put together a really strong application for funding to help them recruit and train new volunteer firefighters to keep their community safe. And I wrote you a letter in support of their application, and I would appreciate the opportunity to get in touch with your office again.

Can you commit to working to follow up on this issue also with me after this hearing?

Mr. RICHARDSON. Sure, and thanks once again. I think I replied to the letter, but yes, I would be happy to speak with you.

Ms. GILLEN. Great. Thank you so much, Mr. Richardson.

I yield back.

Mr. PERRY. The Chair thanks the gentlelady. The Chair now recognizes Representative Kiley.

Mr. KILEY OF CALIFORNIA. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks for being here today, Mr. Richardson. I would like to talk with you briefly about a very simple action that the President and FEMA could take that would come at a relatively modest cost, would make an enormous difference for many people in my district, and would reverse an enormous wrong committed by President Joe Biden. It relates to the Caldor Fire, which you might be familiar with.

The Caldor Fire was one of the biggest fires in California history. It was in 2021, and you might remember the images that were really surreal of the ski slopes that were on fire and were ablaze. The blaze came very close to actually destroying the entire town of South Tahoe, which I represent. Fortunately, there was legislation that had created a categorical exclusion for fire mitigation that had allowed for a firebreak to be created, and we were able to stop it from going into South Tahoe. But folks in the community of Grizzly Flats were not so fortunate. Hundreds of homes there were destroyed in 2021.

The fire was so massive that Joe Biden actually came and visited shortly after, and did a tour in a helicopter, and then he made a promise to the victims in Grizzly Flats that he was going to help, that the Federal Government would support them. He said it was a Federal responsibility.

He then broke that promise. Joe Biden's FEMA denied Individual Assistance to the victims of the Caldor Fire in Grizzly Flats on multiple occasions. I spoke with the President about it personally, and he said he wanted to correct the wrong. He never did. And so,

these folks now, several years later, many continue to suffer with the rebuilding process. Many are still just camped out in RVs or trailers on their property, and they still have not received the Individual Assistance that they are entitled to.

So, FEMA under President Biden, as I mentioned, denied this multiple times. But the President has the authority to grant the assistance himself. And, in fact, President Trump did this during his first term for multiple wildfires in California. So, my question is, is this something that you might be able to look into and talk with the President about to finally get the victims of the fire, of the Caldor Fire, the victims in Grizzly Flats the Individual Assistance they deserve?

Mr. RICHARDSON. Yes, I can go both ways on that. I can talk to—and thank you for the question—I can talk to region 10, Bob Fenton, and I can also reach out to the White House, find out where the delta is, and then get back to you with the potential way forward.

Mr. KILEY OF CALIFORNIA. I really appreciate that, and I think that there is also room to look at the process by which these determinations are made within FEMA, because one of the things, for example, that they used in their analysis, even though there are bigger wildfires where folks have gotten the Individual Assistance, they, for example, looked at the income level in El Dorado County as a whole, which is where Grizzly Flats is, even though Grizzly Flats itself is not by any stretch of the imagination a wealthy area. But they counted the overall median income of the county against the people who lost their homes within this particular jurisdiction. There is a lot of arbitrary things like that that just don't make sense.

But at the end of the day, this is a promise that the President of the United States, Joe Biden, made to the people in our community and then he broke that promise. And I am really hopeful that the President, if he has the ability to do so, can right that wrong.

Mr. RICHARDSON. I will reach out to region 9, I will reach out to region 10, and then I will be able to get back with you.

Mr. KILEY OF CALIFORNIA. Thank you very much, I appreciate it. I yield back—I yield to the chair, in fact.

Mr. PERRY. I thank the gentleman.

Regarding the issue of call time, I just want to reference the New York Times article which apparently was the source for the dispute over how many people actually received an answer on the call. And according to the article—it says according to a person briefed on the matter who spoke on the condition of anonymity. Now, like I have said before, we all have, I think, reasonable criticisms of and valid criticism of FEMA. But on this occasion, I just want to make sure we are not making judgments based on people that spoke on condition of anonymity.

And further, in the article, it says the agency did publish similar data on October 29, 2024, which I will remind everybody was during the last administration, during President Biden's administration, days after Hurricane Helene barreled across the South and nearly 3 weeks after Hurricane Milton hit Florida. That information showed the agency did not answer nearly half of the 507,766 incoming calls over the course of a week, E&E News reported.

With that having been said, Mr. Administrator, can you—like I said, I think we all want to level-set here. People on both sides of the aisle would like to know the efficacy of the call center and the response to people calling in for disasters. Can FEMA provide that information and the source of that information moving forward? Can we get a report on that so that we can know how well FEMA is performing in that paradigm?

Mr. RICHARDSON. So, this is how I will answer that, Mr. Chairman. I think we can legally share that with you. I think we can, okay? I don't know for sure. But if we can, we will.

I do know that we surged support—

Mr. PERRY [interrupting]. Yes, I understand.

Mr. RICHARDSON [continuing]. To the call center.

Mr. PERRY. I just—I think that both sides of the aisle would like, again, to level-set and know what that information is, and the source of that information. And if there is some reason that you can't do it legally, we would like to know that, as well, so that we can take whatever action is appropriate here in Congress.

Mr. RICHARDSON. Yes.

Mr. PERRY. All right, I thank—

Mr. RICHARDSON [interrupting]. I will fully cooperate.

Mr. PERRY [continuing]. I thank the gentleman. The Chair now recognizes the gentlelady, Representative Titus.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, I would like to go back to the conversation about NOFOs. You mentioned it several times, said that information is out the door. That is good news, because some of these are months behind.

I am particularly interested in the UASI grants. That is the Urban Area Security Initiative grants, if you are familiar with that. Those are especially important in my district of southern Nevada, Las Vegas. We have a lot of events, large-scale events that might be subject to a terrorist attack or some other disaster. And we have seen how these grants have been very helpful. In fact, there was a report that showed where they made such a difference after the Harvest Festival shooting, which is still the largest shooting in American history. We've got the Super Bowl, the F1. I want to be sure those are going out the door. And if you will commit to checking on that and let me know so I can tell the first responders and all back home that that is coming.

Mr. RICHARDSON. What I can commit to is that we have been doing due diligence on all of the grants, and we are getting the NOFOs out the door as we speak. So, we want to make sure we got the NOFOs out the door so that we have a chance to respond to them. I can't tell you—I can't necessarily tell you exactly which ones, but I can tell you that they are going out the door as we speak.

