

POLITICS ANALYSIS

'ROTTEN TO A CORE': 5-Year FEMA Veteran Reveals Woke Bias at Disaster Relief Agency

Tyler O'Neil November 15, 2024

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The Federal Emergency Management Agency is under fire after a supervisor directed staff to avoid helping Florida residents with signs supporting Donald Trump, but that incident illustrates a larger culture of woke priorities undermining FEMA's central mission, according to one current employee and one former employee who spoke with The Daily Signal on condition of anonymity.

The FEMA veterans said that, under the Biden-Harris administration, the agency prioritizes racial minorities, LGBTQ+ individuals, and climate initiatives, undermining its mission of helping Americans face disasters and leading Americans to distrust the federal

government. FEMA pushes diversity, equity, and inclusion, or DEI, at the risk of saving fewer lives, they said.

“FEMA’s rotten to a core,” said an employee who worked there for about five years and left earlier this year. “It’s overstaffed, it’s bureaucratic, [and] they don’t really help anybody.”

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“FEMA needs to help people. It doesn’t help people right now,” he said. “It’s so biased and racist [against those perceived as white].”

(Note: This article refers to both the former staffer and the current staffer using male pronouns, but this editorial decision should not be taken as revealing the sex of either person.)

The current FEMA employee, who has over a decade of service in federal agencies, said the woke bias undermines FEMA’s disaster response goals.

“I think such an approach more broadly undermines trust in government,” the employee told The Daily Signal. “While FEMA aims to help people through noble missions, such emphasis on DEI compartmentalizes people, further dividing the country and sowing distrust.”

“The current FEMA administrator made a conscious decision to sacrifice a ready and prepared nation for a divisive DEI agenda and unserious climate goals,” the staffer added, referring to Deanne Criswell, who was appointed by President Joe Biden.

FEMA did not respond to The Daily Signal’s request for comment by publication time.

The Trump Signs Scandal

A FEMA supervisor, Marn’i Washington, told workers in a message to “avoid homes advertising Trump” as they canvassed Lake Placid, Florida, to identify residents who could

qualify for federal aid after Hurricane Milton, [The Daily Wire's](#) Leif Le Mahieu reported last week. Employees of FEMA told [The Daily Wire](#) that Washington relayed this message both verbally and via a group chat.

Her directive reportedly prevented FEMA from offering post-hurricane aid to at least 20 homes displaying Trump signs or flags between late October and November.

Criswell confirmed the story and announced on X that Washington had been fired.

“More than 22,000 FEMA employees every day adhere to FEMA’s core values and are dedicated to helping people before, during and after disasters, often sacrificing time with their own families to help disaster survivors,” Criswell wrote. “Recently, a FEMA employee departed from these values to advise her survivor assistance team to not go to homes with yard signs supporting President-elect Trump. This is a clear violation of FEMA’s core values & principles to help people regardless of their political affiliation.”

The FEMA administrator called the actions “reprehensible” and pledged to “continue to do everything I can to make sure this never happens again.”

Deanne Criswell · Nov 9, 2024



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This was reprehensible. I want to be clear to all of my employees and the American people, this type of behavior and action will not be tolerated at FEMA and we will hold people accountable if they violate these standards of conduct.

1:50 PM · Nov 9, 2024



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Yet after her firing, Washington told journalist Roland Martin that FEMA's avoidance of Trump supporters is a "colossal event" that also occurred in North Carolina and South Carolina after both Hurricane Helene and Hurricane Milton.

"They all alleged that these actions were made on my own recognizance, and from my own political advances," Washington said. "However, if you look at the record, there is what we call a community trend and unfortunately, it just so happened that the political hostility that was encountered by my team—and I was on two different teams during my own deployment—they just so happened to have the Trump campaign signage. FEMA always preaches avoidance first and then de-escalation, this is not isolated. This is a colossal event of avoidance, not just in the state of Florida, but you will find avoidance in the Carolinas."

Washington also claimed that her FEMA team witnessed hostility and "verbal abuse" from

residents who had Trump signs on their property, leading to the instruction to avoid Trump supporters. She said her staff did not canvass at homes with Trump signs to avoid facing the alleged “verbal abuse” and “hostile encounters” at the behest of Chad Hershey, a FEMA supervisor above Washington who allegedly instructed them to avoid homes they felt were unsafe.

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Florida Attorney General Ashley Moody, a Republican, filed a lawsuit Wednesday [alleging that FEMA](#) engaged in discrimination against Floridians. Gov. Ron DeSantis, also a Republican, supported the lawsuit.

“It’s unacceptable for the federal government to discriminate against Floridians who voted for Trump, and especially egregious in the aftermath of a hurricane,” DeSantis said Thursday. “I’m supportive of this legal action by the Attorney General’s Office, and I have instructed state agencies to likewise take any action necessary to investigate and ensure those who engaged in this behavior are held accountable.”

