

ASSESSING FEMA'S READINESS FOR FUTURE DISASTERS

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BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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ASSESSING FEMA'S READINESS FOR FUTURE DISASTERS

Wednesday, June 12, 2019

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:06 a.m., in room 310, Cannon House Office Building, Hon. Bennie G. Thompson (Chairman of the committee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Thompson, Jackson Lee, Richmond, Payne, Rice, Rose, Underwood, Slotkin, Green of Texas, Clarke, Watson Coleman, Barragán, Demings, King, McCaul, Katko, Walker, Lesko, Taylor, Joyce, Crenshaw, and Guest.

Chairman THOMPSON. The Committee on Homeland Security will come to order.

The committee is meeting today to receive testimony on assessing FEMA's readiness for future disasters.

Good morning. Before we begin, I want to observe that today marks the third anniversary of the tragic shooting at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida. Our thoughts remain with the victims and their families on this solemn day.

I would like to welcome our witnesses, Acting Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator Pete Gaynor and Mr. Christopher Currie of the Government Accountability Office.

The committee is meeting today to assess FEMA's readiness for future disasters. The Federal response to Hurricane Maria nearly 2 years ago was an abject failure. Slow response for the Federal Government, FEMA staff and challenges, and botched contracts left millions of our fellow Americans in Puerto Rico to respond to the devastating storm without the help they desperately needed from FEMA and other Federal agencies. We may hear some revisionist history about the response today, but the fact remains that FEMA and its Federal partners were not ready to respond to consecutive major storms in 2017.

Unfortunately, Puerto Rico continues to pay the price. People there are also still suffering from disparate treatment by the President, who continues to tweet his disdain for Puerto Ricans working to help their communities recover.

Politicizing disasters or treating communities differently based on their political persuasion should be beneath any President. All Americans deserve the unwavering support of their President and the Federal Government in times of crisis, regardless of their political persuasion, economic status, skin color, or where they live. We

need to restore the American people's confidence that they will have that support.

Those of us who went to Puerto Rico both in the immediate aftermath of the storm and more recently as Puerto Rico continues to recover, know first-hand more remains to be done. As Chairman of this committee, I am committed to continuing oversight of recovery there.

Meanwhile, as recovery from the 2017 hurricane continues, the 2019 hurricane season got underway June 1. Many of us are concerned whether FEMA has learned the lessons of the 2017 season and will apply those lessons in response to future disasters. Is FEMA more ready to respond today than it was nearly 2 years ago? What more remains to be done? How can we ensure FEMA addresses persistent challenges and future risk? I hope to engage with our witnesses to help answer those questions today.

Fortunately, the Government Accountability Office is working on a series of audits related to these questions at my request and that of several Congressional colleagues. Their work so far has found it is imperative FEMA improve its disaster resilience response recovery and work force management efforts. FEMA's own after-action report on the 2017 hurricane season acknowledges many of those concerns. I am particularly interested in how FEMA will address its persistent disaster work force shortages. Without having the right people in place, trained, and ready to respond, FEMA cannot carry out its mission.

This is particularly concerning to me because, in my own State, we have experienced severe storms, flooding, and tornadoes already this season. I want to express my sincere appreciation to employees of FEMA who work hard on behalf of our disaster survivors.

Also, I remain concerned about a recently discovered FEMA data breach that exposed the personal addresses and banking information of more than 2 million U.S. disaster survivors. I hope the acting administrator can share with us the plan for helping those whose privacy has been compromised and preventing other similar incidents.

Finally, I want to express my strong opposition to the President's proposal to slash Homeland Security and first responder grants by more than \$600 million for fiscal year 2020. These draconian cuts would undermine our Nation's security and preparedness. Congress must reject the President's proposal and ensure State and local partners and our first responders receive the funding necessary to secure our communities.

Before closing, I want to note that the President's nominee for FEMA administrator will have a confirmation hearing before the Senate later today. I look forward to the Department filling one of its many vacancies and to engaging a confirmed administrator on the issues facing the agency.

Again, I thank the Members and witnesses for joining us, and look forward to a productive discussion about FEMA's readiness to respond to future disasters.

[The statement of Chairman Thompson follows:]

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN BENNIE G. THOMPSON

JUNE 12, 2019

The committee is meeting today to assess FEMA's readiness for future disasters. The Federal response to Hurricane Maria nearly 2 years ago was an abject failure. Slow response from the Federal Government, FEMA staffing challenges, and botched contracts left millions of our fellow Americans in Puerto Rico to respond to the devastating storm without the help they desperately needed from FEMA and other Federal agencies. We may hear some revisionist history about that response today, but the fact remains that FEMA and its Federal partners were not ready to respond to consecutive major storms in 2017.

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Politicizing disasters or treating communities differently based on their political persuasion should be beneath any President. All Americans deserve the unwavering support of their President and the Federal Government in times of crisis, regardless of their political persuasion, economic status, skin color, or where they live. We need to restore the American people's confidence they will have that support.

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Meanwhile, as recovery from the 2017 hurricanes continues, the 2019 hurricane season got under way June 1. Many of us are concerned whether FEMA has learned the lessons of the 2017 season and will apply those lessons in its response to future disasters. Is FEMA more ready to respond today than it was nearly 2 years ago? What more remains to be done? How can we ensure FEMA addresses persistent challenges and future risks? I hope to engage with our witnesses to help answer these questions here today.

Fortunately, the Government Accountability Office is working on a series of audits related to these questions at my request and that of several Congressional colleagues. Their work so far has found it is imperative FEMA improves its disaster resilience, response, recovery, and workforce management efforts. FEMA's own After-Action Report on the 2017 Hurricane Season acknowledges many of these concerns.

I am particularly interested in how FEMA will address its persistent disaster workforce shortages. Without having the right people in place, trained, and ready to respond, FEMA cannot carry out its mission. This is particularly concerning to me because in my own State, we have experienced severe storms, flooding, and tornadoes already this year.

I want to express my sincere appreciation to the employees at FEMA who work hard on behalf of disaster survivors. Also, I remain concerned about a recently-discovered FEMA data breach that exposed the personal addresses and banking information of more than 2 million U.S. disaster survivors. I hope the acting administrator can share with us the plan for helping those whose privacy has been compromised and preventing another similar incident.

Finally, I want to express my strong opposition to the President's proposal to slash homeland security and first responder grants by more than \$600 million for fiscal year 2020. These draconian cuts would undermine our Nation's security and preparedness. Congress must reject the President's proposal and ensure State and local partners and our first responders receive the funding necessary to secure our communities.

Before closing, I want to note that the President's nominee for FEMA administrator will have a confirmation hearing before the Senate later today. I look forward to the Department filling one of its many vacancies and to engaging a confirmed administrator on the issues facing the agency.

Mr. THOMPSON. The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Mississippi, Mr. Guest, for an opening statement.

Mr. GUEST. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

With the 2019 hurricane season officially under way, the resilience of FEMA and the American people will once again be tested. FEMA's mission is to help people before, during, and after a natural disaster.

Over the last 2 years, FEMA has led the response of an unprecedented set of disasters. Hurricanes leveled large swaths of the country. Catastrophic wildfires destroyed over 1 million acres. Large floods inundated millions of homes, farms, and businesses. Tornadoes ripped a path of destruction through dozens of communities. So far this year, 28 major disaster declarations have been declared.

As a Mississippian, I share the State with the Chairman that is prone to natural disasters, and I am familiar with the devastations of hurricanes, floodings, and tornadoes. In fact, as recently as this week, Mississippi's Governor, Phil Bryant, requested a major disaster declaration for the State of Mississippi for severe storms, floodings, and tornadoes that hit our State.

This request marks the third major disaster declaration inquiry from Governor Bryant this year. In each of these disasters, first responders and community officials worked hand-in-hand with FEMA on response and recovery efforts. It is the strength of this Federal-State partnership that is key to successful disaster preparation, response, and recovery.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on the resilience of that partnership in the wake of such large-scale disasters that we have recently witnessed.

I am also interested in hearing about the progress FEMA is making in implementing the Disaster Recovery Reform Act. It is my understanding that last year, the Republican Majority enacted DRRA as the first major reform to the Stafford Act in over a decade.

In addition to helping to expedite assistance to survivors and increasing State flexibilities, DRRA established a new predisaster mitigation fund to help communities preempt the damage that results from disasters. Mitigation continues to be our best defense against natural disasters. For every dollar we spend on mitigation, we save between \$4 and \$8 on recovery. The more we can help our communities mitigate disasters, the less they rely on Federal assistance when disasters strike.

Finally, this committee has exclusive jurisdiction over preparedness and response to acts of terrorism. I am interested in hearing from our witnesses their perspective on how prepared the Federal-State partnership is to respond to a terrorist attack on American soil. As the threats to our Nation continually evolve, it is critical that Congress continue to make robust investments in FEMA's preparedness grants. States and communities rely on these grants to build, sustain, and enhance their capabilities to protect the public from acts of terrorism.

I thank the witnesses for appearing today, and I look forward to hearing their testimony.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

[The statement of Ranking Member Guest follows:]

STATEMENT OF HONORABLE MICHAEL GUEST

JUNE 12, 2019

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

With the 2019 hurricane season officially under way, the resilience of FEMA and the American people will once again be tested. FEMA's mission is to help people before, during, and after a disaster.

Over the last 2 years, FEMA has led the response to an unprecedented set of disasters. Hurricanes leveled large swaths of the country; catastrophic wildfires destroyed over 1 million acres; large floods inundated millions of homes, farms, and businesses; and tornadoes ripped a path of destruction through dozens of communities.

So far this year, 28 major disaster declarations have been declared.

As a Mississippian, I share a State with the Chairman that is prone to natural disasters and am familiar with how devastating hurricanes, tornadoes, and flooding can be. In fact, as recently as Monday, Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant requested a major disaster declaration for the State of Mississippi for severe storms, flooding, and tornadoes that hit our State in April. This request marked the third major disaster declaration inquiry from Governor Bryant since February of this year. In each of these disasters, first responders and community officials worked hand-in-hand with FEMA on response and recovery efforts.

It's the strength of this Federal-State partnership that is the key to successful disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on the resilience of that partnership in the wake of the large-scale disasters we've recently witnessed.

I am also interested in hearing about the progress FEMA is making in implementing the Disaster Recovery Reform Act. It's my understanding last year, the Republican Majority enacted DRRRA as the first major reform of the Stafford Act in over a decade.

In addition to helping to expedite assistance to survivors and increasing State flexibilities, DRRRA established a new pre-disaster mitigation fund to help communities pre-empt the damage that results from disasters.

Mitigation continues to be our best defense against natural disasters. For every dollar we spend on mitigation, we save between \$4 and \$8 on recovery.

The more we can help our communities mitigate disasters, the less they must rely on Federal assistance when disasters strike.

Finally, this committee has exclusive jurisdiction over preparedness and response to acts of terrorism. I am interested in hearing our witness' perspective on how prepared the Federal-State partnership is to respond to a terrorist attack on American soil.

As the threats to our Nation continually evolve, it is critical that Congress continues to make robust investment in FEMA preparedness grants. States and communities rely on these grants to build, sustain, and enhance their capabilities to protect the public from acts of terrorism.

I thank the witnesses for appearing today and look forward to hearing their testimony.

I yield back.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you very much.

Other Members of the committee are reminded that, under the committee rules, opening statements may be submitted for the record.

[The statement of Honorable Jackson Lee follows:]

STATEMENT OF HONORABLE SHEILA JACKSON LEE

JUNE 12, 2019

Thank you Chairman Thompson for holding today's hearing on "Assessing FEMA's Readiness for Future Disasters."

The purpose of this hearing is to examine FEMA's management of recent disasters to assess its readiness for future disasters.

I look forward to hearing from today's witness's testimony on preventing unlawful profiling:

- Peter Gaynor, acting administrator, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA); and
- Chris Currie, director, Homeland Security and Justice Division, Government Accountability Office (GAO).

For 39 years, FEMA's mission remains: To lead America to prepare for, prevent, respond to, and recover from disasters with a vision of "A Nation Prepared."

On April 1, 1979, President Jimmy Carter signed the Executive Order that created the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

From Day 1, FEMA has remained committed to protecting and serving the American people.

The FEMA coordinates the Federal Government's role in preparing for, preventing, mitigating the effects of, responding to, and recovering from all domestic disasters, whether natural or man-made, including acts of terror.

The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Public Law 100-707), signed into law on November 23, 1988, amended the Disaster Relief Act of 1974 (Public Law 93-288).

The Stafford Act constitutes the statutory authority for most Federal disaster response activities especially as they pertain to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and FEMA programs.

The work of the FEMA Office of Disaster Recovery and the Office of Disaster Recovery are critical when disaster strikes and for this reason they should be a permanent part of the agency.

These are the offices responsible for the Federal-wide coordination of disaster response and recovery efforts.

Disaster response and recovery has taken on a new urgency because of the frequency and furiousness of extreme weather events.

Climate change finally has a face and a new name—extreme weather.

Extreme weather includes unexpected, unusual, unpredictable, severe, or unseasonal weather.

Often, extreme events are based on a location's recorded weather history and defined as lying in the most unusual 10 percent.

Extreme weather is becoming the new normal.

The question is "Can we be prepared for success extreme weather events occurring nearly simultaneously?", as was the case in 2017, when Hurricanes Harvey, Jose, and Maria hit within days of each other, while wildfires burned in California.

GAO estimates that extreme weather costs the United States over \$300 billion in 2017 alone.

In the past the tools and resources available to FEMA to support disaster response and recovery have been limited to meals, water, tarp.

Local, Tribal, territorial, and State governments had to make request for aid to be provided.

For more substantial assistance, Government contracting and awards must be put into place, which can take months and in some cases years to get resources to victims.

This is too much time for survivors to have to wait for help.

EXTREME WEATHER EVENT—HURRICANE HARVEY BY THE NUMBERS

The 9-county Houston metro area impacted by Hurricane Harvey covers 9,444 square miles, an area larger than 5 States, including New Hampshire, New Jersey, and Connecticut.

Harris County covers 1,778 square miles, enough space to fit New York City, Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, Seattle, Austin, and Dallas, with room still to spare.

There was over 41,500 square miles of land mass impacted by Hurricane Harvey and the subsequent flooding that covered an area larger than the States of Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont combined.

Hurricane Harvey dropped 21 trillion gallons of rainfall on Texas and Louisiana, most of it on the Houston Metroplex.

Nederland, Texas, recorded 60.58 inches of rainfall making Harvey the highest storm total rainfall. Rainfall within a tenth of an inch of that total was recorded in Groves, a neighboring community.

Both these totals exceed the previous U.S. rainfall record of 52 inches, set by Hurricane Hiki in Hawaii in 1950.

At its peak on September 1, 2017, one-third of Houston was underwater.

Over 300,000 structures flooded in southeastern Texas, where extreme rainfall hit many areas that are densely populated.

Hurricane Harvey is the largest housing disaster to strike the United States in our Nation's history.

Hurricane Harvey damaged 203,000 homes, of which 12,700 were destroyed.

There was no way to pre-prepare for Hurricanes Harvey, Jose, Maria or any of the other major disaster events in 2017.

What we can do is learn as much as possible and apply those lessons to future disaster response and recovery efforts.

When there is an event, like Hurricane Harvey, there are important and valuable lessons that can help us to meet future challenges.

It must be the duty of this Congress to make sure that FEMA is prepared to meet the challenge.

For this reason, I introduced, H.R. 3060, a bill providing for reform and reorganization of the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Extreme weather events mean that we must be able to respond to the need wherever it is with the support required as quickly as possible and do so in way that will support response to multiple catastrophic events nearly simultaneously.

H.R. 3060:

- makes permanent the FEMA Office of Disaster Response and the FEMA Office of Disaster Recovery;
- creates an ombudsman for each office to assist survivors and victims;
- establishes a new National Disaster Medical Triage Capacity and an Incident Medical Recovery Management Team to determine best practices for implementing Advanced Trauma Life Support capabilities, effecting medical evaluations, and to assess health impacts that result from Federal disasters;
- establishes a program to provide education and job training;
- provides for accurate reporting on deaths and missing persons; and
- collects data and reports on effective casework management for the provision of survivor benefits and services.

Under H.R. 3060, homeowners who in the past were left out of the full benefit of Federal Government disaster recovery assistance, will have access to the help they need.

The bill establishes a Disaster Emergency Housing Assistance Grant Program that allows the FEMA administrator to authorize the Secretary of HUD under Section 408 of the Stafford Act to provide immediate housing and urban development assistance that meets the housing needs of survivors of a Federally-declared disaster event, which shall include condominiums designated as such by local tax records.

The bill does not require all substantial housing assistance to victims to wait for new legislation.

This bill provides a report on options on creating a single National Disaster Insurance Program to ensure that every property owner will have the opportunity to purchase disaster policies when purchasing property insurance to bring stability and ensure that proactive steps to address disasters victims being underinsured or without insurance.

I look forward to working with the committee on a FEMA bill that incorporates much of the hard lessons learned for disaster season 2017.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Thank you.

Chairman THOMPSON. I welcome our panel of witnesses. First, I would like to welcome Peter Gaynor, the acting administrator at FEMA. Mr. Gaynor was confirmed by the Senate in October 2018 as FEMA's deputy administrator, and has been serving as the acting administrator since March of this year. Prior to FEMA, Mr. Gaynor served as director of Rhode Island's Emergency Management Agency, and has a long history in public service and emergency management.

Next, I would like to welcome Mr. Chris Currie, director of the Government Accountability Office of Homeland Security and Justice team. Mr. Currie leads GAO's work on National preparedness and emergency management, and has been at GAO since 2002.

Without objection, the witnesses' full statement will be inserted in the record.

I now ask each witness to summarize his statement for 5 minutes, beginning with Mr. Gaynor.

**STATEMENT OF PETER T. GAYNOR, ACTING ADMINISTRATOR,
FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY**

Mr. GAYNOR. Good morning, Chairman Thompson, Representative Guest, and Members of the committee. My name is Pete

Gaynor. I am the acting administrator for FEMA. On behalf of the Department of Homeland Security, Acting Secretary McAleenan, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide this committee with an update on the agency's readiness for future disasters.

First, thank you for the support over the past few years. Congress passed and the President signed into law the Disaster Recovery Reform Act on October 5, 2018. We are grateful for the passage of this important measure. It will assist the Nation in reducing disaster risk and it will increase preparedness.

I would also like to recognize the work of the committee and our partners at the Government Accountability Office for their oversight of this agency. Your efforts provide opportunities to advance our work and the emergency management profession. Having partners with the same goal of helping people before, during, and after disasters helps us continuously improve and adapt as a Nation.

Since 2017, FEMA has supported 179 major and emergency disaster declarations and 114 fire management assistant grants. As of June 1, the first day of hurricane season, we have more than 5,700 employees deployed to support 52 active disaster declarations. I am proud of the agency's efforts and our staff who work tirelessly to carry out our mission.

Even in this environment of unprecedented disaster workload, we have made substantial strides in achieving the agency's strategic goals and addressing areas for improvement identified in our own 2017 after-action report and our GAO partner recommendations.

The scale and rapid succession of disasters in recent years has stretched response recovery capabilities at all levels of government. Following a disaster, FEMA serves as a lead coordinator for Federal assistance. But the emergency management process breaks down when the agency is expected to assume a first responder role.

Through our experiences, we have learned that success and emergency response is locally executed, State-managed, and Federally-supported. FEMA's role is the coordinator supporting the recovery efforts of State and local elected officials, while ensuring we execute the laws passed by Congress to dispense Federal dollars in a responsible way.

Our 2017 hurricane after-action report outlined key findings and made recommendations for improvement. The report also highlighted the importance of building a community-based response capacity. Eighty percent of all declared disasters incurred obligations of \$41 million or less. Disasters below that amount have cost FEMA, on average, \$100 million total per year in administrative costs.

Aligned with the key focus areas in the after-action report, the agency's strategic plan goes on existing best practices and identifies new initiatives geared toward achieving three overarching goals. First, to build a culture of preparedness. Second, to ready the Nation for catastrophic disasters. Third, to reduce the complexity of FEMA.

As part of our initiative to ready the Nation for catastrophic disasters, FEMA is emphasizing stabilization of community lifelines. Lifelines provide indispensable services that enable continuous op-

eration of critical functions that, if not properly restored, would risk health, safety, or economic security.

In addition to the lifeline's construct, FEMA has taken considerable steps to prepare for the 2019 hurricane season. First, enhancing our logistics management. FEMA has significantly increased our commodity stock at strategic locations across the continental United States and island States and territories. In Puerto Rico alone, we have more than 6 times the stocks on hand on the island that we did before Irma and Maria made landfall.

Since 2017, FEMA has increased incident management work force strength by more than 20 percent, even despite normal attrition rates, and hired more than 1,500 local hires who support their communities. We have also increased the number of staff roster through the DHS surge capacity force to augment FEMA assets when needed. We have made strides specifically aimed at survivor assistance. We have increased investments in urban search-and-rescue capabilities, and increased our call center capability to better serve disaster survivors.

We continue to embrace lessons learned and best practices in our planning and exercises. For example, we revised a National response framework to improve other private-sector coordination. Additionally, last week, we conducted Shaken Fury, an exercise based on a catastrophic earthquake in the central United States.

Today, nearly 2 weeks into the 2019 Atlantic hurricane season, the disasters to our Nation have never been higher. Given the historic magnitude of disasters over the past 2 years, if a hurricane makes landfall this year, it will likely hit an area that is still working to recover from a prior disaster. That means this year, even smaller and less severe storms could have a larger impact.

By utilizing best practices, adopting response concepts, and increasing predisaster investments to reduce risk, we can achieve the goals of building a culture of preparedness and readying the Nation for catastrophic disasters.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I look forward to any questions you may have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Gaynor follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF PETER T. GAYNOR

JUNE 12, 2019

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon, Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Rogers, and Members of the committee. My name is Peter Gaynor and I am the acting administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). On behalf of Acting U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary McAleenan, I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to discuss FEMA's readiness for future disasters.

I am proud to continue to be part of an agency that, every day, helps communities before, during, and after disasters. The historic disaster seasons over the last 2 years were a true test of the Nation's ability to respond to and recover from multiple concurrent disasters.

Two years later, FEMA remains steadfast in its commitment to support the needs of disaster survivors. We continue to work tirelessly to support State, local, Tribal, and territorial (SLTT) partners to respond to and recover from disasters and to mitigate against future disasters. We overcame many challenges, and we have gained invaluable knowledge which we have incorporated into our strategy going forward, but we are not finished. We will continue to adapt and expand our understanding of emergency management to ensure that we can best support our partners' ability

to build more resilient communities, lessen the impacts of disasters, and ultimately help individuals get back on their feet quickly.

On February 9, 2018, the President signed into law the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018. Thanks to the authority that Congress has given to FEMA in this law, FEMA may, in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, provide Public Assistance funding for critical services to replace or restore the function of a facility or system to industry standards without restrictions based on their pre-disaster condition. The law further allows FEMA to provide assistance for critical services to replace or restore components of the facility or system that are not damaged by the disaster when it is necessary to fully effectuate the replacement or restoration of disaster-damaged components to restore the function of the facility or system to industry standards.

In Puerto Rico, we are facing many unique challenges throughout the long-term recovery process. We continue to work with our partners in the Commonwealth, other Federal agencies, and Congress to find joint, outcome-driven solutions to: (1) Develop cohesive, solutions-oriented strategies to maximize Federal funding while building a more resilient Puerto Rico; (2) build Puerto Rico's capacity to manage the incoming tens of billions of dollars in grant funding; and (3) continue internal controls to ensure appropriate use of taxpayer funding.

KEY THEMES & LESSONS LEARNED

Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria caused a combined \$265 billion in damage and were each among the top 5 costliest hurricanes on record. In response, FEMA coordinated large deployments of Federal personnel, both before and after the hurricanes' landfalls, to support response and initial recovery efforts across 270,000 square miles. These deployments included more than 17,000 FEMA and Federal Surge Capacity Force personnel, and nearly 17,000 personnel from various offices of the Department of Defense. FEMA facilitated logistics missions that moved more than \$2 billion worth of commodities and supplies across several States and territories, using multiple modes of transportation. FEMA Urban Search and Rescue Task Forces, comprised of State and local emergency responders, saved or assisted nearly 9,500 lives across the 3 hurricanes. In total, the hurricanes and California wildfires affected more than 47 million people—nearly 15 percent of the Nation's population. FEMA registered nearly 4.8 million households for assistance.

The unprecedented scale, scope, and impacts of the complex combination of disasters tested the improved capabilities that were developed as a result of lessons learned from Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy.

Following the 2017 and 2018 disasters, FEMA thoroughly reviewed preparations for the immediate response and initial recovery operations with the goal of identifying lessons learned which collectively benefit future operations undertaken by FEMA, the emergency management community, and the Nation. Key themes which emerged include:

- *Sustained Whole Community Logistics Operations.*—The scale and duration of life-saving and sustainment operations showed that FEMA must be ready to support logistics missions that span weeks or months, particularly in remote locations where commodities and equipment are transported by non-traditional methods. Plans and procedures for resource movement, sequencing and transportation logistics, including the last mile of delivery when requested, must be effectively coordinated and prioritized with the supported State, territory, or Tribe, other Government agencies, non-profit organizations, and the private-sector supply chain.
- *Locally-Executed, State-Managed, and Federally-Supported.*—FEMA's ability to provide support in disasters builds on, and is subject to, the capacity of SLTT governments. If these governments are well-resourced, well-trained, and well-organized, the effectiveness of FEMA's assistance is enhanced. If the SLTT government's ability to respond—for example, the ability to provide law enforcement, medical support, or commodity distribution—is diminished, then FEMA and its partners must find ways to deliver and support these critical services. FEMA is not traditionally a first response organization but had to play a more direct response role following Hurricane Maria.
- *Staffing for Concurrent, Complex Incidents.*—When Hurricane Harvey made landfall in Texas, FEMA had staff deployed to 32 Presidentially-declared disasters across 19 field offices. By the time Maria made landfall following Harvey and Irma, decisions regarding personnel made in support of one incident impacted on-going disaster operations. FEMA and our Federal Government partners rapidly surged and deployed personnel to support immediate response operations. FEMA also relied on mission assignments and the Surge Capacity

Force to supplement our existing disaster workforce, pulling resources and personnel from across Federal Government departments and agencies.

- *Survivable and Redundant Communications.*—Following Hurricane Maria, Puerto Rico’s communications infrastructure was so devastated that assessing the needs and the capability of the Commonwealth and its municipalities proved extremely difficult. FEMA provided satellite phones to each of the 78 municipalities in Puerto Rico to gather information on municipality impacts and critical needs. However, this short-term solution had limited success in addressing overall communications challenges. The private sector played a key role in restoring communications, including cell towers and allowing open roaming services, and remains a critical partner for restoration of communications.
- *Responding During Long-Term Infrastructure Outages.*—Too often, we assume the loss of power, communications, and water infrastructure following disasters will be limited in duration. The extreme degradation of critical infrastructure in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands created significant challenges. We need to be prepared for long-term outages of these critical systems, while our SLTT and private-sector partners work to mitigate future damages to these vital systems.
- *Disaster Sheltering and Housing.*—Providing housing for survivors following the 2017 and 2018 disasters was a challenge, especially when a disaster devastates a community that already had limited affordable housing. Regardless of the readiness of a SLTT government, when dealing with the displacement of tens of thousands of survivors from their homes, there is no easy or one-size-fits-all solution. FEMA has authorities to provide sheltering options including Transitional Sheltering Assistance (TSA) that provides assistance to SLTT governments for survivors to stay in hotel rooms, as well as a program that provides for basic and temporary home repairs to make a home safe to live in while the survivor makes arrangements for more permanent repairs. Any sheltering option is, by design, a temporary and short-term solution, designed to be a bridge to middle- and longer-term solutions. We have other programs and authorities that assist with housing, including rental assistance, repair assistance, multi-family lease and repair, and manufactured housing units. With all of these options, we partner with our SLTT stakeholders to identify the sheltering and housing solutions that make the most sense for each State, each event, each community, and each survivor. States have a much better familiarity with the needs of their residents, the local laws and ordinances that can impact some of the FEMA housing options, and are better situated to design and administer to the survivors in their communities. Regardless of the tools we are able to provide, however, permanent housing solutions and full recovery needs are best addressed by insurance. FEMA assistance programs are not designed to return a survivor’s home to its pre-disaster condition. As we know, though, there are too many people in our Nation that are underinsured or not insured at all.

FEMA’S 2018–2022 STRATEGIC PLAN

Incorporating the knowledge gained from the 2017 disaster season, FEMA’s strategic plan builds on existing best practices and identifies new initiatives geared toward achieving three overarching goals. The three main goals of FEMA’s Strategic Plan are to: (1) Build a Culture of Preparedness; (2) Ready the Nation for Catastrophic Disasters; and (3) Reduce the Complexity of FEMA.

Build a Culture of Preparedness

FEMA is just one part of the team. During a disaster, citizens in the impacted communities also become the first responders. Do they know how to shut off water and gas? Do they check on their neighbors? Do they know CPR? Are they financially prepared to deal with the impacts of disasters in their communities, including having the right insurance for the specific threats they face, including flooding, earthquakes, and tornadoes? Do they have some modest level of savings to allow them to miss a few days of work without ending up in financial ruin? We need to empower individuals to help speed the response and recovery efforts.

Developing resilient communities before an incident occurs reduces loss of life and economic disruption. When communities are impacted, they should ensure that they rebuild infrastructure better, tougher, and stronger to protect taxpayer investment and promote economic stability. FEMA is exploring ways to encourage additional investments in mitigation that reduce risk, including pre-disaster mitigation, to help reduce disaster costs at all levels.

While we will never be able to eliminate all risk, we must mitigate the known risks as much as possible. FEMA will work with communities and insurers to close

the insurance gap across the Nation. Managing risk through insurance, including the National Flood Insurance Program, helps communities to recover faster following disasters and reduces overall costs for taxpayers.

Ready the Nation for Catastrophic Disasters

As this past year has shown, communities must increase their capacity to respond to smaller-scale disasters on a local level. We continue to work with our SLTT partners to increase their capacities to respond to and recover from smaller-scale disasters so FEMA and its Federal partners can focus more on readiness and support for catastrophic events.

No level of government can continue to plan, train, and exercise for what is easy. We need to prepare for catastrophic events that stress our capabilities. In 2017, FEMA announced our intent to embed FEMA staff within SLTT partner offices to help provide a continuous and more coordinated FEMA presence to improve customer service and provide targeted technical assistance to help build capacity and address capability gaps. The first FEMA Integration Team (FIT) was placed in North Carolina in 2018. Prior to Hurricane Florence, the North Carolina FIT developed an understanding of the State's capabilities, gaps, and processes, and helped to develop and share potential needs. Because of the team's proximity and co-location, the FIT began incident preparations for Hurricane Florence much sooner and with a better understanding of issues, prior to landfall. Currently, FEMA has FITs embedded in 22 States with more to follow.

As part of FEMA's initiative to ready the Nation for catastrophic events, FEMA is emphasizing the stabilization of critical lifelines and coordination across critical infrastructure sectors. Lifelines provide indispensable services that enable the continuous operation of critical business and Government functions, and that would risk health and safety or National economic security if not promptly restored. Solutions to stabilize lifelines do not fit within a single construct (i.e. an Emergency Support Function [ESF] or Recovery Support Function [RSF]), so we must provide cross-sector coordination to effectively stabilize critical lifelines. For example, the critical lifeline of food, water, and sheltering crosses many agencies, community partners, and ESFs, but must be addressed holistically in order to support a community's recovery. Focusing on these lifelines and related impacts will allow decision makers to move rapidly and will allow better utilization of limited resources to target toward the restoration of critical functions.

Reduce the Complexity of FEMA

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

Reducing administrative and bureaucratic burdens will allow survivors and communities to receive Federal assistance quicker. Throughout the Federal Government, there are a number of programs that offer assistance to survivors. We are working with our partners to improve some of these activities to ensure survivors can better navigate these various programs. For example, FEMA is consolidating and updating all FEMA Individual Assistance (IA) policies and program guidance to simplify and streamline information about IA programs.

FEMA employees must have transparency and clarity in the processes and resources they deal with. We cannot implement any of these priorities and initiatives without ensuring that they meet the needs of our survivors. We also need to make sure that we continue to capture lessons learned by FEMA and our partners to meet the needs of survivors with disabilities and others with access and functional needs.

These are the priorities and vision of this agency. As we examine and further develop these initiatives, we will find that some can be accomplished by existing authorities Congress has already provided to us. There will be some challenges that cannot be solved by administrative action alone. As we identify these challenges, we will work with this committee and the rest of Congress to ensure we move forward in close partnership. I look forward to working with you on our shared goal to help people before, during, and after disasters.

PREPARING FOR THE 2019 HURRICANE SEASON & ON-GOING INITIATIVES

The 2017 Hurricane Season FEMA After-Action Report (AAR) outlined 18 key findings across 5 focus areas, and it made recommendations for improvement moving forward. In 2018, Congress took significant steps to help FEMA pursue many of the changes recommended by the AAR when it passed transformational legislation in the Disaster Recovery Reform Act. The law represents the most comprehensive emergency management reform since the Post-Katrina Emergency Management

Reform Act, and will meaningfully assist the Nation in reducing risks and increasing preparedness.

