

**OVERSIGHT OF THE FEDERAL  
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY**

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**HEARING**  
BEFORE THE  
**COMMITTEE ON  
OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY**  
**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

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## **OVERSIGHT OF THE FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY**

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TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2024

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY  
*Washington, D.C.*

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:18 p.m., in room 2154, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. James Comer [Chairman of the Committee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Comer, Jordan, Gosar, Foxx, Grothman, Cloud, Palmer, Higgins, Sessions, Mace, Fallon, Donalds, Timmons, Burchett, Greene, McClain, Boebert, Fry, Luna, Langworthy, Burlison, Raskin, Norton, Lynch, Krishnamoorthi, Mfume, Ocasio-Cortez, Porter, Brown, Stansbury, Frost, Lee, Crockett, Goldman, Moskowitz, Tlaib, and Pressley.

Also present: Representatives Steube and McCormick.

Chairman COMER. This hearing of the Committee on Oversight and Accountability will come to order. I want to welcome everyone here today. Sorry we are getting late. Votes extended about 15 minutes longer than they were supposed to.

Without objection, the Chair may declare a recess at any time.

I now recognize myself for the purpose of making an opening statement.

Today marks our first hearing since the election in which President Trump won in a landslide. This summer, Ranking Member Raskin described Republicans as a “shrinking, shriveling minority party. They are a cult of personality, and there are not many people who are buying the cult and dogma anymore.” Yet, just 2 weeks ago, President Trump received historic support from Americans of all races, religions, and backgrounds. It is clear the American people are not buying what the Democrats and their allies and the media are selling anymore.

For nearly a decade, Democrats, many of whom are in this room today, have demonized the millions of Americans who support President Trump. I think of the proud Americans in my district—good neighbors, citizens, and God-fearing individuals. They are tired of being called trash, cult followers, fascist, Nazis, and many other horrific names for simply loving their country and supporting President Trump. My constituents want the cost of living to stop skyrocketing, whether it is food, gas, heating their homes. They want the border sealed to stop the flow of illegals and criminal aliens coming to our communities, and they want to end the

weaponization of government. Unfortunately, we have recently seen a disturbing example of this weaponization of government on full display.

In the wake of Hurricane Milton, at least one FEMA official engaged in political discrimination against supporters of President Trump. This official ordered employees to discriminate against vulnerable Americans affected by a hurricane when they needed assistance the most. This same employee alleged on TV that this was not an isolated event, and that FEMA essentially treats the homes of President Trump supporters as if they were homes of people with vicious dogs. This is unacceptable. Americans demand accountability.

Today's hearing provides Members of the Committee and the American people the opportunity to get answers about these troubling developments that have overshadowed FEMA's critical mission. While today's hearing will focus on FEMA, the issue at hand is part of a larger problem: the urgent need to hold the unelected, unaccountable Federal workforce accountable to the American people and the duly elected President of the United States. In his first term, President Trump faced not only open insubordination from Federal employees who refused to help implement his policies, but also subtler practices intended to thwart elements of his agenda. And we are already hearing through media reports that some Federal employees from DOD, EPA, and, of course, DOJ, are already plotting to thwart President Trump's agenda when he is sworn in as President in January. The current system does not have strong enough mechanisms to ensure accountability. The disciplinary system is run by and for civil servants to protect civil servants. President Trump has pledged to take action to bring accountability to the Federal workforce and ensure there are measures in place to appropriately deal with poor performers and those who actively resist implementing the policies of a duly elected President, and he will have strong allies in the Republican Members of this House Oversight Committee.

Democrats claim President Trump is trying to politicize the civil service, but situations like the one at FEMA validate our concerns that it is already politicized. Under the Biden-Harris administration, the civil service has not only grown in size, but also in power, and this power is evident. Just ask the people in Highlands County, Florida. They needed help, but at least one FEMA official used her power to make help harder to get. We only know this because one whistleblower was brave enough to come forward, but others knew about this and said nothing, and FEMA leadership did not take action against its supervisor until the press exposed the discrimination. More importantly, FEMA officials did not immediately end the discrimination. Since being fired, the supervisor has made multiple media appearances claiming she was following direction from above and that this practice is widespread.

So, the question is this: from FEMA's perspective, was her main offense not only saying the quiet part out loud, but that she put it in writing? Who knows how many victims of Florida were left out of rapid disaster relief response, and what about other areas of the country? How long has this gone on and where? It is not acceptable for anyone to threaten the life or safety of FEMA employees if

FEMA does not protect its people, but this does not justify writing off a huge segment of the population. I am eager to hear from the Administrator today about the status of FEMA's disaster relief efforts, as well as how we can prevent further discrimination. I want to thank you, Administrator, for being here today, and I now yield to the Ranking Member for his opening statement.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and congratulations on your victory, and thank you for your magnanimous statement at the beginning. I know you are proud of the 4 million vote majority which the President-elect seems to have now, just as we were proud of the 7 million vote majority that Joe Biden had 4 years ago. The difference, of course, is that we acknowledge the loss of our candidate in this election, and we are not involved in trying to overturn the election or the Constitution, but we accept the Constitution and we accept the victory of the President-elect.

Now, thank you for calling this hearing today. As of last month, more than 300 Americans have lost their lives to the hurricanes. Millions of people across the Southeast have had their lives uprooted, their families displaced, and their communities ravaged by Hurricanes Helene and Milton. Friends of my family were forced from their home in Asheville, North Carolina, and they came to stay with us in Maryland for several weeks following this nightmare, and we closely tracked the recovery effort, which has been unceasing and determined, even though aid was still too slow in getting into some communities.

FEMA is America's lifeline in disasters like these, coordinating rapid response and recovery efforts with state and local first responders and rescue agencies. In these hurricanes, FEMA deployed swiftly, providing survivors with temporary shelter, debris removal, and other emergency measures, including the \$750 for serious needs assistance for individuals to get items like food, water, baby formula, and medicine. FEMA's disaster work is not conducted by a unitary force of full-time Federal Government employees, but rather, a dynamic team of emergency responders and agencies drawn from across the country, which includes Federal, state, and local workers, full-time and part-time employees and private contractors. Two of my own constituents, Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service captains, Josh Kurland and Dave Hutchinson, went south with rescue teams to help communities hit by Hurricane Helene. FEMA workers from around America helped their fellow Americans get back on their feet after a disaster like this.

Now even in the heat of the Presidential election, Mr. Chairman, FEMA's response won high praise from leaders across the political spectrum. Virginia Governor Glenn Youngkin said, "I am incredibly appreciative of the rapid response and the cooperation from the team at FEMA." Florida Governor DeSantis said, "Everything we have asked for from President Biden, he has approved," and our Florida colleague, Congresswoman Luna, said, "As I am seeing, FEMA has been very helpful, and I have been in direct communication with them, and they are absolutely going to assist because President Biden has told them to do so."

So, we could be here today celebrating the workforce of 22,000 FEMA workers, but instead we are invited to focus on one so-called intermittent employee in Florida whose team encountered what she

called political hostility while canvassing door to door for FEMA in Florida. Thereupon, as I understand it, she made the judgment that her workers were unsafe, and she issued the order to her team not to go to any more houses in the neighborhood where there were Trump signs planted in the yard. This was a bad mistake, legally and constitutionally, which violated the core mission of FEMA and every Federal agency to work on behalf of all Americans. It is plainly wrong and divisive to use a Presidential campaign lawn sign as a proxy for someone's dangerousness.

The Director of FEMA, who is with us today, Ms. Criswell, properly acted immediately within 36 hours of learning of the incident because this action was an egregious departure from the norms of nonpartisanship which must govern the conduct and the work of the Federal workforce. Federal workers have a duty to serve all Americans, regardless of their political identification. FEMA's prompt and unequivocal personnel action in this case is powerful evidence that the civil service system is working not only to deliver quality public service, but also to correct employee errors and ensure that the people whose homes were skipped, as in this case, receive outreach and assistance. And I understand that there were 20 homes that were skipped and then they were immediately addressed afterwards, but I want to ask about that.

Now, none of this is to deny for a moment that in recent months, FEMA aid workers have been forced to work under a cloud of propaganda and lies concocted to erode public trust in FEMA. Because of this disinformation, many victims of hurricanes have rejected Federal assistance, and others have even harassed and threatened FEMA workers. As Republican Congressman Chuck Edwards, who represents Asheville, North Carolina, said, all the misinformation has been "not just unhelpful, but it has been harmful." I agree with my Republican colleagues and Administrator Criswell. Federal agencies must serve all Americans, and that means the Federal workforce of nonpartisan professionals hired based on competence and merit. What is true of FEMA canvassers is of course true of the rest of the government. We need government for all the people, regardless of political viewpoint.

President-elect Trump has promised to be a President for all Americans, and I hope he delivers on that, and if he falls short of it, I trust all my colleagues will hold him to it. In his first administration, President Trump all too often deliberately directed disaster aid based on the party politics of local leadership and past electoral performance, not the needs of the community and disaster survivors. In 2017, his Administration denied 99 percent of the aid that North Carolina's Democratic Governor requested as part of cleanup efforts after Hurricane Matthew. Also, in 2017 after Hurricane Maria, President Trump blocked the full release of emergency assistance to Puerto Rico that was appropriated by us in Congress due to his unfounded belief that the destruction and death toll had been inflated to make him look bad. In 2018, after California suffered the deadliest and most destructive wildfire in its history, President Trump initially refused to approve disaster aid because of the state's liberal Democratic leanings. He reportedly later changed his mind after his staff provided him data showing that



there were more Trump voters in Orange County, California than there were in the entire state of Iowa.

Now is the right time for all of us, Mr. Chairman, and I mean this, for all of us to agree that nobody in public office, no matter how high nor how low, should play partisan politics with disaster relief in the age of climate change. Thank you for convening today's hearing so we can stand together and reaffirm our commitment to the idea that government exists to serve all of our citizens and to commend the devoted Federal workers who work day in and day out to serve all of our people. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman yields back. Without objection, Representative Steube of Florida and Representative McCormick of Georgia are waived onto the Committee for the purpose of questioning the witness at today's hearing.

I am pleased now to introduce today's witness. Ms. Deanne Criswell has served as Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency since 2021. She has spent much of her career in emergency management, having previously served as Commissioner of the New York City Emergency Management Department, as well as previous positions within FEMA, serving as leader of the Agency's National Incident Management Assistant Teams and as a Federal coordinating officer. Ms. Criswell served 21 years in the Colorado Air National Guard and is the veteran of two overseas tours.

Pursuant to Committee Rule 9(g), the witness will please stand and raise her right hand.

Do you solemnly swear or affirm that the testimony you are about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you, God?

Administrator CRISWELL. I do.

Chairman COMER. Let the record show that the witness answered in the affirmative. Thank you very much. We appreciate you being here today and look very forward to your testimony.

Let me remind the witness that we have read your written statement and it will appear in the record. Please limit your oral statement to 5 minutes, but obviously you can speak whatever you need to say. We want to hear it. As a reminder, please press the button on the microphone in front of you so that is on and the Members can hear you. When you begin to speak, the light in front of you will turn green. After 4 minutes, it will turn yellow. When the red light comes on, your 5 minutes have expired, and we will ask that you try to wrap it up at that point.

I now recognize the Administrator for her opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF DEANNE CRISWELL  
ADMINISTRATOR  
FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY**

Administrator CRISWELL. Thank you. Chairman Comer, Ranking Member Raskin, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding FEMA's efforts in response to Hurricanes Helene and Milton. We value this Committee's legislative support and oversight of our Agency, and I look forward to our conversation today.

On September 26, Hurricane Helene made landfall in Florida as a powerful and a fast-moving Category 4 storm with hurricane-force winds extending 40 miles and tropical storm force winds extending 310 miles from its center. Helene then entered Georgia as a Category 2 hurricane before becoming a powerful tropical storm that continued to release historic rainfall over already saturated soils as it marched through South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia. There were also impacts in West Virginia and Kentucky. Helene's powerful winds and flood waters altered landscapes and devastated communities in many places not accustomed to experiencing such storms. The destruction caused by Helene was catastrophic.

Less than 2 weeks later, Hurricane Milton rapidly intensified into a Category 5 storm in the Gulf of Mexico. After making landfall in Florida as a Category 3, it moved across the state into the Atlantic, spurring the formation of tornadoes and leaving an overlapping trail of destruction in many communities still reeling from Hurricane Helene. Many of these same communities were still recovering from Hurricane Ian, Hurricane Idalia, and Hurricane Debbie, and our hearts have been heavy with the stories of the survivors we have encountered and talked to, people who have lost their loved ones, their homes, and their businesses. These two catastrophic storms led to the loss of over 200 lives and caused extensive damages to homes and neighborhoods across the impacted states. There was also widespread disruption of critical services across Southeastern United States, including the obstruction of transportation routes which isolated many homes and communities.

FEMA's mission statement is a simple one spelled out in seven powerful words: helping people before, during, and after disasters. And in my written testimony, I have provided a detailed account of FEMA's preparation, our pre-positioning of assets and personnel, and our coordination with other Federal agencies in support of our state, our local, and our tribal partners. I have described in detail how FEMA responded to these two storms across eight states, mobilizing the full weight of the Federal Government to help in impacted areas that were not accustomed to this kind of disaster, prioritizing search and rescue efforts, reopening roads to reconnect hard-to-reach areas, delivering essential food, water, and other supplies to residents, and restoring critical infrastructure. And I have described how FEMA is leading recovery efforts in these impacted states, doing everything we can to cut through red tape and expedite assistance to survivors.

This has been a challenging time for our workforce of over 22,000 dedicated, hardworking people, many of whom were impacted by the storms themselves and delayed their personal and family recovery to meet our mission needs and respond to the disaster. Our workforce persevered through all of these challenges that I have just described, and they also persevered through a difficult security environment generated by misinformation about FEMA's work, which was spread through social media. Our goal is to help all people obtain all of the assistance that they need and that they are eligible for under the law, and any of the assistance and any misinformation that was out there was making this much more difficult

for them to get this needed assistance. I greatly appreciate the voices and the support from Congress from both sides of the aisle during this event who attested to the work that FEMA was doing on the ground.

So, I was very concerned when I learned a FEMA employee had given instructions to a Disaster Survivor Assistance Team that were completely at odds with FEMA's mission. A critical function of these teams is to go door-to-door to meet with disaster survivors, to make them aware of FEMA programs that are available for them, and to help them register for needed assistance. This employee wrote to about 11 staff members under her supervision that they should "avoid homes advertising Trump." My senior leadership team provided me with this visual evidence that the employee had, in fact, issued these instructions and they recommended that this employee be terminated, and I concurred and directed the termination of this employee. I released a statement that day, and I will repeat what I said 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 all people accountable if they violate our standards of conduct. I do not believe that this employee's actions are indicative of any widespread cultural problems at FEMA. FEMA, however, has taken appropriate action to ensure this matter is fully investigated, and I am committed to ensuring that nothing like this ever happens again. In the meantime, we have sent a new team to the field to contact all of the homes that had been skipped over at this employee's direction, and that work has been completed.

Now, I know that this incident is on the minds of many members of this Committee and across America, and I will be happy to answer your questions on it. However, I also hope that we will be able to have a chance to discuss the great work that our workforce has been doing in response to hurricanes Helene and Milton, as well as the important challenges that lie ahead in the recovery effort.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify, Chairman. I look forward to your questions.

Chairman COMER. Thank you very much. We will now begin with questions, and the Chair recognizes first the Member on ground zero of the last hurricane, Dr. Foxx from North Carolina.

Ms. FOXX. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to associate myself with your opening statement. Also, I want to thank the thousands of Americans who responded to the destruction of Helene in the North Carolina mountains by donating everything you can imagine to people there. Many tractor trailers of goods came from all over America. This response was wonderfully overwhelming. Unfortunately, our government agencies have not matched the care and compassion of average Americans.

Ms. Criswell, I have the mission statement for FEMA here because I looked at it and saw what you have said in terms of saying that the mission statement is to help people before, during, and after disasters in every form. But I think one of the biggest problems that I recognized while being on the ground for 6 weeks minimum helping people—I was there. My area was very hard hit with the hurricane. But what I saw is constituents affected by the storm is how FEMA's representatives on the ground are telling people

what the Agency cannot do rather than what it can do. And you mentioned that you were bringing the entire weight of the Federal Government there, and I think that FEMA has fallen way short of that, and that is what I am going to talk a little bit about today.

Again, FEMA's entire mission is to assist "before, during, and after disasters." It should not be up to disaster survivors to navigate the bureaucratic labyrinth in their time of need. FEMA appears to be plagued by poor decisionmaking and a serious lack of communication. Therefore, I think FEMA is not living up to its mission statement, a telling sign of mismanagement. And I want to say that I am the kind of person who believes government of the people, by the people, and for the people, and I tolerate no discrimination of any kind. There should be an information road map available to those affected by disasters, including what they can expect from FEMA.

You started out by giving us figures about what happened and a description of what happened. We all know that. And in every meeting I have had with FEMA, either on the phone or in person, we get this litany of things that FEMA has done, how much money it has spent, but when you really get down to the nitty-gritty, you cannot get any details. What that road map should include is how much, what kind of aid they can expect to receive, a timeline for aid, information on all available assistance—the total Federal Government, as you said, which we do not get—what types of decisions will have to be made in the coming weeks, months, and years. So, does FEMA have this road map, and if so, how is it communicated to people on the ground?

Administrator CRISWELL. Congresswoman Foxx, I completely agree that our programs can be very complicated, and I have worked hard over the last 3-and-a-half years to try to minimize the bureaucracy and make it easier for people to gain access to our program.

Ms. FOXX. So, why are you unable to provide the basic information to those suffering from disasters in a timely fashion?

Administrator CRISWELL. Congresswoman, we do have information that we give out to individuals that have been impacted by communities. We have several ways that they can reach out to us, but my direction has always been to try to meet people where they are, which is why we go into the communities and talk to people. We call them back if they have registered and they have been denied.

Ms. FOXX. I was in the meeting with 20 homeowners who live really close to where I live, the other day, and again, the first 30 minutes of the FEMA presentation was all bragging about what FEMA did. It is not providing basic information. If it is not doing that, how can it claim to be committed to helping people where they are?

Administrator CRISWELL. I am happy to look at the information and the materials that were presented at your meeting and look for ways to improve them. Our goal should be to try to tell people how we can help them instead of telling them what we cannot do, and I have tried and worked to try to change that focus or that the way we approach reaching out to people and finding ways to get to yes.

Ms. FOXX. One of my colleagues recently asked FEMA where approximately 400 trailers full of supplies and aid were allegedly delivered in Western North Carolina in the days after Hurricane Helene hit. He was told that the trailers were delivered to the state emergency management headquarters, but they also could not share where the aid, estimated to be worth between \$4 million and \$10 million, was actually located. Is it correct that FEMA delivered aid to the state then simply absolved itself from ensuring the aid actually reached the people it was intended to help?

Administrator CRISWELL. This is a partnership. Our ability to respond to communities requires a deep collaboration between Federal, state, and local partners. FEMA delivers supplies at the request of the state in the amount that they have requested, and the state prioritizes, in consultation with their local jurisdictions, on where those supplies need to go.

Ms. FOXX. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will have several questions to submit for the record.

Thank you. I yield back.

Chairman COMER. Thank you. The gentlelady yields back. The Chair recognizes Mr. Frost from Florida.

Mr. FROST. Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. So, in my district, which was impacted by Hurricane Milton—I live in Orlando, Florida—I have been dealing with natural disasters and hurricanes my entire life. I have heard nothing but praise for FEMA's sense of urgency and how you all have responded in the last many storms we have had. Since Hurricane Milton, many of my constituents have opened up case work with my office to help get FEMA assistance. My team and yours have worked hand-in-hand to solve these problems, regardless of their political affiliation or their voting record. So, just thank you for your hard work, and thank you to the hard work of all of the members of FEMA and staff who are fighting to ensure that people are safe and that we can recover after these horrible disasters.

The individual responsible for the instruction that FEMA workers can avoid houses with Trump flags was fired. That is good, and thank you for handling that quite isolated situation. I do, though, however, have to call out the hypocrisy of many Members of this Committee. Madam Administrator, according to staff on President-elect Trump's former National Security Council, on at least three occasions, the President-elect hesitated to give disaster aid to areas he thought were too Democratic, like California, after the 2018 wildfires. If President Trump were to engage in partisan discrimination, how could that impact Americans, the economy, the environment, and also taxpayers in general?

Administrator CRISWELL. The severe weather events that we have been experiencing and the increase in them, they do not discriminate. They impact all people across all walks of life in every part of this country, and we have seen a continued increase in the number of those events affecting more Americans. We have to maintain our ability to be a non-partisan Agency so we can ensure that everybody impacted by these events can get the resources and the help that they need, that they deserve and that they are eligible for under the law.

Mr. FROST. According to reports, Trump only agreed to release aid when his staff pulled voting results to show him that the heavily damaged area of Orange County, California had more Trump supporters than the entire state of Iowa.

I ask unanimous consent to enter into the record a *Politico* from October 2024 titled, "Trump Refused to Give California Wildfire Aid Until Told How Many People There Voted for Himn, Ex-Aide Says."

Chairman COMER. Without objection, so ordered.