Ms. TITUS. Okay, well, I am glad to hear that. I had led a letter to you about this with the Nevada delegation, trying to encourage this to happen. So, if your office will let me know if we are one of the ones that is going out the door, I would appreciate it.

Mr. RICHARDSON. Yes, and I believe I responded to your letter, Representative Titus.

Ms. TITUS. Well, thank you. We will look forward to getting that.

I also want to talk about another thing that is particular to my district and to the Southwest. I wonder if you are aware of which weather condition causes the most death in the United States.

Mr. RICHARDSON. I don't know exactly which one causes the most. I have a hunch which direction you are going on this. I am not exactly sure.

Ms. TITUS. Well, it's surprising. A lot of people wouldn't guess this. They would say tornadoes or floods or hurricanes, but it's not. It's extreme heat. Extreme heat causes more deaths, and it's less visible than some of these other disasters. It's harder to show on TV, it lasts longer. It impacts different people in different ways, but it is the largest cause of death.

And last year in southern Nevada alone, there were 520 heat-related deaths, and we already have nearly 30 just in Clark County in my district already this year. So, I have been working on getting FEMA to recognize extreme heat, and be prepared to help communities deal with it, mitigate, recover, whatever. I am pleased that I am introducing a bill that is the Extreme Weather and Heat Response Modernization Act with our ranking member, so, Mr. Stanton. We introduced that in May, and it will empower FEMA to have more authority to help with this.

So, I wondered if you are aware of it, or if you would be willing to work with us to help us get this through so extreme heat can be recognized and addressed, because it's only going to get worse, it's not going to get better.

Mr. RICHARDSON. Thank you, Representative.

I do know, and I will be glad to work with you, and then I do know that the Stafford Act does recognize heat. So, I am aware of the Stafford Act, recognize it, and I am willing to work with you.

Ms. TITUS. I appreciate that. And it does recognize, but it is not—it's hard to get it declared and recognized formally because, like I said, it's not as easy to recognize as a flood that happens in 2 days, like in Texas. It's an extended problem. And it—like I said, it hurts different people in different ways, affects lives, and it affects livelihoods.

So, Mr. Stanton and I, I am sure, will appreciate your getting involved and helping us with that. Thank you.

I yield back.

Mr. RICHARDSON. Thank you.

Mr. PERRY. The Chair thanks the gentlewoman. The Chair now recognizes the Representative from Pennsylvania, Representative Bresnahan.

Mr. BRESNAHAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you, Mr. Richardson, for being here. I represent northeastern Pennsylvania, which has been privy to flooding over the years dating back to 1972, slightly before my time. But still, as I drive around with my family, my grandmother, she will occasionally point to different areas about how high the water actually was.

And then back to 2011, northeastern Pennsylvania saw some flooding in an area outside of a levee system which totally decimated a community, ultimately redrawing the flood maps and making it extremely challenging for various different homeowners to be

able to get flood insurance, and created some additional strains on the school districts.

So, actually back to 2021, we also saw a flood that actually claimed the lives of at least one person in Lackawanna County. And this past May, the city of Scranton was finally able to complete 40 projects totaling \$5.5 million to improve 8 waterways and infrastructure damaged by severe flooding in August of 2018.

In April, I sent a letter to then-Acting Administrator Hamilton asking for the BRIC program to be reinstated. And Mr. Chairman, I ask for unanimous consent to enter that letter into the record.

Mr. PERRY. Without objection, so ordered.

[The information follows:]

Letter of April 9, 2025, to Cameron Hamilton, Senior Official Performing the Duties of FEMA Administrator, Federal Emergency Management Agency, from Hon. Robert P. Bresnahan, Jr., Submitted for the Record by Hon. Robert P. Bresnahan, Jr.

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES,
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-3808,
APRIL 9, 2025.

Mr. CAMERON HAMILTON,
Senior Official Performing the Duties of FEMA Administrator,
500 C Street, SW, Washington, DC 20024.

DEAR ACTING ADMINISTRATOR HAMILTON:

As the Congressman for Pennsylvania's Eighth Congressional District, I am writing to express my opposition to FEMA's recent announcement it would cancel the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program and cancel all applications from fiscal years 2020-2023. This decision is detrimental to my constituents, and I strongly urge you to reverse this decision.

The city of Scranton, PA was awaiting \$2.5 million for buyouts of 21 flood-prone properties (18 homes and 3 lots) that were destroyed by flash floods on September 9, 2023. The city had lined up its 25% match of \$849,000 to work with FEMA to purchase and remove these properties. City officials worked diligently with the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency, and in July 2024, the city's BRIC application passed its initial Federal review. Now, the city is left holding the bag to come up with this \$2.5 million to buy out these properties to create floodplain restoration and infrastructure. City officials have said the buyout of these properties is important to city public safety and future cost savings.¹

The BRIC program was established in 2018 during President Donald J. Trump's first administration. It was designed to support states, local, and territorial governments, and Tribal Nations as they work to reduce their hazard risk. FEMA's own website states that, "The BRIC program aims to categorically shift the federal focus away from reactive disaster spending and toward proactive investment in community resilience."²

This program is a hand-up, not a hand-out, to at-risk communities who have suffered catastrophic weather events. This includes my district and Northeastern Pennsylvania. The September 9, 2023 floods caused nearly \$25 million in damage and destroyed 459 residences. Unfortunately, FEMA denied Governor Josh Shapiro's request for an emergency disaster declaration³.

The median household income of my district is \$61,000. Sadly, the tax base for a number of municipalities in my district is not always sufficient to complete buyout programs without Federal assistance. I strongly believe that disaster efforts are lo-

¹ Scranton Times-Tribune, "Scranton: FEMA funding cut erases \$2.5M for 21 flood buyouts in city," April 8, 2024, <https://www.thetimes-tribune.com/2025/04/08/scranton-fema-funding-cut-erases-2-5m-for-21-flood-buyouts-in-city/>

² FEMA, "Summary of FEMA Hazard Mitigation Assistance (HMA) Programs," May 29, 2024, <https://www.fema.gov/fact-sheet/summary-fema-hazard-mitigation-assistance-hma-programs>

³ Fox 56 WOLF, "FEMA denies Pennsylvania's disaster appeal for September floods," March 21, 2024, <https://fox56.com/news/local/fema-denies-pennsylvanias-disaster-appeal-for-september-floods>

cally executed, state led, and federally coordinated. In cases where communities cannot bear the full cost of property purchases, programs like BRIC are not wasteful, but well within the purview of federal coordination of disaster relief efforts.