The 2017 AAR also discussed the need to improve FEMA's ability to respond to catastrophic events while simultaneously building partner response capacity. Eighty percent of all declared disasters are small (meaning total obligations of \$41 million or less). During the past 15 years, FEMA has spent more than \$1.8 billion on administrative costs for these small disasters—more than \$120 million per year. FEMA's focus needs to be building the capabilities of our partners to manage smaller disasters so that the agency can improve our capabilities to respond to the larger and potentially catastrophic disasters our Nation faces.

As we continue with recovery operations, FEMA is also focused on making sure we are as prepared as possible for this year's hurricane season. Combining the lessons learned from 2017, as well as the goals outlined in FEMA's Strategic Plan, the agency took immediate actions to prepare for the 2018 hurricane season. These steps will continue to prepare the agency for the 2019 hurricane season. These steps included:

- *Updating Plans.*—FEMA has updated hurricane plans, annexes, and procedures for many States and territories.
- *Maturing the National Response Framework (NRF).*—FEMA updated the NRF to incorporate community lifelines construct, enhanced coordination with the private sector, and other best practices and lessons learned.
- *Staff Movement Prior to & During Responses.*—To improve staffing for incidents, FEMA created Standard Operating Procedures for a Personnel Mobilization Center (PMC), a central location for equipping and training staff prior to disaster deployments. To support the PMC, FEMA is also establishing three permanent PMC core teams in its Field Operations Directorate and training regional personnel on PMC operations.
- *Logistical Improvements.*—FEMA made improvements in logistics operations in preparation for the 2018 and 2019 hurricane seasons, including increasing disaster stocks and supplies for the Pacific and Caribbean such as meals, water, tarps, sheeting, cots, blankets, infant and toddler kits, durable medical kits, consumable medical kits, and generators. FEMA is also adding 352 new emergency generators to the inventory in the coming months.
- *National-Level Contracts.*—FEMA updated high-priority National-level contracts, including the National Evacuation Contract, Caribbean Transportation Contract, and National Ambulance Contract.
- *Disaster Communications.*—FEMA Disaster Emergency Communications is refining tactical and long-haul communications, from land mobile radios to satellite communications. We're working to update emergency communications support plans for each State, incorporating best-practices and lessons learned across both the Government and private sector based on each State's unique geographic, infrastructure, and operational requirements or risks to provide the Nation with an accessible, modern, reliable, and resilient communications infrastructure.

FEMA installed new FEMA National Radio System (FNARS) high-power stations on Guam, Saipan, and American Samoa, and refreshed the FNARS high frequency antenna farm at the FEMA Alternate Operations Center to increase resiliency and survivability. FEMA added more than 200 agencies to the list of State, local, territorial, and Tribal authorities with access and ability to use the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) to send emergency alerts and warnings to the public. We also provided technical alert and warning assistance and support to multiple State and local agencies including for wildfires in California and for hurricanes and volcano in Hawaii, and live public alert tests for the Navaho Nation.

FEMA assisted Puerto Rico Emergency Management Bureau to restore the territory's capability to send alerts and warnings by installing and training staff to use an IPAWS compatible alert origination system, conducting two live tests of the system distributing test messages to the public through radio, television, and cellular phone, and installing a new IPAWS compatible siren system at the Guajataca Dam to warn people below the dam of flood emergencies.

- *Housing Inspection Process.*—FEMA will modernize housing inspections to improve the survivor experience and streamline the process to lessen the inspection burden for the disaster survivor and better leverage similar efforts across the Federal Government.
- *Exercises and Training.*—In May 2018, FEMA sponsored National-Level Exercise (NLE) 2018, based on a scenario of a Category 4 hurricane on the mid-Atlantic coast. This exercise brought together more than 12,000 individuals across the whole community to examine the ability of all levels of Government, private

industry, and non-Governmental organizations while testing and validating plans and initial lessons learned from last year. FEMA also coordinated with the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico on a series of workshops, seminars, and functional exercises in June to prepare for this hurricane season.

On October 5, 2018, the President signed the Disaster Recovery Reform Act into law. Key provisions in this law enable greater investment in pre-disaster mitigation; support efforts to reduce risks from future disasters after fires; increase State capacity to manage disaster recovery; and provide greater flexibility to survivors with disabilities. FEMA looks forward to continuing to work with our Federal, SLTT, and private-sector partners as we continue to implement this legislation.

CONCLUSION

The 2017 and 2018 hurricane and wildfire season continue to shape the future of FEMA and emergency management. By utilizing best practices, adopting new response concepts, and training all emergency management partners to the same standards, we can achieve the goals of building a culture of preparedness and readying the Nation for catastrophic disasters. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I look forward to any questions you may have.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you for your testimony.

I now recognize Mr. Currie to summarize his statement for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF CHRIS P. CURRIE, DIRECTOR, HOMELAND SECURITY AND JUSTICE, U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

Mr. CURRIE. Thank you, Chairman Thompson, Mr. Ranking Member, other Members of the committee. It is an honor to be here today to talk about GAO's past work on disaster preparedness, response, and also recovery.

In the years since Hurricane Katrina, GAO has evaluated almost every aspect of FEMA's mission. What we found is that there has been major progress in a number of areas, but there continue to be major challenges in a number of other areas. Unfortunately, the challenges we face as a country and the risk we face aren't going to make those challenges get any easier for the agency.

The 2017 disasters were a historic year in terms of cost and damage and impact on our citizens. But I think it would be a big mistake to look at that as a one-time event. Whether it is 500-year floods, tornadoes like we have never seen before, and huge wildfires, these events are happening every year. It is important that we figure out how to address these things.

I also think it is important to say that—and not forget that it is important that we are preparing to respond and recover from acts of terrorism too, which are even more unpredictable than natural disasters too.

On top of that, State and local expectations are also increasing for Federal support as these disasters overwhelm their capacity. We have found, since 2005, we have spent, as a Federal Government, approaching half a trillion dollars on disaster response and recovery in this country. That is just not a sustainable path moving forward, given our Federal deficit and budget issues.

Now, in terms of response, it is the first thing I would like to talk about. The 2017 disasters, the work we have done in that area shows a positive story, but also a number of lessons learned, and some not-so-good news as well.

In Texas and Florida and California, what we saw was that years of preparedness and relationship building really helped to ad-

dress some of the massive challenges we saw in Hurricane Harvey, Irma, and the California wildfires. It helped us to quickly evacuate people in California. It helped us to restore power to 6 million people quickly in Florida. Helped us to evacuate hundreds of flood survivors in south Texas too. That is the good news, not that there weren't major challenges.

In Hurricane Maria, although FEMA provided historic levels of support, what we saw is that everybody was overwhelmed in that case, both Puerto Rico and FEMA. FEMA has already provided almost \$15 billion in support for Puerto Rico, but it is going to provide many billion dollars more. So it is important also to focus on the recovery aspects.

Regarding the work force at FEMA, 2017 also highlighted and exposed many challenges that we have identified over the years and exacerbated those challenges. Lack of training, retention problems really caused problems when FEMA was stretched thin. So I continue to be concerned about their ability to handle a really major catastrophic incident, given what Mr. Gaynor said about currently managing hundreds of active disasters.

On recovery, Members of this committee that have had a disaster in their jurisdiction know that these recovery programs can be complex and, frankly, very frustrating for State and local governments to deal with. We continue to see challenges in the recovery area. We just issued a report last week that showed that FEMA could do a much better job of helping elderly individuals and those with disabilities to get assistance. In Puerto Rico, we continue to see confusion and challenges with implementing public assistance grants. Lack of guidance and procedures on how the program is being implemented is causing a lot of problems, which is delaying longer-term recovery projects from being implemented and not as quick as I think everybody, including FEMA, would want to see them implemented.

To their credit, I think FEMA has been very careful, particularly in Puerto Rico, with the concerns about fraud, waste, and abuse, and has implemented additional controls to try to avoid those situations too. That is part of what is going on there as well.

Last, I would just like to talk about where we go from here moving forward. Mr. Guest—Congressman Guest mentioned—talked about resilience a lot. I think GAO and many others have proven and shown that investments and resilience work, they buy down risk over the long haul. You know, what we found over the years is that the Federal Government has invested only in resilience typically after a disaster strikes. What that means is that it only—the monies for that only typically go to disaster locations too, which means that Mother Nature really dictates where we spend our disaster resilience funding.

We have tried to move that needle to be a little bit different and recommended that FEMA develop a disaster mitigation investment strategy so we can know where best to invest those dollars when we get them. Also, Congress has moved that needle forward too by—with the DRRF, as was mentioned, in providing additional funding before a disaster strikes so we can make smarter investment decisions as well.

Thank you very much. That concludes my statement, and I look forward to questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Currie follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF CHRIS P. CURRIE

JUNE 12, 2019

GAO HIGHLIGHTS

Highlights of GAO–19–594T, a testimony before the Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives.

Why GAO Did This Study

Recent hurricanes, wildfires, and flooding have highlighted the challenges the Federal Government faces in responding effectively to natural disasters. The 2017 and 2018 hurricanes and wildfires affected millions of individuals and caused billions of dollars in damages. In March 2019, the Midwest experienced historic flooding that affected millions of acres of agriculture and damaged significant infrastructure. Since 2005, Federal funding for disaster assistance is at least \$450 billion. Increasing reliance on Federal help to address natural disasters is a key source of Federal fiscal exposure, particularly as certain extreme weather events become more frequent and intense due to climate change.

This statement discusses, among other things, FEMA's progress and challenges related to disaster resilience, response, recovery, and workforce management. This statement is based on GAO reports issued from March 2011 through May 2019, and also includes preliminary observations from on-going GAO reviews of FEMA operations. For on-going work, GAO reviewed Federal laws; analyzed documents; interviewed agency officials; and visited disaster damaged areas in California, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, Puerto Rico, Texas, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, where GAO also interviewed FEMA and local officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO has made numerous recommendations in its prior reports to FEMA designed to address the challenges discussed in this statement. As of May 2019, FEMA has addressed about half of these recommendations and GAO is monitoring FEMA's on-going efforts.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT.—FEMA HAS MADE PROGRESS, BUT CHALLENGES AND FUTURE RISKS HIGHLIGHT IMPERATIVE FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS

What GAO Found

GAO's issued and on-going work identified progress and challenges in the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) disaster resilience, response, recovery, and workforce management efforts, as discussed below.

Disaster Resilience.—GAO found that Federal and local efforts to improve resilience can reduce the effects and costs of future disasters. FEMA has made progress in this area, but in July 2015, GAO found that States and localities faced challenges using Federal funds to maximize resilient rebuilding following a disaster. GAO recommended that the Mitigation Framework Leadership Group—an interagency body chaired by FEMA—create a National strategy to better plan for and invest in disaster resilience. FEMA is working to address this recommendation and plans to publish the strategy by July 2019.

Damage from Hurricane Michael in Florida and Wildfires in California



Source: GAO. | GAO-19-594T

Response and Recovery.—In September 2018, GAO reported that the response to the 2017 disasters in Texas, Florida, and California showed progress since Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Specifically, FEMA and State officials' pre-existing relationships and exercises aided the response and helped address various challenges. However, GAO and FEMA identified challenges that slowed and complicated FEMA's response to Hurricane Maria, particularly in Puerto Rico. GAO's issued and on-going work also identified challenges in implementing FEMA Public Assistance grants. For example, FEMA and Puerto Rico officials identified challenges with Public Assistance policies and guidance that have complicated and slowed the recovery. GAO did not make recommendations, but continues to evaluate recovery efforts and will report its findings later this year.

FEMA Workforce Management.—GAO has previously reported on long-standing workforce management challenges, such as ensuring an adequately staffed and trained workforce. For example, GAO reported in September 2018 that the 2017 disasters overwhelmed FEMA's workforce and a lack of trained personnel with program expertise led to complications in its response efforts, particularly after Hurricane Maria. While FEMA has taken actions to address several of GAO's workforce management-related recommendations since 2016, a number of recommendations remain open as the 2019 hurricane season begins. Also, GAO is currently reviewing FEMA's workforce management efforts and lessons learned from the 2017 disasters and will report its findings early next year.

Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Rogers and Members of the committee: Thank you for the opportunity to discuss our work on the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) disaster preparedness, response, and recovery operations. Recent hurricanes, wildfires, and other events have highlighted the challenges the Federal Government faces in responding effectively to natural disasters—both in terms of immediate response and long-term recovery efforts. According to FEMA's 2017 after-action report, the 2017 hurricanes and wildfires collectively affected 47 million people, and Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria all rank among the top 5 costliest hurricanes on record.¹ The 2018 hurricane season followed with Hurricanes Florence and Michael, causing nearly \$50 billion of damage, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Furthermore, the deadly and destructive wildfires continued into 2018, including the Camp Fire in northern California, which destroyed more than 18,500 buildings and was the costliest and deadliest wildfire in the State's history.² In March 2019, the Midwest experienced historic flooding that affected millions of acres of agriculture, numerous cities and towns, and caused wide-spread damage to public infrastructure. Collectively, these extreme weather events have stretched and strained Federal response and recovery efforts and staff.

The rising number of natural disasters and increasing State, local, and Tribal reliance on Federal disaster assistance is a key source of Federal fiscal exposure—which can come from Federal responsibilities, programs, and activities, such as National flood insurance, that may legally commit or create the expectation for future

¹According to the 2017 Hurricane Season FEMA After-Action Report, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration identified the 5 costliest hurricanes on record being Hurricane Katrina at \$161 billion, Hurricane Harvey at \$125 billion, Hurricane Maria at \$90 billion, Hurricane Sandy at \$71 billion, and Hurricane Irma at \$50 billion.

²NOAA, National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI) U.S. Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters (2019). <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/billions/>

spending.³ Since 2005, Federal funding for disaster assistance is at least \$450 billion,⁴ most recently for catastrophic hurricanes, flooding, wildfires, and other losses in 2017 and 2018.⁵ Disaster costs are projected to increase as extreme weather events become more frequent and intense due to climate change—as observed and projected by the U.S. Global Change Research Program and the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine.⁶

³GAO, *Fiscal Exposures: Improving Cost Recognition in the Federal Budget*, GAO-14-28 (Washington, DC: Oct. 29, 2013).

⁴This total includes, for fiscal years 2005 through 2014, \$278 billion that GAO found that the Federal Government had obligated for disaster assistance. See GAO, *Federal Disaster Assistance: Federal Departments and Agencies Obligated at Least \$277.6 Billion During Fiscal Years 2005 through 2014*, GAO-16-797 (Washington, DC: Sept. 22, 2016). It also includes, for fiscal years 2015 through 2018, \$124 billion in select supplemental appropriations to Federal agencies for disaster assistance, approximately \$7 billion in annual appropriations to the Disaster Relief Fund (a total of \$28 billion for the 4-year period). For fiscal years 2015 through 2018, it does not include other annual appropriations to Federal agencies for disaster assistance. Last, on June 6, 2019, the Additional Supplemental Appropriations for Disaster Relief Act of 2019 was signed into law, which provides approximately \$19.1 billion for disaster assistance. H.R. 2157, 116th Cong. (2019) (enacted).

⁵GAO, *High-Risk Series: Substantial Efforts Needed to Achieve Greater Progress on High-Risk Areas*, GAO-19-157SP (Washington, DC: Mar. 6, 2019).

⁶GAO, *Climate Change: Information on Potential Economic Effects Could Help Guide Federal Efforts to Reduce Fiscal Exposure*, GAO-17-720 (Washington, DC: Sept. 28, 2017). Managing fiscal exposure due to climate change has been on our high-risk list since 2013, in part, because of concerns about the increasing costs of disaster response and recovery efforts. See GAO-19-157SP; also http://www.gao.gov/highrisk/limiting_federal_government_fiscal_exposure/why_did_study.



One way to save lives, reduce future risk to people and property, and minimize Federal fiscal exposure from natural hazards is to enhance disaster resilience. For example, in September 2018, we reported that elevated homes and strengthened building codes in Texas and Florida prevented greater damages during the 2017

hurricane season.⁷ Furthermore, in October 2018, the DRRRA was enacted, which focuses on improving preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery.⁸ Specifically, the DRRRA contains provisions that address many areas of emergency management, including wildfire mitigation, public assistance, and individual assistance, among others.

My testimony today discusses our prior and on-going work on FEMA's progress and continued challenges in 4 key areas: (1) Resilience and preparedness, (2) response, (3) recovery, and (4) selected FEMA management issues. My statement today is based on products we issued from March 2011 through May 2019, along with preliminary observations from our on-going reviews on Federal disaster preparedness, response, recovery, and FEMA management issues for a number of Congressional committees and subcommittees.⁹ To perform our prior work, we reviewed Federal laws related to emergency management, analyzed FEMA documentation, and interviewed relevant agency officials. More detailed information on the scope and methodology for our prior work can be found in each of the issued reports listed in Enclosure I. To develop our preliminary observations from on-going work, we reviewed Federal laws such as the DRRRA, and analyzed FEMA documents, including policies, procedures, and guidance specific to emergency management. Moreover, we conducted site visits to areas throughout the Nation that were affected by disasters in 2017, 2018, and 2019, including California, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Puerto Rico, Texas, and the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI). During these visits, we met with Federal, State, territorial, and local government and emergency management officials to discuss disaster response and recovery efforts for Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria in 2017, the California wildfires, and Hurricanes Florence and Michael in 2018. See the list of our on-going reviews in Enclosure II.

We conducted the work on which this statement is based in accordance with generally accepted Government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

FEMA HAS TAKEN STEPS TO STRENGTHEN DISASTER RESILIENCE AND PREPAREDNESS,
BUT ADDITIONAL STEPS ARE NEEDED TO FULLY ADDRESS REMAINING CHALLENGES

We have previously reported on various aspects of National preparedness, including examining the extent to which FEMA programs encourage disaster resilience and identifying gaps in Federal preparedness capabilities. We have found that when Federal, State, and local efforts aligned to focus on improving disaster resilience and preparedness, there was a noticeable reduction in the effects of the disaster. However, our prior and on-going work also highlight opportunities to improve disaster resilience and preparedness Nation-wide.¹⁰

Disaster Resilience

Hazard mitigation is a key step in building resilience and preparedness against future disasters.¹¹ In July 2015, we found that States and localities experienced challenges when trying to use Federal funds to maximize resilient rebuilding in the wake of a disaster.¹² In particular, they had difficulty navigating multiple Federal grant programs and applying Federal resources toward their most salient risks because of the fragmented and reactionary nature of the funding.¹³ In our 2015 report,

⁷ GAO, *2017 Hurricanes and Wildfires: Initial Observations on the Federal Response and Key Recovery Challenges*, GAO-18-472 (Washington, DC: Sept. 4, 2018).

⁸ Pub. L. No. 115-254, div. D, 132 Stat. 3186, 3438-70 (2018).

⁹ Our on-going work is for the House Committee on Homeland Security, House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, and 7 additional committees and subcommittees, and 4 individual members.

¹⁰ For example, see: GAO, *Hurricane Sandy: An Investment Strategy Could Help the Federal Government Enhance National Resilience for Future Disasters*, GAO-15-515 (Washington, DC: July 30, 2015); *Emergency Preparedness: Opportunities Exist to Strengthen Interagency Assessments and Accountability for Closing Capability Gaps*, GAO-15-20 (Washington, DC: Dec. 4, 2014); and GAO-18-472.

¹¹ FEMA's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan States that the most successful way to achieve disaster resilience is through preparedness, including mitigation.

¹² GAO-15-515.

¹³ GAO-15-515. A provision of DRRRA also created a grant in the Disaster Relief Fund for pre-disaster hazard mitigation. DRRRA authorized the President to set aside 6 percent of the total grant awards for the Individual Assistance and Public Assistance programs (each discussed later in this statement) for each declared disaster to be used for pre-disaster hazard mitigation. From May 20 through July 15, 2019, FEMA is collecting public comment on the implementation of

we recommended that the Mitigation Framework Leadership group—an interagency body chaired by FEMA—create a National Mitigation Investment Strategy to help Federal, State, and local officials plan for and prioritize disaster resilience. As of May 2019, according to FEMA officials, the Mitigation Framework Leadership group is on track to address the recommendation, and they expect the strategy to be published by July 2019.

In September 2017, we reported that the methods used to estimate the potential economic effects of climate change in the United States—using linked climate science and economics models—could inform decision makers about significant potential damages in different U.S. sectors or regions, despite the limitations.¹⁴ For example, for 2020 through 2039, one study estimated between \$4 billion and \$6 billion in annual coastal property damages from sea-level rise and more frequent and intense storms. We found that the Federal Government has not undertaken strategic Government-wide planning on the potential economic effects of climate change to identify significant risks and craft appropriate Federal responses. As a result, we recommended the Executive Office of the President, among others, should use information on the potential economic effects of climate change to help identify significant climate risks facing the Federal Government and craft appropriate Federal responses, such as establishing a strategy to identify, prioritize, and guide Federal investments to enhance resilience against future disasters; however, as of June 2019, officials have not taken action to address this recommendation.

In November 2017, we found that FEMA had taken some actions to better promote hazard mitigation as part of its Public Assistance grant program.¹⁵ However, we also reported that more consistent planning for, and more specific performance measures related to, hazard mitigation could help ensure that mitigation is incorporated into recovery efforts.¹⁶ We recommended, among other things, that FEMA: (1) Standardize planning efforts for hazard mitigation after a disaster and (2) develop performance measures for the Public Assistance grant program to better align with FEMA's strategic goal for hazard mitigation in the recovery process. FEMA concurred with our recommendations, and as of March 2019, officials have reported taking steps to increase coordination across its Public Assistance, mitigation, and field operations to ensure hazard mitigation efforts are standardized and integrated into the recovery process. Additionally, FEMA officials reported taking actions to begin developing disaster-specific mitigation performance measures. However, FEMA has yet to finalize these actions, such as by proposing performance measures to FEMA senior leadership. As such, we are continuing to monitor FEMA's efforts to address these recommendations.

Disaster Preparedness

In March 2011, we reported that FEMA had not completed a comprehensive and measurable National preparedness assessment of capability gaps—for example the amount of resources required to save lives, protect property and the environment, and meet basic human needs after an incident has occurred.¹⁷ Developing such an assessment would help FEMA to identify what capability gaps exist and what level of resources are needed to close such gaps. Accordingly, we suggested that FEMA complete a National preparedness assessment to evaluate capability requirements and gaps at each level of Government to enable FEMA to prioritize grant funding.¹⁸ As of December 2018, FEMA had efforts under way to assess urban area, State, territory, and Tribal preparedness capabilities to inform the prioritization of grant funding; however, the agency had not yet completed a National preparedness assessment with clear, objective, and quantifiable capability requirements against which to assess preparedness. We are continuing to monitor FEMA's efforts to complete such an assessment.

Furthermore, in March 2015, we reviewed selected States' approaches to budgeting for disaster costs to help inform Congressional consideration of the balance between Federal and State roles in funding disaster assistance. Specifically, we re-

this provision through a program it has named the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities grant. 42 U.S.C. § 5133(i).

¹⁴ GAO-17-720.

¹⁵ In addition to rebuilding and restoring infrastructure to its pre-disaster state, the Public Assistance program, under Section 406 of the Stafford Act, funds mitigation measures that will reduce future risk to the infrastructure in conjunction with the repair of disaster-damaged facilities. 42 U.S.C. § 5172.

¹⁶ GAO, *Disaster Assistance: Opportunities to Enhance Implementation of the Redesignated Public Assistance Grant Program*, GAO-18-30 (Washington, DC: Nov. 8, 2017).

¹⁷ GAO, *Opportunities to Reduce Potential Duplication in Government Programs Save Tax Dollars and Enhance Revenue*, GAO-11-318SP (Washington, DC: Mar. 1, 2011).

¹⁸ GAO-11-318SP.

ported that none of the 10 States in our review maintained reserves dedicated solely for future disasters, and some State officials reported that they could cover disaster costs without dedicated disaster reserves because they generally relied on the Federal Government to fund most of the costs associated with disaster response and recovery.¹⁹

In response to the 2017 disasters, we also have on-going work to review National preparedness capabilities to assist communities in responding to and recovering from disasters. Based on our preliminary observations, some States and localities we interviewed reported that while they are prepared to deal with immediate response issues in the aftermath of a disaster, gaps exist in their capacity to support longer-term recovery. One reason for this, according to these State and local officials, is because Federal preparedness grant funds are largely dedicated to maintaining response capabilities and sustaining personnel costs for local emergency management officials. While these preparedness grants fund critical elements of the National preparedness system, there are some limitations to using them. Specifically, some State and local officials told us that the preparedness grant activities are generally focused on terrorism issues rather than all-hazards. In addition, they reported that the preparedness grants are generally spent on maintaining response capabilities rather than to enhance their capacity for disaster recovery—such as additional training and exercises. In addition to the State, territory, and urban region assessments that FEMA is conducting, FEMA is currently in the process of developing the first National Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment. This National assessment may help FEMA and policy makers better understand how to target Federal resources in a way that enhances the Nation's capacity to respond and recover from future catastrophic or sequential disasters. We are continuing to evaluate National preparedness efforts and plan to report on FEMA's Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment process in January 2020.

FEMA'S RESPONSE TO THE 2017 DISASTERS HIGHLIGHTED SOME AREAS OF PROGRESS,
BUT ALSO IDENTIFIED SIGNIFICANT WEAKNESSES

FEMA's Response to the 2017 Disasters

In September 2018, we reported that the response to the 2017 hurricanes and wildfires in Texas, Florida, and California showed progress made since the 2005 Federal response to Hurricane Katrina.²⁰ We also found that FEMA coordinated closely with Texas, Florida, and California emergency management officials and other Federal, local, and volunteer emergency partners to implement various emergency preparedness actions prior to the 2017 disasters in each State, and to respond to these disasters. According to FEMA and State officials, these actions helped officials begin addressing a number of challenges they faced such as meeting the demand for a sufficient and adequately trained disaster workforce and complex issues related to removing debris in a timely manner after the hurricanes and wildfires.

In contrast, we also reported in September 2018, that in Puerto Rico and the USVI a variety of challenges—such as the far distance of the territories from the U.S. mainland, limited local preparedness for a major hurricane, and outdated local infrastructure—complicated response efforts to hurricanes Irma and Maria. Many of the challenges we identified are also described in *FEMA's 2017 Hurricane Season FEMA After-Action Report*, including:

- the sequential and overlapping timing of the 3 hurricanes—with Maria being the last of the 3—caused staffing shortages and required FEMA to shift staff to the territories that were already deployed to other disasters;
- the far distance of both territories from the U.S. mainland complicated efforts to deploy Federal resources and personnel quickly; and
- the incapacitation of local response functions due to wide-spread devastation and loss of power and communications, and limited preparedness by Puerto Rico and the USVI for a category 5 hurricane resulted in FEMA having to assume response functions that territories would usually perform themselves.

We also reported that FEMA's *2017 Hurricane Season FEMA After-Action Report* noted that FEMA could have better leveraged information from preparedness exercises in the Caribbean, including a 2011 exercise after-action report for Puerto Rico which indicated that the territory would require extensive Federal support during

¹⁹GAO, *Budgeting for Disasters: Approaches to Budgeting for Disasters in Selected States*, GAO-15-424 (Washington, DC: Mar. 26, 2015). The 10 States in our review were Alaska, California, Florida, Indiana, Missouri, New York, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Vermont, and West Virginia.

²⁰GAO-18-472.

a large-scale disaster in moving commodities from the mainland to the territory and to distribution points throughout.

In our September 2018 report, we also found that FEMA's efforts in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria were the largest and longest single response in the agency's history. According to FEMA, the agency's response included, among other things, bringing in approximately \$1 billion in food and supplies; and distributing food, commodities, and medicine via approximately 1,400 flights, which constituted the longest sustained air operations in U.S. disaster history.²¹ FEMA officials explained that the agency essentially served as the first responder in the early response efforts in Puerto Rico, and many of services FEMA provided—such as power restoration, debris removal, and commodity distribution—were typically provided by territorial or local governments.

We also reported in September 2018, that in the USVI, recent disaster training and the pre-positioning of supplies due to the anticipated impact of Hurricane Irma facilitated the response efforts for Hurricane Maria, which made landfall less than 2 weeks later. According to FEMA's Federal coordinating officer, the lead Federal official in charge of response for the USVI, the Federal Government deployed assets, including urban search-and-rescue teams and medical assistance teams. In addition, due to the sequence of Hurricane Irma hitting the USVI immediately before Hurricane Maria, the Department of Defense (DOD) already had personnel and resources (i.e., ships) deployed to the area, which enabled DOD to respond to Hurricane Maria faster than it otherwise would have.

Additional challenges we have reported on regarding response operations have included providing short-term housing and sheltering for disaster survivors. The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) 2017 National Preparedness Report states that providing effective and affordable short-term housing for disaster survivors has been a long-standing and continuing challenge.²² For example, following the California wildfires, local officials faced challenges identifying shelter for displaced survivors, in part due to a housing shortage that existed before the wildfires. Federal, State, and local officials formed housing task forces which facilitated a joint decision making approach to address these challenges.

While this approach has enabled the State to meet its most pressing short-term housing needs, according to FEMA officials, the State faces other challenges in the long term.²³ For example, FEMA officials in the region covering California told us that because of the nature of damage following a wildfire and because of housing shortages in California, some of FEMA's forms of housing assistance have been less relevant in the wake of the California wildfires than for other disasters. We will continue to evaluate these and other challenges and plan to report in fall 2019.

We also have on-going work to review efforts to provide mass care—which includes sheltering, feeding, and providing emergency supplies—following the 2017 hurricanes. Our preliminary observations indicate that during and immediately following the hurricanes, the number of people seeking public shelters outpaced the capacity. In Texas and Florida, emergency managers we spoke with described having unprecedented numbers of residents needing shelters but not always enough staff initially to operate the shelters. In Texas, Puerto Rico, and the USVI, Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria flooded or destroyed many buildings planned for use as shelters, according to emergency management and local Government officials in these areas. As a result, some remaining shelters were at maximum capacity. In the USVI, residents of some public housing units that had sustained significant damages sought help at the territory's Department of Human Services because there was no more space in the shelters, according to local Government officials. While they were turned away from the shelters, these families were able to take refuge in the lobby of the Department of Human Services building. We will continue to evaluate these and other challenges and plan to report in summer 2019.

FEMA Disaster Contracting

In December 2018²⁴ and April 2019,²⁵ we reported that, in response to Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, as well as the 2017 California wildfires, FEMA and

²¹ GAO-18-472.

²² Department of Homeland Security (DHS), *National Preparedness Report* (Washington, DC: Aug. 28, 2017).

²³ GAO-18-472.

²⁴ GAO, *2017 Disaster Contracting: Action Needed to Better Ensure More Effective Use and Management of Advance Contracts*, GAO-19-93, (Washington, DC: Dec. 6, 2018).

²⁵ GAO, *2017 Disaster Contracting: Actions Needed to Improve the Use of Post-Disaster Contracts to Support Response and Recovery*, GAO-19-281, (Washington, DC: April 24, 2019). The

other Federal partners relied heavily on advance contracts—which are established before a disaster to provide for life-sustaining goods and services such as food, water, and transportation typically needed immediately after a disaster—and post-disaster contracts—which can be used for various goods and services, such as debris removal and installation of power transmission equipment.

FEMA is required to coordinate with States and localities and encourage them to establish their own advance contracts with vendors.²⁶ In December 2018, we reported on inconsistencies we found in that coordination and in the information FEMA used to coordinate with States and localities on advance contracts. As a result of this and other challenges identified, we made 9 recommendations to FEMA, including that it update its strategy and guidance to clarify the use of advance contracts, improve the timeliness of its acquisition planning activities, revise its methodology for reporting disaster contracting actions to Congress, and provide more consistent guidance and information for contracting officers in coordinating with States and localities to establish advance contracts. FEMA concurred with all of these recommendations, and we are continuing to monitor its efforts to implement each recommendation.

Furthermore, in April 2019, we reported on challenges that we found in the Federal Government's use of post-disaster contracts. These challenges included a lack of transparency about contract actions, challenges with requirements development, and with interagency coordination. In our report, we found that FEMA had begun taking some steps to address the consistency of post-disaster contract requirements with contracting officers, but that inaccurate or untimely estimates in the contracts we reviewed sometimes resulted in delays meeting the needs of survivors. As a result of our findings in this report, we made 10 recommendations to FEMA and other Federal agencies that use these post-disaster contracts related to improving the management of such contracts. FEMA and other agency officials concurred with 9 of the recommendations and have reported taking actions to begin implementing them.²⁷ We will continue to monitor FEMA's progress in fully addressing these recommendations.

FEMA PROVIDES LONG-TERM DISASTER RECOVERY SUPPORT, BUT STATE AND LOCAL OFFICIALS CITED CONTINUED CHALLENGES MANAGING COMPLEX RECOVERY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

FEMA provides multiple forms of disaster recovery assistance after a major disaster has been declared, including Public Assistance and Individual Assistance.²⁸ Through these grant programs, FEMA obligates billions of dollars to State, Tribal, territorial, and local governments, certain nonprofit organizations, and individuals that have suffered injury or damages from major disaster or emergency incidents, such as hurricanes, tornados, or wildfires. In September 2016, we reported that, from fiscal years 2005 through 2014, FEMA obligated almost \$46 billion for the Public Assistance program and over \$25 billion for the Individual Assistance program.²⁹ According to FEMA's May 2019 Disaster Relief Fund report, total projected obligations through fiscal year 2019 for the Public Assistance and Individual Assistance programs for just the 2017 hurricanes—Harvey, Irma, and Maria—are roughly \$16 billion and \$7 billion, respectively.³⁰ Given the high cost of these programs, it is imperative that FEMA continue to make progress on the challenges we have identified in our prior and on-going work regarding its recovery efforts.

post-disaster contracts discussed in this report may support both response and early recovery activities.