Mr. FROST. In the FEMA chapter, Project 2025, the blueprint for the Trump Administration, on the FEMA section, it said, "They need to shift the majority of preparedness and response costs to states and localities instead of the Federal Government." This would be devastating for Floridians. We know these storms are happening more often because of the climate crisis. I have heard directly from scientists and meteorologists who fly into these storms, after I flew into one with the hurricane hunters, that they are going through more of these. They are seeing the worst storms they have ever seen in their careers. These are folks who have been doing this work since the 1980's. Madam Administrator, how would this proposal impact the safety of folks like my constituents in Central Florida who are getting hit year after year with these once-in-100-year hurricanes?

Administrator CRISWELL. The ability for these communities to rebuild after these events is extremely critical. Without them being able to rebuild, but also rebuild to a level that makes them more resilient against future events, is going to really impact their ability to recover. And so, what I have seen through my time as a local emergency manager as well as serving in this role, that the biggest limitation and the reason we have Presidential declarations is when it exceeds the capacity of a jurisdiction to be able to rebuild and allow their community to recover, then it will only make it more vulnerable to future disasters.

Mr. FROST. After Hurricane Helene, President-elect Trump spread a ton of disinformation about FEMA assistance. Even like me, some of my Republican colleagues representing areas actually impacted from the storm, like Sir Edwards from North Carolina, we have had to expend significant amount of resources to fight these lies. During these hurricanes, in the days leading up, I spent a lot of time in all the EOCs that are in my district. I spent time going to the shelters and speaking with people, and I cannot tell you the amount of folks who came up to me in these shelters asking the most ridiculous questions based on what they heard from Donald Trump. And we know that in these emergencies, every second matter, every minute matters in terms of life or death. Does FEMA have the tools and partnerships it needs to fully combat the disinformation we have seen from certain politicians?

Administrator CRISWELL. We continue to see the amount of misinformation around all disasters increase month after month, and what we saw during Hurricane Helene was certainly at a scale that I had never seen before.

Mr. FROST. And how does this disinformation prevent you all or affect you all in being able to do the lifesaving work that you do and impact assistance delivery?

Administrator CRISWELL. I think the biggest impact is that it makes individuals that have perhaps lost everything concerned about whether they should come to us for assistance, and then they cannot start their recovery process if they do not enter the system to get the resources that they are eligible for.

Mr. FROST. My hope is that over the next 4 years, President Trump will not do the same things again, which puts American lives at risk. Thank you. I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The Chair now recognizes Mr. Donalds from Florida.

Mr. DONALDS. Thank you, Chairman. Administrator Criswell, it is good to see you. My district was hit by Hurricane Ian 2 years ago, so we were devastated like so many other communities were devastated like by Helene and by Hurricane Milton. My question for you actually surrounds the firing of Ms. Washington. She had given multiple interviews where she claimed that avoiding politically hostile homes is commonplace throughout FEMA. Is this a practice at FEMA?

Administrator CRISWELL. Congressman, there is nothing in any of our policies, our training, or our information sent out to our field workers to avoid any home for whatever reason, especially not because of a political affiliation. The actions of this one individual are not representative of the work that we do at FEMA.

Mr. DONALDS. Now, Administrator, I got an issue because, and I will submit the article for the record. According to a *New York Post* article, titled, "This is Not Isolated," there is a FEMA official who spoke under the condition of anonymity, who says that the Agency's practice of skipping Trump-supported houses or avoiding white or conservative-dominated disaster zones altogether is an open secret at the Agency and has been going on for years. So, Ambassador [sic], this is a statement given to the *Post* by an employee at FEMA. What is your response to that statement?

Administrator CRISWELL. We have investigated this incident, and it is still under investigation. We are working with the Inspector General to determine whether or not this is broader than this, but the evidence that I have seen so far shows that this was an isolated incident, and it has not gone beyond what this one employee did.

Mr. DONALDS. So, a follow-up question to that, has FEMA finished its investigation into this matter?

Administrator CRISWELL. No, we have not finished our investigation. We have been working with the Office of the Inspector General. It was also referred to the Office of Special Counsel for a potential violation of the Hatch Act, and I have asked the Inspector General to do a full review of this incident.

Mr. DONALDS. So, Administrator Criswell, you told me at the beginning of this questioning that there is nothing in your policies that would dictate that this is to occur, yet you have one official who was fired who said it does occur. You have another official under your purview, under the condition of anonymity, talking to the press, that it does occur, but you cannot verify to this Committee that these practices do or do not occur. Is that correct?

Administrator CRISWELL. I have been given no evidence and seen no indication that this goes beyond this one incident. If you have specific information, I would welcome that.

Mr. DONALDS. Are you prepared to turn over the communiques between your supervisors and their field representatives and upper-level management at FEMA to this Committee?

Administrator CRISWELL. We always cooperate with Congress on the information that they request, and we will continue to cooperate throughout this.

Mr. DONALDS. So, you are prepared to turn over all those communications?

Administrator CRISWELL. We are prepared to support requests for information to help support the ongoing investigation into this.

Mr. DONALDS. Chairman, I would move that it is clear that the Administrator is more than prepared to share all communications with the Oversight Committee about various communications with field volunteers, volunteer staff on the ground, supervisors at FEMA headquarters here in Washington, DC. Also, for the record, Chairman, I move that the article that I talked about, "This is Not an Isolated Incident," be submitted for the record.

Chairman COMER. Without objection, so ordered.

Mr. DONALDS. Administrator, I want to follow up with one point. It was said later in this article, "FEMA employees are trained to deal with threats and disasters," and I think it is important for the Committee to understand that when you are on the ground dealing with threats, especially in a disaster area, it is important. Administrator, do you think it is a better course of action for law enforcement to be involved when potential threats occur on the ground because, look, during Hurricane Ian, we understood that you not only had citizens who were trying to protect their homes from looters, and they are concerned, you have looters who are actively trying to get at people's property in a disaster zone. But apparently, it appears that you have employees, whether you know or not, who are trying to take matters into their own hands. So, wouldn't it be a better course of action to involve law enforcement who is on the ground in a prolific manner? And it is not just local law enforcement. I know from personal experience, it is other law enforcement agencies that are on the ground in support to neighboring communities. Would you agree with that?

Administrator CRISWELL. Congressman, we have seen an increase in the amount of harassment during the response to hurricanes Helene and Milton. We have been closely coordinating with law enforcement in all of the states that have been impacted, in particular in North Carolina where we had several reports of harassment and potential threats to our employees.

Mr. DONALDS. OK. Fair enough. What I would also let the Committee know, as somebody who had to deal with this firsthand, it is important for citizens to understand that it is very difficult to go through the FEMA protocols. We have had many amounts of citizens who applied for direct assistance, were denied, and they had to work through my office to do that. I am quite sure my colleagues who have had to deal with FEMA have dealt with this firsthand. I would really call on FEMA, whether it is this Administration or the next, that they need to clean this process up because



the No. 1 thing that hurts FEMA's reputation is the fact that so many citizens are denied when they apply, the first time they come through the FEMA portal. And if they have to go through congressional offices to get help, and trust me, me and my colleagues, we will do everything for our citizens. But if that is going to be the protocol for how citizens get help from the Emergency Management Agency, then it needs to be completely revamped. I yield.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman yields back. The Chair recognizes the Ranking Member for 5 minutes.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ms. Criswell, thank you for your testimony. Can you explain what the role of a door-to-door canvas is by FEMA during our hurricane recovery?

Administrator CRISWELL. These are, Ranking Member, our Disaster Survivor Assistance teams. These are groups of individuals that go out into communities to either see if they have registered for assistance, check on their case for them, or also identify if they have any other needs that we need to engage our nonprofit partners that might be in the area, like assistance with mucking and gutting their home, and we can relay that information back to the local emergency manager or back to the state to make sure we are meeting all of their needs.

Mr. RASKIN. And this is a situation where there may be a complete communications breakdown because of the hurricane itself, right?

Administrator CRISWELL. That is part of the reason we do this. It is because we know, and especially during these incidents, we saw limited cellular communication availability. They could not get online to register for assistance, they could not call us, and so we sent people out to go knock on their door and see if they have had that opportunity yet.

Mr. RASKIN. How many doors would you have knocked on during hurricanes Helene and Milton?

Administrator CRISWELL. Tens of thousands, I would have to get you the exact number.

Mr. RASKIN. OK. And hundreds of people would have been involved in the effort?

Administrator CRISWELL. Yes.

Mr. RASKIN. OK. So, it has been reported that there were unprecedented levels of harassment and threats leveled against FEMA workers, both the full-time workers and then intermittent part-time workers and volunteers who came along. Do you have any sense of where this harassment and where these threats were coming from? What were the things being said that would lead people to attack FEMA workers?

Administrator CRISWELL. We have seen, over my last few years in this position, but even as my time as a local emergency manager, we have seen the amount of information being spread that is just inaccurate—about FEMA programs, about FEMA policies—continue to increase. We saw a big jump during Maui. We saw an even larger increase, and again, on a scale that I have not seen, during Hurricanes Helene and Milton, primarily being spread through social media channels.

Mr. RASKIN. And have you undertaken any efforts to combat that disinformation?

Administrator CRISWELL. So, we do a number of things. We have an entire team of public affairs and external affairs experts that help us try to put positive information, correct information out. We establish a page, it is a standing practice for us to establish a rumor control page, that we have done for many years through many administrations, to put accurate information about the programs that FEMA is offering and the assistance that is available.

We also reach out to the community. For example, in North Carolina, right now, we are hiring community liaisons, people from the community that can help be a bridge between us and the people in their community to build that trust, make sure people are getting everything that they need, but also to let us know what kind of information or what kind of resources they may still need.

Mr. RASKIN. The employee who was fired by you, a day or a day and a half after you learned of what had happened, was an intermittent employee, a part-time employee who may or may not have been trained on the proper protocols of FEMA. But what do you tell your workers to do if in fact they are harassed or attacked at the doors, going door to door, offering people assistance?

Administrator CRISWELL. Again, we have people that go into communities that have just been impacted by significant weather events and meeting people on their worst day. And people are, you know, angry and they are upset because of what happened to them. And so, we often have people that feel that they may be in an unsafe situation, and so we train them to be able to remove themselves from that situation reactively. We never have done anything to teach our employees to proactively avoid an area where they feel they might be threatened.

Mr. RASKIN. OK. And just to restate the obvious, if this is correct, you have no policies or rules counseling people to engage in political party or candidate discrimination. Is that right?

Administrator CRISWELL. We have no policy, no doctrine, no rule, anything to that matter.

Mr. RASKIN. OK. And that is why you acted so swiftly to deal with that situation when it arose?

Administrator CRISWELL. I learned of this on November 7, that there was an alleged claim that an employee had done this. I directed my team to be able to look into it and provide me information. They showed me the evidence on November 9, which is when I directed the termination of the employee.

Mr. RASKIN. And I understand that FEMA itself is investigating to get all of the facts of the matter. Do you also support an investigation by the Inspector General at FEMA?

Administrator CRISWELL. I have already requested an investigation to the IG.

Mr. RASKIN. OK. Well, look, on behalf of the family that stayed with me after the hurricane hit Asheville, North Carolina, and other friends who were affected, I want to thank FEMA for doing your very best on behalf of the American people and mobilizing a strong relief effort, not perfect, none of them are, but certainly a very serious attempt to address all of the needs that arose.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman COMER. The Chair now recognizes Mrs. Luna, from Florida.

Mrs. LUNA. Administrator Criswell, nice to see you again. Up here. Sorry.

Administrator CRISWELL. Yes.

Mrs. LUNA. Yes, thanks. You came to my district when we were impacted. Before I get to some questions that I have from my constituents, I did have a question in regard to the investigations that you have into Marri Washington. So, she went on CNN, and she had stated that under the practice of avoidance and de-escalation, that was what she was using, what her supervisor was using, in order to politically discriminate. My question for you, she also had stated that her supervisor, Chad Hershey, had directed her not to help politically hostile Americans, a/k/a, anyone who, in their opinion, had Trump signs. My question for you is, were you aware of that, and has Chad Hershey been fired, or is he under investigation currently?

Administrator CRISWELL. I understand that Mr. Hershey was in her supervisory chain, but that is part of now the ongoing investigation.

Mrs. LUNA. If you find that he directed her to, and I assume that you guys will be talking with her directly, but if you find that, are you committing that he is going to be fired?

Administrator CRISWELL. I will commit that anybody who has taken actions to politically discriminate against people that were impacted by this disaster will have the appropriate disciplinary action to include termination.

Mrs. LUNA. OK. And then she also had stated on that same interview that this was not just isolated in Florida, but under that same de-escalation and avoidance guideline from your field manual, that it also happened in North Carolina and Georgia. Are you aware of this, and in your estimates, roughly how many people have been impacted? She also stated that there should be incidence reports in regard to FEMA, that we should request them, but I assume that you are looking into that, so if you can just follow up on that?

Administrator CRISWELL. Yes, we will certainly follow up on that, but again, our policies nowhere talk about proactively discriminating against areas where they feel that there might be something harassing—

Mrs. LUNA. Tracking. Sorry, I just have to move on, because we have time here. My next question is that, in regard to your investigation, Marri Washington stated that after she was terminated, that she still had access to her portals and the cases that she had filed, and because of that, she was actually able to see that FEMA was going through and deleting information in regard to the cases that she had specifically handled. Now, I understand that when people leave, sometimes things have to be terminated, but if you do have an ongoing investigation, my question is, why would you then want to delete information because then you would not be able to adequately conduct a conclusive investigation?

Administrator CRISWELL. I have no information that we have deleted anything, as stated by Ms. Washington. Even if something was deleted, it is all part of a permanent record, and we have access to it.

Mrs. LUNA. OK. Then I would advise, if you are tracking that, you should go because she is saying that she physically saw that information was deleted out within 24 hours of her firing. I have one more question, but I am going to get to some constituent questions, so please answer these quickly. Pinellas and Pinellas County, where we were hit, we had actually 13 deaths during the first hurricane, but the county has currently had only one DRC and has requested a second DRC with no success. What is FEMA's process for approving additional DRCs when they are requested?

Administrator CRISWELL. We work closely with the state director of emergency management and the county to determine the best place for those. I can follow up with your staff on specifically why we have not put a second one.

Mrs. LUNA. OK. And we are requesting additional help just because of the amount of claims that we have for that area, so we are going to be following up. Please assist with getting us that additional. The second thing is, what is the status of FEMA's Flood Mitigation Assistance Program?

Administrator CRISWELL. The NFIP program has seen a significant amount of claims as a result of Hurricanes Helene and Hurricane Milton. As you will see in the supplemental request, we are asking for debt relief for the National Flood Insurance Program so we can continue to pay on those claims. To date, I believe the number is somewhere over \$800 million that we have paid out in response to Hurricanes Helene and Milton, but we will quickly run out of funding from that fund without the debt relief, and we will have to go to the Treasury and ask for additional funding to pay those claims.

Mrs. LUNA. OK. So, if you get that funding, you guys will be able to essentially ensure that recovery and resiliency grants for all the counties impacted will be received? If you get the money?

Administrator CRISWELL. For claims against the NFIP—

Mrs. LUNA. Correct.

Administrator CRISWELL [continuing]. With the debt forgiveness, we can pay those claims.

Mrs. LUNA. OK. My last question for you is, in regards to community trends, Marri Washington had alleged that that was what was put into a system that would mitigate these interactions if they felt that it was dangerous and these communities, a lot of them were conservative and Trump supporters, that they felt that FEMA had created an environment that had stated that those people made them feel uncomfortable, and that was the reasoning for them passing over these homes, what can you tell me about community trends in regards to this allegation that she made?

Administrator CRISWELL. Our Disaster Survivor Assistance teams, part of what they do is go out into the community to understand what the impacts are and to understand what the survivor needs are. This is often called community trends, but things that we are looking at are impacts to access, roads that are out, water infrastructure, needs of the community—like, many places around South Carolina required oxygen bottles—

Mrs. LUNA. If I can just interrupt you real quick. How many people have been impacted by avoidance and de-escalation? Do you

have a number for that, just nationally, or is there a data base for that?

Administrator CRISWELL. I can tell you that for this particular incident at the direction of our employee, 20 homes were skipped.

Mrs. LUNA. OK. All right. Thank you for your time. Chairman.

Chairman COMER. The gentlelady yields back. The Chair recognize Mr. Moskowitz from Florida.

Mr. MOSKOWITZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for holding this hearing. Administrator Criswell, good to be with you. You know, as the only Member in Congress who has run a disaster response, run a disaster recovery, handed out billions of dollars of FEMA money, also a Democrat who worked in a Republican Administration and ran the recovery efforts for Hurricane Michael in deeply Republican areas of the Panhandle, I can tell you, not once did I ever think about their politics or my politics. As I toured the Panhandle in Neal Dunn's district or Matt Gaetz's district, I looked at people as Americans who were hit by a disaster, and my job was to get them every program that FEMA had, every dollar available to them. That was my job.

What happened in Florida in this instance is deeply disturbing. It is unacceptable. I know you know that. Disaster aid should never be declined based on support of any political candidate, and I am happy this rogue employee was fired. You did the right thing immediately, right? What should have happened here is, if there were members of FEMA's team that felt uncomfortable, that should have been passed up to the FCO, that should have gone to the Federal Coordinating Officer, and then that information should have gone to Director Guthrie, who is the Director of Emergency Management in the state of Florida, my former deputy, and then they could have made sure to identify those homes and gotten them the information, but that is not what happened. There was a clear breakdown here, and so you should do an investigation to make sure that something like this does not happen again.

Every emergency manager in the country during COVID, yourself included, I am sure, was worried about the politics of disaster aid changing. We saw it happening in real time, and we were really worried, you know, about how that would go into future disasters. As the world is becoming more partisan, the world is becoming more divided—you are seeing it here in the country—we were hoping that disasters, there would be a force field around FEMA, but that is not the case. I know the people at FEMA are exhausted, OK? Talent is retiring. They have a rotating door because of the burnout rate from disasters. That is not just in this Administration. I talked to the previous two Administrators during Donald Trump's Administration, and it was the same problem because of all the disasters that are happening and the burnout rate that exists. My own agency lost 200 people after COVID because they were burned out.

Every problem that my colleagues brought up—and they are right. Chairwoman Foxx is right. Anna Paulina Luna is right. All of the problems that they brought up with FEMA, those issues about programs and being denied, this is not new. This has been going on for a while. It happened in the Trump Administration, right, because here is one of the things that I am going to say, is

that no FEMA Administrator will tell you while they are FEMA Administrator, but the last two Trump Administrators will tell you, previous Administrators will tell you when they leave the job, is that Homeland has become too big. It has become too big. I got to work with Joe Lieberman. The idea of Homeland was a great idea. It is still a good idea, but never did anyone envision that the bureaucracy would become too big. FEMA cannot make the changes you want them to make. Whether it is Ms. Criswell or the next Administrator that Trump appoints, they cannot. Homeland will not let them because there are 30 people around a table, right? Trying to figure out what to do in the Agency. So, for the people at DOGE, if Vivek and Elon are listening, you need to look at Homeland. You have got problems at Secret Service. Guess where that is? Homeland.

And so, what I am saying is, is that do not look at Administrator Criswell or this FEMA Administration, or in this Biden Administration, if you think there are issues in FEMA that you want to fix. I am letting you know these issues go back decades. They are not new. They are not. And so, I do want to say one more thing because I think it is tremendously important for my colleagues across the aisle and my Democratic colleagues, it is so important that we do not allow FEMA to become politicized, and that we do not allow disaster aid to become politicized. Laser beams do not start fires in California. We cannot guide where hurricanes go. And you know what? You know who is amplifying that stuff? Foreign accounts. Other countries are amplifying that stuff on social media to divide us, to divide Democrats and Republicans. They want us fighting over disaster aid because it helps their goal. We cannot participate in that. We should not amplify that. So, Mr. Chairman, I thank you for having this hearing. We should have this hearing, but I want you to know that these issues that you are bringing up are not issues of today. These are issues of yesteryear, and so I will work with anyone across the aisle on fixing these issues within Homeland. And with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman yields back. The Chair now recognizes the Chairman of the Judiciary Committee, Mr. Jordan.

Mr. JORDAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Administrator Criswell, is Ms. Washington lying to us?

Administrator CRISWELL. Ms. Washington has—

Mr. JORDAN. She said it is common practice. You said it is reprehensible and isolated. Both statements cannot be true, so someone is not giving us the facts, and I am kind of trying to figure out who is not telling the truth.

Administrator CRISWELL. The actions that Ms. Washington took were unacceptable.

Mr. JORDAN. Well, you had another employee—now, they remain anonymous, but I think one of my colleagues pointed this out earlier—FEMA official who spoke on condition of anonymity said Ms. Washington likely received “very clear guidance from her supervisors.” Is that person lying, too?

Administrator CRISWELL. I have not received any evidence outside of the screenshot that Ms. Washington directed to her team.

Mr. JORDAN. So those two people are wrong? They are not telling the truth, too?

Administrator CRISWELL. We are currently investigating this issue and bringing in the IG.

Mr. JORDAN. But that is not what you said. You said this is isolated, reprehensible, has not happened, this is the only time, and they are saying, nope, nope, nope, it is commonplace.

Administrator CRISWELL. I am saying that FEMA's mission is to help all people, before, during, and after disaster.

Mr. JORDAN. Maybe the best evidence we have is the actual screenshot. Can you put the screenshot up on the screen?