President Trump and his Administration have promised not to leave the forgotten men and women of America behind. My district and Northeastern Pennsylvania have been left behind for the last half century. The BRIC program has, and can continue to, support communities like those in my district. I urge you in the strongest possible manner to revive this program. I also reiterate the February 24, 2025 invitation I extended to you to visit my district and Northeastern Pennsylvania to see firsthand the importance of the BRIC program.

Sincerely,

ROB BRESNAHAN, JR.,
Member of Congress.

Mr. BRESNAHAN. Thank you.

My question would be, I have heard some evolution relating to the BRIC program, and there were a few different programs—actually, levee projects—that were slated to take place inside of my district. And unfortunately, because of the cancellation of the BRIC program, about \$10 million of levee construction was, unfortunately, canceled, as well as another \$2.5 million in the city of Scranton for buyouts for properties that were ravaged by that earlier flooding that I mentioned.

My question would be, have you given any thought or has there been any dialogue relating or circulating around the BRIC program, or the possible reinstatement of the BRIC program, or something to the likes or similarity of it?

Mr. RICHARDSON. So, thank you for the question, and a bit on BRIC first.

As I think you might have alluded to, BRIC originally was during 2018 during the Trump 45. And then it went into the Biden administration, and, kind of, BRIC went off the rails, and it went off the rails because we were funding things like bus stops and bike paths. So, right now, it is under litigation. And so, I can't really speak about it.

But what I can tell you is that resilience is a priority for me, and it is a priority for FEMA. So, even though the BRIC program is under litigation, resilience is important and a top priority for me. And I would like to stay engaged with you on that regarding BRIC—I mean regarding resilience.

Mr. BRESNAHAN. I really appreciate that, and I will use this as an opportunity to invite you to northeastern Pennsylvania and see some of the communities that have, unfortunately, suffered dire consequences because of flooding where levees were never even projected. Some of these areas never even had received water in 1972 that ended up being decimated in 2011 just because of different dynamics and landscapes with—inside of the river.

But I definitely want to continue to stay in touch, work together on some different systems and solutions for my community, so, I appreciate you being here.

I yield back.

Mr. PERRY. The Chair thanks the gentleman. The Chair now recognizes Representative Hoyle.

Ms. HOYLE OF OREGON. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Richardson, for joining us today.

I represent the central and south coast of Oregon, a very beautiful place, and my constituents have been pummeled by increas-

ingly severe weather due to climate change. So, whether it is fire or floods or heat domes or ice storm, these extreme weather events that we have not experienced before make it so that my communities and constituents have suffered greatly, and they aren't prepared.

So, I will echo my colleague, Mr. Garamendi, and my colleague from Pennsylvania in stressing the importance of the BRIC grant program, because I want to—I agree with you. We have to make sure our tax dollars are used efficiently, and well, and not in a wasteful manner. But, like, Port Orford, this is a coastal rural community in Curry County, Oregon, that just had millions of dollars for water infrastructure upgrades eliminated, even though they had already been allocated. So, they have to stop this project. That is not a bus stop, that is not DEI. This is absolutely critical.

So, I would encourage—I would love to work with you to see how we can move forward, because now they are in limbo, and there is just no other way for them to go forward without Federal assistance.

And I also would like to express my gratitude because last night, FEMA approved Public Assistance of \$9 million to address public infrastructure for damage that happens because of floods.

But there are hundreds of families who are still waiting for Federal support to put their lives back together. These people were advised not to get flood insurance, because the areas had never flooded before. So, the personal assistance—and even though it is like \$800 to \$2,000, these communities are almost \$20,000 less than the median income. That \$800 to \$2,000 will make all the difference in the world for them to get their lives back on track.

So, we still have—I don't want to play a blame game. There is no administration that has handled FEMA well. None. It is inefficient. You have people that are traumatized that have to go through bureaucratic processes. I still have 200 people upriver from me that are out of their homes from the 2020 Labor Day fires. We are waiting for reimbursement from FEMA from 2020, 2021, and every year since then. And the process is bureaucratic. We are so worried about someone not stealing a penny that we make these traumatized people go through too much.

So, again, I would love to work with you on how we can have this be more efficient and get aid directly to people and those tax dollars working. So, I have two questions.

It has been over 2 months since Oregon requested a disaster declaration for these floods. When can families expect a decision on Individual Assistance?

And secondly, is FEMA still considering changes to the Public Assistance thresholds that would cut off support for disasters like our floods in Oregon? Because that doesn't look like reform, it looks like an action that's going to, like, punch people while they are down.

So, those are my two questions.

Mr. RICHARDSON. So, thank you for the questions. And flooding, by the way, is, as you know, the most costly disaster that we have.

Regarding the first question, which is—could you just real quick—

Ms. HOYLE OF OREGON [interposing]. Sure.

Mr. RICHARDSON [continuing]. Summarize the two questions? I am going to jot them down real quick.

Ms. HOYLE OF OREGON. So, like, first question, how do we track and when can we expect a decision on—

Mr. RICHARDSON [interposing]. Got it.

Ms. HOYLE OF OREGON [continuing]. Individual Assistance? We got the Public Assistance, but—this Individual Assistance might, in the scope of a Federal budget, looks small, but it is massive—

Mr. RICHARDSON [interposing]. Right.

Ms. HOYLE OF OREGON [continuing]. Massive to my communities.

Mr. RICHARDSON. So, all the declarations have been cleared. I was briefed on that this morning. So, they are all cleared at this point.

Ms. HOYLE OF OREGON. So, even for the Individual Assistance?

Mr. RICHARDSON. Yes, I believe so.

Ms. HOYLE OF OREGON. Okay, we will—

Mr. RICHARDSON [interrupting]. But—I was briefed on this this morning—

Ms. HOYLE OF OREGON [continuing]. We will follow up with you.

Mr. RICHARDSON [continuing]. So, I do believe that they were cleared yesterday.

Ms. HOYLE OF OREGON. And then, is FEMA still considering changes to the Public Assistance threshold that would cut off support for disasters like our floods—our floods, our fires, the ice storms? I mean, these are not things we have suffered from before, and they are kind of smaller areas. So, we oftentimes just get overlooked.

Mr. RICHARDSON. So, as—and I understand the question—as we currently stand, they remain the same. However, the future of FEMA is going to be determined by the council. So, that would be forthcoming, depending on what the council decides to recommend to the President.

Ms. HOYLE OF OREGON. Okay. And then finally, I will just say again, please do not throw the baby out with the bath water. Do not eliminate and completely take out the BRIC programs, because it is really, really important work that is done, and we need those dollars.