²⁶The Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006 (Post-Katrina Act) required FEMA to establish advance contracts Pub. L. No. 109–295, § 691, 120 Stat. 1355 (codified at 6 U.S.C. § 791).

²⁷DHS did not concur with our recommendation that DHS reopen the National interest action codes used to track data on post-disaster contracts involved in responding to the 2017 and 2018 hurricanes. These codes can provide Government-wide insight into response and recovery efforts; however, DHS closed the codes for Hurricanes Harvey and Irma less than a year after the hurricanes hit. In contrast, the codes for prior hurricanes were open for at least 5 years, with the code for Hurricane Katrina remaining open for 13 years. We continue to believe DHS should implement our recommendation, to the extent practicable, as discussed in the report.

²⁸In addition, FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program provides additional funds to States to assist communities in implementing long-term measures to help reduce the potential risk of future damages to facilities.

²⁹GAO–16–797.

³⁰DHS, FEMA, *Disaster Relief Fund: Monthly Report as of April 30, 2019* (May 8, 2019).

FEMA Public Assistance Grants for Disaster Recovery

FEMA's Public Assistance program provides grants to State, Tribal, territorial, and local governments for debris removal; emergency protective measures; and the repair, replacement, or restoration of disaster-damaged, publicly-owned facilities. It is a complex and multi-step program administered through a partnership among FEMA, the State, and local officials. Prior to implementing the Public Assistance program, FEMA determines a State, territorial, or Tribal government's eligibility for the program using the per capita damage indicator.³¹ In our September 2018 report on Federal response and recovery efforts for the 2017 hurricanes and wildfires, we reported on FEMA's implementation of the Public Assistance program, which has recently undergone significant changes as a result of Federal legislation and agency initiatives. Specifically, we reported on FEMA's use of its redesigned delivery model for providing grants under the Public Assistance program, as well as the alternative procedures for administering or receiving such grant funds that FEMA allows States, territories, and local governments to use for their recovery.³² Our prior and on-going work highlights both progress and challenges with FEMA's Public Assistance program, including the agency's methodology for determining program eligibility, the redesigned delivery model, and the program's alternative procedures.

³¹The per capita indicator is a set amount of funding, \$1.50 per capita in fiscal year 2019, that is multiplied by the population of the jurisdiction (for example, State) for which the Governor is requesting a disaster declaration for Public Assistance, to arrive at a threshold amount, which is compared with the estimated amount of damage done to public structures.

³²GAO-18-472. The Sandy Recovery Improvement Act of 2013 amended the Stafford Act by adding Section 428, which authorized FEMA to approve Public Assistance program projects under the alternative procedures provided by that section for any Presidentially-declared major disaster or emergency. This section further authorized FEMA to carry out the alternative procedures as a pilot program until FEMA promulgates regulations to implement this section. Pub. L. No. 113-2, div. B, § 1102(2), 127 Stat. 39, amending Pub. L. No. 93-288, tit. IV, § 428 (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. § 5189f).



Criteria for Determining Public Assistance Eligibility

In September 2012, we found that FEMA primarily relied on a single criterion, the per capita damage indicator, to determine a jurisdiction's eligibility for Public

Assistance funding.³³ However, because FEMA's current per capita indicator, set at \$1 in 1986, does not reflect the rise in: (1) Per capita personal income since it was created in 1986 or (2) inflation from 1986 to 1999, the indicator is artificially low. Our analysis of actual and projected obligations for 508 disaster declarations in which Public Assistance was awarded during fiscal years 2004 through 2011 showed that fewer disasters would have met either the personal income-adjusted or the inflation-adjusted Public Assistance per capita indicators for the years in which the disaster was declared.³⁴ Thus, had the indicator been adjusted annually since 1986 for personal income or inflation, fewer jurisdictions would have met the eligibility criteria that FEMA primarily used to determine whether Federal assistance should be provided, which would have likely resulted in fewer disaster declarations and lower Federal costs.

We recommended, among other things, that FEMA develop and implement a methodology that more comprehensively assesses a jurisdiction's capacity to respond to and recover from a disaster without Federal assistance, including fiscal capacity and consideration of response and recovery capabilities. DHS concurred with our recommendation and, in January 2016, FEMA was considering establishing a disaster deductible, which would have required a predetermined level of financial or other commitment before FEMA would have provided assistance under the Public Assistance program. In August 2018, FEMA told us that it was no longer pursuing its proposed disaster deductible due to concerns about the complexity of the proposal. FEMA is considering options that leverage similar approaches, but does not have an estimated completion date for implementation. In addition, the DRRA requires FEMA to initiate rulemaking to: (1) Update the factors considered when evaluating requests for major disaster declarations, including reviewing how FEMA estimates the cost of major disaster assistance, and (2) consider other impacts on the capacity of a jurisdiction to respond to disasters, by October 2020. Until FEMA implements a new methodology, the agency will not have an accurate assessment of a jurisdiction's capabilities and runs the risk of recommending that the President award Public Assistance to jurisdictions that have the capacity to respond and recover on their own.

Redesigned Public Assistance Delivery Model

Prior to our September 2018 report, we had previously reported on the Public Assistance program in November 2017. Specifically, we reported that FEMA redesigned the delivery model for providing grants under the Public Assistance program.³⁵ As part of the redesign effort, FEMA developed a new, web-based case management system to address past challenges, such as difficulties in sharing grant documentation among FEMA, State, and local officials and tracking the status of Public Assistance projects. Both FEMA and State officials involved in testing of the redesigned delivery model stated that the new case management system's capabilities could lead to greater transparency and efficiencies in the program. However, we found that FEMA had not fully addressed two key information technology management controls that are necessary to ensure systems work effectively and meet user needs. We recommended, among other things, that FEMA: (1) Establish controls for tracking the development of system requirements, and (2) establish system testing criteria, roles and responsibilities, and the sequence and schedule for integration of other relevant systems. FEMA concurred with these recommendations and has fully implemented the first recommendation. Regarding the second recommendation, FEMA has not yet finalized its decision on whether to integrate its new case management system with its current grants management system. As of March 2019, we are awaiting a final decision from officials to determine whether their actions fully address our recommendation.

FEMA's original intention was to implement the redesigned delivery model for all future disasters beginning in January 2018. However, in September 2017, FEMA expedited full implementation of the redesigned model shortly after Hurricane Harvey made landfall. In September 2018, we reported that local officials continued to experience challenges with using the new Public Assistance web-based, case management system following the 2017 disasters, such as not having sufficient guidance

³³ GAO, *Federal Disaster Assistance: Improved Criteria Needed to Assess a Jurisdiction's Capacity to Respond and Recover on Its Own*, GAO-12-838 (Washington, DC: Sept. 12, 2012).

³⁴ Specifically, our analysis showed that 44 percent of the 508 disaster declarations would not have met the Public Assistance per capita indicator if adjusted for the change in per capita personal income since 1986. Similarly, our analysis showed that 25 percent of the 508 disaster declarations would not have met the Public Assistance per capita indicator if adjusted for inflation since 1986.

³⁵ GAO, *Disaster Assistance: Opportunities to Enhance Implementation of the Redesigned Public Assistance Grant Program*, GAO-18-30 (Washington, DC: Nov. 8, 2017).

on how to use the new system and delays with FEMA's processing of their projects.³⁶

Public Assistance Alternative Procedures in the United States Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico

In February 2019, we also reported that FEMA and the USVI were transitioning from using the standard Public Assistance program to using Public Assistance alternative procedures.³⁷ FEMA and USVI officials stated that the alternative procedures will give the USVI more flexibility in determining when and how to fund projects and allow the territory to use any excess funds for cost-effective hazard mitigation measures, among other uses. Further, when using the alternative procedures, the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 allows FEMA, the USVI and Puerto Rico to repair and rebuild critical services infrastructure—such as medical and education facilities—so it meets industry standards without regard to pre-disaster condition (see Figure 1).³⁸

Figure 1: Hurricane Damage to a Hospital in the U.S. Virgin Islands and School in Puerto Rico



Regarding the implementation of the Public Assistance program in Puerto Rico, in March 2019, we reported that Puerto Rico established a central recovery office to oversee Federal recovery funds and was developing an internal controls plan to help ensure better management and accountability of the funds.³⁹ In the interim, FEMA instituted a manual process for reviewing each reimbursement request before providing Public Assistance funds to mitigate risk and help ensure financial accountability. We also reported that officials we interviewed from FEMA, Puerto Rico's central recovery office, and municipalities said they experienced initial challenges with the recovery process, including concerns about lack of experience and knowledge of the alternative procedures; concerns about missing, incomplete, or conflicting guidance on the alternative procedures; and concerns that municipalities had not been fully reimbursed for work already completed after the hurricanes,

³⁶ GAO-18-472.

³⁷ Under the standard Public Assistance program, FEMA will fund the actual cost of a project. However, the Public Assistance alternative procedures allow recipient governments to choose to receive awards for permanent work projects based on fixed cost estimates, which can provide financial incentives for the timely and cost-effective completion of work. GAO, *U.S. Virgin Islands Recovery: Status of FEMA Public Assistance Funding and Implementation*, GAO-19-253 (Washington, DC: Feb. 25, 2019).

³⁸ The Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 authorized FEMA, when using the Public Assistance alternative procedures, to provide assistance to fund the replacement or restoration of disaster-damaged infrastructure that provide critical services to industry standards without regard to pre-disaster condition. Pub. L. No. 115-123, § 20601(1), 132 Stat. 64 (2018). Critical services include public infrastructure in the following sectors: Power, water, sewer, wastewater treatment, communications, education, and emergency medical care. See 42 U.S.C. § 5172(a)(3)(B). Section 20601 applies only to assistance provided through the Public Assistance alternative procedures program for the duration of the recovery for the major disasters declared in Puerto Rico and the USVI following hurricanes Irma and Maria. Further, the Additional Supplemental Appropriations for Disaster Relief Act of 2019, which was signed into law on June 6, 2019, provides additional direction to FEMA in the implementation of section 20601. See H.R. 2157, 116th Cong. § 601 (2019) (enacted). For the purposes of our report, discussion of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 refers specifically to section 20601.

³⁹ GAO, *Puerto Rico Hurricanes: Status of FEMA Funding, Oversight, and Recovery Challenges*, GAO-19-256 (Washington, DC: March 14, 2019).

causing financial hardships in some municipalities.⁴⁰ FEMA officials stated that the agency is taking actions to address reported recovery challenges, such as additional training for new FEMA employees and drafting supplemental guidance for the alternative procedures process. We continue to monitor FEMA's efforts in our on-going work.

As part of our on-going work, we are continuing to examine hurricane recovery efforts in the USVI and Puerto Rico. Our preliminary observations indicate that the USVI plans to take a cautious approach in pursuing permanent work projects using the Public Assistance alternative procedures program, which requires the use of fixed-cost estimates. Specifically, USVI officials we interviewed told us that developing such fixed-cost estimates that accurately incorporate the future impact of inflation and increases in materials and labor costs for certain projects was difficult. Further, these officials stated that since the territory is financially responsible for any costs that exceed these fixed-cost estimates, the USVI plans to pursue projects that do not include high levels of complexity or uncertainty to reduce the risk of cost overruns.⁴¹

From our on-going work on Puerto Rico's recovery efforts, we have learned that, in March 2019, Puerto Rico's central recovery office released the Disaster Recovery Federal Funds Management Guide, including an internal controls plan for the operation of the recovery office. On April 1, 2019, FEMA removed the manual reimbursement process and began a transition to allow the central recovery office to take responsibility for review and reimbursement approval of Federal recovery funds. We will review this transition process as a part of our on-going work. Our preliminary observations also indicate that some of the challenges we reported in our March 2019 report continue. For example, officials from Puerto Rico's central government agencies told us they did not feel they had sufficient guidance on the FEMA Public Assistance program and where they did, written and verbal FEMA guidance was inconsistent or conflicting. For example, officials from one agency expressed their desire for more FEMA guidance communicated in writing as it frequently happened that different FEMA officials would interpret existing guidance differently. Similarly, officials from two agencies described situations where they had initially been directed to follow one interpretation of a policy, only to be directed to follow a different, conflicting interpretation in the subsequent months. Puerto Rico agency officials also stated that the lack of sufficient instruction led to a "back and forth" with FEMA for clarifications, which led to delays in the phases of project development. FEMA officials in Puerto Rico stated that the agency has developed specific guidance for disaster recovery in Puerto Rico and that there are various ways, such as in-person meetings, where officials from Puerto Rico can obtain clarification. We are continuing to examine this issue as part of our on-going review of Puerto Rico's recovery.

In addition, our preliminary observations from our on-going work for both the USVI and Puerto Rico indicate that FEMA, USVI, and Puerto Rico officials have reported challenges with the implementation of the flexibilities authorized by section 20601 of the Bipartisan Budget Act. This section of the Act allows for the provision of assistance under the Public Assistance alternative procedures to restore disaster-damaged facilities or systems that provide critical services to an industry standard without regard to pre-disaster condition. Officials from Puerto Rico's central government stated that they disagreed with FEMA's interpretation of the types of damages covered by section 20601 of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018. In response, FEMA officials in Puerto Rico stated they held several briefings with Puerto Rico's central recovery office to explain FEMA's interpretation of the section.⁴² Further, FEMA officials in the USVI told us that initially, they had difficulty obtaining clarification from FEMA headquarters regarding how to implement key components of section 20601 of the Act. As of May 2019, FEMA officials in the USVI stated that they continue to move forward with developing alternative procedures projects. USVI officials also told us that FEMA had been responsive and helpful in identifying its options for using the new authorities the Act provides. We will continue to evaluate these identified challenges and any efforts to address them, as well as other aspects of recovery efforts in the USVI and Puerto Rico, and plan to report our findings in late 2019 and early 2020, respectively.

⁴⁰ GAO-19-256.

⁴¹ Under the standard Public Assistance program, FEMA will reimburse the USVI for the actual cost of completed work for any given project.

⁴² In September 2018, FEMA issued guidance for implementing section 20601 of the 2018 Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 through the Public Assistance alternative procedures program.

FEMA Individual Assistance

The Individual Assistance program provides financial and direct assistance to disaster victims for expenses and needs that cannot be met through other means, such as insurance. In May 2019, we reported on FEMA’s effort to provide disaster assistance under the Individual Assistance program to older adults and people with disabilities following the 2017 hurricanes.⁴³ We found that aspects of the application process for FEMA assistance were challenging for older individuals and those with disabilities. Further, according to stakeholders and FEMA officials, disability-related questions in the Individual Assistance registration materials were confusing and easily misinterpreted. While FEMA had made some efforts to help registrants interpret the questions, we recommended, among other things, that FEMA: (1) Implement new registration-intake questions that improve FEMA’s ability to identify and address survivors’ disability-related needs,⁴⁴ and (2) improve communication of registrants’ disability-related information across FEMA programs. DHS concurred with the first recommendation and described steps FEMA plans to take, or is in the process of taking, to address it. However, DHS did not concur with the second recommendation, noting that it lacks specific funding to augment its legacy data systems. FEMA officials stated that they began a long-term data management improvement initiative in April 2017, which they expect will ease efforts to share and flag specific disability-related data. While we acknowledge FEMA’s concerns about changing legacy systems when it has existing plans to replace those systems, we continue to believe there are other cost-effective ways that are likely to improve communication of registrants’ disability-related information prior to implementing the system upgrades. For example, FEMA could revise its guidance to remind program officials to review the survivor case file notes to identify whether there is a record of any disability-related needs.

⁴³ GAO, *Disaster Assistance: FEMA Action Needed to Better Support Individuals Who Are Older or Have Disabilities*, GAO-19-318 (Washington, DC: May 14, 2019).

⁴⁴ For the purposes of this report, we used the term “disability-related needs” broadly to include all needs individuals may have that are related to a disability or access or functional need. For example, this may include replacement of a damaged wheelchair or other durable medical equipment, fixing an accessible ramp to a house, or any needed assistance to perform daily activities—such as showering, getting dressed, walking, and eating.

FEMA's Individuals and Households Program



FEMA's Individuals and Households Program provides individuals with financial assistance, such as grants to help repair or replace damaged homes, and temporary direct housing assistance, such as recreational vehicles.

Source: GAO; photos taken by GAO while on site in California (top) and Florida (below). | GAO-19-594T

We also have work under way to assess FEMA's Individuals and Households Program, a component program of Individual Assistance. Through this program, as of April 2019, FEMA had awarded roughly \$4.7 billion in assistance to almost 1.8 million individuals and households for Federally-declared disasters occurring in 2017 and 2018. Specifically, we are analyzing Individuals and Households Program expenditures and registration data for recent years; reviewing FEMA's processes, policies, and procedures for making eligibility and award determinations; and exam-

ining survivors’ reported experiences with this program, including any challenges, for major disaster declarations occurring in recent years. We plan to report our findings in early 2020.

LONG-STANDING WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
CHALLENGES EXACERBATE KEY ISSUES WITH RESPONSE AND RECOVERY OPERATIONS

FEMA Workforce Management Challenges

FEMA’s experiences during the 2017 disasters highlight the importance of continuing to make progress on addressing the long-standing workforce management challenges we have previously reported on and continue to observe in our on-going work. In September 2018, we reported that the 2017 disasters—Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, as well as the California wildfires—resulted in unprecedented FEMA workforce management challenges, including recruiting, maintaining, and deploying a sufficient and adequately-trained FEMA disaster workforce.⁴⁵ FEMA’s available workforce was overwhelmed by the response needs caused by the sequential and overlapping timing of the 3 hurricanes. For example, at the height of FEMA workforce deployments in October 2017, 54 percent of staff were serving in a capacity in which they did not hold the title of “Qualified”—according to FEMA’s qualification system standards—a past challenge we identified. FEMA officials noted that staff shortages, and lack of trained personnel with program expertise led to complications in its response efforts, particularly after Hurricane Maria.

In February 2016, we reported on, among other things, FEMA’s efforts to implement, assess, and improve its Incident Management Assistance Team program.⁴⁶ We found that while FEMA used some leading practices in managing the program, it lacked a standardized plan to ensure that all National and regional Incident Management Assistance Team members received required training. Further, we found that the program had experienced high attrition since its implementation in fiscal year 2013. We recommended, among other things, that FEMA develop: (1) A plan to ensure that Incident Management Assistance Teams receive required training, and (2) a workforce strategy for retaining Incident Management Assistance Team staff. DHS concurred with the recommendations. FEMA fully implemented our first recommendation by developing an Incident Management Assistance Team Training and Readiness Manual and providing a training schedule for fiscal year 2017. In response to the second recommendation, FEMA officials stated in July 2018 that they plan to develop policies that will provide guidance on a new workforce structure, incentives for Incident Management Assistance Team personnel, and pay-for-performance and all other human resource actions. We are continuing to monitor FEMA’s efforts to address this recommendation.

In November and December 2017, we reported on staffing challenges in FEMA’s Public Assistance program. In November 2017, we reported on FEMA’s efforts to address past workforce management challenges through its redesigned Public Assistance delivery model.⁴⁷ As part of the redesign effort, FEMA created consolidated resource centers to standardize and centralize Public Assistance staff responsible for managing grant applications, and new specialized positions to ensure more consistent guidance to applicants. However, we found that FEMA had not assessed the workforce needed to fully implement the redesigned model, such as the number of staff needed to fill certain new positions, or to achieve staffing goals. Further, in December 2017, we reported on FEMA’s management of its Public Assistance appeals process, including that FEMA increased staffing levels for the appeals process from 2015 to 2017.⁴⁸ However, we found that FEMA continued to face a number of workforce challenges, such as staff vacancies, turnover, and delays in training, which contributed to processing delays.

Based on our findings from our November and December 2017 reports, we recommended, among other things, that FEMA: (1) Complete workforce staffing assessments that identify the appropriate number of staff needed to implement the redesigned Public Assistance delivery model, and (2) document steps for hiring, training,

⁴⁵ GAO–18–472.

⁴⁶ The 3 National and 13 regional Incident Management Assistance Teams are comprised of FEMA emergency management staff in areas such as operations, logistics, planning, and finance and administration. These teams are among the first FEMA officials to arrive at the affected jurisdiction and provide leadership to identify what Federal support may be required to respond to the incident, among other things. GAO, *Disaster Response: FEMA Has Made Progress Implementing Key Programs, but Opportunities for Improvement Exist*, GAO–16–87, (Washington, DC: Feb. 5, 2016).

⁴⁷ GAO–18–30.

⁴⁸ GAO, *Disaster Recovery: Additional Actions Would Improve Data Quality and Timeliness of FEMA’s Public Assistance Appeals Processing*, GAO–18–143, (Washington, DC: Dec. 15, 2018).

and retaining key appeals staff, and address staff transitions resulting from deployments to disasters. FEMA concurred with our recommendations to address workforce management challenges in the Public Assistance program and have reported taking some actions in response. For example, to address the first recommendation, FEMA officials have developed preliminary models and estimates of staffing needs across various programs, including Public Assistance, and plan to reevaluate the appropriate number of staff needed and present recommendations to senior leadership by the end of June 2019. To address the second recommendation, FEMA has collected information on the amount of time regional appeals analysts spend on appeals, and the inventory and timeliness of different types of appeals. FEMA officials stated in September 2018 that they plan to assess this information to prepare a detailed regional workforce plan. As of June 2019, we are evaluating plans and documents provided by FEMA to determine whether they have fully addressed this recommendation.

In our March 2019 report on the status of recovery efforts in Puerto Rico, we also reported Puerto Rico officials' concerns about FEMA staff turnover and lack of knowledge among FEMA staff about how the Public Assistance alternative procedures are to be applied in Puerto Rico.⁴⁹ As part of our on-going work, we are continuing to examine recovery efforts in Puerto Rico. Our preliminary observations indicate that the concerns we reported on in our March 2019 report continue. For example, Puerto Rico agency officials said that the lack of continuity in FEMA personnel has been a challenge for communication and project development. Further, officials from all 7 Puerto Rico government agencies we interviewed felt that the FEMA staff they interacted with did not have a complete understanding of FEMA processes and policies. We are continuing to evaluate FEMA's recovery efforts in Puerto Rico and plan to issue our findings in late 2019.

In April 2019, we reported on the Federal Government's contracting efforts for preparedness, response, and recovery efforts related to the 2017 hurricanes and California wildfires.⁵⁰ We found, among other things, that contracting workforce shortages continue to be a challenge for disaster response and recovery. Further, although FEMA's 2017 after-action report recommended increasing contract support capacities, it did not provide a specific plan to do so. We also found that while FEMA evaluated its contracting workforce needs in a 2014 workforce analysis, it did not specifically consider contracting workforce needs in the regional offices or address Disaster Acquisition Response Team employees.⁵¹ In our April 2019 report, we recommended, among other things, that FEMA assess its workforce needs—including staffing levels, mission needs, and skill gaps—for contracting staff, to include regional offices and Disaster Acquisition Response Teams, and develop a plan, including time lines, to address any gaps. FEMA concurred with this recommendation and estimates that it will implement it in September 2019.

In our May 2019 report on FEMA disaster assistance to older adults and people with disabilities following the 2017 hurricanes, we found that FEMA began implementing a new approach to assist individuals with disabilities in June 2018, which shifted the responsibility for directly assisting individuals with disabilities from Disability Integration Advisors—which are staff FEMA deploys specifically to identify and recommend actions needed to support survivors with disabilities—to all FEMA staff.⁵² To implement this new approach, FEMA planned to train all of the agency's deployable staff and staff in programmatic offices on disability issues during response and recovery deployments. According to FEMA, a number of Disability Integration Advisors would also deploy to advise FEMA leadership in the field during disaster response and recovery. We found that while FEMA has taken some initial steps to provide training on the changes, it has not established a plan for delivering comprehensive disability-related training to all staff who will be directly interacting with individuals with disabilities. We recommended, among other things, that FEMA develop a plan for delivering training to FEMA staff that promotes competency in disability awareness and includes milestones and performance measures, and outlines how performance will be monitored. DHS concurred with this recommendation; however, officials stated that FEMA is developing a plan to include a disability integration competency in the guidance provided for all deployable staff,

⁴⁹ GAO-19-256.

⁵⁰ GAO-19-281.

⁵¹ The primary purpose of Disaster Acquisition Response Team employees is to support contract administration for disasters.

⁵² GAO-19-318.

rather than through training. We will monitor FEMA's efforts to develop this plan and fully address our recommendation.⁵³

In addition to our prior work on FEMA's workforce management challenges related to specific programs and functions, we are continuing to evaluate FEMA's workforce capacity and training efforts during the 2017 and 2018 disaster seasons. Our preliminary observations indicate that there were challenges in FEMA's ability to deploy staff with the right kinds of skills and training at the right time to best meet the needs of various disaster events. For example, according to FEMA field leadership we interviewed, for some of the functions FEMA performs in the field, FEMA had too few staff with the right technical skills to perform their missions—such as inspections of damaged properties—efficiently and effectively. For other functions, these managers also reported that they had too many staff in the early stages of the disaster, which created challenges with assigning duties and providing on-the-job training. For example, some managers reported that they were allocated more staff than needed in the initial phases of the disaster, but many lacked experience and were without someone to provide direction and mentoring to ensure they used their time efficiently and gained competence more quickly. Groups of FEMA field managers we interviewed told us that difficulties deploying the right mix of staff with the right skills led to challenges such as making purchases to support FEMA operations, problems with properly registering applicants for FEMA programs, or poor communication with non-Federal partners. Nonetheless, FEMA staff have noted that, despite any suboptimal circumstances during disaster response, they aimed to and have been able to find a way to deliver the mission.

As part of this on-going work, FEMA field leadership and managers also reported challenges using agency systems to ensure the availability of the right staff with the right skills in the right place and time. FEMA uses a system called the Deployment Tracking System to, among other things, help identify staff available to be deployed and activate and track deployments. To help gauge the experience level and training needs of its staff, the agency established the FEMA Qualification System (FQS), which is a set of processes and criteria to monitor staff experience in competently performing tasks and completing training that correspond to their job titles. According to the FQS guidance, staff who have been able to demonstrate proficient performance of all the relevant tasks and complete required training receive the designation “qualified,” and are expected to be ready and able to competently fulfill their responsibilities. Those who have not, receive the designation “trainee,” and can be expected to need additional guidance and on-the-job training. FQS designations feed into the Deployment Tracking System as one key variable in how the tracking system deploys staff. Among other challenges with FEMA's Deployment Tracking System and Qualification System, FEMA managers and staff in the field told us an employee's recorded qualification status was not a reliable indicator of the level at which deployed personnel would be capable of performing specific duties and responsibilities or their general proficiency in their positions, making it more difficult for managers to know the specialized skills or experience of staff and effectively build teams. We are continuing to assess these and other reported workforce challenges and plan to report our findings in January 2020.

FEMA Information Technology Challenges

In April 2019, we reported on FEMA's Grants Management Modernization program, which is intended to replace the agency's 10 legacy grants management systems and modernize and streamline the grants management environment.⁵⁴ We found that, of 6 important leading practices for effective business process re-engineering and information technology requirements management, FEMA fully implemented 4 and partially implemented 2 for the Grants Management Modernization program. The 2 partially-implemented leading practices were: (1) Establishing plans for implementing new business processes and (2) establishing complete traceability of information technology requirements.

In addition, we found that the program's initial May 2017 cost estimate of about \$251 million was generally consistent with leading practices for a reliable, high-quality estimate; however, it no longer reflected the current assumptions about the program at the time of our review. Moreover, the program's schedule—specifically its final delivery date of September 2020—did not reflect leading practices for

⁵³ We continue to believe that FEMA should develop a plan that includes how it will deliver training to promote competency in disability awareness among its staff. The plan for delivering such training should include milestones, performance measures, and how performance will be monitored.

⁵⁴ GAO, *FEMA Grants Modernization: Improvements Needed to Strengthen Program Management and Cybersecurity*, GAO-19-164 (Washington, DC: April 9, 2019).

project schedules, as the date was not informed by a realistic assessment of development activities. Last, we found that FEMA fully addressed 3 and partially addressed 2 of 5 key cybersecurity practices.⁵⁵ The 2 partially-addressed practices were: (1) Assessing security controls, and (2) obtaining an authorization to operate the system. We made 8 recommendations to FEMA to implement leading practices related to reengineering processes, managing information technology requirements, scheduling system development activities, and implementing cybersecurity. DHS concurred with all of our recommendations and provided estimated completion dates for implementing each of them through July 2020.

Thank you, Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Rogers, and Members of the committee. This concludes my prepared statement. I would be happy to respond to any question you may have at this time.

Chairman THOMPSON. I thank the witnesses for their testimony. I remind each Member that he or she will have 5 minutes to question the panel.

I now recognize myself for questions.

Mr. Administrator, do you have the staff necessary at FEMA at this point to respond to the disasters for this hurricane season?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir. We are ready every day of the year. We believe we need, not only be ready for hurricane season, but we are ready every day for what we like to call earthquake season, earthquakes can happen every day, to include a whole host of all hazards that we are prepared for.

Chairman THOMPSON. So you are fully staffed at this point today?

Mr. GAYNOR. When it comes to incident work force——

Chairman THOMPSON. No. No, no, no. Full-time FEMA employees. Are you fully staffed?

Mr. GAYNOR. For full-time employees?

Chairman THOMPSON. Yes.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir.

Chairman THOMPSON. What about the part-time?

Mr. GAYNOR. So the incident work force, we have improved staffing of that 20 percent since 2017. We continue to make improvements. It has been a struggle for FEMA to make sure that we have enough disaster responders in reserve or——

Chairman THOMPSON. So how short are you?

Mr. GAYNOR. Excuse me, sir?

Chairman THOMPSON. How short are you?

Mr. GAYNOR. We are probably short a few thousand employees when it comes to reserve.

Chairman THOMPSON. How do you plan to close the gap?

Mr. GAYNOR. So we just concluded a coordinated work force review to look at where we recruit, reservists in this case, how we on-board them, how we train them. This past spring, we trained a thousand new reservists to be ready for hurricane season. It is a—— it is a continuing improvement process. We know it is one of our struggles, but we have a plan to get there.

One of the issues has been how we qualify these new employees. We are trying to streamline that whole process so it makes more

⁵⁵To conduct these analyses, we assessed FEMA documentation against our *Business Process Reengineering Assessment Guide*, *Cost Estimating and Assessment Guide*, and *Schedule Assessment Guide*, as well as the National Institute of Standards and Technology's risk management framework and identified key cybersecurity practices, among other leading practices and guidance.

sense for us, we can on-board quicker, and employees can get to the field faster.

Chairman THOMPSON. So you have 2,000 vacancies as of now in that area?

Mr. GAYNOR. It probably exceeds 2,000, yes, sir.

Chairman THOMPSON. Mr. Currie, what is your analysis of that shortfall?

Mr. CURRIE. I think two challenges here, sir. One is how many total people does FEMA need to be ready for whatever can happen? Frankly, I am not sure that number is completely knowable, not knowing what is going to happen. But what we have said over the years is that FEMA needs to do a gap analysis to figure out what that number is. I am not certain that that has been done. We found in the past it hasn't been done.

The second issue, though, is for the people you have, who are those people? Are they trained? FEMA employs people with backgrounds and expertise in hundreds of different backgrounds, from incident response to engineers. So the challenge we found in the past is that they lack certain numbers, particularly in some areas. It is not just people responding in the weeks after; it is people long-term that need to be in those locations helping them recover too.

So it is total numbers, and it is then who is trained in what skills?

Chairman THOMPSON. So give the committee what skills you see FEMA lacking in that area.

Mr. CURRIE. So a great example is in long-term recovery projects and programs. Frankly, this is the part of disasters that often gets forgotten long after the media has left the response, is the day-to-day back-and-forth on response—on recovery projects, such as I mentioned in Puerto Rico, on public assistance. Those are the engineers, the site inspectors, the people that are doing the calculations, the cost estimators. Frankly, the less glamorous jobs that are hardest to fill, and FEMA has struggled to fill over the years. Those lead to delays and challenges in those recovery programs.

Chairman THOMPSON. Speaking of Puerto Rico, Mr. Gaynor, are you aware that there are a number of mayors in Puerto Rico who have submitted reimbursements to FEMA that are substantially outstanding?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir. In general terms, we are. But I would like to point out that we—our program—recovery program, Public Assistance Program, is a reimbursement program. We work closely with COR3, who is our recovery partner in Puerto Rico. We share the same office space. They are responsible for making sure that, whether it is a local official or vendors, get paid. Once they submit the proper paperwork and it is validated, we send the money off.

But I think the disconnect is between the COR3 who manages all the work. We don't directly pay contractors. We don't directly pay our locals. It really is the COR3 that owns that responsibility.

Chairman THOMPSON. Are you aware that a number of municipalities in Puerto Rico have not been reimbursed for monies they have already spent?

Mr. GAYNOR. I think in general terms there is always a lag between work done, the proper processing of the paperwork to make sure we don't pay for something that we—

Chairman THOMPSON. I understand. But do you—do you also understand that they don't have any more money to spend to do any work in their municipalities until they get reimbursed?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir, we do understand that. Liquidity is a problem in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. I think that is why we want to be extra careful. You know, Puerto Rico is \$70 billion in debt. We want to make sure that—and what typically happens after a long disaster, long recovery is, years after, when you try to rectify the records and make sure all the payments are correct, you have to do clawback. What we don't want to do, because we are committed to building Puerto Rico back better, what we don't want to do is claw back money because we had—

Chairman THOMPSON. I understand that. But I have been a mayor involved in a disaster of a small town. If I expend all of my funds helping my citizens waiting on reimbursement, the comment you gave me doesn't give me any solace if I were one of those mayors in Puerto Rico waiting on reimbursement.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir.