[Photo]

Mr. JORDAN. Let us look at what the text message said. The text message said, "Implement best practices," like this is the best practices, we are going to implement them, and they talk about making sure you are going in pairs or with more than one person, avoid the Trump homes, drink your water, take your towel, coconut waters. So, stay hydrated, walk with someone else, and do not go to the Trump homes. It seems pretty common and matter of fact in the actual evidence we do have the text message itself. But you are still saying Ms. Washington and this other person are not telling the truth.

Administrator CRISWELL. When I received this text message, it was not in accordance with the way we conduct business at FEMA, and I directed her termination.

Mr. JORDAN. Even though it said best practices, even though it said stay hydrated, which everyone would agree with, even though it said go in pairs, which everyone would agree with, even though it said bring a towel, make sure you are covered. I mean, it said coconut water is the best way to stay hydrated. Even though it said all those practical things, the part about avoiding the Trump homes, that is not a best practice. That is not commonplace. Is that what you are saying?

Administrator CRISWELL. That is nowhere in our policy, and I cannot speak to motivations behind—

Mr. JORDAN. I am not saying that your policy, but it was—

Administrator CRISWELL [continuing]. What Ms. Washington did.

Mr. JORDAN. OK. Now, and her supervisor, Mr. Hershey, have you talked to him and to find out if he knew this was happening?

Administrator CRISWELL. I understand that he was in her chain of command, and this is under investigation.

Mr. JORDAN. There are 13 people in this text message. Have you talked to all 13 of those individuals?

Administrator CRISWELL. This incident is under investigation. The officer—

Mr. JORDAN. That is not what I asked you. I know it is under investigation. We know how investigations work when it is done inside the Agency. It takes forever. I am asking did you talk to the 13 people on this best practices text message?

Administrator CRISWELL. The Office of Professional Responsibility has taken this, and they are following appropriate protocol to investigate.

Mr. JORDAN. Is the Inspector General looking at it as well?

Administrator CRISWELL. And I have asked the Inspector General to take a look at this. I welcome their review.

Mr. JORDAN. Any idea when they are going to talk to these 13 people since you have it? How about you personally? Have you talked to these 13 people?

Administrator CRISWELL. I have not talked to them personally.

Mr. JORDAN. You have not talked to them?

Administrator CRISWELL. I have an entire team that focuses on this investigation, and that is what they are doing.

Mr. JORDAN. Seems to me, it is part of a mindset that is in government. This is the scary part, because I think it is broader, and you do not have to take my word, take what people have said. I mean, this reminds me, we have talked about this many times, well, actually the same person. Let us go back to that, the same person who said that this likely received very clear guidance, this other FEMA official, also said this: "I have heard from other entities who are serving in North Carolina that there was clear guidance to be mindful of the types of people who are in Western North Carolina."

Administrator CRISWELL. I have not seen——

Mr. JORDAN. That is pretty derogatory stuff there, isn't it?

Administrator CRISWELL. I have not seen any of that.

Mr. JORDAN. But you know what it sounds like. It sounds like Peter Strzok when he said, "Oh, I just went in the Walmart. I can smell the Trump supporters." Sounds like Joe Biden when he said, "Oh, the garbage I see is the Trump supporters out there." Sounds like the guy, the professor, the Democrats had testified back in 2019 in the impeachment, "conservatives, especially very conservative people, tend to spread out, perhaps because they don't even want to be around themselves." This disdain, this mindset that is in the government where they are, everyone is deplorable, everyone is garbage, everyone is, you know, smelly people at Walmart and, oh, be mindful of those people in Western North Carolina. That is what it sounds like. And again, the best evidence is the text message we have, which reinforces that mindset that we have seen from so many people in our government.

Administrator CRISWELL. The actions directed by Ms. Washington are unacceptable, and when I received this text message, I directed her termination.

Mr. JORDAN. Do you have any idea who this other official is? You said——

Administrator CRISWELL. I do not, and if you have that information, Congressman, please share it.

Mr. JORDAN. Well, I do not have it. You are the one who has not talked to the 13 people on the text message.

Administrator CRISWELL. It has not been raised to me.

Mr. JORDAN. All right. With that, Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The Chair will now recognize Ms. Norton from Washington, DC.

Ms. NORTON. Administrator Criswell, I understand that in the weeks since Hurricanes Milton and Helene, FEMA has provided more than \$1.6 billion in assistance to more than 910,000 households. FEMA has also delivered more than 16 million meals, 18 million liters of water, more than 3,000 rows of blue roof sheeting, and more than 700,000 gallons of fuel to the communities devastated by these hurricanes, and 500 FEMA employees remain de-



ployed in these communities to assist with recovery. Administrator, what steps did FEMA staff take to contact survivors on the ground, including those displaced from their homes, and make them aware of the resources available to them?

Administrator CRISWELL. Congresswoman, FEMA has many ways that we can reach and connect with people that have been impacted by disasters. They can contact us through our 1-800 number. They can go through our [disasterassistance.gov](https://www.fema.gov/disasterassistance) website to register for assistance. They can use the FEMA app. We also have teams that go out into the communities, especially in something like North Carolina, where communications were limited, to make sure that they have had the opportunity to register for assistance or to check on their case to see what other information might be needed for them to finish it up and to process it.

And then we established disaster recovery centers, fixed facilities, once the infrastructure supports it so people have a place they can go, and they can talk to somebody face-to-face and work through their particular needs and their particular case because we know everybody's situation is going to be unique to them. And we want to make sure all of our programs are available, and we help them find the right ones to support their unique needs.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you. The disruption of Hurricane Helene left close to 4 million people without power. Administrator, how did FEMA workers reach affected residents for support in this disaster response effort, even if a certain region lost connectivity or if a survivor lacked access to internet?

Administrator CRISWELL. One of the first things we do, Congresswoman, is we put part of our leadership team in with local emergency managers to work side-by-side with them to understand which parts of their communities still need assistance. Then we can either direct our Disaster Survivor Assistance teams to go into those areas, or also the state is sending their resources, like the National Guard. The National Guard in North Carolina did an amazing job of getting into the communities and helping people that have been impacted. This is a holistic effort. This takes all of us to be able to reach all of those impacted, especially in something that has been widespread and complicated as the destruction that we saw in North Carolina.

Ms. NORTON. I also want to recognize that because of challenges like these, it did take too long for emergency assistance to come in such communities. We must learn the lessons of those shortcomings to improve the reach of emergency services at the local, state, and Federal level. Earlier this year, the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration projected an "above normal" hurricane season, meaning the level and intensity of storms and hurricanes would increase over this period. Eleven storms have developed into hurricanes this year. More than a few years later, the Lahaina community is still being built back after wildfires hit the land of Maui, and recovery operations are still continuing more than 2 years after Hurricane Ian made landfall in Florida. Administrator Criswell, what can Congress do to make it easier for FEMA to support long-term recovery efforts and assist with future disasters that strike the United States?

Administrator CRISWELL. Congressman, we have two pieces of bipartisan legislation that would be very beneficial to our ability to help communities: the Disaster Survivor Fairness Act and the Management Cost Modernization Act. And I understand that I am over the time, but I would be happy to talk more about those two pieces. They would be critical in changing the way we help survivors.

Ms. NORTON. I commend you and FEMA's thousands of staff from across the country who left their homes to deploy to communities in need and provide them with assistance in the face of disruption, trauma, and loss, and I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The Chair now recognizes Mr. Gosar from Arizona.

Mr. GOSAR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just last night, the White House requested an additional \$98.6 billion for disaster relief with \$40 billion marked for FEMA. Although it was created to provide relief from disasters, FEMA has now become the Biden-Harris Administration's star student in political prosecution. In October, FEMA intentionally violated the civil rights of American citizens in response to Hurricanes Helene and Milton. This is a key example of the weaponization of the Federal Government against the American people, and I suspect there is more for this Committee to uncover. It is critical that Congress is empowered to conduct rigorous oversight before any emergency funding has been placed into FEMA's hands. Ms. Criswell, according to your testimony, FEMA led the interagency response to Hurricane Helene and Milton for up to 64 different agencies. Do you think FEMA has the authority to direct these other agencies to also avoid homes with Trump signs?

Administrator CRISWELL. There is nothing in FEMA's policy that would ever direct anybody to avoid anybody regardless of political affiliation or way of life. Our mission is to help all people before, during, and after disasters.

Mr. GOSAR. Gotcha. Former FEMA employee, Marri Washington, told reporters this discrimination was a colossal event and occurred in Florida, North Carolina, and South Carolina. You justified earlier today at T&I Committee that this was an isolated incident and that no other supervisor or employee deployed with Marri Washington provided the guidance to avoid homes advertising Trump signs. Will you commit to also requesting an IG report for the discrimination in North Carolina and South Carolina?

Administrator CRISWELL. I have already requested the Inspector General to investigate this, but I will be certain to ensure that they include North Carolina and South Carolina in that.

Mr. GOSAR. Thank you. An anonymous FEMA employee, we have been told, I guess it would be from *The Daily Signal*, that employees were also advised to avoid certain homes and specifically use the terms "hick," "cowboy," "redneck," "Trump supporters," and "MAGA" to describe them. Have you come across any of these terms in your investigation so far?

Administrator CRISWELL. This is the first I am ever hearing any of those terms.

Mr. GOSAR. I will make sure you have those. In an interview with the Washington Examiner, they said these homes were avoid-

ed based on community trends from hostile political encounters. My question to you is, how does FEMA declare an incident as a community trend? Is it true that it only takes one encounter to make a FEMA employee uncomfortable to declare a community trend?

Administrator CRISWELL. One of the things that these teams do, our Disaster Survivor Assistance teams, is they go into the communities to not only register people for assistance, but to understand the impacts of the community. They are looking for things like damages and access issues to transportation infrastructure. They are looking for damages to water and power. They are also trying to understand the survivor needs. These are often referred to as community trends, but these are used to help us understand the impacts and what resources we are going to need to bring in. These are not proactive efforts to try to identify where we should or should not go.

Mr. GOSAR. OK. So, my office requested these incident reports ahead of this hearing, but they were not provided. Can you please provide this Committee with the incident reports that determine Lake Placid should be defined as a community trend?

Administrator CRISWELL. I would not say that Lake Placid was defined as a community trend. Again, when we talk about impacts to a community, we are looking at impacts to that community and survivor needs.

Mr. GOSAR. So, you would provide all the incident reports?

Administrator CRISWELL. We will work with Congress on the request for information and provide what you need.

Mr. GOSAR. Now, Ms. Criswell, in October you said fighting this information is a priority for FEMA, including that you alleged misinformation from President Trump, Elon Musk, and some of my colleagues about FEMA's responsibility, or lack thereof, in spending. Is FEMA spending its taxpayer funds responsibly? Quick question.

Administrator CRISWELL. Can you repeat that, sir?

Mr. GOSAR. Yes. Is FEMA spending its taxpayer funds responsibly?

Administrator CRISWELL. We are absolutely spending our taxpayer dollars responsibly in supporting an unbelievable increase in the number of severe weather events that have been happening across the United States.

Mr. GOSAR. OK. So that would be a yes. Are you aware of the OIG's report from March 2023 titled, "FEMA Should Increase Oversight to Prevent Misuse Of Humanitarian Relief Funds," and/or a second September 2022 OIG report titled, "FEMA Did Not Implement Controls to Prevent More Than \$3.7 Billion in Improper Payments From the Lost Wages Assistance Program?"

Administrator CRISWELL. I am aware of those reports.

Mr. GOSAR. And you knew this? And how are you applying that to this discovery now that you are hearing about Ms. Washington and possibly other people causing a problem for this?

Administrator CRISWELL. We value our partnership with the Inspector General, and we appreciate the findings that they give us and our areas that we can continue to improve. Some of those reports and some of the findings in those we non-concurred with, but for those that we did, we continue to work with them so we can

continue to improve because we are not a perfect Agency, and we always look to improve the way we help people.

Mr. GOSAR. I do not think anybody is perfect, so thank you. Appreciate it.

Chairman COMER. The gentlemen, yields back. The Chair now recognizes Mr. Lynch from Massachusetts.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome, Administrator Criswell. As evidenced recently by hurricane Helene and Milton and the catastrophic consequences, we continue to witness historic flooding that is triggered by extreme weather events. In our own state of Massachusetts, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has already predicted that my area, the Boston area, is expected to endure between 12 and 19 days of high-tide flooding that we have never experienced before. That is the most in the Northeast region. The non-partisan congressional Research Service also reports that floods are the most common and costliest natural disasters across the United States. However, flood damage is not covered, typically, by traditional homeowner insurance, and, moreover, most private insurers do not even offer flood coverage. Instead, as you know, most of our constituents procure flood insurance for their homes and businesses from the National Flood Insurance Program, which you administer. It is a Federal Government program that provides more than \$1.3 trillion in insurance coverage and 4.7 million policies to residents, mostly in flood zones in over 22,000 communities nationwide.

Unfortunately, Madam Administrator, to the detriment of both victims of flood damage and the American taxpayer, this program is currently more than \$20 billion in debt, especially after having to borrow substantial funds from Treasury, as you noted earlier, to cover a series of devastating flood seasons, including going back to 2017, which became the costliest season on record and included hurricanes Maria, Harvey, and Irma. Administrator, FEMA administers the National Flood Insurance Program, which is set to expire in a few weeks, of this year. Can you offer us your thoughts on how the financial position of this program is impacting your ability to support homeowners and businesses that are recovering from flood damage?

Administrator CRISWELL. The National Flood Insurance Program is one of the only ways that a homeowner can get the necessary coverage to protect their investments, and the National Flood Insurance Program has not had a multiyear authorization in many years. It has been from CR to CR. Without a multiyear authorization, we will continue to struggle year after year to meet the claims that individual homeowners have. And we have offered up, with our reauthorization proposal, 13 measures—I think it is 13—steps that we can take that will be able to make the program financially solvent and make sure that everybody has access to this through an affordability framework as well. As we know, not everybody can afford flood insurance, yet it is their No. 1 resource and tool to help protect their investment.

Mr. LYNCH. So, we seem to keep falling behind with these 1-year, I think it is called as-needed funding. You do not have a multiyear program where you can actually try to get ahead of some of the stuff. So, we are still dealing with Hawaii. We are still dealing with

some of these 2017 disasters that we have not caught up to. One thing I wanted to ask you is that we seem to compartmentalize these disasters. Because of the impacts of climate change, we have got, you know, these epic rainfall events that is causing flooding, we have got tornadoes, we have got hurricanes, we have got drought-induced wildfires, and our flood insurance program only covers certain people or targets certain people in flood zones. Would it be better, would it be more efficient if we looked at a, rather than having a flood insurance program, we had a wider, a broader disaster insurance program where we have more people paying into that? It might cross-subsidize some of the costs that we are seeing as a result of these disasters and might allow a break to the taxpayer instead of having to go in and bail out people who might repeatedly be experiencing flood damage from storm surges in areas where they may not wisely relocate.

Administrator CRISWELL. Yes. I mean, the National Flood Insurance Program is available to anybody, and I often have said, if it rains where you live, it can flood where you live. There are only certain areas that are mandated to purchase flood insurance, but everybody has the opportunity to purchase flood insurance. As far as making that a broader, more catastrophic insurance program, I think that is something that we should be having conversations with the private sector about because that is what they should be providing.

Mr. LYNCH. All right. Thank you. My time has expired. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman COMER. Really good questions. I will recognize myself for 5 minutes, and, Administrator, I want to thank you for the work that you and FEMA did in my district a few years ago after the tornadoes in West Kentucky. I want to publicly say that.

[Photo]

Chairman COMER. With respect to the text message behind me, how did you receive the text message? Did you know about it before it became public, or was it brought to your attention before the media made public with it?

Administrator CRISWELL. It was brought to my attention on November 7 while I was in North Carolina with my leadership team checking in on recovery. It was mentioned to me that they had heard that there was a text message that a staff member had sent. I then directed my team to look into this. This was before the media inquiry or the media story came out. They reviewed it and looked into it on the 8th. They contacted me on November 9. They showed me the text message. I still had not seen any media stories, and I directed the termination of the employee because it violates the way we conduct business.

Chairman COMER. And you have testified that you believe this was an isolated incident. Why should we believe that this is an isolated incident and not part of a pattern in FEMA? Because we have seen many other government agencies that we believe have become politicized and/or weaponized. So, I mean, why should we believe this is an isolated incident?

Administrator CRISWELL. Chairman, I understand your concern, and I share your concern because I want to ensure that the American people know that FEMA is there to support all people, which

is why we are conducting an investigation and why we have asked the IG to look into this further to ensure that this is not beyond the one employee who sent this message, it is not indicative of the rest of our workforce, and it is completely unacceptable.

Chairman COMER. So, I want to go back to Ms. Washington. You terminated her. She was a part-time employee. If she were a full-time FEMA employee, could you have terminated her then and there on the spot?

Administrator CRISWELL. We definitely have more flexibility within our intermittent employee H.R. practices, but we would have been able to take the necessary action to remove her until a full investigation had been done.

Chairman COMER. So, how likely would it have been that her termination would have been overturned because she would have been a full-time civil servant and been protected by the civil service merit laws, tenure laws, whatever you want to call it?

Administrator CRISWELL. Given the text of this message, it is very clear that this was an unacceptable type of behavior, and I do not believe it would have been overturned. I think the system worked.

Chairman COMER. Well, we are going to find out with a lot of Federal employees that we believe should be held accountable for bad behavior. And that is one of the huge issues in this election, and this is going to be a priority for the new Administration. And this is a role that this Committee is going to play moving forward to try to work with the Trump Administration, work with Elon Musk, and Mr. Ramaswamy to try to make government more efficient, so we will see. We certainly believe that people, regardless of their party, regardless of their status and their years of service in the Federal Government, regardless of their ideology, if they have done wrong, then they should be held accountable. And I think the American people agree with us, and I think that was a huge issue in the election a few weeks ago.

I want to switch gears and talk about FEMA, and I think a lot of people, myself included, often wonder what is the role of FEMA. So, if a hurricane or a tornado or a natural disaster happens, I believe FEMA should be first on the scene. I believe that they should be in charge of, obviously, rescue and recovery to help coordinate to ensure that people have food and shelter. And then, of course, the big role, I believe, FEMA plays is debris removal, to try to help coordinate to get the power going, to get the roads cleared, and things like that. A lot of people wonder what then? What else is FEMA responsible for? Because I know when we had our issues in West Kentucky, people were thinking that if they did not have insurance, that FEMA was supposed to come in and pay for that. Can you tell this committee and the American people who are watching this what exactly FEMA's role is the second a natural disaster happens, whether it is a wildfire out West, or whether it is a tornado in the Midwest, or whether it is a hurricane on the East Coast? What is FEMA's responsibility from start to finish, and how long should that take?

Administrator CRISWELL. I think the best way to start that, Chairman, is the fact that all disasters are executed at the local level. They are managed at the state level and supported by the

Federal Government, and that is where FEMA comes in. In this particular incident, I contacted Governors before the storm made landfall in all of the states that were impacted, encouraging them to ask for a pre-landfall emergency declaration. What that does is it allows me to preposition resources, and these are not just FEMA teams. These are the Federal Government. It gives me the ability to direct other members of the Federal Government to come in and be able to respond to those immediate lifesaving needs as needed after a storm passes.

For these events, we prepositioned resources from Florida up to North Carolina and into Virginia to support those immediate needs, and we do that at the support of the Governor. We have teams that are embedded with the Governor sitting side-by-side who are also communicating with the local emergency managers, the local first responders to know where those needs are so we can direct our resources to the areas that do not have enough. These all start and end with that local first responder, and they did amazing work in those first few hours after these storms passed. And our teams on the ground immediately, the search and rescue teams from across the Federal Government, were there doing life-saving activities as the storm were passing all of these states.

We then support through mission assigning other Federal agencies like the Army Corps of Engineers to help assess what the needs are going to be for debris removal or at the request of a local jurisdiction to actually do the debris removal if they do not have the contracts to do so. And then we continue to support the stabilization of those lifelines, being able to reimburse communities if they put in a temporary bridge or if they have done something to—

Chairman COMER. And the time has expired, but what is the normal time length for this? Do you have an objective when you go in and say, all right, this is when we hope to be finished, we hope everybody is paid and all? Is that ever a factor or an objective?

Administrator CRISWELL. All disasters are definitely unique. My objectives and my timelines are, in that response, to make sure that I have teams on the ground before landfall, that they are engaged during and after landfall, and then when the Governor's team tell us that the incident has stabilized, then we demobilize those response teams.

Chairman COMER. The Chair recognizes—

Mr. RASKIN. Mr. Chairman, I just have a UC request on some relevant articles.

Chairman COMER. Yes, go ahead.

Mr. RASKIN. One published in *The Hill*, September 30, 2024, titled, "Georgia Governor Kemp Praises Biden's Hurricane Helene Response Amid Trump Criticism;" a CNN article, October 7, titled, "DeSantis and Biden Speak On Storm Recovery After Reports GOP Governor Had Not Returned Calls From President, Vice President; and three, a CNN article, October 3, titled, Fact Check: Amid Bipartisan Praise for Biden's Hurricane Response, Trump Falsely Claims Reviews are Universally Negative."

Chairman COMER. Without objection, so ordered.

Chairman COMER. The Chair recognizes Mr. Krishnamoorthi from Illinois.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHI. Thank you, Chairman, and I thank you, Administrator, for your service. I want to show you a visual.

[Photo]

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHI. Do you recognize this picture?