I get that we can disagree, or you can say you don't think this is the way money should be spent. But water infrastructure and resilience are critical, and that is something in a bipartisan way we should agree that our Federal dollars should be pointed towards. So, thank you so much.

Mr. RICHARDSON. Thank you.

Mr. PERRY. The Chair thanks the gentlewoman. The Chair now recognizes Representative Carbajal.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Richardson, for being here.

I want to start by reminding all of us why these Federal dollars exist in the first place: to support the American people when they need it the most. These funds are meant to help communities prepare for the worst and respond quickly when disasters strike.

Mr. Richardson, you say you have stayed in Washington during the recent disaster to kick down the doors of bureaucracy. But for the central coast and for many communities across the country,

FEMA delays in reimbursements have had real consequences. Contractors, cities, counties are forced to front the cost of emergency response and recovery, straining local budgets and slowing down rebuilding efforts. Yet, when it is time for the Federal Government to pay back local communities, it is holding funds rather than repaying its share. Why? Because Secretary Noem is now personally reviewing every FEMA grant contract over \$100,000. This bureaucratic bottleneck is suffocating our communities.

I have heard from my constituents from the county of San Luis Obispo, the city of San Luis Obispo, the county of Santa Barbara, the county of Ventura, and various water districts throughout my district. They are not receiving the reimbursements that they are owed. Today, I want to focus my questions on these issues.

Mr. Richardson, what specific action is FEMA taking to clear these overdue reimbursements?

And how much longer will my constituents on the central coast have to wait?

Mr. RICHARDSON. Thank you for your question.

So, the reimbursements and the bureaucratic nature of that is indeed something I am concerned about, because I will kick down doors of bureaucracy. And we are digging into that now, because it takes far, far too long for the reimbursements and also to close out the disasters. So, it is something that we are looking into.

I don't necessarily have a timeline, but I can work with you to let you know.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you. For months, Donald Trump has claimed that he is cutting redtape, and his administration is doing that in Washington. For communities on the central coast, it sure doesn't feel that way. What process improvements has FEMA implemented or will implement to accelerate these reimbursements?

Mr. RICHARDSON. So, one of the things that I have done—and once again, thank you for the question—is I have consolidated—the office was somewhat disparate when addressing these. What I have done is I have consolidated those functions in FEMA so we can get a better handle on it and better reporting measures for it. And I can share those with you.

Mr. CARBAJAL. I would love to have that information.

What accountability measures or metrics does FEMA use to track reimbursement timelines internally?

And would you commit to provide this committee and me a report on average processing times for reimbursement claims, especially for the central coast disasters, over the past 2 years?

Mr. RICHARDSON. What I can do is I can commit to looking into it and then getting ahold of you and talking through it.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. PERRY. The Chair thanks the gentleman. The Chair is going to recognize the ranking member for a moment for a close.

Mr. STANTON. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I do have one final question for Mr. Richardson.

Like you, the loss of life from the Texas flood haunts me, the pictures in my mind of people clinging to trees, some who were saved by Coast Guard or other heroes in this incident. But it haunts me that we could have had more urban search and rescue pre-position

in place. We could have saved more of those people who were clinging onto those trees but weren't able to hang on for long enough.

You testified here today that you relied on the judgment of the Texas emergency management officials, including Texas pre-based urban search and rescue. But FEMA did not act to bring in and pre-position additional urban search and rescue. That was a choice. The choice was made not to pre-position those additional search and rescue.

In light of the fact of the lack of the greater number of urgent search and rescues that could have saved more lives, do you still agree with President Trump's assessment that the response to the horrific Texas floods was "the best FEMA response ever"?

Mr. RICHARDSON. The response in Texas, which was community-led, State-managed, and federally supported, brought the maximum amount of capability to bear in Texas at the right time and the right place. Through the Secretary's leadership, through the President's leadership, through my own leadership, through Nim Kidd's leadership, through region 6, we made that happen. And that is a model of how response should be done.

The maximum capability—remember, emergency management is not a pile-on sport. It is well coordinated, relies on personal relationships. It has got to be exercised beforehand. And all those things came together on Texas' worst day. And we all grieve for the State of Texas. All those things came together to show what President Trump and Secretary Noem called the best response ever. And I agree that it was an outstanding response, and the people of Texas deserved that outstanding response, and Texas emergency managers, region 6 all did an outstanding job.

Mr. STANTON. Well, I will strongly disagree that all of the resources were brought to bear that could have been. I think it was a choice by FEMA to not fulfill their statutory responsibility to pre-position under the circumstances. I believe that that likely cost lives in these circumstances, and I believe it is a shame that you say that this was the "best FEMA response ever."

I yield back.

Mr. PERRY. The Chair thanks the gentleman and, just again, wants to level-set. Let's make sure we understand definitionally what pre-positioning means and why it occurs.

And in this instance, flood warnings happen all across the country on a regular basis, and FEMA doesn't pre-position to every flood warning it gets, because they would pre-position literally 365 days a year, or just about something close to that. That having been said, with fast-moving disasters like the one that occurred in Texas, it is not like a hurricane, which you can track, you can anticipate landfall or the location of the disaster to pre-position assets.

And so, definitionally, we need to just make sure, again, level-setting what the expectation is here. Again, there are plenty of reasons to be critical of FEMA, and those criticisms are justified in many cases. But definitionally, we must understand and recognize what the limit of the expectations are, and in this case, what pre-positioning is for and what it is all about.

That having been said, I thank the gentleman. The gentleman does yield back. Are there further questions from any members of the subcommittee who have not been recognized?

Seeing none, that concludes our hearing for today. I would like to thank the witness for his testimony.

This subcommittee now stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:04 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

QUESTIONS TO DAVID RICHARDSON, SENIOR OFFICIAL PERFORMING THE DUTIES OF FEMA ADMINISTRATOR, FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY, FROM HON. SCOTT PERRY

Question 1. During the response to the recent flooding in Texas (DR-4879-TX), there were public reports alleging that on July 6, 2025, “nearly two-thirds of calls” from impacted survivors to FEMA’s disaster assistance line went unanswered on July 6, 2025.¹ In a bipartisan, members-only briefing on July 17, 2025, Associate Administrator (Acting) Keith Turi indicated that calls originating from Texas were prioritized in the queue, that the average wait time ranged from three to ten minutes, and that calls that went “unanswered” were often instances where the caller disconnected before reaching an operator—after which FEMA initiated a callback.²

Question 1.a. Can you confirm whether this information is accurate and elaborate on FEMA’s standard protocol for handling high call volumes during a surge event?