Chairman THOMPSON. What I would like for you to do for the committee is to have your staff prepare the reimbursement requests that have come in from Puerto Rico and give us the age of those reimbursement requests.

Mr. GAYNOR. We would be happy to work with your staff, sir.

Chairman THOMPSON. So are you aware that cities have to have two inspections before they get reimbursed once?

Mr. GAYNOR. So there is a process, and we actually established a new process, validate as you go, to make sure, again, that the paperwork is proper and that those payments are legitimate. We work through that.

Chairman THOMPSON. I understand. I appreciate it. But the same people come back and look at it the second time. The same people. So the mayors are saying, why can't you just come once and say it is OK or it is not?

Mr. GAYNOR. So there may be different levels of validation, depending on who validates and whether it is FEMA or COR3. We will be happy to get with your staff on a list of delinquent or unpaid vouchers.

Chairman THOMPSON. OK. We will get through some other questions.

I yield to the Ranking Member for some questions.

Mr. GUEST. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Gentlemen, I want to first thank both of you for being here today. I want to thank your agencies for the help that you provide our communities as they seek to recover and prepare for disasters.

As I mentioned earlier, Mississippi, the State that both I and Chairman Thompson call home, we appreciate the support of your agencies over the years as we have sought to recover from natural disasters, particularly Katrina that was so devastating to the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

Acting Administrator Gaynor, I want to ask you a question. In 2017, we had Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria. They presented FEMA with a challenge that has not been seen before and hopefully will never be seen again as it related to timing, to scale, and to the location of these 3 disasters.

With respect to Hurricane Maria, could you please indicate to us how the response and the recovery process has been more challenging to meet this disaster than others?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir. So I think everyone stipulates that this is a disaster like we have never seen. Combined with other disasters, you know, 2017 was a challenge for everyone. Specifically for Puerto Rico, Irma, a Cat 3 on September 10, and then Maria 10 days later, a Cat 5, really, again, stretched the limits of what we—what the challenges were.

If I can share just some of the things that we did to support Puerto Rico, because I am not sure that many have really realized how much effort, not just FEMA put into recovery and response, but, really, all of Government.

It was really one of the largest responses from DOD. Sixty-seven thousand DOD personnel and Guard personnel responded to Maria. It was the largest domestic air mission of food and water in U.S. history. Approximately 62 days of moving food and water to Puerto Rico. It was the largest air—disaster air mission in U.S. history. Four thousand six hundred sorties from DOD and our private-sector partners that flew more than 3,200 missions transporting urban search-and-rescue teams, disaster medical teams, relief supplies and equipment, and evacuated residents and patients. It was the largest disaster commodity mission in U.S. history. Defense logistic agency delivered almost 4 million gallons of fuel and 106 million meals and gallons of potable water and other life-sustaining supplies to Puerto Rico.

It was the largest generator mission in history. We delivered over 2,000 generators to the island. It was the largest disaster medical mission in history. Thirty-eight thousand patients cared for, to include deploying thousands of DOD medical providers, both on land and sea, treated on the USNS Comfort that rendered critical medical care to some of those patients. The largest request for assistance ever in any disaster that we have seen. The Navy's deployment of 11 ships that represented the largest naval flotilla to respond to civilian support operations in U.S. history. Corps of Engineers executed the largest temporary power mission in history.

When it comes to how we deal with disaster in the United States, we have this thing called the Emergency Management Assistance Compact. Ninety-two EMAC requests from 27 States assisted Puerto Rico in response to recovery from Maria. Today, we have 2,500 FEMA employees on the island. We were committed to a response like we have never seen in U.S. history. Today, we are still committed to the recovery in Puerto Rico.

Mr. GUEST. Can you just expand a little bit on the on-going work that is occurring in Puerto Rico as we speak today?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir. As of today, we have expended about \$15 billion. About \$5 billion of that is in Public Assistance. Another \$1.8 billion in individual assistance. We have repaired 112 homes' roofs. The work goes on and on and on.

Again, we are committed to the recovery of Puerto Rico, to build it back better. We are complete partners with the government of Puerto Rico. They are 50 feet from my leadership staff in Puerto Rico. There is not a day that goes by that we are not down there solving problems together.

Mr. GUEST. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you very much.

Mr. Gaynor, the President said that we have spent \$91 billion in Puerto Rico. The numbers you quoted didn't add up to \$91 billion.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir. I will let the President's comment stand on its own.

So what I do know is, you know, that—I will let the President's comments stand on their own. But what I can tell you is what we are doing today.

Again, 59—I mean—

Chairman THOMPSON. No. Just—have we spent \$91 billion? I am just trying to—that is what the President said.

Mr. GAYNOR. I think the—over the life of the disaster, that is what we estimate the cost could be for Hurricane Maria.

Chairman THOMPSON. No.

Put on the screen. That is what the President said: \$91 billion. Is that true or false?

[The information follows:]





Mr. GAYNOR. Again, I think it is an estimate about what could be spent in Puerto Rico. Right now, we have expended \$15 billion in—from FEMA and another \$27 billion from all other Federal agencies. So—

Chairman THOMPSON. So does this add up to 91—Mr. Gaynor, does it add up to \$91 billion?

Mr. GAYNOR. I think when recovery complete, it could achieve that number, yes, sir.

Chairman THOMPSON. But as of now, is it \$91 billion?

Mr. GAYNOR. As of now, it is \$42 billion.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you.

I yield to the gentleman from New York, Mr. Rose.

Mr. ROSE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Gaynor, thank you for being here and for your service.

Recently, FEMA has announced on its website that it will be, in late 2020, initiating Risk Rating 2.0 for flood insurance. My understanding of this is that it will be a far more quantitative hypertargeted formula which will basically focus in potentially on individual homes rather than the entire country, entire regions, and so forth. Is this correct?

Mr. GAYNOR. In part, yes, sir. I think with—you know, NFIP needs to be overhauled. I think we all agree to that. Our goal with 2.0 is to make sure that customers better understand their flood risk based on where they live and to make sure that the rates that they pay reflect the risk that—

Mr. ROSE. Sure. Now, you can understand how this—especially when all you have said to this matter is 221 words on your website, that this is starting to scare people.

Would people be correct in their fear that they could start to pay upwards—or see upwards of 18 percent increases in their flood insurance bills annually as a consequence of them fully understanding their risk?

Mr. GAYNOR. So the cap is 18 percent, so you can't be past 18 percent.

Mr. ROSE. Sure. But we could see, theoretically, people start to pay that 18 percent increase who were not formerly?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir. So, again, what we are doing is try to re-evaluate and rebuild the program to better reflect risk. So in some cases, you know, those premiums do not reflect that. So we are doing modeling right now, so some premiums could go up and some premiums could go down.

I don't know exactly what that looks like. But we—I think—you know, part of our duty as emergency managers is to make sure that if people live, you know—you know, you have to understand how to prepare yourself. If you don't understand risk, I am not sure how you can do that.

Mr. ROSE. I don't think I am not—we are not talking about an understanding of risk; we are talking about potential for a real affordability crisis.

If you jack up someone's premium increases to 18 percent per year, roughly, that is doubling in 5 years, can you see how this could cause a massive affordability crisis for entire communities if this goes through?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir. I think we have an affordability issue today with NFIP. So we have been working with some of the staffers on the Hill on this. I think we are willing to work with any Member here about how we can minimize the impact, such a steep impact on maybe some of these premiums that will go up. So, again, a work in progress. I don't think we have all the answers just yet. But we believe that we need to overhaul the program to better reflect risk so people understand, you know, what is at risk when it comes to——

Mr. ROSE. I guess the point that I am making, and I do—I would like to formally accept your offer to work with you and your team on this, because this is amongst the important issues to me community. I represent an island in New York City and then a coastline in Brooklyn, that—and you say understanding of risk, they see affordability crisis. This will be a problem unless we address it.

Mr. GAYNOR. I think we want to achieve the same goal. We want to have a balance in both of those things. We don't want it to be completely unaffordable, because I think that goes against what we are trying to do is to close the insurance gap in the United States. So there is a balance there. Again, I think our staff is absolutely willing to work with Congress to make sure that we have a program that meets everyone's needs.

Mr. ROSE. OK. Now, with my limited time remaining, I wanted to talk just about counterterrorism. The President has proposed, or his administration, in their budget request a cut to overall counterterrorism related grants by \$600 million.

I wanted to just give you a moment to offer, from your perspective, the justification for that cut.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir. Just as context, I spent 7 years as a local emergency manager in a city working for a couple mayors. I was a State director in Rhode Island working for a Governor, so I understand how these things can hurt.

First of all, I think the administration's budget reflects our priorities. We are struggling with lots of demand and finite resources. So those are hard choices that have to be made in any budget. When it comes to grants, you look back at how much we have invested, I think Chris has kind-of alluded to how much money we

have invested in grants over the years. I think \$50 billion since 2005 to build local and State capability. This is a shared responsibility between local, State, and the Federal system.

I have—you know, again, success in this business is going to take the ability to—locals to execute, the States to manage it, and the——

Mr. ROSE. Of course, and the NYPD understands that. I am sure you know that. But I do just, in the last few seconds, want to make sure we are on the same page.

So as a consequence of previous investments in counterterrorism screening, this administration is now saying that its greater priority are things like the border wall, not counterterrorism. I understand it is still a priority, but a greater priority.

Mr. GAYNOR. There are many different priorities. I think we are trying to do—I think one of the things we haven't kept up with is emerging threat. Some of the grants that were conceived after 9/11 have really not changed in the way we look at threat. So we want to make sure that new grants or revisions to grants reflect the current environment. So a whole host of things that we are worried about. We are an all-hazards agency. We worry about everything.

Mr. ROSE. Sure.

Chairman THOMPSON. The gentleman's time has expired.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New York, Mr. Katko.

Mr. KATKO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you both for being here today.

Mr. Currie, the report is very thorough, and I appreciate that.

Mr. Gaynor, first off with you. I want to take a step back into kind-of a case analysis, if you will, and a little different aspect of FEMA, and that is the process by which you go about getting FEMA dollars.

The Lake Ontario shoreline where my district lies has three counties in my district that have experienced severe flooding 2 out of the last 3 years. We haven't gotten the FEMA designation, but I think this time it is most likely they are going to.

So for the benefit of the record, for the benefit of my constituents back home, could you walk me through briefly how you go about getting the FEMA dollars to the people on the front lines? Then I might follow up with another question.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir. Are you talking about recovery dollars?

Mr. KATKO. Yes, sir. The flooding is at catastrophic levels right now. So explain the process how they go about getting those FEMA funding for a disaster relief.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir. So, typically, it starts with an assessment by the Governor or a local official that declares a disaster. There are certain criteria that has to be met when it comes to Public Assistance and individual assistance.

Again, I worked for a Governor for 4 years, so there is a lot of process that has to be done to make sure you meet the criteria. The Governor submits that request. If it meets all the criteria to the regional administrator, whatever region that you are in in the United States, and then eventually to us, and then we forward it on to the President for approval.

If approved, you are eligible for Public Assistance and individual assistance, depending on what you asked for. Typically, you get hazard mitigation dollars for the entire State, typically, to do predisaster mitigation. So there is a process. It can be very quick. Not all disasters are equal, so it depends what the particulars are of that particular city, town, or municipality. If there is a question about inability to get to a disaster dec, we would be happy to engage with your staff on how to help you get that.

Mr. KATKO. Actually, I know you have a very busy schedule. I would invite you to come up there to see, because it is a different type of disaster that we really—I think would help you in understanding the delay in getting dollars for these types of disasters are—compound the catastrophe.

What I understand now is the water levels are already at all-time highs. Homes are ruined. Shorelines ruined. One of my counties relies on almost 50 percent of their tax revenue from the shoreline properties. It is going to have a devastating long-term effect. The longer it takes to get those dollars, the harder it is for them to recover and fully recover.

One of the concerns I have been told that is happening is they have to wait till the water starts receding before they can start the process. It is a rather lengthy process before the Governor can issue the declaration, which then triggers asking the President to do it, so—could you just speak to that process for a minute, that part of the process?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir. Typically—and flooding is a good example, that, you know, it is hard to estimate damage while the floodwaters are up or the disasters still may be going on. So what we do as a joint effort between locals and State and the Federal Government, we do these preliminary damage assessments. We go there and get eyes on all the damage, calculate what that looks like in dollars and, again, submit that for the Governor for approval and submission to the President. Again, sometimes it is hard to estimate damage if there is still water or still on-going threat to that community.

Again, we will be there in the community as long as it takes to make sure we understand what the damage is and to help local and State emergency managers and local officials get to their desired outcome.

Mr. KATKO. Thank you. You mentioned a disaster mitigation strategy. Mr. Currie needs to be addressed. I don't want you to comment on it. I just want to make a statement to both Mr. Gaynor and Mr. Currie.

The disaster mitigation strategy is exactly why we have exponentially more damage this year than 2 years ago, because there wasn't enough disaster mitigation strategy going on. So going forward, I want to engage with you more on that.

But I want to switch gears with you, if I can, Mr. Currie. Your report is very thorough, and I appreciate it. I was a former Federal organized crime prosecutor in Puerto Rico for several years, and locals called me fiscal, is what the term was.

So I am well familiar with what the problems are in Puerto Rico. The infrastructure problems back in the mid-nineties were quite profound. But I was also cognizant of the fact that, even back then, when the Federal dollars came, they weren't always properly ap-

plied. They were always followed up by an awful lot of indictments of local officials on fraud.

So you mentioned the fraud, waste, and abuse in your report. I am not trying to cast aspersion on anyone in Puerto Rico, but when you did this report, did you find any evidence or indications of fraud, waste, and abuse so far in the monies being sent to Puerto Rico?

Mr. CURRIE. Not yet. To FEMA's credit, they have had to balance this—having to get money out quickly—they always do—have to balance getting out money quickly but making sure it is spent right.

In Puerto Rico, there clearly—they did not have the capacity to manage these Federal funds like States like Texas or Florida and California do who have years of—

Mr. KATKO. It is part of the problem, right?

Mr. CURRIE. Yes. That had to be built. They have worked together to build that over time.

Mr. KATKO. I am very encouraged to hear that it is not there. I hope it stays away. I encourage both of you to keep a close eye on that and work closely with them. I think they need the assistance. I think the capacity issue is a big issue there.

I thank you for your comments.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you very much.

The Chair recognizes the gentlelady from Illinois, Ms. Underwood, for 5 minutes.

Ms. UNDERWOOD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Natural disasters and patterns of extreme weather events are happening more frequently and with greater intensity all over our country, including in my home State of Illinois.

We know that human activity plays an indisputable role in climate change, which is linked to these extreme weather events. Ignoring that link is a direct threat to our National security. So knowing this, I am extremely concerned that FEMA has chosen to strip all mention of climate change from its 2018 to 2022 strategic plan.

Mr. Gaynor, the Department of Defense has reiterated the homeland security threats of climate change in reports published every year since 2007. So, Mr. Gaynor, why, to the best of your knowledge, did FEMA remove all mention of climate change from this document?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am. So I wasn't here for the construction of the plan in 2017, but what I can tell you about the plan, it doesn't mention anything about any hazards. It really is agnostic to any hazards. I go back to my original statement that we are an all-hazards agency. We are committed to preparing for and responding to any threats and hazards, regardless of the cause. That is how we approach it.

So, you know, why it is not in there, I think, again, no hazard is mentioned in there to include any reference to climate change.

Ms. UNDERWOOD. OK. Thanks.

We know that previous iterations of the report have addressed climate change directly. So if we are going to have a proper level of preparedness in our country, I would hope that future iterations

of the report would address specific hazards so we know that they have a disproportionate effect on our National security.

In Illinois, we are seeing extreme weather events like the recent bomb cyclone, as well as periods of heavy rainfall causing record-level flooding in waterways across the Midwest. These events are threatening infrastructure, private property, and the lives of people in our communities. It is a timely issue. Every major monitoring station in Illinois along the Mississippi River reports current and forecasted water levels above the flood stage. The impact is being felt in my home district, the Illinois 14th, as the Fox River and the Des Plaines River have recently been swelling beyond flood stage and past record peaks.

In preparation for this hearing, my office reached out to the Illinois Emergency Management Agency. Officials at that agency spoke highly of their good working relationship with FEMA and of FEMA's support overall. So, Mr. Gaynor, I want to take this opportunity to commend you and thank your staff at FEMA for their work.

Mr. Gaynor, what resources does FEMA need from Congress to continue to support communities like mine that are impacted by increased flooding?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am. Thank you. Just a little bit about the spring flooding that we see. Really historic levels, not only for Illinois, but for many States, from the Canadian border to the Mexican border, from Kansas to Kentucky to Florida.

Ms. UNDERWOOD. That is right.

Mr. GAYNOR. It has been a pretty busy season for us.

I think we have all the tools necessary. I want to thank Congress for passing the DRRRA. I think one of the things we are most excited about in that is predisaster mitigation. Six percent set-aside for all disasters. So we are going to set 6 percent aside in the DRF. We are building a program called BRIC, Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities. We want to really create a new smarter program than our current predisaster mitigation program. We have a program today. But with the new level of funding, we want to make sure that we really try to move the needle when it comes to predisaster mitigation across the Nation.

So that program is being developed now. We are very excited about deploying that here in the next—I think by October 2020. We want to change the dynamic of how we prepare for disasters by investing in predisaster mitigation before the storm happens.

We spend plenty of money postdisaster on trying to fix things after the storm hits. There is no way to do emergency management. I think this is really a transformational legislation that allows us to do that. So DRRRA has really been helpful to us and the Nation.

Ms. UNDERWOOD. So what improvements has FEMA made to address past capability gaps in order to better assist these areas impacted by flooding, right?

So this new bill was authorized last year. I am assuming that you have made some internal improvements. Can you outline some of those?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am. So between the legacy program that we have now, predisaster mitigation, typically, we are authorized

about \$50 million a year. That is kind-of our average over the past 10 years across the Nation. Fifty million dollars across the Nation doesn't really go that far. You really can't do big—you know, high—projects to have a high return on investment.

Congress provided some bridge money between the PDM legacy and BRIC, about \$250 million. That money is available today. So that is how we are going to get from the legacy to the new. Again, I thank Congress for giving us that extra funding to make sure we can make a bigger difference when it comes to predisaster mitigation in the Nation.

Ms. UNDERWOOD. Thanks.

So the extreme weather in the Midwest has prevented farmers from planting their crops, and these next couple of weeks could be their last chance to plant at all. Right now, Illinois farmers have only been able to plant 73 percent of corn and 49 percent of soybean acres, compared to this time last year. I know that FEMA works with the Department of Agriculture, and so we are going to be following up with you to understand exactly how you all are working to ensure that our farmers are given the appropriate assistance that they need.

Thank you, sir.

I yield back.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you very much.

The Chair recognizes the gentlelady from Arizona for 5 minutes, Mrs. Lesko.

Mrs. LESKO [off mic]. I think you heard me, but thank you for what you do.

I want to thank the men and women that work for FEMA, and all the volunteers from all over the Nation that come and help out at disasters.

I have a question for you, Mr. Gaynor, and you may have to follow up with me afterwards. But in April of this year, I led a bipartisan letter dated April 5, 2019, with other members of the Arizona delegation, to former Secretary Nielsen and yourself, a copy to yourself, regarding FEMA's formula for awarding Urban Area Security Initiative—I think you call it UASI—grants.

Our three concerns outlined in this letter were that FEMA is not considering the complete or proper data from the FBI, the threat levels of Phoenix UASI special events are not properly ranked, and that Phoenix's proximity to the border with Mexico is not considered when determining the risk profile of the Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale UASI region, because you downgraded our threat level.

So how does FEMA work with the FBI to determine risk profiles for UASI regions?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am. So I think it is about 32 UASI communities and multiple communities grouped—some of those that get the grant. So we have a risk formula that we use that considers the threat, the vulnerability of that community, and the consequences that could result from a number of different threats.

As a former State director, it was part of my job to make sure that that formula was fully populated with all the factors that go into that, to include conversations with, not only the FBI, but other partners in public safety.

You know, that formula generally informs the Secretary of Homeland Security about how to make awards on those grants. We actually had a conversation with Secretary Nielsen, the former Secretary, about how to improve that formula to make it more reflective. We had a chat about borders, how to, you know, strengthen the border score.

We had made some changes. One of the things we want to focus on is emerging threat. We added some language in past UASI awards to recognize soft targets and events that have mass gathering. You know, the threat is evolving. We are always looking to make sure that we keep up with the threat. I would be happy to engage with you and your staff about, you know, how we can make that UASI award more—better informed for unique jurisdictions like yours.

Mrs. LESKO. Yes. Thank you. I will take you up on that, because we are, you know, going to get—the Phoenix area is going to get less grant money, potentially, because of this lower rating. It doesn't really make sense to me.

So here I looked over this SEER rating of different big events all over the Nation, right? To give you an example, Phoenix has the Phoenix Open, this huge golf competition, right, that attracts 700,000 attendees over a 5-day period. It got a lower rating, a SEER rating, than the Kumquat Festival, which only had 35,000 attendees over a weekend. So, to me, this makes absolutely no sense. The fact that our Phoenix region is only 30 miles away—the southern part of it is only 30 miles away from the Mexican border where we have this huge crisis going on right now, I really just don't understand it. I would like to work with you to try to perhaps make it more reflective of the actual threats.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am. We would be happy to kind-of go through what we receive from the State on some of those submissions and see what—you know, how it was calculated. I would be happy to show you how it was done.

Mrs. LESKO. Mr. Gaynor, when you said you were the State director, do you mean the FEMA State director?

Mr. GAYNOR. I was a State director in Rhode Island, so yes, ma'am.

Mrs. LESKO. The State director of what?

Mr. GAYNOR. Emergency management director. I am sorry.

Mrs. LESKO. OK. I am sorry, what were you?

Mr. GAYNOR. I was the emergency management State director for the State of Rhode Island.

Mrs. LESKO. So perhaps I should be talking also to the Arizona State manager as well, because that is the person that helps guide this UASI rating? Is that what you are saying?

Mr. GAYNOR. Typically, it is the State—either the homeland security adviser for the State or the emergency management for the State. I mean, it could be a group of different public safety professionals from the State.

I don't think any State does it exactly the same, but I would bet that the public—or the emergency management director, the homeland security adviser, and those public safety partners are involved in how they calculate—what they submit to calculate for that formula.

Mrs. LESKO. All right. Thank you, Mr. Gaynor.

I yield back my time.

Chairman THOMPSON. Mr. Gaynor, I thought the UASI designations were made at headquarters, based on what Mrs. Lesko was talking about.

Mr. GAYNOR. At FEMA headquarters?

Chairman THOMPSON. Yes.

Mr. GAYNOR. No, sir. It is a DHS grant. We administer it for the Secretary.

Chairman THOMPSON. Yes. But I am saying, it is made in Washington, not in Atlanta—I mean, not in Arizona.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir, but all the State——

Chairman THOMPSON. So——

Mr. GAYNOR [continuing]. All the State——

Chairman THOMPSON. Well, I just don't want you to give the impression that those decisions that impacted Arizona rest in Arizona when the decisions are made at headquarters at DHS.

Mr. GAYNOR. Alls I am saying, sir, the process is, typically, the headquarters puts out a solicitation for the grant to all the States with the risk rating for each particular UASI. All the States with the UASIs review that, and it comes back to headquarters for consideration.

So it is risk-informed based on, typically, what is submitted from States or UASI communities.

Chairman THOMPSON. Well——

Mrs. LESKO. Mr. Thompson, can I just briefly follow up on that?

Chairman THOMPSON. Sure.

Mrs. LESKO. So what I think you are saying is that, you know, it would probably be to our benefit if it didn't happen—and I don't know—for our State emergency disaster person to promote maybe Phoenix more, that area, so that the Feds know.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am. Again, as a State director and a local director, I was part of a UASI that no longer exists, so I am pretty familiar with the process and what——

Mrs. LESKO. OK.

Mr. GAYNOR [continuing]. The UASI or the State or the local inputs to that, again, to make sure that it is all highlighted for better decision making at headquarters.

Mrs. LESKO. Yes. Yes. That makes sense.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman THOMPSON. The Chair recognizes the gentlelady from New Jersey, Mrs. Watson Coleman.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Thank you, Chairman.

Thank you to both of you for your testimony today.

Just a couple of things. We just ended our appropriations season, and I am happy to report that, even though the President's budget request for 2020 in several categories—on UASIs, Homeland Security Grants, to Port Security Grants, to Transit Security Grants, Emergency Management Performance Grants, to Assistance to Firefighters Grants, to Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Grants—was even less than was enacted in 2018 and 2019, the Appropriations Committee has seen fit to increase those things. Hopefully, you will have more resources to do the things that you need to do.

I wanted to talk to you about two things. I want to ask about the Federal assistance for low-income individuals after a disaster. There have been multiple reports—and I have one right here that I seek unanimous consent to put into the record from the NPR report dated March 5, 2019.

Chairman THOMPSON. Without objection.
[The information follows:]

ARTICLE SUBMITTED BY HONORABLE BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN*

HOW FEDERAL DISASTER MONEY FAVORS THE RICH

March 5, 2019, 5 o'clock AM ET, by Rebecca Hersher and Robert Benincasa

If they had known, they never would have bought the house on Bayou Glen Road. Sure, it was a beautiful lot, tucked in a bend of the creek, backyard woodsy and wild, the neighbors friendly and the street quiet. A little piece of nature just 20 minutes from downtown Houston. It was exactly what John and Heather Papadopoulos—recently married, hoping to start a family—were looking for in 2007. They didn't think much about the creek that ran along their yard, aside from appreciating the birds it attracted to the neighborhood.

Across town, the Evans family was similarly indifferent to the wooded bayous that cut through their neighborhood. Janice Perry-Evans chose the house she rented because it was conveniently located near the local high school, which made it easy for her two boys to get to class and home from football practice. Her commute to the post office wasn't far either. Plus, at \$800 per month, the rent was affordable. By 2017, the family had lived there for 4 years, and didn't have any plans to move.

And then, in August of that year, both homes were destroyed. Both families had to start over from nothing. But today, one family is financially stable. The other is facing bankruptcy.

Disasters are becoming more common in America. In the early and mid-20th century, fewer than 20 percent of U.S. counties experienced a disaster each year. Today, it's about 50 percent. According to the 2018 National Climate Assessment, climate change is already driving more severe droughts, floods, and wildfires in the U.S. And those disasters are expensive. The Federal Government spends billions of dollars annually helping communities rebuild and prevent future damage. But an NPR investigation has found that across the country, white Americans and those with more wealth often receive more Federal dollars after a disaster than do minorities and those with less wealth. Federal aid isn't necessarily allocated to those who need it most; it's allocated according to cost-benefit calculations meant to minimize taxpayer risk.

Put another way, after a disaster, rich people get richer and poor people get poorer. And Federal disaster spending appears to exacerbate that wealth inequality.

THE FLOOD

Nowhere are the economic and racial inequities of disaster aid more apparent than in communities that have experienced one of the most costly and wide-spread disasters: urban flooding.

Houston is arguably ground zero for urban flooding—a sprawling city built on low and marshy flatlands exposed to hurricanes blowing in from the Gulf of Mexico. In the past decade, there have been five major floods in the city, culminating in the largest amount of rain ever recorded from a single storm: Hurricane Harvey in August 2017.

The Papadopoulos and Evans families were two of the hundreds of thousands of families who evacuated their homes during the storm.

"We were the first ones to evacuate out of our house, up the street," remembers John Papadopoulos. In the years before the hurricane, their home had gone from a refuge to a nightmare. It flooded in 2009, in 2015 and in 2016. By 2017, they knew what to do: Put the valuables up high, and get out. They went to a neighbor's house first, and then to a hotel.

It was a new experience for the Evans family. "When the water started coming up, we thought we were going to have to go on the roof," says Janice Perry-Evans. "But we ended up not going on the roof. We ended up, me and the kids, packing up a little bit of stuff" in a plastic container.

*This information is also available at <https://www.npr.org/2019/03/05/688786177/how-federal-disaster-money-favors-the-rich>.

"We got out and we walked in that water," she remembers. The water was up to her armpits in places. Eventually, a dump truck carried them to a bus, and the bus dropped them at the convention center downtown.

The next morning, Perry-Evans and Papadopoulos took the same first step to start rebuilding their lives—they turned to the Federal Government for help. But almost immediately, their experiences diverged.

From the beginning, a lot of things went right for the Papadopoulos family. John's employer, Microsoft, gave him as much time off as he needed and more than \$10,000 to help with rent and other bills that piled up after the flood. The Papadopouloses rented a townhouse nearby and, within a few months, the Federal aid they had applied for began to arrive.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency gave them \$30,000; because the family owned a home that had been destroyed in the flood, the Internal Revenue Service sent checks for more than \$100,000 in refunded taxes—a perk of having a relatively high income. The Small Business Administration gave the family a low-interest loan.

About a year after the storm, Papadopoulos said, his family was financially stable.

The Evans family was not.

Janice Perry-Evans had one goal after the floodwaters receded: find a place to stay. She didn't have any savings for a hotel or a new apartment, so when a co-worker offered her a room in his house, she took it, even though it was one room for her and her three kids and it was a 45-minute drive from work and school.

Then, she started applying for help from FEMA.

The agency gave her about \$2,500, enough to cover a deposit and first month's rent in a new place, but Perry-Evans needed the money for something else. Her oldest son was hoping for a college football scholarship. He couldn't afford to miss school or football practice that fall, and the family couldn't afford for Perry-Evans to miss shifts as a mail carrier for the post office.

"I had to go to work, and I had to get these boys back and forth to school. So I took that [money] and I put it for a car," she explains.

With her immediate transportation needs met, Perry-Evans went back to FEMA to see about getting more money for housing, but she says agency representatives reprimanded her for incorrectly using the money she had been given.

"Some of them were kind of rude," she remembers. "Some of them felt sorry for me because I would be crying, [saying] 'Hey, I have nowhere to go. I don't have no money. You guys are not helping me like I thought.'"

FEMA didn't block Perry-Evans from reapplying for housing money, but she says after the scolding she turned to other potential sources of Federal aid, unsuccessfully. Her income wasn't high enough to claim a significant tax refund. She says she was denied a low-interest loan from the Small Business Administration because her credit score was too low. A FEMA representative suggested she try to get housing money from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, but after she used her day off to go to an information session, she was informed that her income was too high to qualify.

"It was like every time I tried something, it was an obstacle in the way," she says.

The entire time, Perry-Evans says, she never missed a shift at the post office. She even worked the week that Hurricane Harvey hit Houston. She often worked 6 days a week. But her paycheck just wasn't enough to cover all her bills, and her co-worker said it was time for the family to move out of the spare room.

Six months after the flood, Perry-Evans did the only thing she felt she could: She signed a lease to rent a house that cost 50 percent more than where they used to live, for less space. The electricity didn't always work. For more than a year after the flood, Perry-Evans was still sleeping on a cot she took from the convention center.

THE RICH GET RICHER; THE POOR GET POORER

Perry-Evans is not alone in her struggle. "Recovery for vulnerable families [looks] a lot different than it does for more affluent neighborhoods," says Kathy Payton, the director of the Fifth Ward Community Redevelopment Corp., a neighborhood nonprofit that works a few miles from where Perry-Evans lives.

Payton grew up in Houston and has spent decades supporting the basic needs of her neighbors, many of whom live on fixed incomes or do not have a cushion of savings to fall back on after a disaster.

"We had loss of income because people lost their jobs. We had increased health issues as a result of them living in bad situations," she says, ticking off the cascade of challenges lower-income families have contended with since the flood. Many families struggle to successfully apply for money because they do not have access to a

computer, she says, or do not have all the paperwork they need, or can't take time off from work to meet with a FEMA representative.

Payton says wealthier families are more able to comply with the rigid application requirements. "There shouldn't be a cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all template," she says. "You've got to make adjustments based on the vulnerabilities and the needs of the families. And that's not what we do."

Those application requirements are not explicitly designed to favor some citizens over others. Under the 1988 Federal disaster relief law, the requirements exist to protect taxpayers from fraudulent or improper payouts after a storm, by keeping track of who has been given money for what.

But Payton says the upshot in Houston is that the more affluent parts of the city have recovered more quickly and deeply since the flood. Private insurance accounts for some of that, but Payton also believes residents in those areas have been more successful at getting Federal money.

"Those families who are more apt to be able to respond to that [funding] will do so quickly, will do so more efficiently and the funds will be available on a first come, first serve basis," she says. Families who cannot, she says, "will be left behind again."

A new and growing body of research backs up Payton's observations. Studies by sociologists, as well as climate scientists, urban planners and economists, suggest that disasters, and the Federal aid that follows, disproportionately benefit wealthier Americans. The same is also true along racial lines, with white communities benefiting disproportionately.

"Cities are often very unequal to begin with," says James Elliott, a sociologist at Rice University. "They're segregated and there are lots of income disparities, but what seems to happen after natural hazards hit is these things become exacerbated."