Administrator CRISWELL. I do not.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHI. Good. It is an atmospheric research facility in Alaska that, believe it or not, conspiracy theorists allege is a mind-controlling weather machine, and one of the conspiracy theories out there is that somehow FEMA controls the weather. And I assume that you, as the Administrator, do not control the weather, right?

Administrator CRISWELL. I do not control the weather.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHI. And you do not use secret machines to control hurricanes to target certain places in the United States, right?

Administrator CRISWELL. Correct.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHI. And you and your team did not direct severe weather at North Carolina to “commandeer lithium mine property in that state,” right?

Administrator CRISWELL. Why would anybody want to bring harm to the American people?

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHI. And you would not direct severe weather to target any one of a particular political party, right?

Administrator CRISWELL. Never.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHI. You are not establishing FEMA camps to detain individuals or enact martial law, right?

Administrator CRISWELL. Correct.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHI. These are all conspiracy theories that you have had to deal with. I am glad that you have addressed them in this forum. Now let me talk about stuff that is true. It is true that during Hurricane Helene and Milton, FEMA assisted more than 35,000 households with disaster relief, right?

Administrator CRISWELL. That number sounds about correct.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHI. Let me just talk to you a little bit about what certain Republican officials have said about your response. Can you please show the first one?

[Chart]

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHI. This is Governor Glenn Youngkin of Virginia. Do you recognize him?

Administrator CRISWELL. I do.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHI. He said, “I am incredibly appreciative of the rapid response and the cooperation from the Federal team at FEMA.” You do not disagree with that, right?

Administrator CRISWELL. Governor Youngkin and I were communicating, texting, and talking daily, if not hourly, during the initial hours that it was passing Virginia.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHI. Well, let me show you another quote. This is Governor Henry McMaster of South Carolina. He said Federal assistance from FEMA has “been superb.” You do not disagree with that either, right?

Administrator CRISWELL. I do not.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHI. Another one. This one is from Senator Thom Tillis, Republican of North Carolina. He said, “It has to be



a coordinated response, and FEMA knows how to do this well.” I presume you do not disagree with him either, right?

Administrator CRISWELL. I do not.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Let me turn to a final topic, and this has to do with, basically, homes that also serve as childcare centers in many places, including in disaster zones. Administrator Criswell, access to childcare is often forgotten in the aftermath of a disaster, and I am worried that cases like these do not get enough attention by FEMA or other agencies because these childcare centers are often based in the provider’s homes rather than a commercial facility. Let me show you what is called a flood susceptibility map of the Chicago area, which is what I represent.

[Map]

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. I would like to draw your attention to this particular map because it shows the areas of the Chicago, what we call Chicagoland, that have high susceptibility of flooding, and as you can see, it is this blue area, which basically covers the entire region like a wet blanket. It represents millions of parents and children as well as thousands of childcare centers. And so, my question to you is, in light of the fact that there is a perception, and I believe a reality, that not enough attention has been paid to these childcare centers that are situated in homes, can you commit to proposing to my office and this Committee ways that you can increase coordination between FEMA and the SBA to assist businesses like these home-based childcare centers?

Administrator CRISWELL. Congressman, my office would be happy to provide any technical drafting assistance or further assistance to be able to figure out how we can better address these vulnerable populations within these communities.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Thank you very much, and I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The Chair recognize Mr. Grothman from Wisconsin.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Thank you. Thank you for coming on over here. I think the last time we had FEMA before this Committee was maybe about 8 years ago, and that was a time when, I think down in Louisiana, they had mobile homes that were being sold for, I do not know if you remember this, for maybe a tenth of cost to which they were paid for, but that was the last time. I can tell you, along with many Republicans, when they come into contact with the government, they sometimes worry about prejudice against them, OK? I know one guy in my district, he once did an ad, and miraculously, not your Agency, another agency kind of came down hard on them. Maybe coincidence. Maybe not. We all felt it was not coincidence.

Under President Biden, foreign aid has become a vehicle to promote an overseas social agenda pushed by one party. The Administration has implemented a disturbing trend of using foreign assistance as a tool to advance political and ideological goals. This has raised an important question. Is the same political discrimination influencing how FEMA allocates disaster relief domestically, how it responds to this crisis? First of all, FEMA’s workforce is unionized and represented by the American Federation of Government Employees. Is that true?

Administrator CRISWELL. Yes, our employees have that option.

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK. What percentage of FEMA employees are part of the union? Do you know?

Administrator CRISWELL. I do not have that number on me, but I will be happy to get back to you. It is——

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK. Does FEMA collect or track data on political contributions made by——

Administrator CRISWELL. We do not.

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK. The union representing your employees, at least what I have before me here today, has contributed about \$12 million to Democrats over the last 20 years. Last three cycles, 93 percent to Democrats. Ninety-six percent to Democrats. Again, 96 percent to Democrats. And these contributions go where you would expect, Senate Majority PAC, DCCC, and President Biden himself. It raises the question, when you have a group of employees or somebody representing employees that is so overwhelmingly slanted to helping one party as opposed to the other party, is it possible that that overwhelming bias slips into some decisions that are being made by your employees?

Administrator CRISWELL. Unions are not part of our FEMA control, and employees have the option to choose to join them or not.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Right. I mean, the people who run the unions, though, and who are presumably elected by your employees want to push contributions overwhelmingly to one group. I assume they communicate with your employees. Is this something that possibly concerns you, or is this why we are perhaps here today and that couple of your employees seem to believe their responsibility was to use their government job to help one group of people rather than the other group of people? Could it perhaps create that mindset?

Administrator CRISWELL. Congressman, it is just unacceptable that any FEMA employee would tell any part of our organization to not support an individual that was impacted by a disaster because of a political yard sign.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Right. You see what I am saying, but, you know, it is one thing if it is 50–50, but when it is like 95 percent to one party, 96 percent to one party, does that create an environment, perhaps, of a dislike or even hatred of the political party that they are not giving money to, because, of course, this union, they presumably communicate with their employees, this is who you should be supporting, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. I sometimes wonder if that atmosphere comes a little bit from these one-sided, slanted unions.

Administrator CRISWELL. Again, employees have a choice of whether or not they want to join a union or not. Not all of our employees are part of that union, and regardless, it is unacceptable, regardless of if you are in a union or not, to discriminate against a disaster survivor because of a political sign in their yard. It is not who we are.

Mr. GROTHMAN. I am really glad that Chairman Comer is having this Committee. Are you aware of anything you are doing to make sure this sort of thing does not happen in the past or in the future, given the overwhelming political slant of the union that represents your employees?

Administrator CRISWELL. So, you are talking about anything I have done with the union or this event to——

Mr. GROTHMAN. Specifically, to make sure this is not going to happen again.

Administrator CRISWELL. Yes.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Specifically talking to your employees and say, we realize you have a union that apparently really dislikes Republicans. What are you doing to make sure that that does not flop over into how they dole out the government largesse?

Administrator CRISWELL. Yes. So, immediately upon the termination of the employee that made this direction, I sent out an email to the workforce letting them know what is expected of them and that we serve all people. I have been in this job for 3-and-a-half years, and my focus has always been on putting people first, and that is all people. We have also conducted refresher training for all of our staff that are in the field, explaining to them what we expect of them, again, so there is no misinterpretation of how we support people that have been impacted from disasters. And we will continue to work with the IG on the investigation on if there is any other factors related to this particular incident.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Thank you. I am sure this is something that they will be talking about for the next 15 years.

Chairman COMER. The Chair now recognizes Mr. Mfume from Maryland.

Mr. MFUME. Thank you, Chairman Comer and Ranking Member Raskin. I want to thank the Administrator for being here today, and I want to associate my remarks with those of the Ranking Member, Mr. Raskin, in his opening statement.

Madam Administrator, you have got a tough job, and I have tried to sit here and to listen to what you say and how you say it, and my gut tells me that you are a good person with a good heart who wants to do good things for your Nation. I think that if there was a disconnect here, it might be the fact that you cannot make everybody underneath you good people, even though we would like for them to be that way, because we take pride in our Federal workforce, the fact that it is not a political workforce. Every now and then, there becomes a possibility where something terrible can happen. We all know that 2024 has been a trying year for various agencies throughout the government, dedicated, like yours, to protecting and providing for Americans of all walks of life. Your Agency has done a good job in providing resources, at least what you have, I might add that, in very difficult situations in a number of different communities. That conclusion is not mine alone. It comes from Governors, other Members of Congress, mayors across the Nation.

That being said, I would be remiss if I did not in a deliberately redundant way go back and address this report of a FEMA employee who were allegedly forgoing visits to homes that had Trump signs displayed. Now, regardless of whether that employee was following a FEMA policy or not, it is a sad day, quite frankly, any time. We have realized we have reached such a state in our government where people are making decisions based on their own partisan beliefs when they are in a nonpartisan role of providing service and providing it to everybody, and I must say that every disaster is not even a natural disaster. In my own city of Baltimore, we had a major bridge collapse, the Francis Scott Key Bridge, and

we are still struggling to try to find a way to deal with that, and that has been since March 26 when it collapsed. The Port of Baltimore was forced to close, as you know. Longshoremen and longshore women were let go without work. Small businesses were impacted. We mourned the lives of those six persons who died on that bridge that night. And as we do in every disaster, we did not check to see which political party they favored. When the Small Business Administration, the Army Corps of Engineers and the Coast Guard all stepped up, as they did repeatedly, month after month to do the tough work, nobody asked for a party registration or voting card or voting record.

So, we know that incidents like that are going to happen again. But what we, I think, have to be very firm in is our belief that emergencies should never have a party, and that disasters ought to never be partisan. I expect that we are going to work together on this. I would strongly suggest, though, that as I listen to the interview that journalist Roland Martin did with the person in question, I am still scratching my head trying to figure out if, in fact, she was told by someone who is full-time, who may have taken an overreach in a disaster with a lot going on, to say, by the way, you can skip those homes. I do not know that she necessarily would have done it on her own. As you know from the interview, she is not a Democrat, she is not a registered Republican, and she did not even vote. So, I am still hoping that at some point in time, your request to the Inspector General will be taken seriously, and he will start to look at what is going on. We need facts in this Committee more than anything else.

And I am going back to the comments of my colleague from Florida who mentioned the overall Department of Homeland Security and suggested that that is where the problem lies because it is so massive, and people are not doing what they ought to do when they ought to do it to ensure integrity. I am going to meet with him later today on the Floor because I want to know that. He has worked in that capacity, so he should know what he is talking about. So, I would just hope that as we move forward here, to the extent that you can provide this Committee and all the Members of this Committee with additional details, that would be helpful. I would like very much to know what the IG's response to you is going to be, and I would like to know at the conclusion of your own report, if you would be so kind as to share that with the Chair and the Ranking Member, so that Members of this Committee who are still really not knowing what to believe will have something more concrete that we can look at and make decisions on. Thank you for your time. Mr. Chair, I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The Chair now recognizes Mr. Cloud from Texas.

Mr. CLOUD. Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Administrator, for being here. The Chair had asked how long does it take to recover from these, and I represent a district that was devastated by Harvey. It was just a few months ago that we were still at a press conference at a ribbon cutting for something, a project that we had worked with FEMA to help bring recovery to. So, obviously, our hearts and minds go out to all those devastated in these past two

hurricanes and what those communities and the families are going through right now.

I wanted to ask you about, Representative Donalds mentioned that Ms. Washington says that she thinks this is an unisolated incident. Of course, we have the *New York Post* article that talks about a FEMA official who went on and said that avoiding white- or conservative-dominated disaster areas was an open secret within the Agency. You state that there is nothing in the policy, you know, and I will say, I have been in enough of these, and that is the expected answer from any Administrator—of course it is not in the policy. From our standpoint, it is not the policy that we are concerned with. It is not in the policy for the IRS to target conservatives, it is not in the policy for NIH to fund gain-of-function research, it is not in DHS policy for them to release foreign terrorists into our land, but they are, it is not policy of the FBI to target schoolteachers or people of faith, but all this is happening. And the common response is, well, it is not in the policy manual.

Well, we are concerned about the culture. And I do not think that it is in a stated policy or in the culture to specifically say, you know, skip over Trump signs, but I am concerned about if there is not a proactive response to make sure that that is not clear within the culture, that that kind of attitude should not be accepted at all. And I will point to this: FEMA's current strategic plan lists three goals. The first goal is to instill equity. We know that these DEI initiatives have had a discriminatory aspect in it. We have seen a lot of companies now having embraced it out of altruistic means, but understanding that what they do is they ask us to discriminate proactively. One of the things it mentions is this plan lists racial minorities, even religious minorities, as individuals who should be the beneficiaries of equity. So, I would ask you, whose religious majority or a racial majority does FEMA make decisions about resources distributed according to these policies because this is in the strategic plan. And so, whatever your case is on this, you are asking your employees to make distinguishment between individuals, as opposed to just meeting a need.

I tell people all the time, in our in our office, we do not care who you are, we do not care what your voting record is, we do not care your background, your whatever. When you walk into our office, as many offices here, even across the aisle, we are here to help and to help get your case through. I think that should be the very clear standing of FEMA, and I would encourage you to revise your strategic plan and rid it of all the DEI. We will be addressing this actually in a mark-up, I think, tomorrow. But if you could do that, I think that would go a far way to making sure we have a proactive culture to where it is very clear so these isolated incidences do not pop up because what we did not see in that text thread was any pushback on that either, and that should have been clear, like, no, we are not about that, that is not what FEMA is about. And I would encourage you to do that.

I did want to ask about a couple things, because sometimes I have noticed, and I do not think this is the intent having, you know, my own experience with FEMA, but sometimes it seems that the process gets in the way of the people. And I will point in our own district—you know, most of our districts are rural—sometimes

you would have a grant for \$500,000 for a rural community. They are having to go through the same sort of process that, you know, a large metroplex, somebody with the \$20 million project is going through. Very often it was point of contacts were very difficult. I know one place that had seven site visits. It was a different team every time. They had to start the process over and over again because staff kept changing and these sorts of things.

I was talking to someone even yesterday and have had a number of conversations with someone who is on the ground in North Carolina trying to help, and they listed a couple instances where you have people come out in the community. They put some resources together. They are trying to respond while FEMA is getting there and other resources agencies are getting there. And FEMA would go in, and they would, for example, be hosted in a place. FEMA would come out and rent out the place from underneath the people who are already doing recovery work, and they would confiscate the resources that were in that place and, basically, take over and kick the people out. There was this one group that, basically, were hiding their resources now because that had happened to them 3 times already.

And so, I would also caution you, there are other instances, too, where you have people trying to go and rescue and do recovery of their family, of their friends, of their neighborhoods, who they know are trapped on a mountain, for example, and FEMA workers would stop them and prohibit them from going in to rescue them. And so, again, in the aspect of guiding a culture, could you speak to what you are doing to ensure, in a sense, that you do not have—you mentioned some of them are temporary employees—so you do not have people who have this newfound authority who are actually prohibiting the work because it does not fit within their scope, and that we are making sure we put people before processes?

Administrator CRISWELL. Chairman, I know we are over. Do I have time to answer?

Chairman COMER. Can you—

Administrator CRISWELL. Make it quick?

Chairman COMER. Yes, make it quick.

Mr. CLOUD. My apologies. I have had a lot of experience with FEMA, so.

Administrator CRISWELL. Yes, Congressman. I mean, first, I just want to address that equity is a foundation of emergency management as part of my strategic plan because I think it will also address some of your concerns, because I share your concerns. And when I was a local emergency manager, both in Colorado but as well as in New York City, what I have experienced is the barriers that people have, good working people have, in trying to access the assistance that is available to them. And when I came into this position, my goal was to try to remove those barriers and make sure that everybody had access. That is the foundation of why we put equity in there. It was not a DEI initiative. It was about making sure all people can access the programs.

Mr. CLOUD. Religious minorities, distinguishing between religious minority and majority.

Administrator CRISWELL. There is a definition as in the executive order that is listed in there because that is the executive order, but our view on equity is making sure that we have——

Mr. CLOUD. Why would you even ask?

Administrator CRISWELL [continuing]. Consistent and fair treatment of all people and making sure that nobody is left behind. That has been our goal, and we have made transformational changes in our own policies and our regulations to help assist more people. And we have been able to provide more aid in the last 3 years because of these changes because we focused on making sure that there were no barriers, and we have not before.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman's time has gone way over. The Chair now recognizes Ms. Ocasio-Cortez from New York.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. I think some of the points made earlier today that disaster response and relief is historically and continues to be genuinely an area of bipartisan work, and my hope is that we can continue to protect these programs. In fact, one of the things that was brought up earlier, Administrator Criswell, was the National Flood Insurance Program, the NFIP. I previously served several terms on the Financial Services Committee, which also has jurisdiction over the authorizations around the National Flood Insurance Program. And a lot of people do not know that the maps for the NFIP and what is considered a flood zone are tied to flood maps from before the Federal Government even acknowledged that climate change is real. And so, we are allocating flood insurance from before these areas became flood zones that are now flood zones. And so historically, there has been a great deal of Republican resistance to updating these maps. My hope is that we can do that now.

But I wanted to move a little bit into your work and what we are seeing now in the current information environment, especially after a disaster. Administrator Criswell, recently in North Carolina and with these storms and hurricanes that have hit this year, there have been very large-scale moments of disinformation regarding FEMA, correct?

Administrator CRISWELL. Yes, ma'am.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. One of those that I have just seen is this idea that, and I am going to ask you if this is true or not, and I apologize that I even have to ask you some of these things. But I think it is important for the American people to see in a setting like this, where we have to swear to tell the truth, that we see officially on the record that these things are not true, the first being that the suggestion that FEMA assistance was only a \$750 loan that would have to be paid back, and if not, FEMA would seize the homes of everyday people who may not be able to make that back in such a catastrophic moment. Is that correct?

Administrator CRISWELL. That is completely inaccurate.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. Completely false, correct? But was it, in your assessment, and did you see lots of people believing this on the ground or in the field?

Administrator CRISWELL. I was on the ground for over 3 weeks in North Carolina, and I did hear from people on the ground asking me, is this real or is this not real?

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. Another one that I also saw very widely circulated, that FEMA did not have enough money to provide relief services because that allocation of funds went to either undocumented immigrants, aid to Ukraine, or even aid to the Israeli Government. Is that correct, that FEMA funds were allocated away to those causes?

Administrator CRISWELL. Completely inaccurate.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. Completely false. On the record, completely false, correct?

Administrator CRISWELL. Correct.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. And other things that we have seen as well, that it is standing policy for FEMA to politically discriminate. We know that that is not true, correct?

Administrator CRISWELL. Correct.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. And there was an incident, we see, but that individual was fired and that this is not a policy at scale, correct?

Administrator CRISWELL. Correct.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. Now, we know that these are important pieces, very large and influential pieces of disinformation, but I want to talk about the harm of that, because if you are a FEMA worker canvassing door to door, you need to knock on people's doors and see what help they need, correct?

Administrator CRISWELL. Yes.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. Now, I know as someone who is a target of large amounts of misinformation and disinformation, people will sometimes—and I genuinely want to separate this from a partisan accusation, but it is very important to say that if someone thinks that a FEMA official is coming to their house to take their house away, that is a situation that could be escalatory or potentially become violent over something that is not true, correct?

Administrator CRISWELL. Correct.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. I mean, I have had people that have come to me in an escalatory way because they have believed something about me on the internet that was completely false, and that is just me, let alone an anonymous FEMA official who does not have the same level of resources to be able to combat that kind of misinformation. And then on top of that, when people do believe these kinds of things, what is the harm to the communities that then get convinced of these mistruths?

Administrator CRISWELL. I think, Congresswoman, one of the best stories that I can share with you was when I was in Chimney Rock, North Carolina, and I was talking to the leadership there. And Chimney Rock is the area where there were accusations that there were physical threats to our FEMA staff, where we temporarily moved all of our staff into fixed locations. When I talked to that leadership team there, they said this is not who we are. This is looking bad on my community. Tourists may not want to come visit my community, but let alone we need your help, the people in this community need to register for assistance, and now we have to make sure that they understand that the government is there to help them and encourage them to apply for assistance so they can start their road to recovery. I think that is a really good example of how it not just impacts an individual, but impacts an entire



community and their reputation and who they believe they are, and now who the public, writ large, thinks they are.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. Got it. Thank you very much.

Chairman COMER. The gentlelady's time has expired. They have called votes. They called votes about 10 minutes ago, but we are going to have one more questioner, and then we will recess for votes. But the Chair now recognizes, for the last question before recess, the gentleman from Alabama, Mr. Palmer.

Mr. PALMER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This hearing has been all over the place, from climate change to politics to somewhat on the issue at hand. And I want to ask you, Administrator Criswell, has FEMA made any attempt to identify the people discriminated against because of their support for President Trump?

Administrator CRISWELL. The actions of this individual were unacceptable, and we—

Mr. PALMER. That is not what I asked.

Administrator CRISWELL [continuing]. Do not have any evidence at this point that shows that this was a larger issue, but there are ongoing investigations.

Mr. PALMER. No, ma'am, I have only got a few minutes. No, ma'am. I am asking—there were clearly people who were passed over.

Administrator CRISWELL. Correct.

Mr. PALMER. OK. Have you made any attempt to identify those people?

Administrator CRISWELL. Those people that were passed over?

Mr. PALMER. Yes, ma'am.

Administrator CRISWELL. Yes. We sent another team in there, and they have made contact with everybody in that community.

