

**United States House of Representatives
Select Committee on the Climate Crisis**

**Hearing on April 15, 2021
“Making the Case for Climate Action:
The Growing Risks and Costs of Inaction”**

Questions for the Record

**Dr. Shawn Gillen
City Manager
City of Tybee Island, Georgia**

The Honorable Garret Graves

- 1. In the hearing you noted the importance of the federal government working quickly and efficiently to support local communities’ efforts and creating “easier pathways” to resiliency. What do you think is the best model in terms of decision-making authority, funding priorities and removing obstacles; one that centralizes control at the federal level or one that empowers the local communities?**

Representative Graves,

Thank you for your question and the opportunity to follow up with the committee.

Given our experience over the past four years of improving Tybee's coastal resilience, we strongly recommend a model that empowers local communities. Local communities know best for their particular situation: strong points, weak points, priorities. We had a plan in place, but as usual, funding was an issue. In contrast when we were given a grant by the State, based on our plan, we were able to implement immediately. We were given enough money to execute quickly and successfully, negotiating seasonal issues of tourists, turtle nesting, USACE schedules, DNR schedules, and the like.

The complexities are such that any plan needs to be adapted to meet contingencies. Even with funding, we needed to deal in the moment with various regulatory schedules, permitting requirements, and, of course, storms. The closer to the immediate problem, the more effective the solution can be implemented.

Contrast this speed to implement and ability to react and adapt to changing circumstance with our experience with FEMA grants. It has been five years since Hurricane Matthew and four since Irma, and we continue to wait on FEMA funds to complete lifting homes. Several homeowners went ahead and funded their house lifting themselves. Several others continue to be at risk of the next storm. We applied for a Safe Shelter grant from FEMA in April of last year and have been told it may take another 6-12 months before we know if we get it or not.

We see a great deal of time and energy on the front-side of Federal (and State) grants, to determine who should be funded, and then a great deal of scrutiny and auditing after the fact, upon completion of a project. It seems to us funds could be awarded more quickly and effectively based on the merits of a plan,

and scrutinized after the project has completed with existing audit requirements, rather than have delays on both ends of a project.

Our experience in speaking with other coastal communities in similar situations suggests most communities have identified their weak points and prioritized their plans but need funding to execute. Getting funding to the local level quickly would be a vast improvement over the current practice. Time is truly of the essence in building Tybee's coastal resilience, with a storm season coming each year. We suffered a hurricane or tropical storm in each of the four years we have been building our resilience. We were fortunate to have been spared last year's record number of hurricanes. With every passing year that coastal communities such as Tybee cannot fund their resilience initiatives, the risk of more devastation increases.