"We see these same patterns of wealth inequality being exacerbated in communities that receive more FEMA aid," explains sociologist Junia Howell of the University of Pittsburgh. Howell and Elliott have published multiple studies that find a pattern in who wins and who loses after floods and other disasters: Rich people get richer after a storm, and poor people get poorer.

"That's particularly true along racial lines, along lines of education, as well as homeownership versus renting," explains Howell. And rather than mitigating the inequity, Federal aid exacerbates it, in part because of the biases Payton has noticed that are baked into how Federal money is distributed.

NPR examined one Federal disaster program and found evidence of exactly that phenomenon. The program uses Federal and local money to purchase homes that have flooded or been affected by other natural disasters and permanently turn the lots into green space to reduce flood risk.

The buyouts are voluntary, and the homeowner can use the money to move to a safer place. As climate change drives more extreme rain, David Maurstad of FEMA says he expects the program to grow more in the coming years.

But buyouts have disproportionately gone to whiter communities. NPR analyzed records of about 40,000 property buyouts funded by FEMA and State and local governments and found that most of them were in neighborhoods that were more than 85 percent white and non-Hispanic. For context, the Nation as a whole is 62 percent white/non-Hispanic, and disasters affect communities of all demographics.

A TALE OF TWO CITIES

Hurricane Harvey in Houston was a cataclysmic event. But more extreme rainfall is falling all over the United States, and that means more flooding. The trend will continue in the coming years, and so will the need for disaster relief programs—and programs designed to mitigate damage. But even when those programs work as designed, NPR has found that inequality persists.

More than 1,500 miles northeast of Houston, two towns show how disaster relief efforts are determined and who wins and who loses in the calculation.

Manville, N.J., an hour outside Manhattan, has flooded repeatedly since the 1970's. On a recent tour, Superintendent of Schools Robert Beers drove over a bridge and into a neighborhood called Lost Valley, a suburban enclave of Cape Cod-style homes built in a compact grid along the Raritan River.

"This area was hit the hardest," he says. "And as we drive through you're going to be able to see a lot of vacant homes, and areas that were bulldozed. Some of these open, these vacant lots here, there were homes here."

Over the past two decades about 150 homeowners in Manville have taken disaster buyouts, and 80 more abandoned their homes. A drop in household incomes followed, and home values lagged behind nearby towns.

"After the first flood, people began thinking, 'Is it time to get out?'" says Eleanor Nielowicki, who lived in Lost Valley for more than 30 years. "After the second flood, not again. And the third flood, we've had it." She finalized the sale of her house to a Government buyout in 2015.

And buyouts like Nielowicki's matter to Beers. All those vacant lots affect how much money his schools get. Fewer homes overall mean less tax revenue to fund education. Last year, Manville's public school system found itself battling large budget shortfalls. At the same time, Beers says, the schools faced new demands: Since 1999's Hurricane Floyd, Manville's Hispanic population had risen from 5 percent to 23 percent.

"Nearly 30 percent of our students speak only Spanish at home, so we need to fund additional positions to transition these children and provide them with the services they need," Beers said last spring. (By summer, after an intense lobbying effort, Beers was able to get the State government to increase funding for Manville's schools.)

And even though the buyouts in Manville hurt the tax base, FEMA says the strategy actually saves money in the long run. The agency says for every dollar spent on buyouts and other hazard mitigation programs, Federal taxpayers save \$6 in future disaster losses. The agency has allocated more than \$15 billion on those strategies since 1989.

"I think our program is achieving in Manville what it's intended to achieve," says Maurstad, who oversees FEMA's buyout program. He says FEMA is meeting its goals if it makes a community less risky, saves property, and potentially saves lives.

And he points out that while FEMA pays 75 percent of the cost to buy out homes in disaster-prone areas, States and localities decide where they want those buyouts to occur, so demographic changes aren't on the Federal agency's radar.

"I'm not aware that there's been a specific study by FEMA or anyone else on the demographic distribution of [the buyout] approach," says Maurstad. "But the approach itself is not one that would necessarily, intentionally lead to those outcomes."

Reeling from repeated floods, Manville asked the Army Corps of Engineers to build a flood control system to protect it. In 2016, the Corps said no.

Catherine Kling, an economist at Cornell University, studies the kind of benefit-cost analysis the Corps does to decide which property is worth saving. "The whole idea of a benefit-cost analysis is actually very simple," Kling says. "It simply seeks to answer the question: If we do this project, is the total value from this project greater than the total costs?"

That means that protecting 10 families in \$1 million houses has the same value as protecting 100 families in \$100,000 houses.

In Manville, the Corps counted about 500 homes and businesses in flood zones and said it could protect them for about \$67 million. But for every dollar spent on the project, only 40 cents' worth of property would be saved. Under Federal guidelines, that's not enough.

"It is completely agnostic as to who receives those benefits and those costs," says Kling. And, she says, economists assume the people displaced and the economic activity they generate will simply move somewhere else.

Still, even if the approach is designed to avoid picking winners and losers, it ends up doing so anyway, favoring wealthier neighborhoods. "It's also going to be [choosing] more valuable businesses," Kling says. "More valuable real estate."

Indeed, if there were a climate change lottery with public funding as the prize, you could say Bound Brook, N.J., just 4 miles from Manville, hit the jackpot: a sweeping, \$650 million flood control project whose local portion was completed in 2016. Developers followed, investing tens of millions of dollars.

In Bound Brook, on a very different tour around town last summer, Councilman Abel Gomez detailed plans for hundreds of upscale apartments, new restaurants, and an expanded Main Street. "Without flood control," he said, "you were always the next natural disaster before you were wiped out."

But some residents worry how they will afford to live there once the new projects are completed. Bound Brook has one of the Nation's largest concentrations of Costa Ricans—enough that the country's president visited in 2014—and a history of alleged housing discrimination. The Justice Department sued the town in 2004, saying its housing policies discriminated against Latinos, and for years its housing and development practices were regulated by a consent decree. In 2017, a local government analysis found that households in the most heavily Latino neighborhoods had lower incomes and spent a greater portion of their incomes on housing than those in the majority-white area.

Some of the newer apartments are already renting for hundreds more than the town's median rent.

Francisco Morales Mora, who emigrated from Costa Rica in 1994 and owns a restaurant downtown, says that's too much. "The people of Bound Brook are poor," he says. "And unless the new [apartments] are cheaper, people will leave."

Robert Greco, the project's manager for the Corps, says the flood control project in and around Bound Brook protects a highly dense area with a range of income levels. He says it isn't intended to favor the wealthy but acknowledges that the project is changing the area.

"The Borough of Bound Brook is not wealthy," Greco says. "But guess what, now they're building and the economic vitality is picking up, and it's beautiful, actually."

Pressed on what the new, expensive development plan might mean for the Latino community, Gomez, the councilman, says, "We really, really hope that the Latino identity that's here remains here . . . Because that's key to this. It sets us apart."

The bigger picture around the country is that some Americans will be more vulnerable and some will be more resilient in the face of climate change. And who wins and who loses appears to mirror existing inequalities.

"Hardworking Americans who are working class are going to find their communities stressed even more than they are now," says Andrew Light, an editor of the 2018 National Climate Assessment. "If you're already a community at risk, you're going to be at more risk."

In Houston, the Papadopouloses have applied for a buyout and are likely to be offered one if they wait long enough. It may take years.

Janice Perry-Evans and her family are still in their rental but, "It is really a struggle now to stay afloat," she says. She plans to file for bankruptcy.

And in Manville, even as the Army Corps of Engineers declined to build a flood control project, it predicted that "significant flooding can result in municipal infrastructure damage, loss of jobs, and closure of businesses," as well as "continued potential for loss of life."

NPR's Meg Anderson and Barbara Van Woerkom contributed to this story.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Thank you very much.

As I said, there are multiple reports lately regarding how low-income communities get the short end of the stick when it comes to Federal recovery dollars.

The current system is too complex for people putting their lives back together to navigate. Having to apply to FEMA and the Small Business Administration and back to FEMA, many simply get discouraged and drop out of the process because of the unnecessary complexity.

This is not even dealing with the fact that there is a perception that there is a devaluing of the loss that low-income and minority families are experiencing.

What I would like to know is, what is FEMA doing to simplify this process for disaster victims and survivors?

Mr. Gaynor.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am. First, I would like to say that we don't discriminate for disaster assistance on race, color, gender, political affiliation, religion—

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. I don't want to waste my time going there, because the record will speak for itself. So if you would just tell me what you are doing, what FEMA is doing, to simplify the process for disaster survivors, I would be grateful, because I have one more question.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am.

So recovery is a complex issue not only for—it is a complex system for everyone.

If I can give you the example of what we are trying to do in Puerto Rico. We are trying to do it a little bit differently, what we call 428 outcome-driven recovery.

Legacy systems typically used actual costs. Actual costs make recovery longer, more complicated. What we are trying to do in Puer-

to Rico, as an example of 428—and we have done it around the country, but I think Puerto Rico is one of the places where we see this benefiting everyone—is fixed costs. Let's agree on what it costs.

This is how business is done in America today. It incentivizes the local or State or Commonwealth to actually get to an outcome faster. If it comes in under budget, they can use that money for other needs that aren't connected to the actual project. If it goes over—

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. I think you are answering the question about how you establish the value, the cost associated with making someone whole again. I am glad to hear that you are using actual costs—

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN [continuing]. Associated with that now as opposed to—the actual cost, the real cost.

But what I want to know about is, what are you changing in your process or your requirement of these survivors to get access to whatever it is they are entitled to to make it less complex?

Because one of the consistent complaints has been that the whole process has been so complex, cumbersome, and it discourages people from pursuing their rightful needs.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am. So let me just correct one of the things that you said. So FEMA does not make anyone whole. Our programs, when it comes to individual assistance—

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. OK. Whatever you do, can you tell me how you do it more simply for people who have found the process so complicated and so cumbersome that it has discouraged them and they have not gotten whatever it is they are supposed to legitimately get?

Mr. GAYNOR. So I think, in general terms, we work on this problem every day, so when it comes to disaster assistance, adding more call center takers that can take more calls and be more responsive is one of the things we have improved over time.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. OK. So I am going to ask you, if you would just give us—Chairman, may I ask for a list of improved actions that result with the interaction between FEMA and a person who is seeking assistance?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. OK.

Last question. I want to talk to you about Puerto Rico. Because my impression of Puerto Rico's issues is not just that Puerto Rico residents didn't know what to do; it didn't look like you all knew what to do.

One of the things that you used that you said failed was, sort-of, satellite phones. I wonder what you would do differently in the future.

I also would like to know, (A), do you agree that there are a lot more projects that need to be done in Puerto Rico? If so, could you give us a list of those and a cost of those and the status of those?

Last but not least, could you quickly just tell me, given what we all know about Puerto Rico, what was the criteria that the President of the United States used to say he didn't want to give Puerto Rico any more money?

With that, I yield back, if you would answer my questions.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am. So, first, about—we are talking about survival communications? Is that your question, about Puerto Rico's survival communications?

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. [Off-mike.]

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am. This is a problem in all major disasters, is communications is key, about how we respond and how we solicit information for the situational awareness for us to make better decisions.

So we have been focusing in Puerto Rico on more survivable and sustainable operational communications across the Commonwealth. We made a major investment in making sure that 78 of the municipalities are connected via radio. So I think we have done a pretty good job there. We will continue to work on that. We send teams periodically to Puerto Rico to make sure that we address those and we test them and we evaluate them.

When it comes to projects, I am not sure what projects you are talking about. Public Assistance projects?

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Particularly.

Mr. GAYNOR. I am not sure I can answer in detail all the projects that are going on——

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Not now? Not at this moment? Not here?

Mr. GAYNOR. Maybe if you could help me restate the question, it would be a——

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. I want to know what would it take to restore Puerto Rico to pre-disaster. That is individually and infrastructure. I want to know what the status is of those outstanding projects, the potential cost of them, and your plan of action as it relates to them.

Then the last question was, knowing that there is still such a disastrous situation in Puerto Rico, could you just explain to me the criteria the President used to say he didn't want to give any more money to Puerto Rico?

I am sorry for taking so much time, Mr. Chairman. I yield back after I get an answer. Thank you.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am. So I think we are doing hundreds of projects in Puerto Rico. I think I would be happy to provide you a snapshot of what we are doing. I don't think we have enough time to go into all of them, and I am not sure I have all the details on many of them. Again, this is an unprecedented disaster.

For your last question, could you just repeat that one more time?

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. I am curious as to the criteria that the President of the United States used to determine—what he said was that he didn't want to give Puerto Rico any more assistance, that they didn't deserve it or whatever it is he said that was negative that indicated he wasn't desirous of sending any more resources there.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am. What I——

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. I know you didn't make the statement, but, since you are FEMA, I am asking you if you knew the criteria he used.

Mr. GAYNOR. So, whether it is Puerto Rico or the other 727 disasters that are open today, those disasters were approved by the President of the United States in some administration.

So we have the authority today, based on what the President approved for Puerto Rico and many other disasters in 2017, 2018, and 2019, to deliver that disaster assistance. That is how we are operating today, and that is how we will continue to operate under the authority that we have under the Stafford Act.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. I appreciate being able to ask the question, but you certainly have not been able to answer it.

Thank you. I yield back.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Taylor.

Mr. TAYLOR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Appreciate you being here, Mr. Gaynor. Thank you for your service in the Marine Corps in Iraq.

I am going to go into something that is close to home for me. I have a terrific district where I have a lot of people who train search-and-rescue dogs to a FEMA standard. For these people, it is their hobby. They take their weekends and after work and they go and train these dogs.

Then when there is a disaster, they take off work. They literally drive hundreds of miles, if not thousands, to go and help their fellow Texans or fellow Americans wherever they may be and help recover the bodies of people who perished in the disaster or survivors, actually find people alive.

Something I found when I talked to this community of great volunteers is that they found that when they would go to Galveston during a hurricane and work for, you know, days on end without sleeping and then they would try to go into a hotel to go get some rest or go to a restaurant and get something to eat, they were refused service because they had a dog with them.

Something I was able to do in the Texas legislature, working with Republicans and Democrats unanimously, to allow those dogs, those search-and-rescue dogs, to have the same legal status as service animals, as seeing-eye dogs. That just made sense, to help those volunteers.

I was just wondering if you could speak to us today about the role of these search-and-rescue dogs that are trained to a FEMA standard and what role they play in helping find survivors and finding the remains of loved ones.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir. Thank you.

So one of our crown jewels at FEMA is our urban search-and-rescue assets, 28 Federal teams across the Nation. There are many other urban search-and-rescue teams that support local and State. But it really is our go-to force when something really bad happens, especially with a collapsed structures.

We have a Nation of great volunteers that make this all possible. So, whether on the Federal level or the local and State level, volunteers really make the magic happen in a disaster, to include those that have dogs. Some of these dogs help with the recovery of victims—again, typically, structural collapse.

We could not do our job as an emergency management agency or as an urban search-and-rescue team without these highly-trained

animals. We make big investments both in people, when it comes to search and rescue, and to our animals. I think anything that can help make it easier on our teams and our volunteers to get their animals to a disaster location, I am all for it.

Mr. TAYLOR. OK. Thank you.

Just one thing that struck me as I talk to these volunteers is they say that there just aren't enough search-and-rescue animals that are on the payroll that the Federal Government has or that the city of Dallas has or—you know, we just don't have enough, you know, on the payroll. So you have to have this volunteer force that then steps in and fills the gap to help in this situation.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir. Any help—I think that, again, getting volunteer dogs or dogs that are assigned to urban search-and-rescue teams to a disaster, I think, would be helpful to all of us.

Mr. TAYLOR. OK. Well, I am working on some legislation to try to help search-and-rescue dogs get to disaster sites, to give them the same—a FEMA-standard dog, to go to a FEMA rescue site, to be able to have the same legal status as a seeing-eye dog. So tying into existing Federal statute and bipartisan support.

So it is a very small piece of this bigger puzzle, but I appreciate your comments, Mr. Gaynor, and thank you for your service.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you very much.

The Chair recognizes the gentlelady from New York, Miss Rice.

Miss RICE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Gaynor, I sent you a letter on May 9 of this year requesting some information regarding an issue that is going on now in my district regarding substantial damage assessments.

As you know, we are 6 years after Superstorm Sandy, and the town of Hempstead, within my district, continues to face challenges with their disaster recovery efforts. There now recently, the issue that they are dealing with is how to handle newly-surfaced preliminary damage assessment records detailing what homes were badly damaged after the storm and did not apply for any building permits.

What that is going to require is, thousands of homes are going to need to receive what they call an SDA, substantial damage assessment. Some of them may need to be listed as a result of that.

So the purpose of my letter was to point out that it appears that there is a lack of universal standards for the SDA process and how there seems to be no universal metric standard for all flood plain managers who perform the SDAs. I have also been made aware that the extent to which a homeowner may be able to appeal his or her SDA depends on the local jurisdiction.

So my letter asked if you could explore possible solutions to ensuring greater consistency in the SDA process as well as the SDA appeals process, and I have yet to receive a response. I don't know if you can respond right now or if you have the answers now.

Mr. GAYNOR. So I am going to have to submit for the record, ma'am, on some of that. I mean, I don't know the details of this particular issue. I will check on your letter to make sure that we have it and we are processing it. I will have my recovery experts follow up with you and your staff to make sure that we address your concerns.

Miss RICE. If you could——

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am.

Miss RICE [continuing]. Because, literally, we are 6 years post-Superstorm Sandy, and people are still having these issues arise.

So this was dated May 9. I can give you a copy of it now to make sure you get it. But I would really appreciate a quicker response.

Mr. GAYNOR. I will have one of my staff get the letter, ma'am, before we are done.

Miss RICE. Thank you very much.

So, now, after Hurricane Irma, FEMA emptied out its distribution center in the Caribbean and did not have many supplies in stock to respond to Hurricane Maria. We were in Puerto Rico with a trip with the Chairman in March, and we saw empty shelves and water bottles that were either expired or very near their expiration date.

What are you doing to ensure that there are enough supplies in the area to respond to multiple catastrophic storms in one season?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am. So we have had a couple of island challenges, not only Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands but also Hawaii and Alaska—not actually an island, but same kind of problems when it comes to getting commodities a far distance.

So, when it comes to Puerto Rico, we have made a major investment to make sure we have more commodities on-island. So where we had 1 warehouse pre-landfall Irma/Maria, now we have 6, 1 on U.S. Virgin Islands. We have 6 times the commodities on hand to make sure we can deal with any new disaster or threat to the Caribbean.

Hawaii, we are expanding the warehouse in Hawaii. We are going to double the footprint there. We have a plan on the books to build a warehouse in Alaska.

What we have learned is that it is much cheaper, much more efficient to have those commodities as close as possible. In some cases, if you put it too close, you may lose your stockpile. Transportation costs, when it comes to, you know, whether it is from continental United States to Puerto Rico or continental United States to Guam or Saipan, is expensive.

So we have learned some valuable lessons to make sure that we put some warehousing on some of these remote islands and locations so we can respond faster. I mean, I think we realize that it is just good business to do this.

Miss RICE. I would agree.

Your written testimony states that FEMA will modernize housing inspections to improve the survivor experience and streamline the process. I mean, I certainly welcome that promise, because, after Superstorm Sandy, communities in my district were overwhelmed with the necessary but very time-consuming task of building-by-building damage assessments.

So can you give us any more information about what this modernization might look like and how you will engage States and localities in the effort to make improvements?

It would help if people who live in these areas that are vulnerable, if they would know the process beforehand so that they are not playing catch-up post-storm.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am. So this has been a struggle for us. I think, anecdotally, you could have as many as 14 inspectors come to your home after a disaster, not only from FEMA but from other agencies. We are working hard on trying to downsize that through technology, through mapping. We have made a big investment in LIDAR mapping so we can do sampling across an impacted area to make it faster.

Again, I would be happy to share some of the more technical aspects of what we are trying to do after the hearing. But we know it is one of our issues that we have to resolve, because, again, I think our goal is to make it one-stop shopping. You should see one person from the Federal Government to help you resolve your needs. It is not there yet. We know it is a problem. We are working toward minimizing that interaction.

Miss RICE. Also coordinating with State and localities ahead of time would be helpful.

Mr. GAYNOR. Absolutely. Damage assessment is not just the Federal Government out there. It is really a team effort, a joint—they call them joint PDAs, preliminary damage assessments. So local officials, State officials, and Federal officials go out together to look at that damage and make an assessment and put it in the books and then moving on so we can deliver disaster assistance to those disaster survivors.

Miss RICE. Well, thank you. I will follow up with you on that. I look forward to an answer to my letter. Thank you very much.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you very much.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Crenshaw.

Mr. CRENSHAW. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here.

I want to start off down a line of questioning about what the Federal Government is best-suited to do and what is best done at the State level and what kind of progress we are making since the DRA. In Texas, we do take on a lot of those responsibilities.

This is for Administrator Gaynor and Mr. Currie. What kind of duplicative roles have you seen between the local, State, and Federal levels? What have you assessed can be devolved from the Federal level down to the State and local to make it more efficient, the entire process?

Mr. GAYNOR. I think one of our challenges as a country is post-disaster housing. First of all, I think no matter the disaster or no matter the location, it is a challenge. So whether it is California wildfires or Puerto Rico or Lee County, Alabama, post-disaster housing is an issue.

You know, we have a capability to deliver temporary post-disaster housing solutions like travel trailers and mobile housing units. We will never have enough to do that.

So what we really want to do—and I think we did it in Texas with Governor Abbott about the State taking on that housing solution with our support. I think we really need—and I spoke to the Governors at this fall's NGA in the District of Columbia about Governors having a deliberate post-disaster housing plan—

Mr. CRENSHAW. OK.

Mr. GAYNOR [continuing]. That we would fund but they would deliver to their constituents.

I am not sure that we are ever going to be able to figure out exactly what a Governor or a mayor needs. I think our obligation is to fund it. I think the State's obligation is to have a plan that is on the books that we all agree on so when it happens——

Mr. CRENSHAW. We are on track to get there?

Mr. GAYNOR. Absolutely. Yes, sir.

Mr. CRENSHAW. OK.

Mr. Currie, do you have anything to add?

Mr. CURRIE. One point I would make—I think you were here when I said the Federal Government spent almost half a trillion dollars on disaster relief since 2005, \$50 billion on preparedness grants.

So, in our view, since 9/11, with all that investment and funding, what we would expect over time is that we have addressed our capability gaps and built in enough resilience to where the local governments can handle more and more over time. But what we are seeing is the opposite. We are seeing additional expectation of Federal assistance over time.

Mr. CRENSHAW. Right. That is a problem. It is not a problem we have in Texas, thank God. We have about \$12 billion in the Economic Stabilization Fund and then another—billions added biannually from the Texas budget.

The last legislative session, my friend, Texas State Senator Brandon Creighton, who also represents a part of my district, led the passage of S.B. 7, which created a flood infrastructure fund and provided Texas dollars to match Federal funds. We just passed a \$2.5 billion bond in our county for flood mitigation.

So how does that compare to the rest of the States? Because it is a problem. We can't keep going to the Federal Government every single time. We have to build some resiliency at home.

Mr. GAYNOR. So I am going to continue Chris's line of thought about grants.

A lot of these grants since 2005, you know—the way it works is that you do an assessment of your threats and vulnerabilities, whether it is a local or a State. The Federal Government gives you those grants to buy down that gap. We want to make sure that you are actually buying down that gap. In theory, over time, you buy down the gap and you move on to the next risk that is high; again, apply those Federal dollars to buy that down.

Hopefully, if you are a State or local, you have invested some of your local and State dollars——

Mr. CRENSHAW. Right.

Mr. GAYNOR [continuing]. In that risk to try to offload——

Mr. CRENSHAW. That is what I am getting at. You know, I think, as a country, we need to come to the understanding that a lot of this resiliency has to be built at the local level so that the Federal Government is coming in when it needs to come in, not just as the first option.

I want to move on to—I actually want you to continue along the same lines that you were talking about before with Congresswoman Rice about the many different agencies involved in the process. How are we making progress to make this more uniform?

I mean, in Texas, we have been waiting on HUD money forever. Why can't we just use FEMA for disaster relief? Why are there so many different agencies coming to knock on people's doors?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir. So I just want to tie it back to our strategy. Our Goal 3 is to reduce the complexity of FEMA, and that could apply to help reduce the complexity of the Federal Government in some cases.

So when it comes to—let's stay on housing—you know, we try to partner with our organizations that have Federal disaster programs. There are 19 Federal departments that have disaster programs, about 95 different programs among—I think it is 16 Federal departments. So we have a lot of work to do to make sure we blend that together.

We are trying to do this in Puerto Rico with our outcome-driven recovery where we are just not using FEMA money to solve a problem, we are using all the Federal Government money to solve a problem together. In some cases, you only can use, again, based on statutes and law, you can only use that money for certain things. But in our outcome-driven recovery, we are trying to blend that all together to get a better result for the American taxpayer and get a better result for the residents of Puerto Rico.

You know, HUD is a great partner of ours. I think one of the problems that we hear across the country is, you know, HUD makes an announcement of a grant pretty quickly after a disaster, but it takes some time for a local or a State to actually submit a plan, get that plan back, and get that money on the street. It could take, in some cases, up to a year.

We work with HUD every day in trying to make sure our programs are complementary and that they blend together. We still have some work to do, but it is a challenge.

Mr. CRENSHAW. Back to the Chairman.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the gentlelady from California, Ms. Barragán.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Thank you.

Mr. Gaynor, we have seen horrific wildfires in California in the past few years. The lucky ones lost everything, and the unlucky ones lost even more than that.

As first responders are working tirelessly to save lives on the ground, we have a President tweeting to withhold aid from survivors. It just makes me sick, and I hope it makes you sick too.

Can I have your commitment right now that FEMA will not abandon the disaster survivors in California who are still struggling to rebuild their lives?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am. You know, we are, again, heavily invested in California. I actually talked to Governor Newsom last week about wildfire preparedness and recovery. I think we have a good partnership. That partnership will continue.

I think we are all after the same things when it comes to making sure we keep people safe. Before a disaster—I know the State of California has invested heavily in pre-disaster mitigation when it comes to wildfire. I think the Governor is on the right track in doing that. They have sufficient HMGP money, again, hazard mitigation money, to help buy down that risk.

Again, no matter if it is California or it is Puerto Rico or it is another State, we work in partnership to make sure that we get the outcome that everyone deserves and wants.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Great. Thank you.

I also understand that FEMA plans to implement its National public assistance delivery model in Puerto Rico and will establish a consolidated resource center, or CRC, in Puerto Rico for processing permanent work requests. How does this differ from the process that has been used to date?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am. It is a great question.

So the process that we use in Puerto Rico, the 428 alternative process, is not changing. I mean, we have committed to that. The Governor has committed to that from the beginning.

So the process doesn't change, but the way we track recovery is we are adding in this what we are calling the new PA delivery model. It has been used in more than 100 different disasters across the Nation. Relatively new.

You know, our goal is to improve efficiency, accuracy, consistency when it comes to managing all—you can imagine the paper-work—

Ms. BARRAGÁN. How is that different, though, from what is being used now? Like, what is being implemented?

Mr. GAYNOR. I think it was probably a manual—we have been—you know, the new model wasn't exactly ready when we started recovery in Puerto Rico. I think there was an appetite for both FEMA and the Commonwealth to get the model in use. So we put it in use in May, last month.

We have added a new fourth consolidated resource center to make sure that we have more consistent technical and administrative review on this process.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. So it is kind of technology-based?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am, it is.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. OK.

Mr. GAYNOR. I think one of the other things that we are trying to do is validate as you go.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. OK.

Mr. GAYNOR. I mentioned this before, about trying to avoid clawback. We don't want to do that. So sometimes it takes a little bit longer, but I think the end result will be better for everybody.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. OK.

Mr. Gaynor, after Hurricane Maria, many disaster survivors were initially denied for FEMA aid because the agency did not understand the housing system on the island. Now, many were so discouraged by the process that they simply gave up.

What has FEMA done in terms of training or otherwise to ensure that differences in local laws don't mistakenly stop individuals from receiving aid?

Mr. GAYNOR. Are we talking about the temporary sheltering assistance?

Ms. BARRAGÁN. It is generally speaking. I have been to Puerto Rico twice. We have heard people there basically saying, hey, I applied for aid, this is taking a long time, or we have gotten denied, and people are giving up.

So, for me, it is trying to find out is FEMA doing anything in terms of its training to ensure that any differences—maybe they are not understanding of housing locally there—

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am.

Ms. BARRAGÁN [continuing]. So it doesn't prevent people from—

Mr. GAYNOR. So we have made an investment in case management in Puerto Rico. We invested about \$80 million across all municipalities to make sure that we address—and I think there are about 21,000 case management cases on file right now.

But we have invested heavily on that to make sure that we address any concerns a survivor may have, you know, whether they didn't have all the documentation in the beginning or there is some other issue with their application. We understand that this can be a problem sometimes, especially after a major disaster, that you don't have your hands on your records.

So we have case management professionals across Puerto Rico right now handling all these cases. If there are any particular that you would like to address, I would be happy to get with you and your staff after to—

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Great.

Mr. Gaynor, I only have 10 seconds left. Do you believe in climate change?

Mr. GAYNOR. I believe that the Emergency Management Agency is ready to deal with any disaster, no matter the impact. That is our focus.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Are you considering climate change—maybe at some other time you can explain how FEMA integrates the consideration of climate change and extreme weather into its policies and programs.

We have had hearings here on the Hill—we have had the military come out and talk about how climate change is a, and should be, considered a National security crisis. I want to make sure that FEMA is integrating on the consideration of climate change in what it is doing with its policies and programs.

I am out of time, but if you could maybe respond in writing or at a later time, that would be great.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. I yield back.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas, Mr. McCaul, for 5 minutes.

Mr. MCCAUL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank the witnesses.

I was on the ground when Harvey struck. It was horrific. But I must say, I commend FEMA for the good work you did, pre-positioning assets, getting advanced emergency declaration. We saved a lot of lives, you know, probably 20,000 lives, in that effort, and it was commendable. It was a joint effort—my State operations center, the National Guard, to the Coast Guard, to FEMA. I would give it an A-plus.

I think a lot of the frustration in my State and others is—and I will admit, it is not really under your jurisdiction—has been the recovery. You have the short-term housing.

But a year ago, I remember working with my leadership to get a \$60 billion package passed by Congress. We did it in fairly short order after this disaster.

We just passed another declaration disaster, as you know, and Senator Cornyn and myself put a provision to expedite this money that has been held up at HUD for a year, \$4 billion to my State.

Recognizing that is not completely within your land of jurisdiction, but, you know, how can we take a more whole-of-Government approach—they are a partner, I think, in this effort. You are short-term; they are long-term.

What can we do differently to stop this kind of—this is what drives people crazy, is when Congress acts, particularly Members who got this done, and then a year later it is still being held up in the process.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir. I don't want to speak for my counterparts at HUD. What I can tell you is that we have a close partnership with HUD on many different matters.

I can't disagree that it probably takes too long. So whether you are from Texas or North Carolina or you are from Puerto Rico, you know, as an elected leader, you want to be able to deliver all the resources that the Federal Government can muster in the shortest amount of time. I think that is our goal.

You know, obviously, we have work to do. Like I stated before, 16 other Federal agencies with, you know, in excess of 90 different Federal disaster programs that you need to blend, it is a major undertaking. It is a major undertaking not only for a big State like Texas, but you can imagine, it is a major undertaking for small States that don't have that built-in bandwidth to manage—

Mr. MCCAUL. I agree. You know, Texas is ready. I think Puerto Rico is caught in a different situation.

Mr. CURRIE. Sir, can I say something real quick about the—

Mr. MCCAUL. I have limited time, but go ahead.

Mr. CURRIE. OK.

On the HUD, the CDBG issue, we just issued a report this year, and we had a matter for Congress, that Congress needs to permanently authorize a program such as CDBG, because it is not permanently authorized.

So every time it is appropriated funds in the supplementals, which it has been over 10 years, basically the program is created from scratch. There is a regulatory process. You know how long that takes. So you have to spend a year or 2 creating the program each time to begin figuring out how you are going to have to use the funds.

Mr. MCCAUL. I think that is an excellent recommendation. I was going to go to you for maybe solutions that the Chairman and Ranking Member can look at to make it more whole-of-Government rather than siloed off with all these agencies.

The last one—I have a little time—is the Army Corps. In 1940's, they identified Barker and Addicks. They built reservoirs. They identified Cyprus Creek, and they were going to build a levy wall or maybe a reservoir, and they never did that. So what happened was that it basically got a watershed event, where it went down from Cypress to Barker, to Addicks, Buffalo Bayou, downtown

Houston. Just a complete disaster that could have been prevented with proper flood mitigation projects.

This thing is still being held up. It takes years to study before they can even build. Again, it is the same frustration. My constituents say, what is going to happen as we go into hurricane season? Are we going to have this watershed event again?

So I know, again, the Army Corps is not under your—but the whole-of-Government approach. Maybe the GAO can look at ways we can fix this so it doesn't take so long.

Mr. CURRIE. Yes. Well, we have, actually. That scenario is a perfect example about what is so difficult about mitigation and resilience dollars. It is so difficult, in the present day, to give the funding you need to prevent future damage. It is just human nature.

But there are ways—like, for example, FEMA now has the ability to coordinate its funding with Army Corps funding to build levies. It used to be that that funding only had to be provided to Army Corps, and so what happened was is those—there were thousands of projects across the country that were never fully funded. So the scenario you mentioned, those are all over the country. There are levy projects that have never been funded.