Mr. PALMER. So, what is FEMA prepared to do to meet the needs of those people who were discriminated against?

Administrator CRISWELL. If they registered for assistance or needed assistance, they are now in the system and will get whatever they are eligible for.

Mr. PALMER. OK. And those are people who have applied that notified you that they were passed over, or did you discover them by other means?

Administrator CRISWELL. When we looked at the records from this employee's team and found the homes that were skipped, we sent a team in there to contact all of those homes. I cannot tell you if they all applied for assistance, I do not know that they all needed assistance, but we at least gave them the opportunity.

Mr. PALMER. OK. Thank you. This is not the first time, though, that FEMA has had an issue with discrimination because for years, FEMA discriminated against houses of worship. It was not until a lawsuit was brought by three churches in Texas and two synagogues in Florida that this stopped. Are you aware of that?

Administrator CRISWELL. I am not familiar with the lawsuit that you are mentioning.

Mr. PALMER. Are you aware that FEMA has had an issue with interacting with religious groups and churches?

Administrator CRISWELL. I am not.

Mr. PALMER. I think it is an unfortunate part of FEMA's history. I can understand why there is a built-in political bias for FEMA

employees in Washington because only about 6.5 percent of the vote for President in the Washington, DC. went to Trump. But I want to ask you something else, and I want to go back to the questions that Congressman Jordan asked—Chairman Jordan asked—and that those people who were on that chat group that witnessed the directive to volunteers, I am not sure you gave a satisfactory answer as to whether or not you have contacted those people and what information you have gotten from them. Have you tried to do that?

Administrator CRISWELL. As I said before, I have not personally talked to them, but there are ongoing investigations.

Mr. PALMER. So, will you state for the record that the investigators are contacting those people to get their information?

Administrator CRISWELL. The investigators should be contacting them, and if they have not, I will ensure it.

Mr. PALMER. If you maintain that FEMA took swift and satisfactory action after Mrs. Washington's team message. Why do you think the whistleblower felt compelled to reveal her message to the public?

Administrator CRISWELL. I cannot speak on behalf of the whistleblower. I know that I was made aware of the situation on November 7. I received confirmation that this text message had been sent on November 9, and I directed her termination. It was not acceptable behavior. It is not how we want to treat people.

Mr. PALMER. I understand what you are saying publicly, but what matters is what you are doing in the investigation, what you are doing privately to clean this up and to create a culture of respect for all people, and I really do not care if they are Republican or Democrat. I do not care their religious affiliations. I think the role of FEMA is to provide aid when necessary. And I just want to be sure that there is substantial proof that you can offer the American people today that taxpayers who pay their hard-earned dollars to provide for these disaster response resources will not face future political discrimination from FEMA. Can you give us absolute assurance of that?

Administrator CRISWELL. Congressman, we are here to help all people.

Mr. PALMER. I know, but you did not. I understand that—

Administrator CRISWELL. And I can assure you that we will take action against anyone who has not followed our core values of compassion, fairness, integrity, and respect. We treat everybody the same. Everybody is eligible for assistance.

Mr. PALMER. We are counting on you doing that, and I would like to identify with Mr. Moskowitz. I thought that his perspective on the need to reorganize FEMA—well, Homeland Security—was spot-on. With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman yields back. Pursuant to the previous order, the Chair declares the Committee in recess, subject to the call of the Chair. We plan to reconvene 10 minutes after the conclusion of votes, so the Committee stands in recess.

[Recess.]

Chairman COMER. The Committee will come back to order.

Before I recognize Ms. Brown, I want to make this statement that during the recess for votes, my staff made contact with a new

whistleblower who provided a credible account that a FEMA contractor visited the home of an elderly disabled veteran's family around October 10 following Hurricane Helene. While there, the FEMA contractor recommended that the family remove Trump campaign materials and signs from both their house and their yard. He warned the family that his FEMA supervisors do not take kindly to Trump supporters and that they are seen as domestic terrorists. The elderly homeowners were so frightened by this and afraid that they would not recover their loss that they removed all Trump materials and signs. Nevertheless, FEMA has not returned to their residence, and this took place not in Florida, but in Georgia. Administrator, we are happy to provide you with more information on this, but we and the American people want to know what FEMA is doing to ensure that political discrimination is not dictating how the American people are receiving aid following a disaster.

Mr. RASKIN. Mr. Chairman, will you share the information with the Minority—

Chairman COMER. Absolutely.

Mr. RASKIN [continuing]. As well so we can follow up on that?

Chairman COMER. Absolutely.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you.

Chairman COMER. All right. Now, the Chair recognizes Ms. Brown.

Ms. BROWN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This hearing has shown us why it is so important for our Federal officials to remain unbiased, nonpartisan, and committed to helping every single American under their mandate. The work of the Federal Emergency Management Agency is critical and will become even more important as we continue to experience more severe weather events because of climate change. Just this year, in Northeast Ohio, we experienced severe drought, extreme heat, flash floods, and destructive tornadoes, all of which took place in the span of just 1 month. I am very thankful that no deaths occurred as a result, but the destruction from these storms and climate events continue to be felt in my district and every district across the country. We are grateful for the assistance that FEMA provided, helping to assess the damage, and get Northeast Ohio back on its feet.

As my colleagues have said, storms and other disaster events have no political party, and they do not discriminate. They do not care if you live in a blue state, a red state, or a purple state. That is why FEMA and all of our Federal agencies must remain fiercely nonpartisan. So, Administrator Criswell, can you speak to how FEMA accomplishes its mission and goals in a nonpartisan way, and why doing so is so important?

Administrator CRISWELL. Congresswoman, the work that we do, again, our mission statement of helping people before, during, and after disasters, is so critical and especially, as you mentioned, in a time when we are seeing an increase in the number of severe weather events across the United States. These weather events are becoming more complex, creating additional challenges for people across the country to recover from these events. We have to support everybody that has been impacted by this, and it is one of the reasons why I have been so determined throughout my time here

to remove as many barriers to accessing our programs as possible, like the recent changes to our individual assistance program, which has been transformational, the biggest changes that we have done in probably 20 years to open up more assistance for people across the United States that have been impacted. We have to help these people get back on their road to recovery and that is what FEMA does. We jumpstart that recovery.

Ms. BROWN. And can you tell us why public confidence in your mission is critical to the safety and well-being of the American public?

Administrator CRISWELL. There is nothing more important than trust. We have to have the trust of the American people. We have to have trust of the communities, the leaders that we are there to serve. We work for the Governor. We work for those local communities. These disasters start and end with them and we are there to support them, and we have to have that trust. That is why we embed people side-by-side with the Governor's team, with community leaders' teams, so we know what issues are going on, what the challenges their communities are facing, so we can move resources into those communities to help meet those needs.

Ms. BROWN. Thank you. Now, it is unfortunate we have seen extremist conspiracy theories regarding FEMA's disaster response. Can you please speak to how this harmful and inaccurate rhetoric undermines your Agency's mission to provide support to Americans impacted by a disaster, regardless of party affiliation or anything else?

Administrator CRISWELL. Yes, the amount of misinformation, Congresswoman, that we have seen throughout this event has really been at a whole new level, but this is something that FEMA has experienced since it was instituted in 1979. And we need to be able to reach people where they are at to help them on their road to recovery, and we do this in a number of ways. We can translate information into their native language. We can reach out to local faith-based organizations, trusted leaders in the community to help them reach out to people that have been impacted so they know that the information they are getting is accurate and that they can and should apply for assistance with FEMA.

Ms. BROWN. Thank you for that. And this is how our essential Federal agencies should continue to operate, unaffected by partisan politics and above political interference. I am very glad that this is something we are in agreement on today and look forward to it continuing into the future. And with that, I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The gentlelady yields back. The Chair recognizes Mr. Sessions from Texas.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. Administrator, thank you for taking time to be here. I felt like that in listening to you earlier, that your questions, the answers, and the things that you responded with, not only show that you have the capacity to understand the task in front of you, but that you have effectively dealt with it. If I could just provide two pieces of information. I am not even looking for a response, but two pieces of information. We did a Subcommittee hearing out in Hawaii and we had an opportunity, the Subcommittee which I chair, Federal Workforce—Government Operations and Federal Workforce—and it

was very important for us to go, and we learned that it was the most expensive disaster in the country's history, some \$3 billion. I was surprised to hear that it was the most expensive, but that is the testimony. I would draw to your attention that much of the delay that has caused much of the money that has been spent, I think, could be negotiated better with the Governor of the state. The FEMA representatives who were there did a great job and I enjoyed them, but they felt like that the delays in their ability to make progress, to get people back onto their own home site, back in their own homes has been delayed because the Governor will not issue the necessary paperwork for them to move forward. And so, they have moved them off a little bit, maybe a mile to the West, and they are building a huge new subdivision of mobile homes, essentially, that are going to cost a million dollars each. And I think that many of those could have been placed, maybe 4 or 5 months earlier with the assistance of the Governor. I would encourage you to please engage the Governor.

Second, in 2010, there was a blast that happened at West Texas, a great big explosion, and part of that explosion destroyed many schools, I think the elementary school, the junior high, and the high school. We are still now 14 years off that, and there is a disagreement about the aggregated money that was spent, and FEMA still believes that West Texas, West Independent School District, still owes back a great deal of money, and my staff got deeply engaged. About a 5-hour Zoom call occurred, and at that I think that there could have been more transparency on behalf of the Federal Government because there were dollars that were lumped into aggregate areas that we could not tell what was in there, and I do not think it was a perfect match. It was apples on one side and oranges on another, and the city of West, including the school district, put things that they paid for, for instance, some athletic fields and some other things, which were not broken out and which may have been an assumption that somebody else was paying for things.

My point in saying this, you have not personally looked at this and I have not either, but I am going to, and I would like to, when I contact your regional coordinator there, I would like to advise him that I told you that I think more transparency will be necessary so that we can effectively put this to bed, and I would like to ask that you somehow give some signal or notice. Let us get transparency. Let us resolve this. Fourteen years is too long. We do appreciate FEMA. We do appreciate the work they have done and I am proud of your work as the Administrator. Mr. Chairman, I yield back my time.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman yields back. The Chair recognizes Ms. Lee from Pennsylvania.

Ms. LEE. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I would also like to thank Administrator Criswell for being here with us today on a very long day, obviously, but let us be real. You know, what FEMA does has never been more critical because right now climate change has completely flipped the script. Storms like Milton and Helene hitting landlocked states, that was unthinkable not too long ago, but now we have got places like Asheville, North Carolina, 2,000 feet above sea level and hundreds of miles from the coast getting wrecked by

hurricanes and extreme weather. So, Administrator Criswell, as we are seeing more frequent and intense storms, what new challenges are you seeing emerge for your Agency?

Administrator CRISWELL. As you mentioned, Congresswoman, we are seeing events like we have not seen before. I mean, I can think back to a year ago with the wildfires in Maui that were happening at the same time that we had a hurricane in the Pacific heading toward the desert lands of California. The types of events and severe weather events that we are seeing are at a scale that we have not seen previously. I mean, as an example, 117-ish disasters last year and we have over 170 already declared this year. The challenges we face is making sure as we are rebuilding these communities, that we do so in a way that makes them stronger against future storms, and not just the risks that they faced in the past, but the risks that they will face in the future.

Ms. LEE. Certainly. So, as climate change worsens, would you say that your Agency is going to need more resources or fewer resources?

Administrator CRISWELL. I think we will definitely need more resources to be able to keep up with the pacing demand of the events that we have been responding to.

Ms. LEE. Certainly. It does not take a genius to figure that one out. More disasters in more areas mean more help will be needed. The climate crisis is here. Pretending that it does not exist or that it will not get worse only harms the people that we have been sent to this body to represent. For the sake of not only my constituents, but people all over the country who may face natural disasters they have never even thought to prepare for. I hope that we can all come together to give the American people the help that they deserve. That means making sure that FEMA is fully funded and that they are serving all survivors of natural disasters. So, let us be honest about what is happening here today.

My Republican colleagues want to cherry-pick this incident and sensationalize it. Well, the reality is that for decades there has been different treatment by FEMA, for instance, toward Black and Brown communities. Hurricanes Katrina, Maria, Ida, Florence, Harvey, we all saw communities of color served last or not at all, and those are difficult to discuss, but important. Several reports and investigations confirmed what those of us who are part of those communities already knew, that White disaster victims were helped first and with more money than Black, people of color, even when the damage was the same. Rather than fixate on a single incident, this Committee should be working to ensure that the entire system is equitable for all Americans and that we are building on the work of the Administration to make that so.

With that said, while we are reflecting and analyzing our disaster response, I would like to ask you, Administrator Criswell, what has FEMA done to ensure that all communities, particularly the most marginalized, are being fully served? How has there been improvement since previous storms where we have seen critiques or even difficulties in administering service?

Administrator CRISWELL. You know, I have served as a local emergency manager, and I understand what it is like to be a customer of FEMA. I have seen people within my own communities

that have had a hard time accessing the programs. One of the first things that I did was change some of our policies to ensure that we understand everybody's unique needs. For example, we know that many homeowners in all parts of the country do not have traditional mortgages or traditional deeds to their homes. And so, we expanded the types of documentation that we accept from people so they can access our programs. These are the kind of barriers that were affecting people everywhere, and we wanted to make sure that everyone that was impacted by a disaster could access our programs with minimal amount of barriers. Those are the changes that we have made. We continue to make more. There is more work to do.

Ms. LEE. Certainly, but those are such critical steps that we have seen results from, so we thank you for that. I do not think it can be stressed enough how important FEMA is going to be in the years to come. The climate crisis means recognizing that we are about to see weather events we have just never expected. Hurricanes ravaging inland communities, uncontrollable wildfires, as you have mentioned, across more areas of the country, uncontrollable tornadoes, floods, severe storms that are upending lives. Every dollar not invested in FEMA now, is just going to burn us in the years to come.

When communities are leveled, it costs more money to fix. We have no choice but to invest if we do not want to see communities completely erased after climate catastrophes. I agree with my colleagues across the aisle that partisanship has no place in distributing government services and aid. Neither does race or socioeconomic status. That being said, as more and more of our constituents are affected by increasing natural disasters, it is more important than ever that we maintain that same commitment to non-partisan distribution of aid in the coming years. I thank you, again, for joining us and for your testimony today, and I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The Chair now recognizes Mr. Burchett from Tennessee.

Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ms. Criswell, there seems to be a huge discrepancy in Federal cost share between different states. And if I had a map, I could show you. There it is up there on there.

[Map]

Mr. BURCHETT. Why is East Tennessee only granted 45 days of 100-percent Federal cost share? It seems like parts of North Carolina, as you can see, were granted 180 days of the 100 percent Federal cost share.

Administrator CRISWELL. The cost share requests for each of the states were granted based on the Governor's request.

Mr. BURCHETT. The Governor. So, when I go to Governor Bill Lee, he is going to tell me that was what he requested?

Administrator CRISWELL. That was the Governor's initial request. He has since then requested an additional amount of time, and that is currently under review.

Mr. BURCHETT. OK. We would be very appreciative if you could help with that. Why is there a political border between Tennessee and North Carolina determining the Federal cost share? Does that fall back on the Governors, or is that something that you all do?

I mean, it just seems like if you got a loss, you know, why should it stop at the border if obviously the devastation is in North Carolina and then the water came down through there and just wiped-out parts of Tennessee as well?

Administrator CRISWELL. Presidential disaster declarations are based by statute on individual states, and then everything that goes with that, to include cost share, is based on the request from the Governor as well as the overall capacity and needs of that state.

Mr. BURCHETT. OK. When would the Governor's review be finalized?

Administrator CRISWELL. We plan to have that review done in the next several weeks.

Mr. BURCHETT. OK. If it is done in the next several weeks, won't that delay the cleanup by these companies?

Administrator CRISWELL. No, it should not delay it. This is only about a cost share. So, the work to continue to remove debris or to stabilize critical infrastructure should and needs to continue, and then we will continue to reimburse states on the work that they have done.

Mr. BURCHETT. OK. Is North Carolina eligible for 180 days of Federal cost share due to the severity of the disaster, or it is just that goes back just to the Governor, what they were asking?

Administrator CRISWELL. In North Carolina's case, the Governor did ask for 180 days, and based on the severity and magnitude of the disaster, and the scale of the impacts across Western North Carolina, it was determined that that was an appropriate request.

Mr. BURCHETT. OK. What documentation do you require to reimburse disaster victims for temporary shelter?

Administrator CRISWELL. For individuals themselves or for states that covered sheltering costs?

Mr. BURCHETT. Individuals.

Administrator CRISWELL. So, if an individual has experienced costs related to evacuating their area, either pre-landfall or during a disaster, they are eligible for a number of different programs. They can get rental assistance, and that can be determined just by applying for FEMA additional assistance, but if they need continuing rental assistance, they will have to show receipts that they are continuing to pay for rent. Every case is going to be specific and unique to each individual, and we work with them on a case-by-case basis.

Mr. BURCHETT. The lady who has been alluded to many times, the FEMA employee with the name was Mar'ni Washington, if I am correct, who gave the order to discriminate against Trump supporters. Who is her supervisor, and was the supervisor disciplined or was it just totally taken as an individual action?

Administrator CRISWELL. At this point, the unacceptable behavior of this FEMA crew lead, this individual person, has led to my direction to have her terminated. We are conducting ongoing investigations, and we will continue to provide any necessary disciplinary action as necessary. We have also engaged the Inspector General to assist us and provide their own independent investigation.

Mr. BURCHETT. Was this person's supervisor investigated as well?



Administrator CRISWELL. This is an ongoing investigation, and everybody that has been involved in that incident will be part of that investigation.

Mr. BURCHETT. When do you expect that to be finalized? Is there any way to tell?

Administrator CRISWELL. I think it is too early to tell an exact timeframe, especially since we want to bring in the Inspector General to conduct their own investigation.

Mr. BURCHETT. OK. What documents do illegal migrants need for shelter?

Administrator CRISWELL. I am not an immigration agency. I would have to defer you to DHS.

Mr. BURCHETT. So, they do not come to you all and say—when they apply for FEMA, they do not do that?

Administrator CRISWELL. Only legal citizens can get additional assistance from FEMA. There are a number of ways that they can do that, and it is all described in statute.

Mr. BURCHETT. OK. Secretary Mayorkas uses authority under Title V of the 2024 appropriations bill to shift funds from the migrant program to disaster relief programs. How do you plan to restore the faith in FEMA after that occurred?

Administrator CRISWELL. Can you repeat that question, sir? We shifted—

Mr. BURCHETT. I am running out of time, if that is all right, Mr. Chairman. Has Secretary Mayorkas used his authority under Title V of the 2024 Appropriations Bill to shift funds from migrant programs to disaster relief programs?

Administrator CRISWELL. I am not aware of any funding being shifted from migrant programs into disaster relief programs.

Mr. BURCHETT. Or—

Administrator CRISWELL. Disaster relief is a separate appropriation from Congress.

Mr. BURCHETT. OK. For disaster relief to migrant, either way?

Administrator CRISWELL. There has been no money shifted from the disaster relief fund under this Administration to support migrant programs.

Mr. BURCHETT. OK. I have run out of time. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman COMER. The Chair recognizes Ms. Crockett.

Ms. CROCKETT. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you so much, Administrator, for being here. A couple of things that I want to try to run through as quickly as possible. Are you familiar with NOAA?

Administrator CRISWELL. NOAA, the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration?

Ms. CROCKETT. Yes, yes. And out of curiosity—you obviously knew what NOAA stood for—when we are trying to prepare for these disasters as they are impending, do you rely on information that you receive from them in getting prepared for a potential disaster?

Administrator CRISWELL. NOAA is a critical partner of FEMA's, whether it is through their National Hurricane Center to give us forecasts for where hurricanes and the strength of hurricanes are going to hit, or the National Water Center that helps us under-

stand what the flooding impacts are going to be, or the Severe Weather Center that talks about tornado forecasts. All of this is important to make sure that, one, we can inform individuals that are in harm's way, but also help us prepare and preposition our resources to support any immediate response needs.

Ms. CROCKETT. Thank you for that. So, you would agree with me that any administration that would decide that it wants to get rid of NOAA, that would probably make your job that much more difficult?

Administrator CRISWELL. Without the scientific data that we get from NOAA to help us make decisions and warn the public, it would make that job more difficult.

Ms. CROCKETT. OK. I want to talk about money, and I want to talk about it a lot here in a minute. Listen, we had a vote that was right before these terrible hurricanes that we have been talking about, Milton and Helene, came in. And in that particular vote, we had an opportunity to decide how much funding was going to go to FEMA. And it is my understanding that on this Committee, we had a few Members that decided that they were not going to vote in support of that funding. I do not know how closely you follow, but we had a number of Members who actually served not only on this Committee, but they serve in states that have been mentioned, such as Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. And right now, it is my understanding that we are having a hearing because there is a concern about a specific individual who potentially skipped, I think, the total was 20 homes, correct?

And in those 20 homes, if you had to guess, and I do not know if you have been back to those 20 homes at this point in time to see what resources, if any, were needed, but if you had to guess, approximately how much money are we talking about did not potentially get distributed immediately to those 20 homes?

Administrator CRISWELL. All 20 homes have been revisited by our Disaster Survivor Assistance teams. I do not know how many have actually applied for assistance, but the maximum amount that is available for an individual through this disaster was \$42,500 for housing assistance and another possible \$42,500 for other needs assistance.