ANSWER. The Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) current telecommunications platform does not differentiate incoming calls from survivors based on specific disasters. Registration intake calls (survivors newly registering for assistance) are prioritized over other types of calls (i.e., helpline, survivors already registered and needing assistance with their case or checking the status) and are handled as they are received. Because the Texas Major Disaster Declaration was the only declaration approved over that week, the majority of the registration intake calls on July 6, 2025—those newly registering for assistance—would have been from Texas survivors. From July 6–9, 2025, more than 80 percent of all calls for registration intake were answered with an average speed of less than 5 minutes.

Given the nature of disasters, FEMA rapidly surges resources to support caller services (registration intake and helpline). When call volumes surge, FEMA regularly augments the workforce by leveraging internal FEMA resources, local hires, and other federal agencies. FEMA also has external contact center contracts that receive a percentage of the call volume that is allocated from FEMA to allow internal FEMA agents to focus on more complex casework.

Disaster survivors have multiple ways to register for FEMA assistance: by visiting DisasterAssistance.gov, by using the FEMA app through a smartphone, by calling a contact center, or by speaking with agency staff in person.

Question 1.b. Can you provide data on average call wait times and call abandonment rates on each of the first three days following the Texas flooding event, both nationally and specifically to the impacted region?

ANSWER. FEMA’s current telecommunications platform does not differentiate incoming calls from survivors based on specific disasters, however the majority of the registration intake callers would have been Texas survivors, as that was the only Major Disaster Declaration approved over that week. The table below provides FEMA’s answer rate (the percentage of calls answered by a representative) and average speed of answer (the average amount of time it took for FEMA to answer the call) from July 6–9, 2025, for registration intake. The abandonment rate, which is not a number FEMA collects, represents the proportion of calls that are not answered, and could be calculated by subtracting the answer rate from 100 percent.

¹Maxine Joselow, *FEMA Didn’t Answer Thousands of Calls From Flood Survivors, Documents Show*, NY TIMES, (July 11, 2025), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/11/climate/fema-missed-calls-texas-floods.html>.

²FEMA Briefing to Members of Congress on Texas Floods (July 17, 2025).

Registration Intake

Date	Answer Rate	Average Speed of Answer
Sunday, July 6, 2025	69.8%	0:08:12
Monday, July 7, 2025	82.1%	0:03:59
Tuesday, July 8, 2025	86%	0:03:02
Wednesday, July 9, 2025	82.9%	0:03:52

Question 1.c. How does call center response to the Texas floods compare to prior disasters with similar call volumes?

ANSWER. FEMA's current telecommunications platform does not differentiate incoming calls from survivors based on specific disasters. FEMA has an internal capacity to handle a baseline amount of activity. However, due to the historic number of disaster declarations in 2024 (56 disaster declarations that included Individual Assistance) and approved during 2025 (17 additional declarations that included Individual Assistance, as of July 23, 2025), FEMA continues to receive a significant number of calls from survivors.

This, in addition, to the call volume received from the Texas declaration, led to increased wait times longer than typically expected during this time of year. Therefore, FEMA has continued to retain some augmentation resources to support caller services (registration intake and helpline).

Question 1.d. Can you provide an update on the status of FEMA's call center contracts? Did the Agency lay off contractors on July 5th? Did any contracts expire during the Texas flood response? If so, were they reinstated?

ANSWER. FEMA's call center contracts are in place. Major disasters create sudden spikes in demand. As discussed previously, FEMA has a number of ways to quickly shift staff to ensure every survivor can register for assistance, while still moving critical cases forward. The approach used after the Texas flooding followed this model.

Question 1.e. Are there plans underway to expand surge capacity, modernize systems, or improve performance metrics ahead of future events where call volume might exceed normal levels?

ANSWER. Over the past several months, FEMA has released a series of improvements to the survivor experience including informational videos for survivors before and after they apply for assistance, embedded help text in the application, an online status tracker that shows survivors where they are in FEMA's process and what, if any, actions they need to take to complete their file.

FEMA is working to optimize its technology solutions—including a Customer Relationship Management platform that enables efficient, personalized interaction and empowers survivor action, while strengthening fraud controls and ensuring privacy of survivor data. This will include enhanced customer experience technology, which combines artificial intelligence, machine learning, and data analytics to create personalized interactions. FEMA will leverage digital tools like chatbots and intelligent voice assistants to enhance efficiency, reduce hold times, and create scalable solutions.

These efforts are expected to decrease FEMA's reliance on just-in-time surge staffing solutions as it will enable the survivor to self-serve through additional digital channels. FEMA is committed to working with this Subcommittee to improve disaster survivors' experiences using technology.

Question 2. Mr. Richardson, you testified that you did not travel to Texas to survey the flood damage until July 12, 2025, several days after the severe flooding over the Fourth of July holiday.³ You also stated that you were coordinating the federal response from Washington, D.C. and remained in close contact with Texas officials, senior Cabinet officials, and the White House.

Question 2.a. What considerations informed your decision to remain in Washington, D.C. during the immediate aftermath of the flooding event rather than deploying to the disaster area sooner?

ANSWER. I remained in constant communication with my operational staff, Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem, White House officials, and our federal,

³Thomas Frank, *FEMA Chief Slips Into Texas for Rare Public Appearance*, POLITICO, (July 15, 2025), available at <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/07/15/fema-chief-texas-public-appearance-00452293>.

state, and local partners in Texas, including the state of Texas Emergency Management Director Nim Kidd. I remained in Washington D.C. to coordinate FEMA's support to the state of Texas.

Question 2.b. During previous major flooding events under prior administrations—for example, during Hurricane Helene in North Carolina—was it standard practice for the FEMA Administrator to deploy to the field while flooding was still active, or to remain in Washington for coordination purposes?

ANSWER. FEMA does not have a Standard Operating Procedure for when a FEMA Administrator will deploy to the field. This is due to the fact that every disaster is different and requires different support from leadership.

Question 2.c. Given the need for interagency coordination, do you believe the Administrator's physical presence in the field during major disasters should be considered an operational necessity or a situational judgment call based on the nature and scope of the event?

ANSWER. No one can predict exactly what the operational need will be, but we can prepare for it. I will always be where I am of best use to the President, Secretary Noem, and the American people.

Question 3. FEMA deployed Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) teams in response to the July 4th flooding event in Texas.

Question 3.a. Please provide a timeline detailing when FEMA first received a request for USAR assistance from the State of Texas, when the deployment was approved, and when personnel arrived on the ground.