Mr. McCAUL. Well, this one is funded. I look forward to following, maybe, up with the two of you and Army Corps about how we can move the process a little faster, in addition to HUD.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Green.

Mr. GREEN of Texas. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I thank Mr. Cleaver for allowing me to exchange places with him.

I would also like to thank the witnesses for appearing.

Let me move rather quickly and ask or maybe add to Mr. McCaul's for edification purposes. We have a CDBG-DR bill; Mrs. Wagner and I have sponsored it. It actually originated with her. We are trying to get that done now. We would be honored to have your support. We will make sure that you get a copy of it.

Because what you said is eminently correct; we do reinvent the wheel each time. We have institutional knowledge that has been lost, and sometimes it can be more difficult to reinvent than others. So thank you for the admonition.

Just a quick question about shelter in place. When we hear these words, "shelter in place," there are a good many people who have homes that are not suitable as a place to shelter.

The question that I have has to do with prequalifying community centers, schools, and churches for shelters, such that people will, in a community, know where the nearest asset is. If we are doing it, great. I need more intelligence on how to get into the loop. If we are not doing it, I would like to be a part of getting it done.

I will yield to you, Mr. Gaynor.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir. So I am going to put my local emergency management hat on. I was the local emergency manager in the city of Providence for 7 years.

So sheltering is truly a local responsibility, for the most part. I can tell you how we did it in our community, is that we—

Mr. GREEN of Texas. May I just intercede and ask—I assumed that that would be your answer. Let me just ask this question now.

You have greater expertise than most local folk. As a result of the expertise that you have and the resources that you have, would legislation which allows you to work with locals to prequalify venues such that we don't have to, at the time of the incident, with all of the things that are happening, try to get a shelter and then get notice to people as to where the shelter is, would that be helpful?

Mr. GAYNOR. There may be other things that are out there today, sir. So I will just use what I used as a local emergency manager. The Red Cross has a survey team that goes out and certifies shelters for hurricanes. So I used that resource as a local, and it is available across the country.

They have a survey sheet, they go out, you do it together, and you certify their shelter. If it meets the criteria on the shelter, it becomes an official asset of the Red Cross at the National level and at the local level.

So I think it is out there. You can always get technical assistance from State-sheltering experts and the Federal Government for sheltering. I just think it is probably—we need to make better connections between State and local and the Feds on some of these issues.

If there is a sheltering issue in your community, I would be happy to meet with you or your staff to see if we can, you know, make those connections now before we actually need to use that shelter in a disaster.

Mr. GREEN of Texas. Here is why I am interested in working with you on the project. I have had churches who have volunteered their facilities and had damages, but they wanted to be of help, but getting them the necessary repairs can sometimes be a great challenge.

So my assumption is that if I have the entity that is going to work with us after the fact, then maybe I will be prepared before. Are you following me?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir. Again, I would be happy to offer any technical assistance from the Federal Government and be happy to make those connections at the State and local level to get to your goal.

Mr. GREEN of Texas. You do get requests, I assume, from people who have had property damage who provided them as shelters, this property? You do get requests from people asking for some help after they have made the property available?

Mr. GAYNOR. Probably, sir. I mean, I can't point out any, but I am sure that there are many requests for disaster assistance from all sorts, both public and private, for assistance.

Mr. GREEN of Texas. OK. Well, I can tell you, you do in Houston, because we have a good many churches who have done this.

Sir, let me ask you a quick question. Do you audit best practices, lessons learned? Do you audit these things?

Mr. CURRIE. Absolutely.

Mr. GREEN of Texas. Do you have a list of the lessons learned after Harvey that can be made available to me? Lessons learned.

Mr. CURRIE. So we have a report that we issued last September that chronicles the response situation in Texas, among the other

States, and what we saw as some of the good things that happened and some of the lessons learned.

Also, FEMA has a comprehensive after-action report that is publicly available that talks about that as well.

Mr. GREEN of Texas. OK. I would like to access those things, and I will have someone contact you.

I appreciate—this really is an effort on my part to help people who really can't help themselves when these emergencies occur, and they have homes but they are not suitable for shelter.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Mr. Cleaver.

I yield back.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Missouri, Mr. Cleaver, for 5 minutes.

Mr. CLEAVER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Gaynor, thank you for being here. I appreciate the fact that you are well-informed.

You know, my colleague, a few minutes ago, Miss Rice, raised a question about, you know, the changing environment, the weather issues.

You know, yesterday, we had a number of past EPA administrators, Republican and Democratic, who talked about the dismantling of EPA.

My issue is, I know, I mean, Cabinet members have to dance around the statements that the President makes that are not true, like the ones our Chairman asked you earlier. So I don't care. I just want you to—I mean, I know you are, you know, informed and bright—so that you run EPA in a manner with the understanding that we are experiencing climate change.

I just left some world leaders meeting in the Majority leader's office, and they can't understand why the most powerful and intellectually substantial Nation is denying what the whole world is acknowledging.

That is an editorial comment, and hopefully you can respond to that in what you do.

The Chairman also asked about your staffing. How many people do you have in Congressional affairs?

Mr. GAYNOR. I couldn't tell you, sir.

Mr. CLEAVER. But it is 10? Fifteen? Twenty? I mean—

Mr. GAYNOR. It is probably 10.

Mr. CLEAVER. OK. The reason I am asking is, I represent Kansas City, Missouri, which is the largest city in our State, and so my Congressional district represents the largest city. When they redistricted the State, they took a portion of Kansas City and then put me in the rural areas, which I am representing the best I can.

We have been devastated by tariffs and by flooding, as you probably understand. But my issue is, you know, people have lost their crops, I mean, their soybeans and corn. They have just been devastated.

So I am out meeting with my farmers with the Governor, with our Governor, and they raise the questions to me that they raise every time a disaster hits, about the 8.9 threshold before they can get a FEMA emergency declaration. So, you know, there is just con-

fusion. The Governor is saying, you know, I can't get solid information before SEMA, which is our State emergency system, to put it in action, because we are getting conflicting information.

So I then sent a letter to you. I have been in Government a long time. You can't read everything, and I don't expect you to. I have the letter here. If you read this letter and memorized what is in it, you need to be on some of these game shows to win a lot of money.

But what I do want is for you to convince me that you are going to supply us with enough staff to respond at least to the committee.

The reason I am saying that, I have 50 farmers sitting in front of me and the Governor, my friend the Governor, and I said, "Well, I will find out." So I sent a letter on April 16. Then I had another meeting with my farmers. "Well, Congressman, what did they say? What did they say?" So I have to embarrassingly say, "Well, I don't have an answer yet."

Now, even after the letter was sent, we made phone calls.

So something needs to be put in place, Mr. Secretary, to—this can't happen. Because, I mean, my thought, if I am going to get embarrassed, then I am going to embarrass Mr. Gaynor, but that is incongruent with who I am. So I just want you to fix it.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir. I hear your concerns.

So the conduit, I think, for all these requests is through our Congressional affairs, the conduit. But we have thousands of talented staff that answer some of these very specific questions.

I have not seen your letter, but I make sure I go look for it.

So it gets staff to the agency to make sure that we are as complete and transparent about what your issue is. Sometimes they are easy questions; sometimes they are harder questions. I think we strive to make sure that we are very responsive to Congress to make sure that we hear your concerns and demands.

But I will follow up on your letter. Again, we have thousands of hard-working experts within the agency to try to—

Mr. CLEAVER. I understand. I hate to cut you off, but my time is running out.

When I was mayor of Kansas City, I said to the staff—I had 6,000 staffers—"When a member of City Council sends you a communication, I want it turned around in 10 days." I mean, you know, if you don't turn it around in 10 days, we have a problem. I am just throwing that out.

Mr. GAYNOR. I hear you, sir.

Chairman THOMPSON. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. CLEAVER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman THOMPSON. For the record, Mr. Gaynor, three Members have indicated that they have written you letters and have yet to get a response. All three Members are Members of this committee. I would hope you would go back and review how Congressional correspondence is handled in your operation.

Mr. GAYNOR. Sir, I hear you loud and clear.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Louisiana, Mr. Richmond.

Mr. RICHMOND. Let me ask you a question. What is COR3's contract? What are the terms of their contract? Are they paid in cost-plus?

Mr. GAYNOR. No, sir, they are not a contractor. They are an element of—they are part of the Commonwealth's government. They are Puerto Rican employees for the Government. They are not a contractor. It is the Government's team that is in charge of recovery. They are completely part of the Puerto Rican Government.

Mr. RICHMOND. OK.

Now, what contractors do you have—now, by the way, I am from New Orleans. I have been through Katrina, I have been through Rita, I have been through Isaac, I have been through Cindy. So my experience is that you all usually have inspectors and other people for quality control. So who is the quality control in Puerto Rico?

Mr. GAYNOR. Specifically for?

Mr. RICHMOND. The Government project worksheets and doing the inspections. Is it all FEMA employees, or have you contracted out some?

Mr. GAYNOR. Oh, I think the—so I think the first level of making sure that, you know, payments are legitimate, all the paperwork is there, is the government of Puerto Rico.

Mr. RICHMOND. Right.

Mr. GAYNOR. So we can start at the bottom with the local municipality who received money. They have an obligation to make sure that all the paperwork is correct. They submit it to COR3 for review. We have a program that validates that paperwork to make sure, again, it is all correct.

You know, we had Puerto Rico under what we call manual controls, where we really went through all the paperwork. We released them of that because they have an outstanding fiscal control plan now.

We do sampling of some of their submissions. We will continue to sample that as we go, make sure that it stays within tolerance and that we are not paying for anything that we don't get.

So it really is a process from the local through the Commonwealth—

Mr. RICHMOND. But my question is, on the FEMA side, is it all done through employees, or have you contracted with third-party administrators to do some of that work?

Mr. GAYNOR. I am going to say it is all FEMA employees. I don't think we contract that out. I will double-check on that, but I am generally confident that it is all FEMA employees.

Mr. RICHMOND. Let me ask you another question. Does FEMA still have the policy, according to the Stafford Act, that you all don't spend money on permanent housing and permanent repairs?

Mr. GAYNOR. No, we do permanent—I mean, it depends—

Mr. RICHMOND. For Public Assistance, individual Public Assistance.

Mr. GAYNOR. Well, individual Public Assistance is—there is some repair funding inside of that, but permanent repairs come under PA.

But we do do permanent repairs in some cases and restoration. HUD actually just recently approved about \$1.8 billion for perma-

ment work on housing that is destroyed. So, again, it is a team effort on who does what.

Mr. RICHMOND. Well, let me give you the experience and what happens on the ground. So, when the storm happens, FEMA comes in. You all now have—and I will give you credit for developing the STEP program, which is the shelter-in-place program. But part of the hindrance with the shelter-in-place program is that you will not do permanent repairs because you worry about duplication of benefits and other things.

So let me just give you the most egregious example I have ever seen in my life. In a trailer park, we spent, the Federal Government, \$90,000 to buy a trailer, move a trailer to a trailer park, because we couldn't pay for permanent housing for the person in the trailer, when if we gave them \$75,000, they would have bought a trailer, and they would have been out of our hair. They would have moved on with their future. We spent \$90,000 to get it there. We paid to remove it. Then we have to give the family Public Assistance to help.

This is not necessarily just a FEMA problem; it is a Stafford Act problem. So what I am asking you, as the administrator, is to help us help you. But what I need from you is honest answers about not being able to invest in permanent housing.

So is that still a problem in rapid recovery?

Mr. GAYNOR. So I think it is a process. I think one of the things that happens right after disasters is we want to make sure that disaster survivors have a warm, safe, and dry place to go. So we do that through individual assistance. You can get temporary sheltering in hotels, or you can get money for temporary repairs. In Puerto Rico, we had—

Mr. RICHMOND. But, see, you just said it. "We can put you in a hotel. We can pay for temporary repairs." You are missing my whole point. Why just pay for temporary repairs? Because we are spending the money twice.

So when you do shelter in place, you put up a 2x2 square of Sheetrock behind an outlet so that you can put the outlet cover on so that people can have electricity. So then when we pay for the permanent repairs, you have to go back in, take Sheetrock out, take out the temporary bathroom unit, take out the temporary refrigerator unit.

Why, in the beginning, can't we make an assessment of how to spend taxpayer money the best? What I want to do is partner with you so we can take all the foolishness out of the Stafford Act to allow you to be able to be more efficient.

I am not saying it is your problem. What I am saying is it is a problem, but in order for us to fix it, you have to, No. 1, be honest about it, and, No. 2, articulate it so that we know we are not spending money, time and time again, just to go back and rip it out.

So, you know, blue roofs are great, but a real roof is better.

Mr. GAYNOR. Again, I understand it. I would be happy to work with you on your staff on maybe some ideas, where we can streamline.

This is a challenge, no doubt, right? So you bring up points that we have heard before, and we need to do some work to improve

how we deliver that post-disaster housing. I would be happy to partner with you and your staff on how we can make that improvement or change the Stafford Act to reflect a more common-sense—

Mr. RICHMOND. Well, unfortunately, we have a lot of experience with it, and we will absolutely take you up on how to improve it. Thank you.

Mr. GAYNOR. Thank you, sir.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the gentlelady from New York, Ms. Clarke.

Ms. CLARKE. I thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and I thank our Ranking Member, for holding this hearing today.

We are discussing FEMA's readiness for future disasters, and I represent central Brooklyn, New York. I have first-hand—I have seen first-hand the importance of effective disaster response efforts when Superstorm Sandy devastated my district. Lives were lost and lives were upended, homes and critical infrastructure, including subway tunnels, flooded, and the recovery process continues to this day. That's why I know FEMA cannot be an afterthought at DHS.

The President may want to make immigration enforcement the Department's top priority, but the work FEMA does can mean the difference between life and death when a storm strikes.

This important mission is why it is essential that FEMA remain apolitical. With the threat of climate change leading to rising sea levels and higher ocean temperatures. Superstorm Sandy will not be the last natural disaster to hit Brooklyn. Yet, instead of acknowledging this reality, FEMA's 2018 through 2022 strategic plan removed mentions of climate change, including prior iterations of the strategic plan.

How do we confront a threat as serious as climate change when you refuse to recognize its existence? I have a couple of questions for you, Administrator Gaynor.

As I mentioned, the strategic plan removed mentions of climate change, including—and prior iterations of the strategic plan. Do you believe that climate change is real and caused by human greenhouse gas emissions?

Mr. GAYNOR. Ma'am, I am not a scientist, but what I do know is that FEMA is ready to respond to any disaster within the United States, no matter of its cause. I mean, that is what we focus on every day. That is what we try to do every day to an excellent level. I will leave it at that.

Ms. CLARKE. OK. It would be good if you consulted with scientists, since you are not one, because it is becoming evident. What we can do now is prepare in advance for hurricane season. Some of the work that we are talking about today are things that the—that FEMA should be working on as we speak, because hurricane season is just around the corner.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am. I want to give Congress credit for passing the DRRRA back in October. I think one of the things we can make a major difference is in predisaster mitigation. We are trying to reduce the risk before any disaster. I think that is really our goal as FEMA and the emergency management profession.

Ms. CLARKE. So we both agree that, inevitably, there is going to be disaster.

Mr. GAYNOR. There is going to be disasters, yes, ma'am.

Ms. CLARKE. Absolutely.

So after Maria hit Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, President Trump tweeted that the Dems want to give them more, taking dollars away from our farmers and so many others. Apparently, he forgot that Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens.

What was the response within FEMA to this? I mean, are you in any conversation with the administration? You have got work to do on the ground. To get a diversion of dollars or to have false choices, I—can't meet the needs of Americans, right?

Mr. GAYNOR. So, ma'am, we have, today, 727 open disasters dating as far back as the year 2000. All those disasters from—

Ms. CLARKE. So it is getting compounded, then. What you are saying to me is that the challenges that we face with respect to these natural disasters hitting are becoming compounded. Because I know that in Brooklyn, you know, Superstorm Sandy, people are still recovering from that. So you are seeing a compounding of disaster relief or recovery efforts.

Mr. GAYNOR. Well, I mean, I think, you know, the record is the record. I mean, disasters have happened for thousands, millions of years. They will continue to happen.

Ms. CLARKE. Yes. But we have recovered from those a thousand years ago. We are talking about modern day.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes. So, again, we are recovering and—you know, over 700 disasters today, to include Puerto Rico and other places.

You know, again, I think part of what we want to do is make sure that we invest in predisaster mitigation before it happens, because we know from all the disasters that we have gone through, that we will pay any amount of money postdisaster.

Ms. CLARKE. An internal FEMA report last summer discussed a number of the shortcomings of the Maria response efforts, including the lack of supplies on Puerto Rico before the storm, unqualified staff, and challenges with delivering emergency supplies. But can we feel confident that these same problems would not occur if another storm were to hit the island this summer?

Mr. GAYNOR. If I can just pick on the commodities part of your question. Today, we have 6 more—6 times more commodities on Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands than we did pre-landfall of Irma and Maria.

Ms. CLARKE. So you feel the confident that the same problems would not reoccur if another storm were to hit this summer?

Mr. GAYNOR. I feel confident that we are as ready as we can be. We try to be more ready every day.

Ms. CLARKE. But the same problems would not occur.

Mr. GAYNOR. I believe the same problems would not occur.

Ms. CLARKE. OK.

Mr. GAYNOR. Although no two disasters are the same.

Ms. CLARKE. Well, hurricanes hitting islands, they tend to have the same outcomes.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you very much.

The Chair recognizes the gentlelady from Florida, Mrs. Demings, for 5 minutes.

Mrs. DEMINGS. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. I would love for you to say from Florida again.

My question, of course, is to Mr. Gaynor. You know, I heard you say that for a thousand years, I mean, hurricanes will hit, and, certainly, I am from Florida, and I know that. I grew up in Florida.

While maybe God controls hurricanes and when they hit, you are to control our responses to them and help people recover as quickly as they can. Let's make that a better process and a seamless process. We all need to be concerned about that. I don't think you would be in the position that you are in if you were not.

As Members of Congress, we just want answers so we can thoroughly and faithfully represent the people in our various districts. That does cross all political lines.

My question for you, Mr. Gaynor, today will focus on FEMA's cooperation with utilities following disasters. You know, I have some painful memories of Charley, Frances, Jeanne, Irma, and Michael in Florida. You know, if you don't know it, you heard, the devastation that they caused and the number of people that were impacted.

In 2018, as you have already talked about, that Congress sought to streamline FEMA's reimbursements to ensure that utilities were fairly and expeditiously compensated for power restoration. Many States, as you know, do things differently. However, many utilities in my home State of Florida still report delays due to repeated audits and consistent cost packaging methodology and other delays.

So for the record, Mr. Gaynor, could you please clarify, when are funds obligated to a pass-through entity? Are funds disbursed to a subrecipient insulated from recall without an audit?

Mr. GAYNOR. So let me just go back on a couple of comments that you made. So recovery is a FEMA—you know, we own some of that, but really is a process that takes local, State, and Federal—

Mrs. DEMINGS. How well I know. I do know that, yes.

Mr. GAYNOR [continuing]. To recover, so it is just not FEMA recovering.

Mrs. DEMINGS. Right. But everybody—FEMA certainly plays a major role in that recovery process.

Mr. GAYNOR. We do.

Mrs. DEMINGS. Is that correct?

Mr. GAYNOR. We do. We support—

Ms. CLARKE. OK. Would you please answer the question that I asked you, only because my time is extremely limited and I need to hear your answer to the question that I asked.

Mr. GAYNOR. I think I am trying to answer it.

Mrs. DEMINGS. OK. Please go ahead.

Mr. GAYNOR. In recovery, we are trying to support the local elected officials' recovery plan. So whether it is in Florida or a county in Florida or it is a State, we are supporting that recovery plan. It is not a Federal recovery plan. You are absolutely right, we have a major role in that, in funding recovery, to make sure that we all, you know, recover as quickly and as efficiently as we can.

The other part of your question about utilities. Can you just—

Mrs. DEMINGS. When are funds obligated to a pass-through entity? Are funds disbursed to a subrecipient insulated from recall without an audit?

Mr. GAYNOR. No. I think all funds are subject to audit, no matter what level and to what entity that receives them. I think that is just part of Federal statute.

So the way it works is that we don't—the Federal Government does not get in any direct relationship with anyone other than the grantee, in this case, whether it is the State or a local or a county. All the business dealings with who you hire or contractors that are doing work for you, between the contractor and the local entity that hires them.

We run a program that is based on reimbursement. So if there is an issue about a certain contractor or a certain project, that is between—we will make it simple—the State and whoever they are doing business with at the local level.

Mrs. DEMINGS. OK. Let me ask you this. What is FEMA doing to ensure that States have adequate assurance that, barring fraud or misconduct, FEMA or OIG will not recall reimbursements in the way that FEMA initially packaged or approved them?

Mr. GAYNOR. I am not—I have to go back on what our authority is on that, but I am going to say that whether it is the OIG or the GAO or another Government entity that is looking at how money was spent, I think they are going to look at whatever they want to look at to make sure that there is—

Mrs. DEMINGS. How do you believe, personally, Mr. Gaynor, based on your expertise, that we can streamline the process so—

Mr. GAYNOR. Well, I think—and the only issues—

Mrs. DEMINGS [continuing]. Those local and State government officials and entities that you have talked about can restore, bring restoration to people that are suffering? How do you think we can streamline the process?

Mr. GAYNOR. So I think we are trying to do that both in Harvey, Irma, and Maria with validate as you go. So typically, in a recovery, you know, in a traditional way, a legacy way, we would wait till the end of recovery before we start validating paperwork. That could be years in the making. So trying to go back and find a piece of paper from 5 or 6 years ago typically leads from de-obligations, a clawback of that money. That is not good business practice. We realize that.

So we have a program, validate as you go, we are using it in Florida, to make sure we just do it in quarters, right? So we are going to validate every quarter. We are going to make sure it is completely audit proof, and we are going to move on. That is how we are doing it today.

Mrs. DEMINGS. OK. So that is—I am sorry, Mr. Chairman, I am out of time.

Chairman THOMPSON. Are you satisfied?

Mrs. DEMINGS. Well, if I could just—one more, please.

That is something that we are doing. Thank you.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am.

Mrs. DEMINGS. What additional ways do you believe, based on your expertise and knowledge and experience with the process, do

you believe that we can utilize—you can utilize to streamline the process even further to make it more efficient?

Mr. GAYNOR. If we take a step back, I think recovery, no matter where it is applied, is complex. I think, again, we recognize that in our third goal of our strategic plan that we—

Mrs. DEMINGS. But jurisdiction shouldn't be bogged down because of paperwork redundancy. We ought to make the process more easier, not more complicated and difficult. Would you agree with that?

Mr. GAYNOR. So I would—again, you know, as emergency manager in a local and State, I want to make it easy on myself as possible. But I don't want to subject myself to an audit that results in a clawback where you have to go tell your mayor or your Governor that you are losing \$20 million. So there is—

Mrs. DEMINGS. I am sorry. When I was saying easier, I was actually talking about the people who are suffering from—

Chairman THOMPSON. The gentlelady's time has expired.

Mrs. DEMINGS [continuing]. Damage from a hurricane.

Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, for your endurance.

Chairman THOMPSON. The Chair recognizes the gentlelady from Texas, Ms. Jackson Lee.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

To Mr. Currie, one of the things that the GAO found was a lack of capacity with FEMA. Would you just restate that, please?

Mr. CURRIE. Sure. What 2017 showed, because of the sequential disasters, is that they lacked enough staff with the right skills and resources to cover all those disasters.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Obviously, many of us face hurricanes every season. My district was pointedly hit, devastatingly hit with Hurricane Harvey. To date, we are still recovering. You can't go through neighborhoods that are not trying to nail up and nail down and as well getting ready for hurricane season of 2019; 2018, we like to say we missed the bullet.

My question to you is, do you also think that FEMA lacks the expansive resources that is represented by now the seemingly increasing and very diverse, meaning regionally diverse, you are either in hurricanes, tornadoes, flooding, hurricanes, or tornadoes turned to flooding, do you think there is a question of resources?

Mr. CURRIE. Absolutely I think there is a question of resources. I think that—I think we are just hoping and praying that, frankly, there is not, you know, another couple catastrophics this year on top of what Mr. Gaynor said was managing 700 or more open disasters right now.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Well, first of all, thank you for your detailed work. We would do wise to follow your roadmap that you have given us.

One of the other questions I wanted to pose, and I will pose to Mr. Gaynor, but I have always found when I am on two phones in the command center, the dichotomy between the State, the way they have it, having to ask the Federal Government and FEMA to come or to do something, local officials completely baffled. I remember getting a call from a mayor who was not even in my jurisdiction who was fighting with the State because he wanted to use barges because his whole public housing has gone under water. He

couldn't get permission from the State that then was trying to deal with FEMA.

So do you think—I think the question on GAO, the streamlining, the sort-of allowing the jump start maybe of a local official being able to trigger what is needed and the affirmation of the State, streamlining it where people are on the ground suffering, drowning, if you will, don't have any housing, and you have to wait through this bureaucracy in the middle of an emergency.

Do you think we need to do better than that?

Mr. CURRIE. I totally understand the scenario you are talking about, and I can see where that would be a challenge.

I have to say, to FEMA's credit, when you look at their preparedness and response areas, they are engrained with the State and the local communities, and they are in lock step with them. I mean, I travel around. I go to these disaster locations numerous times. I hear it from State and locals that they are there when they need them, and they usually get what they need.

I think what you are talking about, though, would require a change in the existing structure, which is that needs come from the lowest level and work their way up to the process. FEMA, as Mr. Gaynor said, has to react to the formal request from the State before it can actually activate the Federal resources.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. I know they were both being entrapped by that, and there are good people on the State level, but it creates an enormous problem.

Let me ask Mr. Gaynor. First of all, let me thank all of the many FEMA employees that I have worked with. Let me site Mr. Jason Nelson, who I think has been at FEMA before FEMA started, and he has been a giant in many different disasters. Many others have been stupendous. Thank you for your service.

But let me frame for you an approach that I think the community is asking for. No. 1, the idea of creating the opportunity for FEMA to pre-educate States and local governments on what to ask for. One of the problems is the slowness in getting back to you is that what you usually say—when I say you, FEMA—what do you need. So to be able to help educate them predisasters, would that be helpful?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, ma'am. We have a pretty robust training capacity within FEMA.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. But we could do more.

Mr. GAYNOR. We could always do more.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. I have quick questions, so that is a good answer that you gave.

The other thing is, that I found in Hurricane Harvey, there is a time when you come in immediately to deal with the people, you know, drowning, people in shelters. Then there is a long period of time. What happens with that is FEMA has a time when they are no longer there. People use the word FEMA, and they find a sense of comfort.

So think of this in this manner, if we were able to help you do, first, a rescue appoint, where you have people coming in, and then give you the ability to have a long-term recovery where you make an ultimate decision as to when it is appropriate to leave. That is different from what you have now. How could you work with that?

Mr. GAYNOR. So, ma'am, I think I am fortunate to have been a local emergency manager and a State emergency manager and now at the Federal level. So, I mean, I have kind of seen it from all angles.

This business of emergency management is a partnership from the lowest level, whether you are in a one-man office in the middle of South Dakota or you are in a big office like Texas Emergency Management working for Nim Kidd, it is a partnership on all levels. We rely—as the State director, I relied on my local emergency management capacity to make sure that they had capacity at the local level.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. My time is ending. I think the question that I am just trying to finish on——

Chairman THOMPSON. They have called votes.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Right.

So let me get his last question.

What I am trying to say, if we had a component where FEMA was on the ground for a longer period of time under the umbrella of recovery, could that be helpful in the idea of disasters?

Mr. GAYNOR. It could be. I hate to say no, and I don't really want to say yes, because every disaster is unique. I would be happy to work, I think, with your staff to get to like some of the specifics that you are trying to get at to maybe——

Ms. JACKSON LEE. For those of us who have been in disasters believe it would be helpful. I thank the Chairman. We are adding money in this particular initiative. But you need to be able to admit that people are looking for FEMA 6 months down the road, and you are not there.

I yield back.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you very much.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey, Mr. Payne.

Mr. PAYNE. I will be very brief, Mr. Chairman.

We don't have very much time. We have to go vote. So I will just—really just ask this one quick question.

Mr. Gaynor, in my capacity as Chairman of the Emergency Preparedness Subcommittee, you know, I have been advised that FEMA is unwilling to provide a hearing witness after receiving almost 2 months' notice for two of my subcommittee hearings. Are you aware of that?

Mr. GAYNOR. No, sir. Can you be more specific on——

Mr. PAYNE. On two occasions, I have had subcommittee hearings of the Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery Committee, which you come under that purview, and have not been able to get a witness to come from FEMA. That is a problem.

Mr. GAYNOR. Sir, this is the first I have heard of it. I will connect with your office to make sure that is rectified immediately.

Mr. PAYNE. OK. I will yield back, sir.

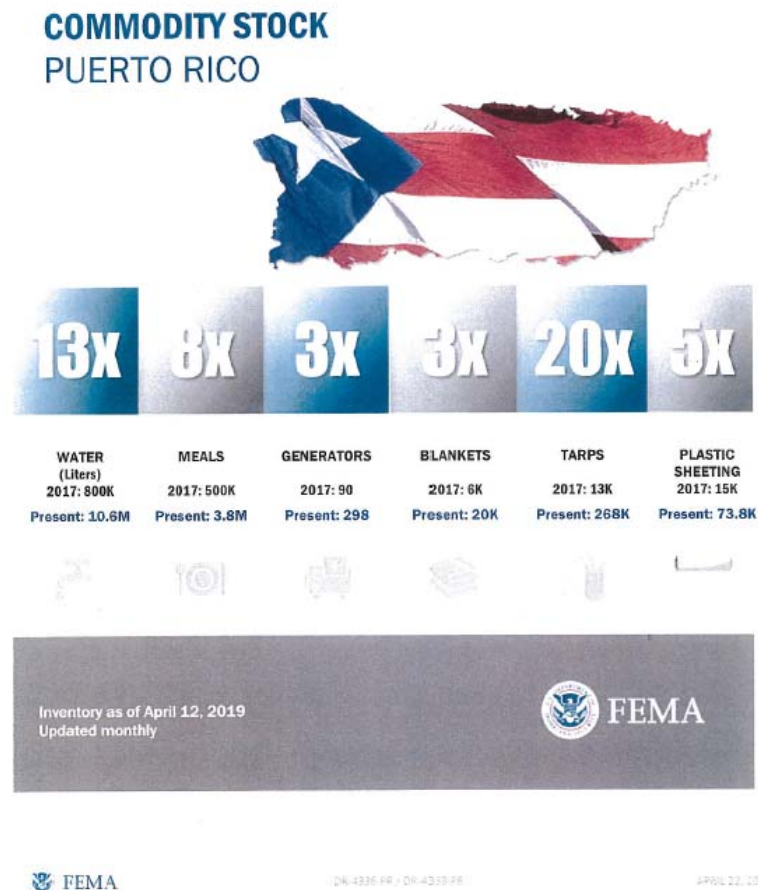
Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you very much.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Mississippi.

Mr. GUEST. Yes, sir, Mr. Chairman. At this time, I would ask unanimous consent to enter into the record a chart illustrating the various commodity stocks within Puerto Rico as provided by

FEMA. This is in response to some questioning that Miss Rice asked Acting Secretary Gaynor.

Chairman THOMPSON. Without objection.
[The information follows:]



Chairman THOMPSON. I have similar insertions into the record. A letter from Oxfam, an article on The Politics of Poverty, as well as a letter from Childcare Aware of America testimony.

Without objections.
[The information follows:]

LETTER FROM OXFAM SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY CHAIRMAN BENNIE G.
THOMPSON

June 12, 2019.

The Honorable BENNIE G. THOMPSON,
Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security, U.S. House of Representatives, Wash-
ington, DC 20515.

CHAIRMAN THOMPSON AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE: Thank you for the opportunity to submit this letter as Testimony for the Record for purposes of your upcoming hearing on "Assessing FEMA's Readiness for Future Disasters."

I. Oxfam America response in Puerto Rico

Oxfam America is non-partisan organization, part of a confederation of 20 independent charitable organizations focusing on the alleviation of global poverty, led by Oxfam International. Founded in 1942, Oxfam is a strong independent voice for effective foreign assistance around the world. Oxfam America's emergency humanitarian assistance and development work is primarily focused internationally, but in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria the situation was so dire that we quickly launched an emergency assistance program in Puerto Rico aimed at addressing critical gaps in highly vulnerable communities. We have been working on the island, initially focused on emergency response and now on recovery including the shocking realities faced by Puerto Rican families due to high levels of poverty and inequality.

During the emergency response phase, Oxfam America worked with local partners to attend to immediate needs (see attached leaflet on Oxfam America's work in Puerto Rico). As detailed in the leaflet, we distributed water filters, provided public health education and held workshops to train on low-cost methods for water treatment and rapid water testing, provided security through the distribution of solar thousands of solar lights and supported Casa Pueblo's efforts to bring wide-spread alternative energy. Also, we led a research project on the gendered impact of lack of water and WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene) on women in rural Puerto Rico, funded partners that provided legal aid to families for their claims and appeals with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and commissioned a groundbreaking report, "Women and their voices: Strategies for survival and common strength after Hurricanes Irma and Maria."