Ms. CROCKETT. OK. What I am hearing, though, is we are talking about 20 houses. The data that I have in front of me shows that over 18,000 interactions have been conducted for survivors of both Hurricane Helene and Milton. Is that approximately correct?

Administrator CRISWELL. I would say that that number is probably much higher than that.

Ms. CROCKETT. OK. Give me your number. Well, let us pre-suppose that the number was 18,000. If we talked about 20 out of 18,000, that would mean that we are currently using resources to have a hearing about .1 percent of interactions, so this is not something that we would consider to be widespread when we start talking about percentages that are as low as .1 percent. In addition to that, it is my understanding that as of November 13, FEMA has delivered over 16 million meals, over 18 million liters of water, over 3,000 rolls of blue roof sheeting, over 700,000 gallons of fuel, and additionally, FEMA has delivered over 2,000 tractor trailer deliv-

eries containing critical supplies. Do you have any reason to have any discrepancies about those numbers?

Administrator CRISWELL. No.

Ms. CROCKETT. In addition to that, it is my understanding—I am sorry, you are right that over 671,000 households impacted by Hurricane Helene have received over \$503 million from FEMA's Serious Needs Program, and over 218,000 households impacted by Hurricane Milton have received over \$145 million. Yet and still, we had Members on this Committee, it looks like there were 82 Members that opposed the bill to fund when we knew that this was coming, thanks to NOAA, and 19 of the 26 Republicans on this Oversight Committee voted against the bill to keep FEMA funded, and nine are in states that were directly hit.

I do not understand why we come in and pretend that we have all these issues with your Agency, and I thank you for your service, when you do not want to fund it. You cannot complain about these issues, and when we are talking about, you know, the people that got skipped over, maybe or maybe not, ultimately there was a concern about safety. Now hopefully, we will get the full investigation, but we know that it was Trump that was out there himself. He was putting out disinformation and misinformation to the extent that you all had to set up an entire website to try to combat it. That was a disservice to all Americans because when a hurricane hits, it does not go into the Democratic areas. It does not go to the Independents. It does not go to the Republicans. It goes to American citizens. It is time for us to decide that we are going to work together and make sure that we can take care of people regardless of the decisions that they decide to make on who they want to put into the White House. And I thank you for your service and I yield.

Chairman COMER. The Chair now recognizes Mr. Fallon from Texas.

Mr. FALLON. I thank you, Mr. Chairman. You know what? Listen, when a natural disaster hits, it is devastating for those who are affected. Their lives, their health, their well-being, their livelihoods, they are all at risk, and it tosses their lives upside down. And in short, in the aftermath of these acts of God, we are going to find Americans at their most vulnerable, and they are desperate, and they need help. And FEMA is the one Federal Agency whose primary mission is to provide them that help, and the American taxpayers, as we all know, fund it, and it does not matter if you are a Democrat, it does not matter if you are a Republican. You are an American, and you pay taxes to ensure that you can be helped if, God forbid, that act of God occurred. And we do not help them by arbitrarily deciding if they support one particular candidate over another. That is not only immoral and wrong, it is criminal. It shatters the Hatch Act. And then we have a FEMA employee unfortunately,—I believe it is Marri Washington—who was purposely and deliberately withholding aid to Trump supporters. So, you are going to avoid those homes that had Trump signs. Director, fair to say that you were horrified when you learned of that?

Administrator CRISWELL. It is completely unacceptable, and it was heartbreaking to hear that anybody that was impacted by this disaster potentially did not get the assistance they needed.

Mr. FALLON. So, would you say that it was an isolated incident?

Administrator CRISWELL. At this time, I have seen no other evidence that goes beyond Ms. Washington, but this is under continuing investigation.

Mr. FALLON. So, it was not systemic? You do not feel it was systemic?

Administrator CRISWELL. I understand the reports that this employee is making. However, the evidence that has been presented to me does not show that this is a widespread problem, but I want to be certain—

Mr. FALLON. OK. Right.

Administrator CRISWELL [continuing]. That this is not a widespread problem.

Mr. FALLON. So, Ms. Washington disagreed, of course, and she said that she would have been scapegoated, and that FEMA, the Agency, prioritizes avoidance and de-escalation in situations where some employees may feel unsafe, like according to her, urban areas where there might be unleashed dogs. And I mean, the thing that gets me about that is, Director, you do not think that a Trump sign poses a danger akin to a runaway dog, right?

Administrator CRISWELL. Of course not.

Mr. FALLON. And I mean, that is ridiculous, and Trump supporters certainly should not be compared to or treated like unleashed dogs, nor should anybody, even somebody that supported Ms. Harris for President. And so, to determine whether or not this is systemic and this is imbued into the fabric of the Agency or not, would you agree that an independent investigation should be called for?

Administrator CRISWELL. Absolutely.

Mr. FALLON. And I think it was Representative Perry, and you had a discussion about that today. Was that right? I do not know if it was today, but—

Administrator CRISWELL. It was this morning.

Mr. FALLON. This morning, yes.

Administrator CRISWELL. And, yes, and I have already reached out to the IG. We had been working with him, but I have directly asked them to perform an independent investigation.

Mr. FALLON. I think that is great. The thing is, like, on a timeline basis, you had October 9, Milton reaches landfall and then the 24th, there was a whistleblower complaint; 28th, your legal staff found out about it, and we know for sure on the 7th that the higher-ups—did you find out about this earlier, or was it on the 7th?

Administrator CRISWELL. I was in North Carolina on November 7 when it was brought to my attention—

Mr. FALLON. OK.

Administrator CRISWELL [continuing]. That we had this potential issue. I asked my team to look into it and get me additional information. They presented me the written text of this employee, and then I directed the termination.

Mr. FALLON. OK. So, did they present you the written text on the 7th?

Administrator CRISWELL. On the 9th.

Mr. FALLON. On the 9th, and that is when you fired her, on the 9th?

Administrator CRISWELL. Correct, after I saw written evidence.

Mr. FALLON. There was a *Daily Wire* article that happened to just hit on the 8th, and that was, like, national news, and then she was fired the very next day. I was just concerned about the fact that your legal staff knew on the 28th and this woman was not only continually being employed by FEMA, but also as a supervisor as well. And then, so you do agree that we should have an IG investigation, and I think that I also do, but that was not until today. Why the delay?

Administrator CRISWELL. There was no delay. We have been working with the IG since this was brought to the Office of Professional Responsibility. They have been determining whether or not they were going to take this case, and I just directly asked them today.

Mr. FALLON. So, you did not directly ask them—you could have directly asked them earlier though, fair to say?

Administrator CRISWELL. Fair to say.

Mr. FALLON. OK. But there was a delay of a couple of weeks.

Administrator CRISWELL. We had to work with them, and we brought them into this.

Mr. FALLON. OK. So, you know, it is interesting being on this Committee, Mr. Chairman, for 4 years. It seems no matter what we talk about, all roads lead back to Donald Trump, and for our friends across the aisle, he is the boogeyman Trump. We can be talking about 40-year high inflation, it is somehow Trump's fault. Twenty-year high interest rates, Trump. We are talking about a FEMA employee denying services to supporters of Donald Trump and that somehow all they want to talk about is Donald Trump—edited, cherry-picked, out of context information. I think that is called misinformation, if I am not mistaken. And it is unfortunate because here is the facts: that Donald Trump was President for 4 years and he approved 89 disasters in states that opposed him, including 17 in California, more than any state. More than 80 percent of the disaster requests that President Trump denied came from Governors of states he won in 2016. And I am going to have a quote here from an expert. "There is really no difference that I have seen," said Chad Berginnis, the Executive Director of the Association of State Floodplain Managers. That is truth in context. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman yields back. The Chair recognizes Ms. Tlaib from Michigan.

Ms. TLAIB. Thank you so much, Chairman. Administrator, thank you so much for being here. I know it has been a long day, but this is really important in regard to something that is happening in my community. I know you probably know I am from Michigan, and we have been hit hard the last 4 years as a result of storms and flooding. We had two declarations in the last 4 years for flooding. Many of my residents still currently struggle with ongoing emotional toll as well as the cost of flood damage, which they have yet to be able to recover to this day.

In my district, though, residents live in housing that often do not have separate rooms, or what you call occupant rooms in the basement, and which triggers this exclusion that FEMA has right now of getting help when there is not somebody sleeping in the base-

ment. This was very much a surprise to me because many of my seasoned residents who had flooding could not get access to be able to do the cleanup, which led to such terrible damage of their basement. And I would love to submit for the record, Chairman, article from *BridgeDetroit*, “Devastating Floods Leave Detroiters With Toxic Mold.”

Chairman COMER. Without objection, so ordered.

Ms. TLAIB. And in this article, it talks about the fact that many of our homes, they would get all this coverage for all these other things except the basement, where the majority of the flooding left—you know, I have one resident, 90-year-old woman in Northwest Detroit. If you walk into her home these days, especially at this time of the year, you will feel cool air coming from her kitchen to her living room. She will tell you that 6 months has passed since the last FEMA declared flood, and your heart sinks because she has no, literally resulting from the damage of the basement, drainage issues, no hot water, rising problems related to the mold and a broken furnace, right? And we are helping her as quickly as possible to try to see if there are any other community-based organizations. But the question then comes to my team and I is, why is this an exclusion, and would FEMA be open to working with Members of Congress in a bipartisan way? Because Michigan, we got basements, and we need to be able to have some sort of a remedy that it can be a livable home. Toxic mold is dangerous for any age, but especially my seasoned residents. They are on fixed income. They do not have the resources to take care of them.

Administrator CRISWELL. Congresswoman, the programs that we have in our individual assistance program, one, do not replace insurance. And when somebody is underinsured or uninsured, they do have access to FEMA financial assistance through our housing programs, but unfortunately, by statute, the only thing that we are allowed to provide financial assistance with is for primary living areas. And so that would be the financial assistance that they get.

Ms. TLAIB. I want my colleagues to hear this, especially one colleague. I think there could be a bipartisan effort here because the basement helps make the rest of the house livable. That is where the utilities are, I mean, allowing the mold to continue to grow. I had a woman in Inkster who did not have the capacity to clean out and get the water out. It froze in the winter, causing even more damages to her home, and, Administrator, I know it is statute. I just wanted my colleagues to understand it. Also, Mr. Chair, for the record, to submit, “After the Flood,” article, again, continue to talk about the growing issue of flood and storms that are coming throughout, I think, Michigan again, impacted by the lack of, again, FEMA being able to cover or just be able to provide some sort of assistance for basements.

Administrator CRISWELL. And Congresswoman, we would be happy to partner with you and provide technical drafting assistance, but right now, as you mentioned and as I mentioned, we are limited by statute on what we can provide financial assistance for, but we also work with our partners then.

Ms. TLAIB. I know.

Administrator CRISWELL. The SBA comes in.

Ms. TLAIB. SBA is so hard. You want to tell one of my seasoned residents to get a loan from the Small Business Administration, they will roll your eyes, probably never talk to me again. I cannot do that to them. Even when I tell them they will work with you, thinking about even a lien on their home, they just do not want to go through that process. The other thing, Administrator, I think is really important. I want to know, and please get back to me, in those two declarations in Michigan, what was the rate of denial? Because I had to go through so many appeals with our families to get them the help that they needed from FEMA, and I thought to myself we are just denying folks. And then later, months later, but it takes so much effort to, again, get somebody to respond, help the family get the submission to appeal, and they actually get approved. But the initial denial, I just feel like we could be preventing that initial denial because it is devastating for a family. Some do not even know to call their Member of Congress for help.

Administrator CRISWELL. We would be happy to get you that information. And I will just add that, you know, it frustrates me equally as much that the way our current system, the platform works, sends these letters out so quickly, when all we need to do often is get one additional piece of information. It is something that we can prioritize and trying to work on it.

Ms. TLAIB. It is like a receipt or something. Yes, just tell the residents. We got to work on that, because denying them, they will walk away and they do not even try again.

Administrator CRISWELL. I understand.

Ms. TLAIB. And I go to my town halls, I go to different places, and they will say, "well, FEMA denied me," and I said, "did you try appealing?" What do you mean? How do I do that? Again, I think we need a better process because we are a public government entity. We should not act like the for-profit insurance companies. We should be better at this. We should move with much, much more compassion. Thank you.

Chairman COMER. The Chair now recognizes Mr. Timmons from South Carolina.

Mr. TIMMONS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank Administrator Criswell for being here. You have been here a long time today. It is about 6. This is what, your 7th, 8th hour? We appreciate you being here to answer these questions. I do not think any of us believe that you are responsible for the conduct of some of the employees and/or leadership. Who knows, we are going to get to the bottom of that, but I just appreciate you being here today.

You have gotten a lot of the same questions all day, and I am going to talk about something a little bit different. I am going to talk about the media and how it responded to this incident. So, on September 30, President Trump posts on X about reports of FEMA not helping Republican areas, stating, "I don't like the reports that I am getting about the Federal Government going out of their way to not help people in Republican areas." And, you know, President Trump posts this on social media, and the mainstream media, quite frankly, lost their mind. So, let us just go over some of the responses. October 1, here we have MSNBC: "What kind of would-be leader lies about a deadly natural disaster? When it comes to Donald Trump and Hurricane Helene, it is not a rhetorical ques-

tion.” Then we have *New York Times*: “The Former President Falsely Accused the Biden Administration of Neglecting Areas That Had Voted for Republicans.” Then we go to CNN: “Trump cites baseless reports about anti-Republican bias in the North Carolina response.” And then, finally, *Vox* on October 8, “Trump Falsely Suggested That Federal Government is Purposely Neglecting Areas With Republican Voters, But None of These Claims Are True.”

So, it seems that at least one of them was true and possibly more. Ms. Washington was fired, allegedly for not providing relief to hurricane victims because of their political affiliation. We have documented that. I guess one question for you is, what exactly was she fired for? So, I mean, I guess the report is that she was terminated due to her actions not adhering to FEMA’s values. Is that correct?

Administrator CRISWELL. She was terminated once I saw the written evidence that she was withholding assistance to people in communities impacted by disasters because they had a Trump sign. This goes against our core values and is inappropriate behavior.

Mr. TIMMONS. OK. I just want to be sure we understand because it sounds like a catch-all, the language of not adhering to FEMA’s values. It is kind of similar to conduct unbecoming an officer in the UCMJ. But I guess my bigger issue is that FEMA did not cite a specific policy that she violated. So, is there a specific policy at FEMA that forbids discrimination of any kind or is this just a catch-all?

Administrator CRISWELL. We definitely have policies that prohibit the discrimination of anybody, whether it is the delivery of our disaster programs or the delivery of our grant programs that support communities to be better prepared for the severe weather events that they are experiencing.

Mr. TIMMONS. And as you should, and I appreciate that. And obviously, Ms. Washington has made a number of claims alleging that this is systemic and that this is something that is not an isolated incident. We just had another whistleblower allege that there is additional information. So, I guess, you have already agreed to keep all records of every kind to make sure that this Committee and that the American public is able to get to the bottom of whether this was Ms. Washington living out her own political fantasy or whether there was a systemic leadership-driven effort to deny relief to people that support President Trump. So, again, you can—you have already done it three to four times, probably 30 or 40 times. You can promise that you are going to keep all information, all data, all emails, all Teams messages for this Committee and for the American public to get to the bottom of this?

Administrator CRISWELL. We archive all information as we have brought in the Inspector General and have been conducting our own investigation. All of that is available to them in the course of their investigation.

Mr. TIMMONS. Well, thank you. It seems that we are going to find a number of other people that have engaged in similar behavior, and I can promise we will get to the bottom of all of it after January 20. So, I mean, you know, anybody that has engaged in this behavior at FEMA, I would encourage them to get their re-



sume ready and find new jobs because a new day is coming. And with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman yields back. The Chair recognizes Ms. Stansbury from New Mexico.

Ms. STANSBURY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Administrator. I know it has been a very long day, and, actually, I am grateful for the commentary that was made just before I began this opportunity to ask some questions and talk about today's hearing because I think it is important to emphasize the statements that were just made that a new day is coming on January 20. And for any of you who are listening at home, what they are referring to is the inauguration day when the Trump Administration comes in and begins their purge of civil servants.

And the reason why I am emphasizing that is because, yes, we are here to discuss a very serious matter, and absolutely, under no condition should politics be the reason why someone is denied basic dignity, access to emergency resources, and comity by our colleagues, whether that is emergency aid in their homes or access to the bathroom here in the Capitol. And so, I think it is important that we talk about what is actually motivating this hearing.

Now, I want to take a moment. I am a former Federal employee. I used to work at OMB. Many people know that here on the Committee, but I think a lot of people do not fully understand what FEMA does, its emergency response. And I want to say thank you to you and all of your team during this summer's historic and catastrophic fires in my district, in Ruidoso and Mescalero Apache. You came to our district, your staff were on the ground immediately, and you deployed every possible resource, and I can tell you unequivocally, that it was the best response I have ever seen to a natural disaster in my lifetime. And I can tell my colleagues across the aisle, that area is very much an area that votes Republican, and those of us in New Mexico, we do not care. We do not care what your political affiliation is. We are going to show up. If you are in need, if you need help, if you are having an emergency, we are going to show up. We are going to help.

And so, obviously, all of us are deeply disturbed to learn of this incident. It sounds like the person was disciplined and dismissed, and so we are grateful for that. But I find it odd that we are having a hearing where my colleagues have spent how many hours now 6, 8, I do not even know at this point—gaslighting us. You know, like, here we are, we are having this hearing about an incident which is totally unacceptable, and yet the gentleman who is about to take office, the President-elect, deliberately and outspokenly withheld aid from his political rivals from the state of California, from Puerto Rico, from communities that he knew did not vote for him. And so, I just find it bizarre that we are even having this hearing.

And one of the things that I do think is important to emphasize is that this single most impactful thing that happened during those two hurricanes that happened in the October timeframe was the disinformation that dissuaded people in emergency situations from going and getting individual aid in their homes. I do not know how many people felt like they did not get direct service from FEMA or other emergency responders. But what we do know, because the

data tells us, is that there was a disinformation campaign by the candidate who was running for President, Members of this Committee, who were spreading disinformation. And we know that thousands of people in North Carolina and across the South and in Florida did not even go and ask for assistance, even though they qualified for emergency assistance for housing, for hotels, for food, and things like that. So, if we want to talk about threats to emergency response, emergency management to our communities, let us talk about one of the biggest threats, which is disinformation and eating away at the emergency services that help our communities.

And I want to just close on this note because I believe that the purpose of this Committee is actually the real pretext of what is going on here is that we know, as was just stated by my friend across the aisle, that on January 20, a new day is coming. And one of the things that we know is that a conservative agenda was put forward by the Heritage Foundation and others in Project 2025, and it called for the privatization, shrinking, and the doing away with certain parts of FEMA and emergency insurance. They are trying to distract from the fact that they know that is what is coming, that is part of the plan. They have not passed an emergency package that they were calling for to help our communities just a month-and-a-half ago, that suddenly, well, we cannot pass legislation because we do not need to get it done.

So, I think it is really important that the American people understand what this is. We are going to have to fight to protect our Federal employees against what we know is going to be an active purge. And I want to say to all of you and to all of our first responders out there, thank you for the jobs that you do. Thank you for the lives that you save. We appreciate you so, so much, and we are going to fight for you.

Chairman COMER. The Chair now recognizes Ms. Greene from Georgia.

Ms. GREENE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. While Democrats are complaining about this lengthy hearing and about President Trump coming in and slashing and reducing the size of government, I just want to say, let the purge begin because there are people that are homeless right now in Western North Carolina, Eastern Tennessee, Georgia, and misinformation is not the most dangerous thing facing us. It is right now pretty much the Federal Government and the failure to the American people. Ms. Criswell, first off, let us put this up.

[Chart]

Ms. GREENE. This is the strategic plan you have posted on the FEMA website. "The goal and objectives laid out in the 2022–2026 strategic plan will help ensure success for our Agency, the emergency management community, and those we serve. The Plan outlines three bold ambitious goals." To meet this challenge, you have listed as No. 1, instill equity as a foundation of emergency management. Two, lead whole-of-community in climate resilience. Three, promote and sustain a ready FEMA and prepared Nation. Ms. Criswell, in FEMA's strategic plan document that you crafted, you say, "We must instill equity as a foundation of emergency management. Systems that foster inequality serve no one, especially in times of crisis. We must recognize that disasters affect individuals

and communities differently, commit ourselves to reducing barriers to access, and deliver equitable outcomes for all whom we serve.” The documents adds, “underserved communities, as well as specific identity groups, often suffer disproportionately from disasters.” However, thanks to whistleblowers that came out, we found out that Trump supporters were also suffering, apparently worse than others, because their homes were skipped over.

And I know you said that you fired the employee that skipped the homes that had Trump signs, but, you know, we do not believe that was a one-time incidence, and now we know there is another whistleblower that has come forward and said that this happened in another state. And you see, the reason why Americans do not believe this is a one-time situation is because they are used to being treated as if they are second-class citizens by the Biden Administration. Not only has this happened in FEMA, when they were suffering under horrific conditions after this hurricane, it has happened through the Department of Justice, where the Department of Justice has been used against pro-life activists, parents holding their school boards accountable, and people that protested the election on January 6. This Biden Administration, as a matter of fact, you talk about equity, has treated half of this country and our beliefs and how we feel completely inequitable.