‘I’ve Seen That’

The former FEMA employee told The Daily Signal that he also witnessed FEMA leaders encouraging staff to avoid whites and conservatives on the supposition that they would be hostile.

“They were told to avoid Trump, avoid any house that has a Trump sign, in a verbal

meeting,” he said. “I’ve seen that happen.”

“We were told, ‘Don’t go into any house that looks suspicious,’” the former employee recalled. “They would use words like, ‘hick,’ ‘cowboys,’ ‘rednecks.’ You can change that over to ‘Trump supporters,’ ‘MAGA.’”

Referring to Washington, the fired supervisor, the former employee said: “She’s saying, ‘I didn’t make this up on my own.’ I believe her because I’ve totally seen it.”

“I believe she did exactly what she was told to do,” he said. “I read Deanne’s statement—it’s a lie, it’s a complete lie.”

The current employee agreed regarding Criswell, FEMA’s administrator.

“The good people at FEMA deserve stronger leadership,” he said. “I believe the FEMA administrator to be premature, shortsighted, and misleading in her assessment of this incident.”

“While public responder safety is a paramount objective, responders are given the necessary latitude to determine whether unsafe conditions exist,” the FEMA employee added. “The extreme liberal ideology behind DEI that this Biden-Harris administration has prioritized, with support from the mainstream media and their sympathetic sycophants, convinced humanitarian responders that Trump signs imply a risk to their personal safety.”

“I do not believe Ms. Washington is alone and I believe we will hear more instances of how DEI has improperly influenced the delivery of lifesaving aid to Americans in need,” the staffer said.

The former FEMA employee said the agency’s leftist bias had been visible since at least Hurricane Harvey in 2017, Trump’s first year as president.

He also pointed to a July 21, 2022, email FEMA sent to staff with the subject line, “How LGBTQ+ Survivors get left out of Disaster Planning.” The email invited staff to a meeting of a resource group for LGBTQ+ employees focused on prioritizing such individuals after disasters.

FEMA's Strategic Plan

In 2020, FEMA launched a new DEI plan, the former employee recalled.

“That’s when everything went crazy,” he said. “All our goals were basically no longer about helping or anything like that. They were about DEI—it was all about equity and helping the disadvantaged/disenfranchised.”

“It had nothing to do with the actual mission of the agency,” he added.

The former employee pointed to the 2022-2026 FEMA Strategic Plan, which prioritizes “equity” and “climate resilience.”

“We must instill equity as a foundation of emergency management,” Criswell, FEMA’s administrator, wrote in the plan’s opening letter.

The plan cites a June 25, 2021, executive order from Biden prioritizing “diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in the federal workforce.”

Biden’s order defines equity as “the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment, such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.”

Critics say this emphasis on “equity” traces back to critical race theory, the idea that American society is inherently racist and discriminatory against racial minorities, LGBTQ+ individuals, women, and others, and needs to be fundamentally restructured to achieve justice.

The FEMA document states that “intentionally directing resources to communities most in need” in order to “counteract systemic disaster inequities” will not entail “that resources will be directed away from others in need of assistance.” Critics, however, say that DEI and

climate priorities undermine the agency's ability to provide disaster relief.

The current employee explained how the emphasis on diversity affects FEMA's operations.

"FEMA has prioritized DEI initiatives that play on three distinct levels: workforce management; disaster program and policy design; and disaster response," the agency employee told The Daily Signal. "The latter two are largely guided using an 'equity lens' purpose-built for FEMA using the Racial Equity Tool developed by Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE). FEMA employees consider this purpose-built 'equity lens' when starting or developing new policy or reviewing existing policy. These policies span grant programs, disaster aid programs, technical assistance, grant funding, training, and community outreach."

"FEMA implements these designs during disasters using Equity Advisors and task forces, which are carved out from the already limited disaster workforce," he added. "These advisors and [task forces] use FEMA's equity guidance to direct aid to specific groups matching categories of demographics."

The Government Alliance on Race and Equity, a project of the left-leaning nonprofit Race Forward, advises local, regional, and state governments on implementing "racial equity."

Race Forward has received over \$1 million in grants from the George Soros-founded Foundation to Promote Open Society since 2021. GARE did not respond to a request for comment about the Racial Equity Tool and the "equity lens."

The current FEMA employee said the equity and climate goals undercut the agency's effectiveness.

"It's the opportunity cost of running government programs," he said. "Limited staff and resources will inevitably hit diminishing returns if their mission suite is diluted with poorly considered directives."

"We can certainly walk while chewing gum, but having to simultaneously sip the climate Kool-Aid runs the risk of choking," the employee quipped. "And choking organizationally

during a disaster response is simply un-American.”

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