As part of our response to the emergency, it has been a priority for Oxfam to empower local actors, and that includes making sure their voices are heard. We were among the first organizations to bring the voices of Puerto Ricans directly to Capitol Hill, where we illustrated the full impacts of the storm, and advocated for swift and equitable recovery funding. We participated in various coalitions, and hosted numerous delegations in Washington, DC which featured local leaders from Puerto Rico who made their case directly to Members of Congress, Congressional staffers, and high-level FEMA and HUD officials. We are continuing that work now, determined to help Puerto Rico tackle the underlying conditions of poverty, inequality, and vulnerability that have been exposed after Hurricane Maria and find long-term solutions.

II. Oxfam America's observations and recommendations

During all these efforts, one of our main findings has been the inadequacy of the Federal Government response to the emergency and recovery process. For this reason, we are very grateful for your continued commitment to investigating the events, the adequacy of FEMA actions, and to take affirmatives steps so that this does not repeat itself in the future. In the next paragraphs we share our observations on the Federal Government response to the emergency in Puerto Rico. Thank you for considering these observations and suggestions. We look forward to our continued collaboration as we work together toward identifying effective solutions with the people of Puerto Rico.

When Hurricane Maria tore through Puerto Rico on September 20, 2017, it did more than rip off roofs and topple power lines: It destabilized every aspect of life for more than 3 million residents. As the new hurricane season began in June 1, and despite the wide-scale repairs and rebuilding, the water and power infrastructure continue to be fragile and vulnerable to even light winds, service is frequently intermittent and most people live afraid of the threat of future storms. Moreover, the Puerto Rico government reports that 30,000 houses still have temporary blue tarps as roofs, and direct accounts from our partners on the island attest to the slowness of the recovery process, especially with respect to the most vulnerable communities.

Nayda Babonis, an attorney and community leader in one of 8 hard-scrabble barrios along a central canal in San Juan, talked to us about the legacy of Hurri-

cane Maria on communities across Puerto Rico (please see attached article for the full interview). To this day, Babonis explains that people experience—and feel—insecurity in many aspects of their lives. She also tells us that, after FEMA denied more than half of all individual claims for assistance, people have been left to pick up pieces of material from the street—wood or aluminum—and try to repair their roofs or structures on their own. It is obvious, as she states, that “any big wind would just rip off those repaired pieces”.

Therefore, almost 2 years after the 2017 hurricanes, the recovery process is extremely slow, with only \$1.5 billion of the CDBG–DR money obligated, and only \$80,000 actually spent in this phase of the recovery. It is incredible to hear from our partners that even now, people are still appealing FEMA’s high number of denials based on the “ownership not verified” situation that they have worked so hard to solve. This slow recovery process, due in large part to the bottlenecks in bureaucracy and the inaction of Federal authorities, is inexcusable and is causing harm to hundreds of thousands of the most vulnerable persons on the island.

A. Backlogs and bottlenecks

In the Federal Government, concerns over misuse of Federal funds has resulted in onerous planning and disclosure requirements in Puerto Rico that are not required for other States. This effect can also be seen at a local level in Puerto Rico, where the same concerns have produced a hyper-centralized monitoring and accounting systems where decisions are made through a single chain of command, creating huge backlogs and funding bottlenecks. Clear example of this is the duplication of processes and lack of communication between FEMA and the COR3 office. Specifically, there have been reports of double reporting requirements from municipalities to FEMA, the COR3 and even to the Fiscal Oversight and Management Board (FOMB).

Also, there have been delays in reimbursement by FEMA to Puerto Rico municipalities for emergency-related work. We are hearing this is a continued problem. For example, we have heard that the municipality of Villalba has to date received about 90 percent of reimbursement for debris pick, and only about 43 percent of reimbursement for other emergency-related work. Furthermore, the centralized government system excludes communities from program design, does not take advantage of the local historical/institutional knowledge on recovery processes, local responsibilities on water management and the incorporation of local actors in order to insure effective mitigation for resilient reconstruction.

Therefore, there is an immediate need to shift focus to accountability and transparency mechanisms instead on monitoring and accounting systems. The Federal Government must require public engagement throughout the process of Federal spending through the diverse grants provided by Federal agencies and insure continuous feedback loop on whether programs are meeting community needs and objectives. This cannot be achieved with the hyper-centralization created through the creation of COR3 in Puerto Rico, and the Federal Government should take affirmative steps to require civic society engagement through the creation of an entity that would empower stakeholders, oversee process and counterbalance the drawbacks of government centralization.

The necessity to do this type of work-group was realized in the aftermath of Super Storm Sandy, when the Federal Government created the “Hurricane Sandy Rebuilding Task Force” that worked together with the offices created by New York and New Jersey for the recovery and rebuilding through a managed participatory approach.¹ Puerto Rico local actors, municipalities, non-profits, community leaders, and other important organizations have the capacity and knowledge to steer this recovery process in a more effective and agile way.

B. Lack of local participation in Federal contract spending

Another important issue affecting real recovery in Puerto Rico is the lack of local participation in Federal contract spending. At this point, 90 percent of Federal contract spending for disaster relief and recovery have been awarded to firms in the mainland. Local businesses, organizations, and municipal governments are not being able to meet reimbursement requirements, nor do they have large lines of credit accessible. These contracting requirements, therefore, impede the effective implementation of priority contract spending to local actors.

¹Simon McDonnell, Pooya Ghorbani, Courtney Wolf, Maria Jessa Cruz, David M. Burgy, Swati Desai, Daniel Berkovits, Renata Silberblatt, “A Managed-Participatory Approach to Community,” The Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government, May, 2016. HURRICANE SANDY REBUILDING STRATEGY, Stronger Communities, A Resilient Region Presented to the President of the United States, <https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/HSREBUILDINGSTRATEGY.PDF>.

FEMA requires that priority be given to local contractors and to local production, supply, or distribution chains. Nevertheless, since local businesses and organizations cannot comply with the requirements, the priority is only producing for the people and the economy of Puerto Rico a high quantity of low-paying jobs. The same thing is happening with HUD's Section 3 requirement that training and job opportunities be made available to low-income residents. As a result, Federal monies are not working to boost local economies and they are retained by companies that do not possess real local knowledge needed for effective solutions or resilient development. By not harnessing local capital (knowledge, resources, and capacities) Puerto Rico will not be able to really recover and attain the resiliency needed to face future emergencies that can happen in the island.

There can be different options and creative fixes for this dilemma. We propose that the Federal Government support and promote options like the creation of Community Development Finance Institutions (CDFIs), create trust organizations that provide lines of credit and accompaniment to local businesses and organizations, and of course revise stringent requirements as they might not be necessary in the disaster recovery context. The whole purpose of Federal spending in disaster recovery is to permit localities to rebuild homes, infrastructure and their economies in a resilient manner which can withstand future disasters. The contracts should just be based in the capacity of local businesses and organizations to do the job required, instead of requiring liquidity, while at the same time promoting capacity and development of local economic growth.

C. Holding FEMA accountable for obstructionism

It is reported by FEMA that around 60 percent of persons who applied for individual assistance in Puerto Rico were rejected, and that 75 percent of those who appealed those rejections received another denial from the agency. It is no coincidence that almost 2 years after the hurricane there are estimates that account to 30,000 homes still having blue tarps as roofs. We also receive reports from our partners of the desperation caused by the lack of resources to be able to fix destroyed roofs and walls, while the hurricane season just began.

Many of these denials by FEMA could have been avoided. A very important quantity of them were due to FEMA's refusal to recognize local landownership laws and practices. Even after advocates worked with FEMA to create a tool to help survivors overcome these barriers, FEMA has failed to notify survivors. FEMA also refused to disclose information about these survivors so that local advocates can access them.

Congress must demand that FEMA work with community groups to promptly identify and facilitate reapplications. Groups and organizations have already done this work with their limited resources, and with an effective collaboration of FEMA it might be possible to help a higher proportion of the population. Looking onwards, it is imperative to pass the Major Housing Victims of Major Disaster Act (introduced last session by Rep. Espaillat and Sen. Warren), which would codify the use of alternative affidavits of ownership and amplify the types of documents that will permit survivors to prove their claims.

Will people ever feel secure again? Mental health issues and the increase in suicide cases in Puerto Rico are a clear reflection and result of the urgency of all the situations outlined in this letter. Oxfam America will keep working with you and our partners in the ground in Puerto Rico to help their voices be heard and effective solutions to be identified and applied. We are able and ready to work hand-in-hand with the committee on executing the above-mentioned proposals. Thank you for the work you are doing and for the space of collaboration you have provided to us in order to make sure these challenges get solved and are not repeated again. U.S. institutions must do so much more to ensure that the most vulnerable receive the assistance and protection they need.

Sincerely,

ADI MARTINEZ-ROMAN,
Senior Policy Analyst—Puerto Rico, Oxfam America.

ARTICLE SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY CHAIRMAN BENNIE G. THOMPSON*

STILL REBUILDING AFTER HURRICANE MARIA, PUERTO RICANS DREAD THE START OF
A NEW HURRICANE SEASON

May 31, 2019, Posted by Mary Babic

When Hurricane Maria tore through Puerto Rico on September 20, 2017, it did more than rip off roofs and topple power lines: It destabilized every aspect of life for more than three million residents. As the new hurricane season begins on June 1, we all want to know: Where are the billions in Federal money that can help rebuild and heal the island?

When Nayda Bobonis talks about the legacy of Hurricane Maria on communities across Puerto Rico, the word “security” pops up a lot. To this day, says Bobonis (an attorney and community leader in one of eight hard-scrabble barrios along a central canal in San Juan), people experience—and feel—insecurity in many aspects of their lives. And as the hurricane season officially begins on June 1, the sense of foreboding hangs over the island like a dark cloud.

When will the lights go out? “The infrastructure is not prepared at all,” she says, of the still-fragile power grid. After Maria knocked out power in September 2017, the lights came back on very slowly across the island—in some places, it took months. “We still have blackouts all the time. Just a week ago, we had one that lasted 5 hours or so.”

And when the power goes, the water goes. And the air conditioning, refrigerator, and internet. And the lights—which, she says, creates the “perfect situation” for crime.

Will houses ever be made whole? The Governor of Puerto Rico estimates that 30,000 houses still have blue tarps for roofs. After FEMA denied more than half of all individual claims for assistance, Bobonis says, people would pick up pieces of material from the street—wood or aluminum—and try to repair their roofs or structures on their own. “Any big wind would just rip off those repaired pieces,” she notes.

Will business ever thrive again, and offer job opportunities? While the economy on the island had been struggling for some time, the hurricane dealt a deadly blow to many businesses. “So many businesses stood silent for weeks without power, eventually they couldn’t make it; they never opened again.” Now, many of the abandoned structures are open to criminal activities. Bobonis notes that Federal recovery dollars that fund jobs should put locals to work. “A lot of companies came from the mainland to do the work of fixing things. We have people who are prepared and can do the job.”

Will people ever feel secure again? Bobonis cites the impact that the disasters had on people. In her community, the canal flooded and the water in some houses was 6 feet high, and dragged in huge amounts of mud that overwhelmed and killed people. “We still have so many mental health issues,” she notes. “Suicide rates have gone up, people are struggling with anxiety.”

WAITING ON RECOVERY DOLLARS TO REBUILD

Bobonis notes that nearly 2 years after Maria, the island is still waiting on billions of dollars that have been allocated, but not delivered. “We have to do things the government hasn’t done, but we need money. It’s so important that funds come to the people who need them.”

Many experts and organizations worry that when the money does come, it won’t go to the right places. Oxfam and others are advocating on Capitol Hill in the upcoming week about this issue (among others): Solicit local voices, empower local people and communities. This is the only path to equitable recovery.

“Everything the government does, there’s the danger that it gets lost in translation,” says Bobonis. “We’re worried that the funding won’t go to the communities that need help the most. Communities know best what people need: we want the money to repair structures, and to build community centers, and to mitigate risks.”

One of the most acute threats to many communities is the remapping of flood zones—which compels the government to move people (rather than mitigate risks); and then opens that land (often on the coast) to outside developers. “So many of us have spent our lives in this community, we can’t imagine moving. Our roots are in one place, that can’t change from 1 day to another. But the government wants the easy way; we want them to help us stay, and mitigate risks.”

*The information is also available at <https://politicsofpoverty.oxfamamerica.org/2019/05/still-rebuilding-after-hurricane-maria-puerto-ricans-dread-the-start-of-a-new-hurricane-season/>.

AND WAITING, AND WAITING . . .

In fact, billions of dollars have been allocated to help Puerto Rico rebuild: over \$20 billion from HUD and the Army Corps of Engineers has been approved, and is sitting in coffers.

So why isn't it being delivered to the island?

The bottom line appears to be what we've known all along: The Trump administration considers Puerto Ricans to be second-class citizens. When the President threw rolls of paper towels at a crowd who'd just gone through the devastation of Hurricane Maria, he showed what he really thought: Puerto Ricans don't count as much as citizens of the mainland—and it's up to them to clean up their mess.

And he's been doubling down on that perspective since.

He's repeated the numbers in this tweet several times—even though it's false on many levels. First, the amount of aid committed totals \$41 billion (not \$91 billion); and so far, Puerto Rico has received only \$11 billion in emergency funds. Second, the President has proposed taking from the money committed and using it for other projects (such as the wall on the southern border). And finally, almost none of the \$21 billion in funds that have been committed through HUD has actually reached the island.

While Puerto Rico is still working hard to recover, the truth is that it could have been much worse. The communities on the island have shown extraordinary resilience, hard work, and care for each other. The people have done so much to support each other through the long months without power and water, and through the recent months waiting on the recovery money.

It's time for the government to support these communities with the money and respect they deserve.

Next week, Oxfam will be hosting a delegation of local leaders from Puerto Rico on Capitol Hill. They will bring their concerns from the island directly to agencies and Members of Congress, and will urge them to release the funds, and to empower local communities to handle them and make best use of them.

STATEMENT OF AMI GADHIA, CHIEF OF POLICY, RESEARCH, AND PROGRAMS, CHILD CARE AWARE® OF AMERICA

JUNE 12, 2019

Dear Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Rogers, and Members of the committee: Child Care Aware® of America (CCAoA) appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony on the importance of assessing the readiness of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) in future disasters, especially with regards to protecting children and reunifying them with their parents and caregivers.

Founded in 1987, CCAoA advocates for child care policies that improve the lives of children and families, that lead research that advances the child care and early learning field, that leverage technology to help families make informed decisions about child care, and that provide professional development for child care providers. CCAoA is the only National nonprofit organization that focuses exclusively on child care.

Our mission is to advance the affordability, accessibility, and quality of child care environments and to support the positive development and learning of all children in child care. This work is done in partnership with our members, which include representatives of the child care resource and referral (CCR&R) networks. There are CCR&Rs in every State in the United States.

CCR&Rs are part of a Nation-wide system with touchpoints at the local, State, and National levels. These agencies support families by helping them navigate complicated child care systems and by conducting initiatives that increase the quality, affordability, and accessibility of child care. They provide guidance—by phone, in person, and/or via the internet—tailored to meet the unique needs of each individual family. CCR&R agencies are also the primary source of data about child care and use their comprehensive databases to track and monitor trends, including the changes in cost, quality, and supply of care available in States and local communities.

In addition, CCR&Rs coordinate with other professionals involved in supporting low-income families, and we work together to help lift them out of poverty and put their children on a path to success in life. This includes supporting Federal health, nutrition and education programs that serve children from birth to 18, as well as their parents.

For years, CCAoA has been committed to ensuring the child care sector has the support it needs, including during man-made and natural disasters. Our staff recog-

nizes the critical role child care providers play in the resiliency of children, families, and communities and they remain engaged with partners to assist before, during, and after disasters strike.

The work of our emergency preparedness team includes:

Preparedness

- Empowering and training CCR&Rs and other organizations so they are able to help providers develop and implement emergency preparedness plans.

Response

- Via our website, providing and maintaining critical and relevant information providers need during a crisis.
- Assessing providers' operating status, scope of damage, and specific needs through direct outreach and surveys.
- Providing detailed maps of child care programs impacted by disasters that first responders and emergency managers can use to aid their efforts.

Recovery

- Coordinating with partners to send essential resources to providers and families (e.g., diapers, replacement of classroom furnishings, etc.).
- Developing informational webinars, articles, and other resources to assist providers and families.
- Coordinating with CCR&Rs to help families find temporary care.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the Nation learned how unprepared we were at the Federal, State, and local levels of government in addressing and responding to the needs of children. As a result, in 2007, Congress established the National Commission on Children and Disasters, which produced a comprehensive book of recommendations in 2010. These recommendations included improved mental health services, pediatric and child welfare needs, and disaster management planning, response, and reunification for child care settings.

The reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act of 2014, which passed with overwhelming bipartisan support, mandated that States and territories develop comprehensive child care development plans to address the need of children before, during, and after a major disaster or an emergency. CCAoA continues to provide guidance to CCR&Rs, State leaders, and providers on this requirement.

In addition to legislative initiatives by Congress, in 2009, FEMA established a "Children's Working Group" to partner with Federal stakeholders, pediatric experts, and non-governmental organizations to ensure that the needs of children were included in all disaster planning at the Federal level. CCAoA has been involved with this working group over the last several years, and we greatly appreciate that both Congress and the Trump administration continue to support this work.

CCAoA maintains frequent communication with the Children's Working Group and routinely partners with them in public stakeholder events, technical assistance for FEMA's children and disasters webpage, and facilitating meetings and webinars.

However, while there has been significant progress over the last decade, much work remains to safeguard child care facilities when disasters strike. In just the last few years, the Nation has seen an alarming number of devastating hurricanes, wildfires, tornadoes, and historic floods. For example, just last month, a 24-hour child care center in Jefferson City, Missouri took a direct hit from a tornado. The center sustained massive damage, including to the infant/toddler room. Of the 4 young children scheduled to be there, only one arrived. Fortunately, the child care worker and the child that were present that evening were able to shelter in place and notify and reassure the parent that her child was safe and well after the tornado had passed.

As a result of the disaster, 78 children who were enrolled with the 24-hour program were now without care as the center has been condemned.

We remain grateful for FEMA's leadership in addressing the needs of children and families, and we hope Congress will continue to provide the support the agency needs to meet this challenge.

With that in mind, Child Care Aware® of America makes the following recommendations to improve the Federal Government's work to protect children in disasters:

- *Pass the Homeland Security for Children Act (H.R. 2932).*—This bill, which was recently reintroduced last month by Congressman Donald Payne (D-NJ), would authorize FEMA to incorporate the needs of children into all preparation, mitigation, response, and recovery agencies. This includes the appointment of a technical expert who will consult with representatives outside of FEMA, including child care and early education partners.

- *Ensure FEMA Has Sustained Resources.*—this includes the fiscal year 2020 budget, as well as timely passage of disaster supplemental spending bills when needed.

In addition, we also recommend that FEMA:

- *Work with the Administration on Children and Families (ACF).*—The agency should work with ACF to support its efforts to ensure all 50 States comply with the 2014 disaster preparedness requirement. As of now, 17 States remain non-compliant.
- *Coordinate with Other Working Groups.*—Earlier this month, the Department of Education announced the establishment of a 5-person “Disaster Recovery Unit” to address the need in K–12 settings. We support and applaud the Department for launching this initiative and encourage FEMA, as well as the Department of Health and Human Services, to work closely with this group and consider including child care and early childhood settings in the new working group. CCAoA also recommends that at least one member of the 5-person “Disaster Recovery Unit” team has a background in child care/early childhood disaster preparedness issues.

When a disaster strikes, it’s critical for both the child and family to return to a normal routine as soon as possible, and that’s why child care is a priority in the aftermath and recovery needs of a community. Child care is a critical part of children’s social-emotional development from the very beginning; parents rely on safe, quality, affordable, and accessible child to go to work and provide financial support for their families. The benefits from access to quality, affordable, accessible child care are critical to the health of our communities and our economy.

In closing, CCAoA recognizes the progress made on ensuring the safety of children when a disaster strikes, but urges the committee to continue to work together to better incorporate the needs of child care facilities and providers, and the children and families they serve, in your work.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Chairman THOMPSON. One question—well, two. Mr. Currie, if we were to have a repeat of the 2017 hurricane season this year, would FEMA be prepared to respond, in your opinion, based on your report?

Mr. CURRIE. I think it would be prepared to respond. I think that we would likely still face some of the similar work force challenges and shortages that we faced in 2017.

Chairman THOMPSON. So one of my earlier questions talked about work force, and we are really concerned if we do have that repeat. I want to be on record to say that we see it as a potential problem, and we hope, Mr. Administrator, that you address that accordingly.

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir.

Chairman THOMPSON. Information. The President said, after Hurricane Maria, that there were 6 to 18 deaths.

What is your official death count for Hurricane Maria?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir. First of all, you know, one death is too many in any disaster. So, you know, one of the missions of emergency management is to protect life. We try to do that every day, and we try to do that by being proactive to make sure people understand risk.

You know, we are not the source of mortality data at FEMA, although we are users. Again, I would like to thank Congress for passing DRRA. In one of those sections, DRRA 1244, we were directed to conduct a mortality and morbidity study, and we have done that, through the National Academy of Medicine. That study is on-going. I think we look forward to the results of that so we can be better informed, better prepared for the next disaster.

Chairman THOMPSON. So what is your count? Are you saying that you don't know how many people died in Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico?

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir. Typically——

Chairman THOMPSON. Yes or no?

Mr. GAYNOR. Sir, I am just going to tell you, we don't count deaths. But typically, it is local and State county health departments that are responsible for morbidity and mortality data.

Chairman THOMPSON. Look, we are charged to try to help. If I told you that FEMA has paid for 800 burials——

Mr. GAYNOR. Yes, sir, we have.

Chairman THOMPSON. So does that mean they died based on Hurricane Maria?

Mr. GAYNOR. Typically, our program supports disaster survivors and those who have deceased with our funeral program. I am not disputing that we provided burial entitlements to almost 900 Puerto Ricans.

Chairman THOMPSON. Mr. Currie, if FEMA paid for 800 burials based on the disaster declaration for Hurricane Maria, would that be considered an official death count?

Mr. CURRIE. Well, no, sir, not—those two things wouldn't naturally correlate, because there is all sorts of—I couldn't get into the details about why they pay certain things. They also pay for gravesites that were damaged.

But Mr. Gaynor is right. The State and local government determines their official death count. In the case of Puerto Rico, they determined—they conducted a study. Recently, GW did the study, and they revised their official death count over 2,700.

So we are doing on-going work looking at both how Puerto Rico did that, but also Texas and Florida, and what changes were made so hopefully we never face this challenge in identifying this again.

Chairman THOMPSON. So we know it is at least 2,700?

Mr. CURRIE. That is Puerto Rico's official—new official death count, according to the GW study.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the Ranking Member.

Mr. GUEST. Yes, sir, Mr. Chairman. Just a point of clarification.

In response to some questions asked by Mr. Payne, outside of this hearing, has FEMA been invited to participate in other hearings before this committee, to your knowledge?

Chairman THOMPSON. You are saying to me?

Mr. GUEST. Yes, sir. Have they been invited to participate——

Chairman THOMPSON. Well, their subcommittee Chair indicated that he has offered the request for FEMA to have witnesses, so I have no reason to doubt him.

Mr. GUEST. To your knowledge, did FEMA fail to appear at those hearings?

Chairman THOMPSON. Well, the process is subcommittee Chairs invite the witnesses of their choosing.

Mr. GUEST. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman THOMPSON. Thank you.

I thank the witnesses for their valuable testimony and the Members for their questions. The Members of the committee may have

additional questions for the witnesses, and we ask that you respond expeditiously in writing to those questions.

Without objection, the committee record shall be kept open for 10 days.

Hearing no further business, the committee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:28 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

QUESTIONS FROM CHAIRMAN BENNIE G. THOMPSON FOR PETER T. GAYNOR

Question 1. The committee has heard from residents of Vieques who detailed the urgent need for reconstruction of the island's only hospital. To date, we have heard that FEMA and Puerto Rico are still struggling to come up with an agreed-upon cost estimate for the hospital. Can you provide a status update?

Answer. In May 2019 the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) verbally advised the Government of Puerto Rico's Central Office for Recovery, and Reconstruction, (COR3) and the Municipality of Vieques (subrecipient) that FEMA had preliminarily determined that the Vieques Diagnostic and Treatment Center (Centro de Diagnostico y Tratamiento [CDT]) was eligible for replacement. Following the validation of the repair and replacement cost estimates by the Independent Expert Panel (IEP),¹ FEMA formally advised COR3 and the Municipality of Vieques in a letter dated July 9, 2019 that the validated estimated repair cost estimate exceeds 50 percent of the validated estimated replacement cost of CDT. Therefore, the CDT is eligible for replacement pursuant to FEMA's "50 Percent Rule". This decision was documented in an Eligibility Determination Memorandum that was included with FEMA's July 9 letter.

Project formulation includes first identifying and agreeing upon the eligible damage description and dimensions (DDD), then developing and agreeing upon the eligible scope of work (SOW), including hazard mitigation proposals (HMPs), and finally, developing and agreeing upon the cost estimates. Until the parties (in other words, FEMA, COR3, and the Municipality) agree on the DDD, the SOW, HMPs and cost estimates cannot be developed.

FEMA provided COR3 and the Municipality with the DDD on June 27, 2019. On August 14, 2019, the Municipality of Vieques approved the DDD. If, however, the parties could not resolve their differences and reach agreement on the DDD, FEMA would issue a Determination Memo and the Municipality may submit an appeal in accordance with 44 CFR § 06.206.

FEMA is currently developing the scope of work and fixed-cost estimate for the replacement facility based upon the approved DDD. The Recipient or Subrecipient may appeal any FEMA determination related to an application for, or the provision of, assistance under the PA Program. However, large projects cost estimates that require review by the IEP must abide by the IEP findings as those findings are binding.

Question 2a. A *Politico* article from December stated that only 62 percent of FEMA staff was deemed qualified for their job. In a briefing for committee staff in May, FEMA said 61 percent of its staff was deemed qualified for their job. Has the percentage of FEMA staff deemed qualified for their job gone down in the first half of 2019?

Question 2b. How does FEMA plan to meet its training goals?

Answer. FEMA continues to successfully grow the incident management workforce that deploys to help survivors before, during, and after disasters. In the face of historic disaster requirements since 2016, FEMA's pace of hiring has increased to keep up with the demand.

Every FEMA employee meets the basic qualification standards of the position for which they were hired. In regard to the qualification rates cited for FEMA's incident management cadres, the designation of "Qualified" refers to rigorous training, experience, and field-based performance; combined to complete their assigned Position Task Book (PTB).

¹A review of cost estimates is required for projects with cost estimates of \$5 million or more; when the parties (FEMA, COR3, and the subrecipient) cannot reach agreement on the cost estimate; and when the replacement cost estimate used in calculating whether a facility is eligible for replacement exceeds \$5 million.

As of January 7, 2019, FEMA had an incident management force strength of 12,595 personnel, of which 7,826 (62 percent) have been designated under the FEMA Qualification System as “Qualified,” meaning these staff have successfully met the combination of classroom training and demonstrated disaster performance requirements to achieve this designation.

Roughly 6 months later, on July 8, 2019, FEMA had a net increase of 925 additional incident management staff, resulting in a force strength of 13,520. This growth is a result of FEMA’s on-going and aggressive efforts to find, hire, train, and keep talented staff to support survivors before, during, and after disasters. During this same period, FEMA had designated an additional 490 staff within the incident management workforce, resulting in 8,316 (61 percent) personnel with an FQS designation as “Qualified.”

FEMA has many on-going initiatives that are focused on developing the Qualified Workforce. FEMA has refined all the Position Task Books (PTBs) to reflect tasks required to be successful in the field, allowing for more accurate and efficient coaching and evaluating. FEMA has expanded its Coach and Evaluator program to improve performance-based coaching and the evaluation of specific knowledge, skills, and abilities. The agency provides cadres the opportunity to demonstrate performance through coach evaluators who can deploy and assist with employee progression, increasing classroom training opportunities, and increase job-specific training opportunities outside of disaster deployments through the Mission Rehearsal Training (MRT). MRTs are designed to ensure individual deployment readiness in order to respond to disasters in a competent and effective manner.

FEMA developed the instructor qualification program to provide consistency in the training, proficiency, and qualification of Incident Workforce Instructors who deliver formal educational programs and learning activities. This program is critical to FEMA’s ability to standardize the training of the incident workforce. Finally, FEMA is performing FQS curriculum revisions for all current FQS-required courses. These revised courses will build experiential learning opportunities into training through a broader array of training modalities.

FEMA continues to expand the availability of incident management training at both of its resident training facilities. In fiscal year 2017, 153 classes were completed for 2,851 students at FEMA’s two primary training facilities. A 56 percent increase in resident training classes were completed in fiscal year 2018 including 239 classes for 4,488 students. To date, 137 classes have been completed during fiscal year 2019 for 2,547 students with 92 classes remaining for the year and 319 classes projected for fiscal year 2020.

Question 3. FEMA’s After-Action Report on the 2017 Hurricane Season acknowledged it needed to update key documents to address natural disasters occurring outside the continental United States. When will we receive the updated Outside Continental United States Hurricane Response Plan, the Puerto Rico Earthquake and Tsunami Operations Plan, and the U.S. Virgin Islands Earthquake and Tsunami Operational Plan?

Answer. FEMA Region II is currently updating the Caribbean All-Hazards Plan, prioritizing the Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) Hurricane portions for completion by 2020, at which point the earthquake and tsunami portions of this plan will be addressed. There are currently no planning gaps; an updated all-hazards catastrophic plan was operational in 2018.

Current and upcoming outside the continental U.S. hurricane response plans include:

- Caribbean Hurricane Plans, Current and Upcoming:
 - The FEMA Region II Hurricane Response Plan was completed in July 2011
 - The FEMA Region II Hurricane Annex for Puerto Rico and USVI was completed in June 2014
 - The Joint Operational Catastrophic Incident Plan of Puerto Rico (Operational Draft) was completed in June 2018
 - The FEMA Region II Puerto Rico Hurricane Plan (Pre-Decision Draft) is currently in progress; expected completion is by 2020.
- Pacific Typhoon Plans, Current and Upcoming:
 - The FEMA Region IX Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) Plan (2018 CNMI Catastrophic Typhoon Plan) Annex to the Region 9 All-Hazards Plan was completed in February 2018
 - The FEMA Region 9 Guam Typhoon Operations Plan (OPLAN) was completed in August 2010
 - The FEMA Region 9 Guam Catastrophic Typhoon Plan Annex to the Region 9 All-Hazards Plan was completed in February 2018

- The FEMA Region 9 Hawaii Catastrophic Hurricane Annex/FEMA Region 9 Hawaii Catastrophic Annex was completed in July 2015; new planning effort expected to initiate with expected completion in 2021.

Caribbean Earthquake and Tsunami Operations Plans:

- Puerto Rico:
 - The Region II Puerto Rico Catastrophic Earthquake Annex was completed in June 2012
 - The Region II Puerto Rico Catastrophic Tsunami Annex was completed in June 2012.
- U.S. Virgin Islands:
 - The Region II USVI Earthquake Operations Plan was completed in May 2012
 - The Region II USVI Tsunami Operations Plan was completed in May 2012.

Question 4a. FEMA recently reorganized its Resilience Office, with a mission to build a culture of preparedness. Among other things, this office focuses on integrating mitigation into disaster recovery activities. Please describe the type of work has FEMA's Resilience Office completed in Puerto Rico since Hurricane Maria.

Question 4b. Does the Office plan to have an increased presence in the territory as recovery efforts progress?

Answer.

FEDERAL INSURANCE AND MITIGATION ADMINISTRATION

Mitigation

Long-term sustainability and resilience for Puerto Rico requires significant Federal intra-agency and interagency partnerships. An example of such a partnership is the prioritizing of the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) toward protecting the Federal investment in public infrastructure. FEMA's Public Assistance and Mitigation programs are working closely together to target mitigation funding under both HMGP (404) and 406 mitigation to protect critical sectors or lifelines. This close coordination is necessary to support Puerto Rico's efforts toward building long-term resilience. FEMA is also working to leverage the use of disaster resilient Building Code standards and enforcement as part of Puerto Rico's long-term recovery efforts.

Summary of Mitigation Actions in Puerto Rico:

- DR-4336-PR (Irma) and DR-4339-PR (Maria)
 - Ceiling \$3.00 billion/Fed Share Obl. \$28.18 million/Available \$2.99 billion (94 percent)
 - HMGP for Codes & Stds—2 Projects/Fed Share Obligated \$12 billion
 - Advance Assistance—5 Projects/Fed Share Obligated \$7.75 million
 - Management Costs—4 Mgmt. Cost projects/Fed Share Obligated \$1.61 million
 - Planning Related Activities—4 projects/Fed Share Obligated \$6.40 million
 - HMA Obligations for all DR's to date approximately \$28.18 million.

The NFIP's Floodplain Management staff have been continually working in support of the Puerto Rico Planning Board (NFIP State Coordinating Agency) and individual municipalities that enforce floodplain management regulations.

Specific assistance has included:

- Supporting the enforcement of the "substantial damage" requirement in local floodplain management regulations. If local officials determine that a structure in the floodplain has been substantially damaged—meaning the cost to repair the home is equal to or greater than 50 percent of its market value before the flood damage—the structure must be elevated (or relocated) to address the most current flood elevation requirements. To assist local officials in these determinations, FEMA:
 - Supported training of conducting substantial damage assessments to local hires.
 - Supported field assessment of approximately 31,000 structures island-wide.
- Supporting efforts to close the insurance gap.
 - In 2018, conducted an NFIP outreach operation that reached more than 400 insurance agents and all 78 municipalities.
 - In 2019, launched an NFIP campaign on the island conducting a live NFIP orientation that reached approximately 60 insurance agents.
 - The Policy-in-Force count in August 2017 was 5,287. Currently, the policy count is 11,315, of which approximately 2,800 are Group Flood Insurance Policies.