So, on that note, I also want to bring up that you also said, “In administering our mitigation programs, we will keep equity considerations top of mind, and we will include them in the competitive scoring process for programs such as flood mitigation assistance.” What exactly is this scoring process that you use when you are choosing organizations to give FEMA funds to?

Administrator CRISWELL. Congresswoman, we have a number of competitive grant programs that provide assistance across a variety of areas. The ones that you are speaking of are part of our mitigation program where we want to build resilience in these communities so they can be stronger against some of the impacts from the severe weather events we are seeing, but we know that many communities do not have paid staff to write grants. They do not have the resources to be competitive against the larger urban areas. And so, we want to make sure everybody, again, has access to the programs that we offer and that we reduce those barriers to make sure that they come in on a level playing field and can get access to make their communities stronger.

Ms. GREENE. Well, in the Fiscal Year of 2023, FEMA spent nearly \$1 billion, \$789 million, to shelter illegals in the United States. This past year it was about \$641 million, and this money largely is distributed through NGO’s. Here is a whole list of them.

[Chart]

Ms. GREENE. I know it may be hard to see from there, but this is a whole list of cities, states, and NGO’s that received millions and millions of dollars from FEMA. And this was to house illegal aliens, not Americans, who, by the way, all that money right there, that comes from Americans’ bank accounts when they write their checks to pay their taxes. Do you think it is acceptable for billions of American taxpayer dollars to be spent on housing people invading our country, but yet Americans in North Carolina, Georgia, and Florida are still homeless and have yet to fully receive support?

Administrator CRISWELL. Congresswoman, we have been directed—

Ms. GREENE. Is that equitable?

Administrator CRISWELL. We have been directed by Congress to administer the shelter and services program. If Congress chooses to change that direction, we will follow that law.

Ms. GREENE. Congress is changing that direction, absolutely. We are going to put American citizens first, not migrants, because we do not believe that is equitable. You see, the situation, housing illegal aliens, while Americans suffer, with Americans taxpayer dollars, that is not equitable. As a matter of fact, that is the biggest failure that could be ever done to the American people. It is such a failure, it should be treason, and that is how the American people feel. As a matter of fact, regular people are so outraged, they are pissed, furious at the fact that they feel completely failed by FEMA that is funded by their money, and yet their own money went to house illegal aliens that have invaded this country. Americans are dead today because of the failures of our border, and FEMA took care of these people. You see that we cannot allow that to happen. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The Chair now recognizes Ms. Pressley from Massachusetts.

Ms. PRESSLEY. Administrator Criswell, thank you for your stamina here today. It is good to see you again. Thank you for joining us today and for your leadership. In the face of repeated climate disasters, mass violence, and humanitarian crises, the workers of FEMA represent the very best of public service and deserve the support of Congress. Attempts by Republicans—many of whom are climate and science deniers, in the face of a frequency of events that were once anomalies, but I digress—attempts by Republicans to question the integrity of FEMA workers is a direct attack on FEMA's mission. Its mission is especially vital for our constituents, many of whom face not only the loss of homes and livelihoods, but also lasting emotional and psychological trauma in the wake of such profound loss.

Ms. Criswell, Administrator, 2 years ago, my bill, the Post-Disaster Mental Health Response Act, was signed into law by President Biden. It expands mental health supports during emergency declarations. Survivors, in my opinion, deserve not only to heal, but to thrive, and this law moves us closer to that. As someone who is deeply committed to addressing trauma, I am proud to have partnered with you and FEMA in this fight. Bearing this in mind, can you expound, Administrator Criswell, on how FEMA is incorporating long-term mental health care into its recovery plans to support the survivors of recent hurricanes?

Administrator CRISWELL. Congresswoman, I appreciate your partnership in pushing that bill forward because the impact that these citizens have after a disaster is traumatizing, and what we do not want to do is re-traumatize them with the delivery of our programs. We have worked with our teams to institute a trauma-informed care approach so we can understand better how a community feels and how a community is reacting to the impacts from the severe weather event.

We also have teams that go out into the field because our staff also get traumatized with the day-in and day-out conversations with people who have lost everything, and it affects them personally, many of them survivors from previous storms themselves. And so, this holistic mental health support is so critical, and we have to de-stigmatize mental health support in a way that encourages our staff, but also survivors, to get the help that they need.

Ms. PRESSLEY. Thank you, Administrator Criswell. When we focus on healing, that is right, we do have to also acknowledge the work of the healer, who is healing the healer? So, FEMA workers themselves are exposed to immense stress and trauma during their services, and as Mr. Moskowitz was alluding to earlier, there is high fatigue and burnout and low morale because these are extenuating circumstances with which to be proximate to. What resources or initiatives does FEMA provide to support the mental health of its own personnel after a disaster?

Administrator CRISWELL. We have taken this very seriously and we have our own mental health advisor at headquarters, but we have also put in mental health advisors in each of our regional offices. And we send teams out into the communities, into our disaster recovery centers and our joint field offices to make sure we are taking care of our people. And even back at headquarters, we will do stand-downs to make sure that we are providing the assistance that they need, making sure they know the resources that are available to them, and that when we ask somebody, how are you doing, we are not just doing it in passing and we are really listening so we can understand the stress that they may be going through and encouraging them to take a break if you need a break, but come back so you can help these people.

Ms. PRESSLEY. Thank you for recognizing the importance of that work and for your continued partnership. Now, my district, the Massachusetts 7th, relies heavily on FEMA in times of crisis. That is why earlier this year, I was proud to work with municipal leaders to secure \$2.5 million for the Cambridge Community Center Resilience Hub and the Mill Creek Resilience Program in Chelsea, and the Island End River Resilience Project in Everett. Administrator Criswell, while I understand there are many priorities before the new Administration steps in, can I have your commitment that FEMA will work to quickly get these funds to my district, and can you follow up with a point of contact I can connect with to follow through on this?

Administrator CRISWELL. Congresswoman, we will certainly follow up with you on the status of those programs and see where they are at and what we can do to move them along.

Ms. PRESSLEY. Thank you. Like every district represented in this hearing room, the Massachusetts 7th depends on FEMA's ability to do its job. We cannot turn the Agency into a political game. Instead, we must ensure FEMA and its workers have the resources, respect, and public confidence they need to continue their work. Our constituents deserve nothing less. Thank you. I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The Chair now recognizes Mrs. McClain. Before I recognize Mrs. McClain, we want to publicly congratulate Mrs. McClain for being elected the Majority Caucus Conference Chair. That is a big deal, a big high-ranking leader. We have an

all-star cast of Members in both parties, especially on our side of the aisle. So, congratulations, Chairwoman.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Chairman COMER. And we recognize you for 5 minutes.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. Thank you. I appreciate it. Thank you so much.

There has been a pattern of discrimination, and I think from what I have listened to, you want to clean it up today, right? You do not approve of what happened. Neither side approves of what happened. I mean, we have seen the weaponization of the Justice Department against President Trump, the Department of Education investigate religious-affiliated universities, the DOJ and FBI targeted parents at school board meetings, blah, blah, blah, goes on and on and on, right? And I think we all want to clean it up, right? Would you agree with that?

Administrator CRISWELL. Discrimination should never be tolerated.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. One hundred percent. I appreciate that. Now, there is a confirmed discrimination against conservatives at FEMA, right? So, I just want to put up this timeline to make sure I have everything correct, right?

[Chart]

Mrs. MCCLAIN. October 22, verbal guidance was given by Ms. Washington to skip over, for lack of better words, Trump homes, anybody that has a Trump sign. October 24, the whistleblower comes forward. October 27, the Teams message that we have seen was sent out. Twenty-eight of October, the complaint received by FEMA's legal staff, and October 8, the story became public. And then on November 9, you became aware of it and terminated her position, correct?

Administrator CRISWELL. I think we are missing one step in there, Congresswoman. I was made aware of it on November 7.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. November 7.

Administrator CRISWELL. I cannot see down below.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. Yes, it is not up here. November 7, and the story became public on the 8th, and then on the 9th, right? I am sure you had—

Administrator CRISWELL. I was made aware of it on November 7. I directed my team to get me additional information. They presented that to me on November 9, which is when I directed the termination of the employee.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. Thank you. Did Ms. Washington receive a severance package?

Administrator CRISWELL. I would have to check. I do not know.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. When could you get back to us? So, you have no idea?

Administrator CRISWELL. I do not know what the terms of her termination were.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. Who would?

Administrator CRISWELL. I would have to check with my mission support team.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. Your mission support team, OK. So, who gave Ms. Washington the authority to give the verbal guidance?

Administrator CRISWELL. I do not know what motivated Ms. Washington to give that guidance. The direction that she gave was

unacceptable and did not align with the way we conduct our business to help the American people.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. What was her title?

Administrator CRISWELL. Crew lead.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. Crew lead, and how many crew leads did you have?

Administrator CRISWELL. We had several crew leads. I would have to get back to you with a specific number, but it is one of the lowest levels of supervision we have.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. So, Ms. Washington had a supervisor?

Administrator CRISWELL. Correct.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. And maybe even a supervisor above that supervisor, right?

Administrator CRISWELL. Correct.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. There may be layers upon layers. OK. Why do you think she felt empowered to give that guidance?

Administrator CRISWELL. I cannot speak to what motivated her to give that guidance. What I can say is I was made aware of this on November 7. It was not acceptable behavior. When I was given the written evidence of her direction on November 9, we directed her termination.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. Who is her supervisor?

Administrator CRISWELL. I do not know specifically who her supervisor is. I know that this individual, Chad, that is in her supervisory chain, but I do not know if that was her specific supervisor.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. Have you done an investigation on this since November 9?

Administrator CRISWELL. We are currently doing an investigation.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. Currently doing.

Administrator CRISWELL. It started on October 28 and it was referred to the Office of Special Counsel.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. So, as of October 28, we have done a bunch of investigations, but we have no idea who her supervisor is?

Administrator CRISWELL. No, I said I personally do not know who her specific supervisor is. I have an Agency of over 22,000 employees. I do not know the supervisor.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. And you have supervisors underneath you. Do you know if anything happened to her supervisor?

Administrator CRISWELL. This is currently under investigation. The only written evidence we had is from Ms. Washington.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. So, we terminated Ms. Washington 3 weeks after you were made aware of it. Thank God that you were made aware of it or this pattern could have continuously gone on because we have layers upon layers, right? You have 22,000 people. I am sure you have a lot of middle management, right? So, you have a crew lead. I do not know what your hierarchical structure is, but you have layers of management before it gets to you, correct?

Administrator CRISWELL. We follow a very——

Mrs. MCCLAIN. That is a pretty simple question. Do you have layers of management before it gets to you?

Administrator CRISWELL. We follow a very, you know——

Mrs. MCCLAIN. That is a great answer.

Administrator CRISWELL [continuing]. Accepted chain of command practice.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. Wonderful. So, I will use your word. You have a chain of command before it gets to you, but you have no clue about what has happened to that chain of command and why somebody would let that happen under their watch. Do you think that is worthy of investigating?

Administrator CRISWELL. I absolutely think it is worthy.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. Wonderful. So, when can I expect a report on what has happened to those people?

Administrator CRISWELL. Which is why I have directed the IG to investigate this.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. When can we expect that report? What consequences would you expect for a supervisor who knew this was going on? Would you expect them to be terminated as well?

Administrator CRISWELL. We have an ongoing investigation, and if we find any evidence that shows that there are additional violations of the way we conduct our business, we will certainly take appropriate action to terminate—

Mrs. MCCLAIN. And would appropriate action be termination?

Administrator CRISWELL. Through termination.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. Wonderful. And when can we expect this report?

Administrator CRISWELL. And we have asked the IG to do this report, and I can connect with them.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. Thank you.

Chairman COMER. The gentlelady yields back. The Chair now recognizes Mr. Goldman from New York.

Mr. GOLDMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to make sure I understand what 4 hours and 20 minutes of fuss is about. Ms. Washington was a crew lead charged with helping to provide assistance to individuals in the following of the hurricane. Is that right?

Administrator CRISWELL. Correct.

Mr. GOLDMAN. OK. You said that FEMA has 22,000 employees?

Administrator CRISWELL. More than.

Mr. GOLDMAN. More than 22,000, OK. And as I understand it, as soon as you saw verified, written evidence that Ms. Washington used partisanship in executing her job, you immediately terminated her?

Administrator CRISWELL. Correct.

Mr. GOLDMAN. And you are now doing an investigation to determine whether anyone else was involved in this?

Administrator CRISWELL. Correct.

Mr. GOLDMAN. Seems like that is the right thing to do. You have a bad apple out of 22,000, and you identified it, and you fired it. I do not understand what the massive fuss here is. It is obviously, as you say, unacceptable conduct and you acted immediately. So, I have not been in here all day, but I have heard the same questions 5 times myself. I am sure you have heard them many more times, but it does beg the question about what happens to FEMA if partisanship bleeds into its mission, and I want to bring up two examples from the last Administration.

Hurricane Maria, you may recall, in September 2017, hit Puerto Rico, resulting in nearly 3,000 deaths. Donald Trump was Presi-



dent then, and he blocked the full release of the emergency assistance appropriated by Congress in 2018, and permitted only a small percentage of the money to go to the island. He insisted that Puerto Rico was not in need of that assistance and alleged that the death tolls had been politically inflated “to make me look as bad as possible.” In November 2018, California suffered the most destructive and deadliest wildfire in the state’s history. Donald Trump, according to his own former National Security Council staffer, refused to approve disaster aid because the state of California had a Democratic Governor and did not vote for him. In fact, this former staffer had to go and pull out the voting records from Orange County, where the fire was, to show Donald Trump that Orange County had more supporters for Trump than the entire state of Iowa, so that he would ultimately release the funding. Now, that appears to me to inject partisanship in administering disaster relief. Is that your understanding of what I just recited to you, Ms. Criswell?

Administrator CRISWELL. I was not the FEMA Administrator during that time, and I would not care to comment on that.

Mr. GOLDMAN. Well, I think it is pretty self-evident that that is exactly what it was, and this now has continued in the recent disasters. We are here focused on one rogue employee who was justifiably and correctly fired, but Donald Trump went on a misinformation campaign to slander your organization. He at one point said that President Biden was sleeping and he was not responding to Georgia Governor Brian Kemp. Brian Kemp responded, “The President just called me yesterday afternoon, and I missed him, and I called him right back. And he just said, hey, what do you need, and I told him, you know, we have got what we need. We will work through the Federal process.” How about this one? Governor Ron DeSantis, “Everything we have asked for from President Biden, he has approved, and we do think we will get more approvals.” Republican Governor Brian Kemp of Georgia, “We got what we need from FEMA. We have had FEMA embedded with us since, you know, a day or two before the storm hit.” Governor Glenn Youngkin, Republican of Virginia, “I am incredibly appreciative of the rapid response and the cooperation from the Federal team at FEMA.” Yet Donald Trump was spreading misinformation that FEMA was not doing its job.

And then, the last few seconds, I would like for you to explain how that misinformation hindered FEMA’s efforts to provide disaster relief to those in need.

Administrator CRISWELL. Any type of misinformation that creates some type of mistrust in the Federal Government creates a lack of opportunity for individuals that have been impacted by these disasters to get the assistance that they need and that they are eligible for. And we want to be able to reach out to everybody that has been impacted and assure them that we are there to support them. They should register for assistance, and we can work with them to help them on their road to recovery.

Mr. GOLDMAN. And do you think that there were some people who did not receive disaster assistance because of this misinformation by Donald Trump?

Administrator CRISWELL. We will never know if there are people that should have applied and did not, but there is the possibility that individuals may not have applied for assistance because of what they were reading across social medium.

Mr. GOLDMAN. Well, there are plenty of publications and media reports about that being the case, and it is a terrific shame, and thank you very much, Administrator Criswell, for all of your hard work during difficult times. I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The Chair now recognizes Ms. Boebert from Colorado.

Ms. BOEBERT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ms. Criswell, I appreciate you being here today. My colleague from Tennessee, Congressman Tim Burchett, had asked you about funding for illegals, those who have come into our country, entered our country illegally, and who are present for some of these storms. And under oath you stated that that only American citizens could apply for additional funding through FEMA. Do you stand by that?

Administrator CRISWELL. American citizens and eligible legal aliens can—

Ms. BOEBERT. Legal aliens, those who have come through the ports of entry legally and have their green card or anything else. Well, we have illegal aliens who have entered our country, and FEMA itself has reported \$380 million in additional funding to communities receiving migrants. FEMA awards \$110 million to the Emergency Food and Shelter Program to assist migrants. Another FEMA notification: “Department of Homeland Security Announces Distribution of More Than \$77 Million in congressional Funding for Communities Receiving Migrants.” *Politico* says, “New York City to Get \$104.6 Million From FEMA,” and the list goes on and on. Even the U.S. Embassy in El Salvador chimed in, and so I would say that there is a quite a bit of money going toward illegal aliens.

And Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask for this to be submitted into the record, these headlines here.

Chairman COMER. Without objection, so ordered.

Ms. BOEBERT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Now, Ms. Criswell, we have heard that Ms. Washington said that she is being used as a scapegoat, and I kind of lean to believe that because here today we have this list of chain of commands. We have supervisors who are all around her, yet we cannot point to any specific supervisor who is being held accountable here. We have heard that there is an investigation. We hear about investigations all the time. Ms. Criswell, I have people sit here in front of this Committee and tell us all about investigations, and then we never receive any information from that. We have seen the devastation of American citizens who have been impacted by these hurricanes and they want answers. So, is Ms. Washington being used as a scapegoat for carrying out the directive to not go to homes with Trump signs?

Administrator CRISWELL. I received information on November 7 that there was an employee that had directed homes with Trump signs and avoided—

Ms. BOEBERT. Correct, and you terminated her, but are there others who are going to be held accountable? Now, let me ask you this. OK. You have the investigation that is been asked of you.

What are you going to do to preserve this investigation and ensure that it continues in the next administration?

Administrator CRISWELL. We will fully cooperate with the IG if they choose to take on this investigation. It has also been elevated to the Office of Special Counsel.

Ms. BOEBERT. Sorry, my time is running out. And in this internal investigation or outside, if you never find anyone who is actually culpable for this, are you going to take any blame?

Administrator CRISWELL. We are conducting ongoing investigations—

Ms. BOEBERT. Are you going to take any blame if no one is found?

Administrator CRISWELL. If we find anyone that has been violating the way we deliver assistance, we will take appropriate actions.

Ms. BOEBERT. I will move on. I am sorry, you are not answering my question directly. So, this is a culture that the Biden Administration has allowed to cultivate as, and I believe that you are a part of this, as FEMA. And I would hope that you would take responsibility for allowing your employees to discriminate those who they help based on politics rather than just dismissing it on an investigation. Now, are there barriers within FEMA between public and private partnerships or relationships, or is FEMA only focused on blocking resources from Trump supporters? Can private citizens help in an emergency?

Administrator CRISWELL. The actions of one individual are not representative of the way FEMA delivers programs.

Ms. BOEBERT. Can FEMA work with private citizens in an emergency to get resources to American citizens?

Administrator CRISWELL. I think you would have to give me some specific examples of what you mean.

Ms. BOEBERT. OK. So, we have Elon Musk. He said, “My blood is boiling.” Mr. Chairman, I would like to submit for the record this article that was printed in regard to Elon Musk as being furious over FEMA blocking SpaceX engineers.

Chairman COMER. Without objection, so ordered.

Ms. BOEBERT. So, when Elon Musk is furious that he cannot get Starlink delivered to folks; when I have Congressman Cory Mills who has to deploy a mission team to bring 26 systems of Starlink to those who are suffering; when the missing persons list is 1,500 people before Starlink is brought to them by a sitting Member of Congress, not by FEMA, and that number goes down to 600 once communication is able to begin; when a Member of Congress has to bring 23,000 pounds of supplies; when Elon Musk is saying we want to get internet, we want to get connectivity and communication to citizens, we want to bring supplies, and yet FEMA is blocking supplies, FEMA is seizing supplies; when I have a senior high school student from Rifle, Colorado, Cody Wyatt, who is driving across country to get supplies because FEMA has not been seen in 11 days in North Carolina or in Pensacola, Florida; when they are not present, can citizens help or is FEMA going to continue to block private citizens and refuse to help those based on their political affiliation?

Administrator CRISWELL. FEMA has never blocked any assistance from moving around any of the states that were impacted. In fact, when Mr. Musk released that statement, we had over 70 Starlink satellite terminals in and around North Carolina, exceeding what he had already said.

Ms. BOEBERT. For 11 days, Congressman Cory Mills did not see a single FEMA representative or truck, and I have witnesses as well in Florida who did not see any help from FEMA for days. I would like there to be—

Administrator CRISWELL. We were on the ground before the disaster started.

Ms. BOEBERT. We will see in your investigation.

Administrator CRISWELL. You can read in my testimony.

Ms. BOEBERT. We will see in your investigation if it is ever released.

Administrator CRISWELL. I have details in my testimony, my written testimony, that shows our exact response. You can read the details there.

Chairman COMER. Before, I recognize Mr. Burlison, the Ranking Member has a unanimous consent request.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Three articles here from *Reuters*, an article dated October 23, “Fact Check: FEMA Disaster Funds Not Diverted to Migrants By Biden Administration;” *Washington Post*, October 4, 2024, “No, Biden Did Not Take FEMA Relief Money to Use on Migrants, But Donald Trump Did;” and from *Axios*, an article dated August 27, 2019, entitled, “Trump Reallocates \$155 Million From FEMA Disaster Relief to Fund Ice;” and then finally, one other one, which is a FEMA press release from October 1, 2024, entitled “DHS Announces \$210 Million of Additional Funds to Protect Faith-Based Institutions and Non-Profits Against Targeted Attacks.” Thanks so much.