ANSWER:

Monday, July 7, 2025:

- 0800: FEMA received a verbal request from the State of Texas and began processing the request for two Type 3 Task Force Water Packages
- 1800: Colorado Task Force 1 and Missouri Task Force 1 were activated

Tuesday, July 8, 2025:

- 1440: FEMA received request for three additional Type 3 teams, twenty human remains detection canines, and three Search Team Managers
- 1700: Arizona Task Force 1 activated
- 1800: Nevada Task Force 1 activated
- 1900: Indiana Task Force 1 activated

Wednesday, July 9, 2025:

- 0900: Colorado Task Force 1 and Missouri Task Force 1 arrived on-site
- 2230: Nevada Task Force 1 arrived on-site

Thursday, July 10, 2025

- 0044: Indiana Task Force 1 arrived on-site
- 0210: Arizona Task Force 1 arrived on-site

FEMA manages and funds the National Urban Search and Rescue System, comprised of over 6,000 state and local first responders across 28 task forces throughout the country, including one task force in Texas. During disasters within their respective state, FEMA-funded Urban Search and Rescue task forces may deploy under state authorities using their federal equipment to support local Search and Rescue operations. After the July 4 floods in Kerr County, TX, the State deployed TX-TF1 under state authorities to support local Search and Rescue operations.

Question 3.b. How many USAR teams were deployed to Texas under FEMA authority, and from which locations were they mobilized? How does this compare to other disasters, such as Hurricane Helene?

ANSWER. Five Task Forces were deployed as Type 3 Task Forces, of which three were upgraded to Type 1 Task Forces (increase in number of staff) from Arizona, Indiana, Nevada, Colorado, and Missouri. Twenty individual canine resources (human remains detection) and three Search Team Managers came from across the country. Urban Search and Rescue capabilities range in response and are based on the requirements outlined by the State and by the situation (e.g., hurricane, flood, earthquake). Every flooding incident impacts communities differently, which makes comparison of the search and rescue mission challenging. The magnitude of the Urban Search and Rescue response to the Texas flooding is consistent with some previous flooding incidents where federal search and rescue support was requested, including the 2022 Kentucky floods. However, the exact needs and support for search and rescue vary based on the impacts and existing state and local search and rescue resources.

Question 3.c. Were any Urban Search and Rescue resources coordinated or supplemented through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC)? If so, please describe how those requests were initiated and fulfilled.

ANSWER. The Emergency Management Assistance Compact is a state-to-state request system and is not coordinated through FEMA. Requests are submitted by state authorities through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact Coordinators in State Emergency Operations Centers. The State of Texas requested through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact several federally certified Task Forces which participate in the FEMA Urban Search and Rescue System. This included a request to FEMA for the task forces to use their federal equipment cache. FEMA granted this request, enabling Task Forces to use their federal equipment to support as an Emergency Management Assistance Compact resource.

Question 3.d. What are the key challenges FEMA faces in staging USAR assets for fast-moving events such as flash flooding?

ANSWER. FEMA's Urban Search and Rescue teams were built and intended to be a rapidly deployable federal resource during federally declared disasters and intended to support and supplement state and local search and rescue capabilities when they are overwhelmed. Flooding impacts are not always clearly defined, and flash flood impacts even less so. Due to the dynamic nature of flooding incidents, it is extremely difficult to predict ultimate impacts to state and local communities and whether the impacts will overwhelm existing state and local search and rescue resources. This makes it challenging to determine whether or not federal search and rescue teams should be pre-positioned, as federal teams can only be employed once a Stafford Act declaration is approved. There are limited times when a flood threat can be better predicted because of antecedent conditions. For example, FEMA deployed Utah Task Force 1 to New Mexico when the State requested resources in anticipation of flood impacts in a burn scar area from the previous year. It is known that burn scars can produce landslides during extreme rain events. Frequently during flash flooding incidents, the states will request federal search and rescue resources as the incident is unfolding. In this case, FEMA will deploy federal search and rescue teams directly to the state's requested location to begin supporting state and local search and rescue operations, rather than staging them. FEMA's Urban Search and Rescue teams are built to deploy rapidly within hours of receiving a state request.

Question 3.e. Are there any updates or lessons learned from the Texas response that FEMA is incorporating into future pre-deployment protocols or coordination with EMAC partners?

ANSWER. FEMA maintains a robust continuous improvement process to analyze best practices, lessons learned, and areas for improvement from each incident. Following the Texas response, FEMA identified the need to increase visibility on resource requests through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact. This increased visibility allows FEMA to understand the full scope of resources a state is requesting, identifying where the state may be experiencing gaps and shortfalls, and begin to pre-position federal resources ahead of requests for support. FEMA maintains close coordination with the Emergency Management Assistance Compact and will continue to expand that partnership in the future.

QUESTIONS TO DAVID RICHARDSON, SENIOR OFFICIAL PERFORMING THE DUTIES OF FEMA ADMINISTRATOR, FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY, FROM HON. MIKE EZELL

Question 1. Mr. Richardson, given FEMA's integral role in national security and incident coordination, how does its current location in Washington, D.C., support rapid interagency collaboration and decision-making during crises, particularly with the White House, DHS, and other federal partners nearby?

Question 1.a. Can you further elaborate to how the existing FEMA headquarters facility supports the agency's continuity of operations, secure communications, and mission-critical functions and what risks might arise if those operations were relocated outside of the National Capital Region?

ANSWER to 1. and 1.a. Having a FEMA facility in Washington, DC plays a critical role in supporting the agency's continuity of operations, secure communications, and mission-critical functions. FEMA's mission to guide and lead the development of national continuity policy and coordination of national continuity programs for the executive branch requires operational proximity to the White House and Executive

Branch departments and agencies. This proximity ensures FEMA can maintain close coordination with federal leadership and conduct routine onsite assessments essential for sustaining national resilience and the continuation of the United States Government.

The location in the National Capital Region provides FEMA with strategic advantages, including real-time access to senior decision-makers, streamlined cross-agency collaboration, and timely responses during national security crises or emergencies. FEMA's ability to execute its responsibilities depends on in-person relationships and seamless integration across unclassified and classified environments. For example, FEMA leadership engaged in over 100 senior-level national security and continuity discussions in the National Capital Region in the past year alone, underscoring the importance of proximity to strategic partners such as the National Security Council, the Office of Management and Budget, and the White House Military Office.

FEMA Regional Offices and the Devolution Program are essential elements of FEMA's operational framework, providing resilience and operational flexibility across the nation by leveraging the 10 FEMA Regional Offices. Regional Offices and the Devolution Program enhance FEMA's ability to respond effectively to emergencies. However, they are designed to complement—not substitute—the active presence required in Washington, DC to ensure seamless collaboration and leadership at the federal level.