*Note: A Group Flood Insurance Policy (GFIP) is a policy covering all individuals named by a State as recipients under section 408 of the Stafford Act (42 U.S.C. 5174) of an Individuals and Households Program (IHP) award for flood damage as a result of major disaster declaration by the President. The amount of coverage is

equivalent to the maximum grant amount established and the term of the GFIP is for 36 months and begins 60 days after the date of the disaster declaration.

As part of the effort to reduce future expenses from floods, FEMA automatically purchases the GFIP certificates on behalf of certain disaster survivors who are required to obtain and maintain flood insurance after receiving certain Federal disaster assistance.

The GFIP ensures that eligible disaster survivors have plenty of time to obtain an individual flood insurance policy that meets their needs and complies with mandatory flood insurance purchase requirements. Most importantly, flood insurance provides survivors with a safety net to recover from future flooding.

- Supported the Commonwealth in adoption of the Advisory Base Flood Elevations (ABFEs) in April 2018. ABFEs are maps that provide a better picture of current flood risk than the existing Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs). Adopting these updated maps ensure that local officials are using the most recent data to affect a more resilient recovery.
- Providing on-going training to local officials, surveyors, and design professionals on the NFIP's floodplain management requirements.
- Assisting the State in updating the regulations for development in flood-prone areas by providing technical assistance and review of the State/local Model Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance (Regulation 13).
- Assisting the Commonwealth through personnel changes by providing technical assistance to incoming staff on the fundamental responsibilities of a State NFIP coordinating agency.
- Supporting FEMA's Public Assistance program in review of project siting, map reviews, and to ensure consistency with local floodplain management requirements.

Additionally, the Resilience organization has been engaged in building capability and capacity in Puerto Rico:

- Supported COR3's Letter of Intent (LOI) Workshops in July and provided technical assistance regarding eligibility information and program subject-matter expertise. LOI workshops are joint meetings where FEMA and Puerto Rico provide general information on the HMGP and municipalities can seek feedback on proposed risk reduction efforts for their respective communities. As LOIs are submitted to COR3, FEMA conducts initial reviews and provides initial eligibility recommendations to COR3.
- Support COR3 in identifying potential projects by leveraging existing documents and reports related to mitigation and recovery for Puerto Rico, including:
 - Local Hazard Mitigation Plans
 - Courses of Action (COAs) from the Governor's Recovery Plan: Transformation and Innovation in the Wake of Devastation
 - FEMA Mitigation Assessment Team Report: Hurricanes Irma and Maria in Puerto Rico
 - FEMA Recovery Advisories
 - 404 opportunities as identified by 406 mitigation specialists.
- Support the State Hazard Mitigation Officer (SHMO) through the HMGP application process and provide technical assistance to identify, prioritize, and develop potential projects.
- Coordinated potential support of COR3 for HMGP application reviews using State staff from NJ and/or NY.
- Working to build the capacity of the new SHMO and other COR3 staff through training, mentoring, and subject-matter expertise support.
- Provided a number of formal trainings on HMGP application development and Benefit-Cost Analysis.
- Funded Advance Assistance, Management Costs, and Planning Related Activities projects to assist with HGMP application development in PR.
- Since Hurricanes Maria and Irma, FEMA has conducted 15 training courses in Puerto Rico to increase mitigation capabilities. A total of 355 students comprised of Federal, Territorial, and local governments have attended. The courses include the BCA Entry Level training, HMA: Developing Quality Applications, and HMA: Application Review and Evaluation.

FEMA will continue to have a robust presence in Puerto Rico for the foreseeable future. In particular, this presence includes sufficient staffing to administer the Public Assistance and Hazard Mitigation Assistance (HMA) grant programs. These programs are integral to long-term recovery efforts on the island and will serve to enhance the overall resilience of the built environment.

Risk Management

FEMA began supporting the FEMA Joint Field/Recovery Office and the PRPB in March 2018 to develop, refine, and implement a comprehensive outreach strategy to share information about newly-developed Advisory Base Flood Elevation (ABFE) data and products released after Hurricane Maria to help Puerto Rico build back in a more resilient way. At FEMA, our flood mapping program team developed riverine and coastal advisory flood hazard data, including long-term erosion map change products and assisted the Government of Puerto Rico with adopting that advisory data into the territory-wide floodplain management standard for all new and substantially improved construction. These ABFE maps, which were signed into law and adopted by Puerto Rico provide the best available data are being used for all new construction and substantial improvement projects on the island, and for projects using Federal funds.

- *Puerto Rico Building Code support.*—FEMA provided facilitation and subject-matter expertise in support of the Commonwealth's effort to update its building code and incorporate recommended hazard-resistant amendments. The updated building code for Puerto Rico has been developed by the Commonwealth (OGPE) and reviewed by the PR College of Engineers, PR AIA Chapter, other construction industry professionals and the public; Final updated PR Building Code is expected to be approved within the next few weeks and it is already in effect for Federally-funded projects; Commonwealth's building code will be based on the 2018 I Codes and include some enhancements including more robust requirements for corrosion and will include wind speed maps that take into account the steep topography of the island.

FEMA has supported the Commonwealth's Building Code adoption and enforcement efforts through direct training, technical assistance, and contractual support. Also, FEMA Mitigation approved a \$79 million building code enforcement capability and capacity-building project for the Commonwealth. This project will result in more uniform building code enforcement throughout the Commonwealth and build long-term code enforcement capability. 20+ building science courses have been delivered across Puerto Rico and 15+ building science stakeholder presentations given. Approximately 1,000 individuals have been trained to date including engineers, architects, Commonwealth officials, recovery personnel, and the public. Courses delivered include Fundamentals of Building Science, Coastal Construction, Substantial Damage Estimating, Hazard Resistant Provisions of the I Codes, Fundamentals of Wind Retrofits, Using the New Microzoning Wind Maps. FEMA Building Science training and SME support is continuing.

- *Prescriptive Designs.*—FEMA and Commonwealth are encouraging permitted development by simplifying process and reducing costs for the public by developing residential design details that comply with the hazard provisions of the latest building codes and standards through details for 3 common PR residential dwelling configurations. The plans are scheduled to be completed in December 2019 and will be available from the Commonwealth-permitting department.

Other Building Science Support in PR.—FEMA is developing a Best Available Refuge Area (BARA) Guidance and Job Aids for PR (completion this summer) which the Commonwealth will use to assess existing schools for BARAs. Field visits are on-going to test the guidance and coordinate with stakeholders. FEMA is also developing Guidelines for Wind Vulnerability Assessments of Critical Facilities (completion this summer), this guidance is being developed to be applicable in Puerto Rico and Nation-wide.

- FEMA engages with a wide range of stakeholders across the island, primarily via workshops and public meetings. The bilingual, collaborative outreach effort was implemented to communicate new and updated flood hazard data to diverse audiences across the island. Target audiences and stakeholders included municipal and Commonwealth/State government agencies, as well as engineers, builders, surveyors, planners, emergency managers, realtors, property owners, and residents of the Commonwealth's 78 municipalities. The Puerto Rico-based outreach team is scheduled to continue to provide on-site bilingual support to the PRPB until January 2019. A significant portion of the outreach was conducted through more than 30 in-person workshops and stakeholder meetings throughout the island, with audiences ranging from 3 to 200 people per session, supplemented with web-based resources, and e-mail and telephone support. These outreach efforts fostered and strengthened relationships among Federal, State, and local stakeholders; relationships which are a critical component of future mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery efforts. The team has provided translation support related to ABFE outreach and Building Code Committee activities and is also supporting out-

reach related to communicating Substantial Damage Estimate (SDE) information.

- FEMA National Dam Safety Program deployed to 4339DR-PR to accompany the Geotechnical Extreme Events Reconnaissance Association (GEER) team from 10/29–11/4 to complete a reconnaissance on impacted dams and other infrastructure from Hurricane Maria. The GEER team provided the results of their findings in a report that can be found at http://www.geerassociation.org/index.php/component/geer_reports/?view=geerreports&layout=build&id=84.

Federal Insurance

Our primary objectives were to:

- Reach insurance agents and residents who are vulnerable to flooding
- Create awareness around the NFIP and contents-only coverage
- Deliver a paid media and outreach campaign from March to May 2019.

We engaged residents in a variety of ways and enlisted the technical support from staff in Region II:

- Participated in 46 speakers bureau events, attended 85 community outreach events, engaged with municipalities and had face-to-face meetings with Government officials.
- Placed radio ads on 4 stations across the island leading to more than 8 million potential listeners.
- Placed digital billboards in 15 high-traffic outdoor locations. We delivered a postcard to more than 40,000 residents who will be impacted by the pending map update.
- Utilized a Spanish-language spokesperson to disseminate an Audio News Release to 5 radio stations, reaching more than 8,000 potential listeners.
- Hosted 2 webinars for agents and held 2 in-person agent training workshops. More than 50 participants attended both the webinars and in-person trainings.

Based on informal polling during that time period, we know more than 100 policies were written and we logged more than 83 total page visits to the English and Spanish consumer landing pages at our new website launched specifically for the campaign, *Floodsmart.gov/Puerto Rico*.

OFFICE ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

FEMA's Office of Environmental Planning and Historic Preservation (OEHP) has been actively engaged in supporting FEMA Region II resourcing and environmental compliance strategy for Puerto Rico and USVI. The OEHP's Heritage Emergency National Task Force collaborated with the Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative and 42 other partner agencies to provide Heritage Emergency and Response Training to over 50 cultural institution stewards throughout Puerto Rico as well as train-the-trainer disaster planning workshops to enable local cultural leaders to provide further preparedness to other cultural institutions.

OEHP efforts included deploying more than 100 Headquarters staff and EHP cadre staff to support Unified Federal Review activities, Heritage Emergency Task Force efforts, and Environmental Advisory, Project Formulation, and Compliance Review mission essential tasks. OEHP also provided staff to lead the Natural and Cultural Resources Recovery support Sector in Puerto Rico. OEHP leadership director and deputy director from HQ have been actively engaged and deployed in supporting the mentoring and coaching strategy for local hires, in developing the environmental compliance review strategy and in integrating EHP compliance into resilient recovery.

FEMA Resilience is working closely with Region II to coordinate Resilience functions within the Caribbean Area Division office and the on-going recovery operation in Puerto Rico. Mitigation and preparedness are both integrated into recovery planning through the Region II office.

Question 5. At a May 9 joint subcommittee hearing, FEMA's associate administrator for mission support, Brian Kamoie, indicated that to maintain consistency in transparency practices, the Department had plans to revisit its National Interest Action (NIA) code-closing procedures. Could you please update the committee on the status of the 2017 hurricane season NIA Codes?

Answer. Currently, only the Maria NIA Code is active until September 15, 2019. The extension was granted on June 14, 2019.

The National Interest Action (NIA) codes are managed by the U.S. General Service Administration (GSA) and extending an NIA value end date is appropriate when two or more agencies have a current or anticipated need for tracking a significant number of contract actions and do not have a reasonable alternate method of identifying and internally tracking those emergency acquisitions. In 2017, DHS deter-

mined that there were no facts to support an NIA extension for Harvey and Irma as NIA codes are intended to track the immediate disaster response and recovery contract actions rather than long-term rebuilding/reconstruction.

Other key notes:

GSA established criteria for “end-dating” NIAs includes:

- a. Agencies have permitted procurement thresholds to return to their pre-disaster levels.
- b. The related National mobilization or military operation has ended.
- c. Remaining or predicted contracting activity applicable to the NIA has become routine and, by applying sound judgment and management expertise, it is prudent to no longer track contract actions using a system-wide NIA value.
- d. The number of applicable contract actions is so small that contracting activities have adequate alternate methods other than a system-wide NIA value to identify those procurements.

Question 6. In March, the Department of Homeland Security Office of the Inspector General released findings that FEMA had unnecessarily provided a contractor with personally identifiable information and sensitive personally identifiable information for 2.3 million disaster survivors. On June 11, FEMA advised committee staff that, FEMA still had not notified the 2.3 million disaster survivors that their information was involved in a privacy incident, but that FEMA was planning to offer remedial measures. Would you please explain exactly what the remedial measures are and when they will be executed?

Answer. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) deployed a joint assessment team (JAT) to the contractor’s corporate and data center locations on two occasions, from December 7–21, 2018; and from February 12–23, 2019. They conducted several assessments on the contractor’s network and servers to review policy and compliance measures, validate the sanitization and removal of overshared survivor personally identifying information (PII), and conducted an in-depth technology security review. The JAT did not observe any evidence of compromise of survivor data based on observations and data which included 30 days of logs and a 10-day on-site assessment and the review of collected artifacts. The JAT did identify 11 vulnerabilities that conveyed moderate risk to survivor data, but FEMA continues to work with the contractor to remediate these issues and ensure that FEMA data is protected.

To prevent future incidents like this one, FEMA is currently conducting an Information Sharing Assessment Initiative to review and address any potential vulnerabilities in current data-sharing processes. We also modified the contract with the vendor to include appropriate HSAR clauses to ensure that the contractor is held to appropriate DHS privacy and security requirements. FEMA requires all contractor staff and Federal employees who handle or access FEMA information to complete DHS privacy awareness training. The contractor confirmed completion of this training on March 11, 2019. FEMA contracts with the vendor include NIST SP 800–171 compliance and enforce the use of the Homeland Security Acquisition Manual Appendix G (Checklist for Sensitive Information).

We will notify affected survivors of this incident via U.S. Mail, and provide general information on its public webpage. The individual notifications will outline steps individuals may take as a best practice to ensure their PII is safeguarded. FEMA will also be offering credit monitoring services to those impacted, as detailed in the notification correspondence.

Question 7a. FEMA’s information technology (IT) system has been criticized for being highly complex and consisting of many disparate parts and labor-intensive manual processes. In consideration of the lack of ease associated with FEMA’s IT system, FEMA has attempted to streamline it grants facilitation through the Grants Management Modernization (GMM) program. According to a recent GAO report (GAO–19–164), FEMA’s GMM program schedule and cost estimates are “unrealistic” and “unreliable.” Do you believe FEMA is on schedule with its 2020 implementation time frame? If no, has FEMA updated the GMM schedule and when is full implementation expected?

Question 7b. According to the same GAO report (GAO–19–164), FEMA’s initial cost estimate for GMM, \$251 million, no longer reflects the current approach for the program. Has FEMA revised this cost estimate? If yes, what is the current cost estimate to fully implement GMM?

Answer. The Grants Management Modernization (GMM) Program was recently aligned under the FEMA Grant Programs Directorate (GPD) in May 2019. Under new program leadership, the first priority was to review the current development and delivery schedule to validate its implementation timeline. GMM is currently doing that analysis and evaluation of its development velocity and release process to inform a better time frame for Full Operating Capability (FOC). GMM anticipates

the analysis to be finalized by October 2019 and will have more insight to FOC shortly after. A thorough re-baseline of GMM's life-cycle cost estimate was approved by the Department in March 2019. The new updated life-cycle cost to fully implement GMM is \$390 million.

Question 8a. In April, the committee was advised that FEMA has deployed staff to assist with the situation on the Southern Border. How many staff is FEMA currently utilizing to assist other DHS components on the Southern Border?

Does this represent a peak, ramp up, or ramp down in terms of the staffing numbers?

Question 8b. Please break down the numbers by how many are from FEMA headquarters, FEMA regions, and temporary workers.

Answer. FEMA currently has 7 volunteers deployed (as of July 10, 2019). At the peak, we had 11 volunteers in early June. The level of deployed volunteers has been relatively constant.

- *Volunteers from Headquarters.*—7.
- *Volunteers from Regions.*—0.
- *Volunteers Who are Temporary Workers.*—3.

QUESTIONS FROM HONORABLE JAMES R. LANGEVIN FOR PETER T. GAYNOR

Question 1a. The National Council on Disability recently released a report entitled “Preserving Our Freedom: Ending Institutionalization of People with Disabilities During and After Disasters.” One of the key findings in the report states: “People with disabilities do not have equal access to emergency and disaster-related programs and services, leading to deterioration of health and safety, and loss of independence. This occurs despite the fact that Federal funds are required to be spent in compliance with the equal access requirements of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. § 701 et seq and the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990 as amended, 42 USC § 12102.”

What steps is FEMA taking to ensure that in the future people with disabilities have equal access to emergency and disaster-related programs? What steps will FEMA take to ensure Federal disaster funds are spent in a way that encourages independence for people with disabilities?

Specifically:

What audit mechanisms does FEMA currently have in place to ensure grantees of Federal disaster funds comply with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and/or the Americans with Disabilities Act?

Question 1b. What materials related to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, American with Disabilities Act, or other Federal disability policy are provided to auditors? Please provide a copy of any such guidance.

Question 1c. Is the agency aware of any instances where Federal funds were spent in violation of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act, or other Federal disability policy?

Answer. FEMA has civil rights compliance regulations which implement Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and apply to civil rights investigations and compliance reviews in connection with Federally-assisted activities and compliance with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973). Specifically, 44 Code of Federal Regulations Part 7, provides that FEMA “shall from time to time review the practices of recipients to determine whether they are complying with this regulation.” 44 CFR § 7.11. Similarly, FEMA has the authority to investigate civil rights complaints related to violations of the Rehabilitation Act in Federally-assisted activities. FEMA is building capacity to conduct compliance reviews of recipients of FEMA funds, as appropriate, with greater frequency.

All recipients of FEMA assistance sign assurances that require they comply with Federal civil rights laws and regulations. Guidance on how members of the public can file a civil rights complaint and how the complaint investigation process works is now provided through FEMA's Civil Rights Notice and press releases during disaster operations. Recipients are also required to complete a Civil Rights Evaluation Tool designed to further notify them of their civil rights requirements and seek relevant information to demonstrate their understanding of this commitment.

I am not aware of an instance where Federal funds were spent in violation of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, within the limited context of this request. However, an investigation by the Department of Homeland Security, Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL) found that FEMA violated Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) when it failed to provide a reasonable accommodation for a disaster survivor with a disability to have a third-party present during a post-disaster home inspection. FEMA had previously denied the survivor's application for \$500 in personal property assistance. As a remedy for its violation of Section 504,

CRCL ordered FEMA to approve the applicant's \$500 request. Additionally, FEMA is aware of allegations made in media reports that State and local recipients of Federal funds may have failed to adequately accommodate persons with disabilities. Where such reports include enough specific information, investigations are conducted. Such reports are routinely reviewed by FEMA's Office of Equal Rights, and DHS CRCL. The U.S. Department of Justice has coordinating authority with respect to implementation of the Rehabilitation Act across the Federal Government.

Question 2a. The U.S. Government Accountability Office recently released a report entitled "FEMA Action Needed to Better Support Individuals Who Are Older or Have Disabilities." The report found that FEMA's registration process does not provide a clear opportunity for individuals to self-identify a disability or request an accommodation in the wake of a disaster. FEMA officials acknowledged the disability-related registration questions are unclear, consistently misinterpreted, and do not solicit accommodation requests or effectively collect information on an individual's disability and related needs. GAO recommended that FEMA implement new registration-intake questions to improve the agency's ability to identify and address survivors' disability-related needs. FEMA concurred with the recommendation. What steps has FEMA taken to develop new disability-related registration intake questions?

Specifically:

What actions have been taken by FEMA's Individuals and Households Program, the Office of Disability Integration and Coordination, and/or the Office of Equal Rights to address the disability-related registration intake questions? Please provide any studies, data, or analyses related to proposed changes of the disability-related registration intake questions.

Question 2b. Have any working groups been formed internally at FEMA and/or with external partners to address the registration intake questions? If so, please provide a list of the members of the working group.

Answer. On May 2, 2019, FEMA implemented changes to Question 24 on the Registration Intake form to a question that directly asks respondents if they have a disability and provides clear examples:

Disaster-Related Losses—

Previous Question: "Did you, your co-applicant, or any dependents have help or support doing things like walking, seeing, hearing, or taking care of yourself before the disaster and have you lost that help or support because of the disaster?"

Changed to: "Do you or anyone in your household use any type of mobility or assistive device such as a wheelchair, walker, cane, hearing aid, service animal, personal care attendant, or other similar medically related devices or services that assist with disabilities or activities of daily living?"

If Applicant Selects "Yes", Then—

Previous Question: "You have checked "Yes" that you or a household member has a disability that was affected by the disaster. Please choose any of the general categories that apply."

Changed to: "You stated that you or a household member had a disability or uses a device to assist with activities of daily living or utilizes services to assist with daily living. Please choose from the following:"

This wording was developed through collaboration within FEMA. The revision was part of a routinely scheduled renewal of the registration intake script submitted to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for review and approval. The collection (1660-0002) is currently pending OMB approval.

Since this interim measure has been put in place, the number of applicants responding "Yes" to Question 24 has increased over four-fold, from an average of 3.4 percent (for IA-declared disasters between September 2018 and May 1, 2019) to an average of 14.8 percent for the last 5 IA-declared disasters (FEMA-4438-DR-OK, FEMA-4440-DR-SD, FEMA-4441-DR-AR, FEMA-4447-DR-OH, and FEMA-4451-DR-MO) declared after the change was made to the question on May 2, 2019.

The new percentages approximate the American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau) disability statistics of each State, giving confidence that the wording change has significantly improved FEMA's ability to identify and, therefore, address survivors' disability-related needs.

Additionally, we are in the process of seeking OMB approval to include a new question at the beginning of the Registration Intake process to ascertain if applicants need a reasonable accommodation to access FEMA programs.

FEMA has established a working group comprised of key internal agency stakeholders to develop an approach incorporating this reasonable accommodation question in the Registration Intake.

Question 3a. FEMA began implementing a new approach to disability integration in June 2018. What successes and challenges has the agency encountered when im-

plementing the new approach? How is FEMA measuring success of the new approach?

Specifically:

Has the agency established and disseminated a set of objectives for FEMA's new disability integration approach? Why or why not? If so, please provide copies of the objectives and the list of employees who received copies.

Answer. The FEMA Office of Disability Integration and Coordination (ODIC) has engaged with the FEMA Continuous Improvement Program to develop performance metrics and evaluate implementation of the agency's approach to disability integration.

As part of this effort, FEMA conducted a survey of key stakeholders within the agency that included the Disability Integration cadre, the Field Leadership cadre, and other key staff to evaluate the agency's implementation of disability integration's strategy. A total of 104 responses were collected with feedback regarding improvements to the program such as cross-training within ODIC and other cadres (such as Public Assistance and Individual Assistance), stronger demographic data, whole-community awareness of ODIC and FEMA's programs, and requests for training and job aids.

FEMA then held several workshops to review the findings of the survey and to outline an action plan to address implementation challenges identified. The results of the survey are included as Attachment A*. The action plan will be completed by August 2, 2019.

Expectations and performance requirements of the disability integration model have been established and have been socialized to the deployable Disability Integration Cadre. The full deployable Disability Integration cadre staff and Regional Disability Integration Specialists have received these expectations in writing and through an all-hands meeting held in June 2019. In addition, ODIC has communicated pending changes to the Disability Integration cadre's position objectives, position descriptions, position task books, and the roles and responsibilities of the Disability Integration Advisor and Disability Integration Specialist titles. Mission Rehearsal Training (MRT) has been created to disseminate to all Disability Integration cadre staff and Regional Disability Integration Specialists to train and gain feedback on the model. Position task books have been updated and will be re-issued during the MRT to efficiently set performance standards and expectations to all staff within ODIC. The presentation used at the all-hands meeting is included as Attachment B.*

Question 3b. Has FEMA heard concerns from the disability community, including any nonprofit or grassroots organizations focused on people with disabilities, on its new approach? What were the concerns? Did FEMA change its course of action based on the concerns? Why or why not?

Answer. FEMA has received feedback from the disability community over concerns with the deployment model and its impact directly on survivors with disabilities. The deployment model seeks to address these concerns by strengthening readiness to include survivors with disabilities. ODIC seeks an agency-wide increase in program access through deployment of Disability Integration Advisors to support, advise and empower key leaders of all program areas to implement policies and practices that are inclusive of the whole community. We collaborate with external partners including organizations that represent the interests of people with disabilities to shape the agency's approach to serving people with disabilities in all phases of emergency management. As examples of this engagement, FEMA held 2 Partner Strategy Sessions with State, local, and territorial partners as well as private-sector and NGO partners that represent the interests of people with disabilities in Fall 2018. The concerns raised in these sessions were incorporated directly into ODIC's strategic planning process to formulate its 2019–2022 Strategic Plan. The final report out from the Partner Strategy Sessions is included as Attachment C;* the Strategic Plan is included as Attachment D.* Some solutions for better collaboration with the disability partners include cross-training between FEMA and the disability communities at large, joining/forming coalitions of both NGO and individuals, and on-going communication efforts.

Question 3c. Has FEMA communicated to Regional Administrators and Regional Disability specialists a written plan for implementing its new disability integration staffing approach? Please provide copies of any draft and any finalized guidance.

Answer. FEMA initiated a working group to make recommendations to establish written procedures for how Regions should involve ODIC, clarifying the agency's approach to disability integration, and evaluating disability integration staff performance. The outcomes of this working group will be the standardization of the roles

*The information has been retained in committee files.

and responsibilities of the Regional Disability Integration Specialist (RDIS) position across the 10 Regions, recommendations for reporting standardization across the Regions and ODIC, staffing recommendations for the disability integration mission in the Regions and the development of standardized performance objectives for all disability integration specialists. Table 1 summarizes interim milestones and estimated completion dates for implementation of these recommendations.

TABLE 1

Interim Milestones	Estimated Completion Dates
1. Initiate a working group comprised of Regional and HQ staff to make recommendations to the FEMA Chief of Staff on RDIS standardization.	Completed.
2. Deliver recommendations to the FEMA Deputy Chief of Staff.	Completed.
3. Develop and socialize written procedures consistent with the recommendations to the Chief of Staff to all Regional Administrators.	December 31, 2019.

Question 3d. Has FEMA updated E/L 0197: “Integrating Access and Functional Needs into Emergency Planning”? Please provide copies of any draft and any finalized guidance.

Answer. Working in coordination with FEMA’s Emergency Management Institute (EMI), ODIC has performed a market analysis, completed an updated Uniform Training Needs Assessment (UTNA), and has begun the process of procuring a contract to redesign the training course E/L 0197—Integrating People with Disabilities into Emergency Planning. The new course will be delivered as a multi-day, instructor-led, exercise-based course that will allow State, local, Tribal, territorial, and public and private-sector partners to test their emergency operations plans in a no-fault environment and learn strategies to incorporate the needs of people with disabilities into these plans. Work on the new course will commence in August 2019. The anticipated period of performance for this work is 1 year. Table 2 summarizes interim milestones and estimated completion dates for implementation of the new course.

TABLE 2

Interim Milestones	Estimated Completion Dates
1. Work with EMI and ODIC to develop a Unified Training Needs Assessment for the revision of E/L 0197.	Completed.
2. Issue an RFQ for contractor support	Completed.
3. Select a contractor	July 2019.
4. Initiate work	August 2019.
5. Complete redesign and launch course	August 2020.

QUESTIONS FROM HONORABLE LAUREN UNDERWOOD FOR PETER T. GAYNOR

Question 1. Please explain the process by which FEMA works with the Department of Agriculture to ensure that farmers are given the appropriate assistance when their crops are affected by water damage.

Answer. As crop and business losses are not covered under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, FEMA relies on its partners in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) to provide assistance in such cases. FEMA defers to the USDA and SBA respectively to provide information on their disaster assistance programs.

Question 2. The Disaster Recovery Reform Act of 2018 directs FEMA to coordinate with State and local governments and utility companies to map out policies and best practices to prioritize restoring power to health-care facilities following disasters. Please provide an update on FEMA’s progress in complying with this law.

Answer. FEMA, led by the National Integration Center (NIC) and the National Training and Education Division (NTED), has worked with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and other partners to survey existing programs, policies and guidance across the interagency to determine what guidance and training already exists that can be leveraged in support of this provision. The NIC is final-

izing the development of the guidance that will focus heavily on a compendium of existing resources that support State, local, Tribal, and territorial partners, first responders, and utility companies.

The guidance will include existing training options for the aforementioned partners. The 2018–2019 Government shutdown delayed the development of the guidance. FEMA anticipates releasing the guidance, thus fulfilling the legal requirements of the provision, by August 2019.

Question 3a. Public health considerations are a vital part of disaster response. Floodwaters, for example, don't just go away right after a flood. Communities can remain underwater for days or weeks, causing further risks.

What resources or coordination efforts does FEMA make available to mothers and children following natural disasters, especially if the local and State agencies are unable to provide assistance?

Question 3b. Please provide additional information on the public health consequences of standing water after a flood including information on whether children are particularly vulnerable to these consequences.

Answer. Consistent with the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, (Stafford Act), when a State, territorial, or Tribal government determines an incident has exceeded their capability to respond to a disaster, the Governor or Tribal Chief Executive may request an emergency or major disaster declaration from the President through FEMA.

For FEMA to provide supplemental Federal assistance, the President must declare that an emergency or major disaster exists. The declaration will establish the areas, incident period, type of incident, types of assistance and Federal cost share that applies. The Individual Assistance Program and Policy Guide (IAPPG) consolidates summaries and overarching information for all Individual Assistance (IA) programs and activities, covering the Individuals and Households Program, Mass Care and Emergency Assistance Programs, Community Services grants and Federal awards, and the activities of the Voluntary Agency Coordination Section (which works with voluntary agencies, non-governmental partners, faith-based organizations, voluntary agencies active in disasters (VOAD), and other Federal, State, territorial, and local resources that would be assisting mothers, children, and other survivors). FEMA External Affairs also disseminates resource information for parents/guardians and does so in coordination with Federal partners and other external stakeholders.

Voluntary agencies, whose missions include serving families, mothers, children, and communities in disaster or otherwise would provide the bulk wrap-around services in partnership with local and State resources. If the State, local, Tribal, or territorial government (SLTT) is unable to provide assistance, most of this work would continue to be supported by local nonprofits and community-based organizations as they are the "safety net" to any community. While most of these organizations do not have formal contracts or agreements with SLTTs, the coordination of these voluntary efforts may occur within a Long-Term Recovery Group that FEMA Voluntary Agency Liaisons support.

Regarding public health consequences of standing water after disasters, FEMA defers to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

QUESTIONS FROM HONORABLE MICHAEL GUEST FOR PETER T. GAYNOR

Question 1a. As mentioned in the hearing last Wednesday, the State of Mississippi has had a challenging year with natural disasters. Since December 2018, Governor Bryant has issued 5 states of emergency and just recently requested the third Federal major disaster declaration. As a result of these natural disasters and persistent rainfall, the South Delta region of Mississippi has experienced significant flooding, which has been compared to the Great Flood of 1927. More than 500,000 acres in this region are flooded, and projections are forecasting the water level to reach 98 feet by the end of June. For this reason, thousands of individuals in the area are restricted from their day-to-day activities. State officials have recently noted that this situation has evolved into a public health and safety issue, citing the stagnated water, infiltration of water/sewer systems, access to transportation, and several more problems. Mississippi officials are seeking innovative solutions to address this crisis. One such proposal supported by the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) would be for FEMA to direct the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to install temporary water pumps to remove floodwaters, like previously used in recovery efforts following Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy.

What is the process for reviewing and approving the use of temporary water pumps?

Answer. The process starts when an impacted State requests and is approved for Federal assistance under a Stafford Act Major Disaster or Emergency Declaration. Following a declaration, a State may request direct Federal assistance to support their on-going response efforts, including emergency protective measures. Under this well-established process, FEMA either mobilizes its own capabilities or mission assigns other Federal agencies for capabilities to support the impacted State. Under the National Response Framework (NRF), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) is the coordinating agency for Emergency Support Function (ESF)-3. If FEMA received a request for dewatering assistance from Mississippi, it would turn to USACE as ESF-3 to identify any potential solutions USACE or ESF-3 support agencies could provide, and if any capabilities existed which could support the request, FEMA would issue a mission assignment to ESF-3 to mobilize that support.

Separately, USACE can provide certain capabilities and functions under their own authority. FEMA defers to USACE for details on their agency-specific authorities for responding to floods.

Question 1b. What would be an expected time line for such a decision?

Answer. The time lines for delivering Federal capabilities to support unwatering operations would include the requested delivery date by the requesting State, the speed at which ESF-3 could mobilize and transport the required capabilities to the impacted area, and the time required for the identified solution to be completed based on the size and scope of the mission. Ultimately, the requesting State must submit a request for Federal assistance before FEMA could issue a mission assignment to ESF-3 for support. Once the request is made and approved, FEMA and ESF-3 will work diligently to deliver the required support as quickly as possible.

Question 1c. Does FEMA have any other recommendations for effective response and recovery to addressing this crisis?

Answer. If the area is declared under the Stafford Act, FEMA recommends that the State emergency management agency work through the Federal Coordinating Officer. At that point, they can discuss potential Federal solutions available through ESF-3 that may be available to support dewatering efforts.

FEMA also recommends that State, local, Tribal, and territorial (SLTT) communities continually review and revise response and recovery plans. Additionally, using mitigation techniques, SLTT partners often reduce the effect and risk of incidents that require response and recovery efforts.