Relocating all FEMA's facilities outside the National Capital Region would introduce significant risks. These include delays in decision-making during emergencies, reduced efficiency in coordinating with federal leadership, and challenges in maintaining secure communications and classified operations. Additionally, relocation could disrupt established relationships with key national security partners and hinder FEMA's ability to conduct routine onsite assessments and provide timely technical assistance. Logistical challenges, such as relocating critical personnel and infrastructure, could further compromise FEMA's ability to respond effectively to national security crises, ultimately jeopardizing the agency's mission.

Question 1.b. As the current lease nears expiration, what is FEMA's plan for ensuring seamless operational continuity and avoiding costly or disruptive relocation efforts? Has FEMA assessed the long-term value of staying in place versus the risks and costs of moving?

ANSWER. DHS is working with General Services Administration on facility/real estate options for FEMA headquarters as they near the lease expiration.

QUESTION TO DAVID RICHARDSON, SENIOR OFFICIAL PERFORMING THE DUTIES OF FEMA ADMINISTRATOR, FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY, FROM HON. MIKE BOST

Question 1. Last year, in its Annual Report to FEMA, the Technical Mapping Advisory Council (TMAC), which has now been disbanded at the Department of Homeland Security, issued recommendations that included splitting the current Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA) that is based on the 1% annual flood using existing conditions at the 50% confidence limit into two new flood hazard areas each determined using 95% confidence limit, one based on existing conditions and a second based on future conditions (including land use and climate change).

In leveed areas changing from the 50% to 95% confidence limit will result in many levees not being able to maintain accreditation on FEMA flood maps, which leads to higher insurance premiums, decreased land values, and much levee protected area made subject to federal regulations (mandatory purchase of flood insurance and floodplain management (i.e., land use).

We have since been informed that the recommendation(s) to increase from the 50% to the 95% confidence level will not be advanced. Could you please confirm whether this is the case and also advise whether FEMA intends to move forward with using future conditions, rather than existing conditions, for determining the regulated floodplain boundaries?

ANSWER. FEMA has not implemented the recommendations from the 2023 Technical Mapping Advisory Council Annual report. This report recommends two flood hazard areas: a Special Flood Hazard Area based on the existing 1-percent-annual-chance flood including estimates of uncertainty at the 95 percent confidence limit and a new flood prone area to be used for floodplain management requirements based on future conditions. Recommendations are made to the FEMA Administrator for consideration and no decisions to accept these recommendations have been made.

Furthermore, FEMA has not proposed any changes to the levee accreditation requirements established in the Code of Federal Regulations at Title 44—Emergency Management and Assistance, Section 65.10 (44 CFR 65.10), nor to the levee analysis and mapping procedures for non-accredited levees, which are documented in FEMA’s guidelines and standards for the analysis and identification of the 1 percent-annual-chance flood hazard on a Flood Insurance Rate Map.

QUESTIONS TO DAVID RICHARDSON, SENIOR OFFICIAL PERFORMING THE DUTIES OF FEMA ADMINISTRATOR, FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY, FROM HON. GREG STANTON

Question 1. Two major fires are burning in Arizona on federal land in Coconino County. The Drago Bravo Fire in the North Rim of the Grand Canyon has destroyed the historic Grand Canyon Lodge and more than 70 structures, and the White Sage Fire has burned more than 58,000 acres. Coconino County Emergency Operations Center is on the frontline of these fires coordinating the response. It is the only emergency operations center in the county, a county that is the second largest in the country by land area. Yet, the federal funding the county relies on through the Emergency Management Performance Grant program for 98 percent of its operations has still not been allocated by FEMA. Further delays in releasing these funds will put significant strain on the county and its ability to respond to these fires and other disasters.

When can we expect FEMA to issue the Notice of Funding Opportunity for these Emergency Management Performance Grants and fulfill its obligation to Coconino County and other emergency management offices across the country battling fires, flooding, and other natural disasters?

ANSWER. FEMA is committed to releasing the Notices of Funding Opportunities, including the Emergency Management Performance Grants Notice of Funding Opportunity in the near future, and will keep the Subcommittee updated.

Question 2. In March 2020, Coconino County, Arizona submitted its initial application to FEMA’s Hazard Mitigation Grant Program to remove hazardous vegetation on private properties in a high-fire danger area. This review requires examination of properties previously disturbed and developed for residential construction. Phase 1 was awarded in June 2023, and the County submitted its Phase 1 closeout documents and Environmental and Historic Preservation (EHP) review request in July 2024. Despite these steps, the EHP review for this project remains pending. (FM-5284-03-03R)

Can FEMA provide a clear timeline or estimated date for when the EHP review will be finalized and Phase 2 funding released for this project, so this essential wild-fire mitigation work can proceed?

ANSWER. The subapplication, received on March 31, 2020, required coordination between FEMA and the applicant through May 2023 to address missing information. Due to insufficient details in the original application, FEMA awarded the project as a phased initiative. Phase 1 deliverables included identifying the project location, securing private property owner interest and access approvals, and obtaining Board of Supervisors approval. On August 19, 2024, the Arizona Department of Emergency Management submitted Phase 2 deliverables to FEMA. At that time FEMA initiated review, which included tribal coordination, consultation with Resource Agencies, and engagement with the State Historic Preservation Officer. FEMA has just completed consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Arizona State Historic Preservation Officer. FEMA is currently working with the subapplicant to receive a signed Endangered Species Act Compliance Package. Following completion of an Environmental and Historic Preservation compliance review, FEMA, along with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), will complete the remaining required reviews of this project. Once all reviews are completed, FEMA may award the subapplication and may obligate the funding.

Question 3. Coconino County sought approval from FEMA to place a temporary magnetic antenna on the roof of a 25-year-old county-owned building. Despite the minimal impact, FEMA required a full EHP review, which took four months to complete and ultimately confirmed the mount posed no environmental or historical harm.

What strategies or reforms are under consideration to streamline the EHP process for zero-risk or minimal risk projects or exempt EHP review on applicant owned structures/lands?

ANSWER. FEMA's Office of Environmental Planning and Historic Preservation has been actively working on strategies to streamline the process to meet statutorily required federal responsibilities for environmental compliance for federal funding actions, with the intent of maximizing the use of existing legal exemptions and adopting additional exclusions, where possible. FEMA has developed additional programmatic environmental assessments and, as of June 16, 2025, adopted 46 additional National Environmental Policy Act Categorical Exclusions from eight other federal agencies. This streamlines the National Environmental Policy Act review for a wider variety of project scopes that include minimal-risk projects, such as temporary installations on applicant-owned structures or lands.

FEMA is committed to reducing complexities of the Environmental and Historic Preservation review process and will work with this Subcommittee on potential legislative changes to ease complexities and challenges.

Question 4. Congress approved two Community Project Funding awards (EMF-2023-EO-00002 & EMF-2024-EO-05006) for an Emergency Operations Center in Coconino County, which is now in the 2 design phase. The County attempted to initiate an early EHP review to avoid unnecessary construction delays but was told by FEMA that full budget documentation was required before EHP could proceed even though these details have no relevance to environmental or historical considerations. Currently, there is only one staff member in Region IX handling EHP reviews and, as a result, the County anticipates delays of 12–16 months or longer before approval is received. Coconino County offered to fund a third-party review to expedite the EHP process, but FEMA denied the request.

Question 4.a. What measures is FEMA implementing to address known staffing shortages and persistent processing bottlenecks within the Region IX EHP review team, particularly for critical infrastructure projects?

ANSWER. The Office of Environmental Planning and Historic Preservation at FEMA Headquarters is collaborating closely with Region 9 leadership to implement both immediate and long-term solutions. To date, FEMA has surged national and Headquarters staffing assets, reallocating personnel as needed to address project backlogs and improve processing efficiencies. Additionally, the Office of Environmental Planning and Historic Preservation leadership is working directly with the FEMA Region 9 leadership to develop sustainable capacity solutions through filling critical vacancies. FEMA Region 9 has also been in contact with the State regarding ongoing consultations.

Question 4.b. Why does FEMA not allow the use of or accredit qualified third-party environmental reviewers to help expedite EHP reviews as is done at other federal agencies?

ANSWER. FEMA can accept certain components of environmental review process, such as hydrologic and hydraulic studies or surveys of historic, cultural, or protected species impacts, that are conducted by third parties under specific circumstances. However, regardless of who prepares associated studies or documentation, FEMA is responsible for making all associated compliance determinations as required by statutes and authorities delegated by DHS for FEMA's federally funded actions.

Question 4.c. Is FEMA considering any reforms to enable such collaboration for urgent public safety projects?

ANSWER. FEMA continually looks for opportunities to streamline or improve the environmental and historic preservation review process while complying with statutory Environmental and Historic Preservation requirements to best serve community response, recovery, and resilience goals. FEMA's focus has been on streamlining tools to increase the agency's efficiency in performing required environmental and historic preservation reviews. FEMA is committed to keeping this Subcommittee updated on any changes to the Environmental and Historic Preservation review process and working with the Subcommittee on potential legislative changes to ease complexities and challenges.

Question 5. Pima County, Arizona received a letter from FEMA on March 12, 2025, in reference to three Shelter and Services Program (SSP) competitive grant awards indicating that payment was being withheld and that FEMA was "instituting specific conditions on the award." Pima County is owed more than \$13 million in SSP funds for shelter and other services it provided to those seeking asylum. Throughout the last six years, this temporary sheltering program, which began during President Trump's first term, was conducted at the request of and with the full knowledge, support, and participation of agencies within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Customs and Border Protection (CBP) brought asylum seekers that they had processed and were releasing to the shelters in Pima County, and it was CBP that determined that these individuals were in the United States legally,

Pima County had and played no role in these determinations. Pima County provided these services properly and in good faith to ensure public health and safety, yet the federal government has failed to meet its obligations to reimburse the county for these services, which were approved by the DHS through its normal grant process. Further, Pima County followed all the terms and conditions of the SSP grants and responded to FEMA's letter on April 9, 2025, with the additional information requested, which had already been provided with the requests for payment. To date, the county has been met with silence from FEMA.

When will the expenses legally incurred by Pima County and its subcontractors, for what was entirely a federal reasonability, be fully reimbursed by FEMA?

ANSWER. Pima County's Shelter and Services Program award is subject to ongoing litigation. FEMA does not comment on pending litigation.

QUESTIONS TO DAVID RICHARDSON, SENIOR OFFICIAL PERFORMING THE DUTIES OF FEMA ADMINISTRATOR, FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY, FROM HON. JOHN GARAMENDI

Question 1. Mr. Richardson, in your testimony you cite examples of BRIC-funded projects, such as bicycle lanes, as diverging from the program's original intent, and use this as a rationale for canceling the program.

Question 1.a. Could you please provide a full list of all BRIC-funded projects from 2020 to the present, identifying which specific grants you believe deviate from the program's core purpose?

Question 1.b. Additionally, please indicate what percentage of total grants and funding, respectively, you believe fall into this category.

Question 1.c. In your view, how many such projects are sufficient to justify withholding critical disaster preparedness funding nationwide?

ANSWER to 1.a., 1.b., and 1.c. We have not terminated any grants or ended the program. We are currently evaluating its efficacy to ensure selections align with its original purpose, and the next steps. Once that review has been completed and decisions have been finalized, we will be able to provide a more complete response.

A full list of BRIC funded projects from 2020 to present can be found on OpenFEMA.

- To identify BRIC subapplications from FY 2020 to the present that have been awarded and obligated using OpenFEMA data, refer to OpenFEMA HMA Subapplications v2 [<https://www.fema.gov/openfema-data-page/hma-subapplications-v2>]. Data can then be filtered on the field "program" to only include Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities. The field "totalObligatedAmount" will provide the total federal obligated amount for subapplications that have been awarded and obligated.
- To simplify this, we have included a link to this prefiltered file using the OpenFEMA API [[https://www.fema.gov/api/open/v2/HmaSubapplications?format=csv&filter=\(program%20eq%20%27Building%20Resilient%20Infrastructure%20and%20Communities%27%20and%20totalObligatedAmount%20gt%200\)&\\$allrecords=true&\\$metadata=off](https://www.fema.gov/api/open/v2/HmaSubapplications?format=csv&filter=(program%20eq%20%27Building%20Resilient%20Infrastructure%20and%20Communities%27%20and%20totalObligatedAmount%20gt%200)&$allrecords=true&$metadata=off)].

Question 2.a. In a court filing, FEMA said that they have 'not ended' the BRIC disaster grant program. However, in April, FEMA announced that they were ending the BRIC program and canceling all applications from FY 2020–2023. Could you please explain the apparent contradiction here?

Question 2.b. Is BRIC ended or not?

ANSWER to 2.a. and 2.b. We have not terminated any grants or ended the program. We are currently evaluating its efficacy to ensure selections align with its original purpose, and the next steps.