Chairman COMER. Without objection, so ordered.

Chairman COMER. The Chair recognizes Mr. Burlison from Missouri.

Mr. BURLISON. Thank you, Chairman Comer, and, Ms. Criswell, thank you for being here with us today. The underlying facts behind why we are here has got me thinking about, you know, how did we end up at this point, and I think it did not happen overnight. This is not just one anecdotal story. This is a part of a long list of grievances that the American people have experienced. The whole thing is just very, very familiar. The names change, the agencies change, the bureaucrats change, but the people on the receiving end of it are still the same. You see, the bigger the government, the smaller the individual, and it is these individuals who feel like, they do not feel like it, but they have been told that they are garbage and they are treated like garbage. And when the President of the United States uses words like, you know, like has been used—“deplorables,” “garbage,” “Nazis”—then one can expect your agencies to treat people in the way in which you are talking about them.

As you know, we have a FEMA supervisor that expressly directed volunteers to go door-to-door offering assistance, to bypass the homes that had Trump campaign signs. These are American citizens. These are taxpayers. These are our countrymen and

women who just lost everything, all their possessions, and they are being treated like garbage.

And look, I know that you have said, and I think you have done well today, that political discrimination is not tolerated within the Agency. But it looks to me, and I think it is clear to a lot of Americans, that they feel the same way after the election earlier this month, and I think that is why the election results ended up the way they did because it is the sentiment of the American people. Because they feel like they can relate to the guy who went through all of what was clearly a weaponized prosecution for—whether it is the Department of Justice, the American citizens see that while he is being attacked by the Department of Justice, they have been attacked. We had concerned parents at school board meetings labeled as terrorists. We had Catholics labeled as terrorists. We had excessive sentences handed out for pro-life activists, and we had the aggressive targeting of President Biden’s political opponents while slow-walking the Hunter Biden criminal investigation.

And this is not new, because during the Obama years, we had the IRS was used to target conservative groups, remember? I mean, we had Lois Lerner and that Agency stopping the attempts for groups that had the word “Tea Party” or “Patriot” from being able to get tax-exempt status, or how about during COVID when the Biden Administration pressured social media platforms to censor “disinformation about COVID-19,” including alternative treatment options, or their concerns were forced vaccinations or if somebody had the idea that it leaked from a U.S. Government-funded coronavirus lab in Wuhan rather than some animal in a wet market.

The American people, who have been called garbage, we saw a Federal Government do more to stop the distribution of ivermectin and hydroxychloroquine than it did fentanyl. We saw all of these and more. We saw rent-a-riot campaigns like BLM and Antifa not being prosecuted for all of their fires and destruction, but yet when conservatives have a protest, it is called an insurrection, and grandmas and grandpas who supported Trump are still being thrown in jail. We saw financial institutions work with law enforcement to mark Americans as domestic terror threats for buying religious texts or firearms or supporting Donald Trump. There are so many other examples. Trump, himself, has been attacked by the Department of Justice—Jack Smith, Fani Willis, all this lawfare. We have the FBI censoring information about the Hunter Biden laptop. We have the Democratic Party laundering fraudulent oppo research, like the bogus Steele dossier, to journalists, and the intelligence agencies all back them up, siding with a particular political party. The whole thing was so absurd and stupid, but again, this culture of political bias against conservatives and Trump is how this is cultivated.

The American people want and they deserve their government to be non-partisan. They want their government to be fair. They want justice to be blind. And they are frustrated when they see their government weaponized against them because they dare to support the guy who said let us drain the swamp. And so, this did not happen overnight. It came from a long litany of events where some Americans were treated like garbage, and I cannot wait for DOGE,

the Department of Government Efficiency, to get in under the next Administration and start making this government work more efficiently, because this town does need a purge. This town needs an enema, and honestly, I cannot wait. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman yields back. The Chair recognizes Mr. Higgins from Louisiana.

Mr. HIGGINS. Difficult testimony to follow.

Chairman COMER. That is a tough act.

Mr. HIGGINS. Ms. Criswell, I thank you for being before us today. Mr. Chairman, I have to say, to my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, I have had extensive communications and interactions with Ms. Criswell's team, and she has personally responded to many of my official inquires. We have worked through hundreds and hundreds of very complicated claims after Hurricanes Laura and Delta that hit the heart of my district in the middle of COVID. It was the worst thing you could possibly imagine. Very powerful hurricanes, a Category 5 and a Category 4, back-to-back, 1 month apart in the summer of 2020. It was incredibly difficult to respond to, and so I am just going to say that through the course of the years, I have found that Ms. Criswell's team has been about as responsive as you can find any large bureaucracy anywhere in the world. And I would challenge any colleagues that would question the good lady's character because I have found her character to be fine. She runs an organization that many of us are almost paid to hate, you know, but it is 22,000 employees, which sometimes things can get out of hand. But I have to say, ma'am, that your response to my office through the years has been as excellent as it can be under difficult circumstances.

Ma'am, when FEMA interacts with a particular government entity or private entity after a disaster, and planning is made and funding is shared for rebuilding, sometimes extensions for work are required. Is that correct?

Administrator CRISWELL. Correct.

Mr. HIGGINS. If the schedule for reconstruction is interrupted by supply chains and workforce restrictions, things like that, the entity that is in partnership with FEMA to restore their services, they have the opportunity to ask for an extension, correct?

Administrator CRISWELL. Yes.

Mr. HIGGINS. OK. I have a letter, Mr. Chairman, and request unanimous consent to submit, from Lake Charles Harbor and Terminal District regarding just such a request for extension for permanent work to be performed and I would ask that your office taken it into full consideration, ma'am.

Chairman COMER. Without objection, so ordered.

Administrator CRISWELL. Absolutely, Senator—Congressman.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, ma'am. I will deliver that to you. This deal with—it was just outrageous, these reports that we had of a FEMA employee bypassing Trump supporters. I found it to be outrageous. How did it strike you, ma'am?

Administrator CRISWELL. It is completely unacceptable, and it is heartbreaking to know that anybody impacted by Hurricanes Helene or Milton would have not been given the opportunity to get the assistance that they are eligible for.

Mr. HIGGINS. Do the people of North Carolina, and Florida, and Georgia, and South Carolina, and Tennessee have your unwavering commitment to do everything in your power to help them recover?

Administrator CRISWELL. Absolutely. We will be with all of these communities every step of the way throughout their recovery.

Mr. HIGGINS. OK. So, I think it is fair that we hold you to that commitment, don't you?

Administrator CRISWELL. Yes.

Mr. HIGGINS. Yes, ma'am. And regarding this behavior out of this employee, I think you handled that. I mean, you discovered the behavior on 1 day, you confirmed the behavior the next day, and you fired your employee the following day, and then you initiated an investigation to look for what, if there is anything deeper, like some cultural existence that you are not aware of this type of behavior. Is that what your investigation is seeking?

Administrator CRISWELL. We are doing additional investigations to be certain where the direction came from, and if we find—

Mr. HIGGINS. If you find more of that, will more people get fired?

Administrator CRISWELL. If we find any additional evidence that there was discrimination against a political party—

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you. Quickly, you had to question how she came to that. Could you address for us, please, what she meant when she said avoidance first and then de-escalation, and that she mentioned avoidance several times in her statement. What is that within FEMA?

Administrator CRISWELL. Our teams go into the field and go into communities door-to-door and talk to people, and we provide them safety training. It is a reactive training if they feel threatened or harassed in any way that, first, they need to avoid that harassing situation, and if needed—

Mr. HIGGINS. But have you ever instructed any of your people to, like, presume there is going to be conflict and, therefore, avoid a particular type of citizen?

Administrator CRISWELL. This training is all about reacting to perceived threats. Never has it been directed to be proactive—

Mr. HIGGINS. All right.

Administrator CRISWELL [continuing]. To avoid a situation.

Mr. HIGGINS. Mr. Chairman, thank you for this hearing. My time has expired. I yield. Thank you, ma'am.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman yields. The Chair recognizes Mr. Langworthy from New York.

Mr. LANGWORTHY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Administrator Criswell, the reports of this FEMA employee directing volunteers to bypass properties of Trump supporters is an absolutely disgusting affront to the mission of FEMA in the trust of the American people in all of their Federal Government. FEMA exists to serve all Americans at times in their darkest hours, in their times of crisis, and this has got to be delivered without bias or favoritism or despite any level of discrimination. Yet here we are discussing allegations that there was political discrimination tainting FEMA's response.

I mean, I really appreciate you being as forthright as you have been today, but after Hurricanes Helene and Milton, countless Americans lost their homes, their businesses, and their livelihoods.

Their worlds were turned upside down, and FEMA should have been the lifeline. It should be a beacon of hope for any community that has been ravaged by disaster. And if this situation was flipped and this was happening to those that supported Kamala Harris, the outrage across this country would have been deafening. You know, the media would have been going crazy, yet we did not have that same level of outrage.

This is symptomatic of a dangerous and growing culture of bias throughout this entire Federal Government, and I would hope that FEMA would be the last Agency to ever contribute to that, because you truly are dealing with American citizens at their darkest hour. We need to be about Americans helping Americans, period, end of story, no matter where you are, where you come from, or who you support for President of United States. When disaster response has been corrupted by political bias and gamesmanship, the American public's faith in this Federal Government gets broken permanently. And it is really tough to erase that stain.

So, I take you at face value that, you know, you are a person of action, you want to fix this. But what bothers me is how this employee got to this moment and what culture existed around them where they thought it was OK to guide other employees to say, no, skip those houses. I mean, are you aware of any of your employees that felt that Trump supporters were dangerous to approach their homes? I mean, like, what was in your initial portions of your investigation leading to the termination of this employee? I mean, what was it that, you know, she expressed as to why we would avoid these Trump households?

Administrator CRISWELL. I cannot speak to the motivations that drove her to send that message, but the actions that she took were completely unacceptable. We have initiated ongoing investigations, and if we find any further evidence that this is broader than this incident, then we will take appropriate action.

Mr. LANGWORTHY. I mean, since you have been at FEMA, has political affiliation ever been classified by FEMA or any other Federal Agency to your knowledge is a dangerous community trend?

Administrator CRISWELL. Never.

Mr. LANGWORTHY. OK. Did your employees and volunteers go to properties with any signage or flags or memorabilia supporting Kamala Harris or any of the other Democratic candidates running for office across country?

Administrator CRISWELL. Other than the information that I have from this one incident, we have gone to tens of thousands of homes across all six states impacted.

Mr. LANGWORTHY. So, yes or no, are you aware of any directive from supervisors of FEMA to avoid properties with any Democratic or Republican signage for that matter?

Administrator CRISWELL. I have given no evidence and I am not aware at this time.

Mr. LANGWORTHY. OK. I think that this investigation is really important, that you are on, and I am really going to be looking for a keen interest to the final product, you know, as you finish that product. Any timeline as when that investigation might conclude?



Administrator CRISWELL. We have reached out to the Inspector General to conduct the investigation. I cannot speak to what their timeline will be.

Mr. LANGWORTHY. And it is really important to restore faith for all Americans in many parts of the Federal Government, but FEMA in particular. So, I really look forward to hearing from you more in the future.

In my remaining time, I would like to quickly revisit a letter that I sent earlier this year urging FEMA to update its methodology for snowstorm-related reimbursements. In its response, FEMA says that it is working with NOAA on potential updates, and as winter approaches, lake effect snow season in Buffalo New York is coming, it is crucial that, to my constituents in Western New York, that we know that FEMA is taking proactive steps to ensure the most current standards guide Federal assistance decisions. Can you give an update on any progress FEMA and NOAA have made in their efforts to modernize this methodology?

Administrator CRISWELL. I know following the historic snow season that we have had last year and previous years, our teams have been working on that, but I would have to get back to you specifically as to where that is at.

Mr. LANGWORTHY. OK. We look forward to following up. Thank you very much, Director, and I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman COMER. Thank you, gentleman. And I assume the Inspector General is watching this hearing. This Committee has jurisdiction over the inspectors general. I cannot encourage the Inspector General enough not to take this investigation seriously and report back to the Ranking Member and myself as soon as possible. The Chair now recognizes Mr. McCormick from Georgia.

Mr. MCCORMICK. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for allowing me to be part of this very important discussion. I appreciate all the first responders across the Nation who have done their very best, including those people who are part of FEMA, to help those people most in need, especially during these dire times. I think we really owe it to the people to be accountable for where the money goes and who are helping, and I think that is what this is really about. One of the interesting things that came across when we were reviewing your budget. Can you tell me what your annual budget is for disaster relief out of FEMA?

Administrator CRISWELL. In this continuing resolution, we were given just over \$20 billion for Fiscal Year 2025.

Mr. MCCORMICK. So, it is not \$38.2 billion. It is \$20 billion. Is that what you said?

Administrator CRISWELL. Out of my overall budget, just over \$20 billion is for disaster relief.

Mr. MCCORMICK. OK, specifically, and according to your September report that you submitted, what percentage of that went toward COVID?

Administrator CRISWELL. I do not have the report in front of me, sir, but the COVID reimbursements are part of the Disaster Relief Fund, reimbursements to communities that had impact, so I would have to get back to you on this.

Mr. MCCORMICK. According to your report, in September, 40 percent of your budget went toward COVID relief. That is not talked

about very much. Now I am an ER doc. I got my MBA. I was actually serving on the front lines of the COVID pandemic during the entire pandemic. Can you tell me when the pandemic was no longer a pandemic according to the President of the United States?

Administrator CRISWELL. We closed the incident period in May of last year.

Mr. MCCORMICK. OK. And yet, we spent 40 percent of our budget from this year's budget on COVID Relief instead of hurricanes and other things. Is that correct?

Administrator CRISWELL. Again, I do not have the numbers in front of me—

Mr. MCCORMICK. According to your report—

Administrator CRISWELL. but those are major disaster declarations that were eligible for reimbursement.

Mr. MCCORMICK. You can prove me wrong by submitting papers later on, but according to your report submitted just 2 months ago, we spent 40 percent. I want that number to sink in. Forty percent of our budget for disaster relief was spent on COVID, which was gone a long time ago. I was there when it started. I was there when it ended. I know what the reaction was. I know where they overspent on it. I know where the waste, fraud, and abuse was. It makes me sick to my stomach. It is one of the main reasons I am here in Congress, and to see a disaster relief spent on something that was behind us, probably paying off a lot of waste, fraud, and abuse, in my opinion, quite frankly, and I would love to see that reviewed by Oversight because this is what is wrong with government. They spend 40 percent of the budget on something that happened 2 years ago, and we have not enough money to deal with what is happening right now.

And quite frankly, the whole COVID relief thing, I saw where the money was spent. I saw how haphazardly it was spent, and I saw who it benefited and who it did not. And I know a lot of millionaires and billionaires that benefited greatly off that money was spent from the U.S. Government taxpayers. And that is what I am very upset about, and that is why I am here today as part of the COVID Committee as a doctor who watched this stuff happen first-hand.

And now to see the budget, I think it is very dishonest. I know what happened with somebody who skipped over a Trump house. I get that, and I think it is environmental as far as the way that the prevailing attitude was. I understand you fired somebody, which I am very happy about. I understand you are looking into other people that might be at odds with what you are supposed to accomplish. But to have a budget that has dedicated almost half of their budget to something that ended a long time ago, can you explain that?

Administrator CRISWELL. All 50 states received a disaster declaration in the previous Administration to support their reimbursements for the cost experience from 2019.

Mr. MCCORMICK. For this year?

Administrator CRISWELL. These are all payments from the disaster declarations declared during the previous Administration in 2020.

Mr. MCCORMICK. So, you mean to tell me that you had to do it?

Administrator CRISWELL. These were Presidentially declared disasters, just like all disasters, and as people—

Mr. MCCORMICK. So, you are saying, yes, you had to do it. Is that correct?

Administrator CRISWELL. Yes, as communities turn in their bills—

Mr. MCCORMICK. So, you were by law abided to spend 40 percent of your budget on COVID response?

Administrator CRISWELL. We are abided by law to reimburse jurisdictions that received a Presidential disaster declaration to reimburse them for the costs as eligible under the law.

Mr. MCCORMICK. So, I am new to Congress, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I am new to Congress. I am not really had that experience that you have, but as an Oversight guy who spent a lot of your time getting to the bottom of these egregious errors, and you can fact check me on the other side of the aisle, too. But I have a hard time believing that, by law, we had to spend 40 percent of a budget on disaster relief for this year based on something that ended a couple years ago.

Chairman COMER. I agree.

Mr. MCCORMICK. I am just trying to figure out where that went, and that is why I am here in Congress. And I hope you can work with me—and I hope you can work with me—to get the bottom of why we have those kind of stupid spending laws in America and we can end those things for good, because that is the biggest part of the problem of government as I see it. Thank you, and with that, Mr. Chairman, I rest.

Chairman COMER. Very good question. The Chair now recognizes our last questioner, Mr. Steube from Florida.

Mr. STEUBE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for allowing me to join the Committee today in this important hearing. And as I assume that the Director knows, my district has been devastated by six major hurricanes in just the last 2 years. Just a few months ago, my district experienced three major hurricanes in 3 months and two in 2 weeks. A little over 2 weeks after Hurricane Helene took out my district with a 5-to 7-foot storm surge, Hurricane Milton, a Category 3 hurricane, made landfall in my district with a 7-to 8-foot storm surge and over 100-mile-an-hour wind, some of the same businesses that I visited and ripped drywall out of because of Hurricane Helene, 2 weeks later, got flooded again.

So, as you can imagine, my district, both Republicans and Democrats and Floridians in general, were outraged to learn that FEMA had been avoiding conservatives, Trump supporters, white males, et cetera. Ranking Member Raskin in the beginning of this hearing stated, “No one should play partisan politics with disaster aid,” but that is exactly what your Agency has been doing. In the aftermath of such devastation, the American people expect and trust that FEMA will administer disaster relief in a fair manner. Unfortunately, we recently learned that a FEMA Supervisor in Florida named Marñi Washington directed subordinates to skip homes displaying support for President Trump. Despite your testimony, this now former employee claims this was a widespread practice under a policy she termed avoidance. No matter who initiated this avoid-

ance policy, it was a malicious act that resulted from a corrupt culture within FEMA.

Administrator Criswell, I wrote you a letter on November 15 in which I asked for information related to this incident. Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent to enter the letter into the record.

Chairman COMER. Without objection, so ordered.

Mr. STEUBE. Although I asked for my answers by November 25, perhaps you have enough information to at least answer one of my questions, and I have heard some of your answers are related to this. Well, let me just ask it as I asked it in the letter. Is it Agency policy for FEMA canvassers to practice avoidance in certain circumstances?

Administrator CRISWELL. We provide safety training to our staff as they are going out into communities, door-to-door, and part of that safety training includes how to avoid or de-escalate potentially harassing situations in reaction. None of that is directed at being proactive to avoid certain situations that they may perceive without an actual threat.

Mr. STEUBE. But it is subjective, right? It is subjective on the person canvassing. So, if that person is a Democrat, which you are in a Democratic administration. You are a Democratic appointee. You are probably hiring mostly Democrats over Republicans. You have a Democratic administration. If it is a Democrat who already believes that a Trump supporter, that a white, Caucasian person is not what they would not feel comfortable talking to that person, because it is subjective in nature, they would skip that house to avoid that. They could do that.

Administrator CRISWELL. No, that would be an unfair characterization.

Mr. STEUBE. Well, that is not what other people have been saying that has been reported. When did this policy go into place? Did you start this policy?

Administrator CRISWELL. This policy has been in place since we have had these teams going into the field as they encounter people all the time, and it is designed to be reactive.

Mr. STEUBE. When was this specific avoidance policy put in place?

Administrator CRISWELL. I would have to get back to you, sir.

Mr. STEUBE. OK. In media appearances, Ms. Washington alleges that she was instructed by a FEMA supervisor named Chad Hershey to practice avoidance. As part of your investigation, have you interviewed Mr. Hershey?

Administrator CRISWELL. I personally have not interviewed Mr. Hershey, but there are ongoing investigations.

Mr. STEUBE. Well, I would ask the IG to interview him. There were 13 people on the text chain with Ms. Washington. Have they given sworn statements in the course of your department's investigation?

Administrator CRISWELL. I would have to check with the Office of Professional Responsibility as to who they have gotten statements from.

Mr. STEUBE. Can you provide the names on that text message list, the 13 people that works for FEMA, to this Committee to further this investigation—oversight over your—

Administrator CRISWELL. We will work with this Committee to provide information, as appropriate, as part of this investigation.

Mr. STEUBE. Earlier today, in the Transportation Committee, you stated, "There is not a widespread culture problem at FEMA." Unfortunately, the evidence contradicts your assertion. And in a report published by *The Daily Signal*, a former FEMA employee—so this is not Ms. Washington, this is somebody else—a former FEMA employee who spent over 5 years at your Agency stated, "FEMA is rotten to a core. It is over-staffed, it is bureaucratic, and they don't really help anybody." Referring to the Trump flag incident, the former employee said, "They were told to avoid Trump, avoid any house that has a Trump sign, in a verbal meeting. I have seen that happen." We were told, "don't go into any house that looks suspicious." They would use words like "hick," "cowboys," "rednecks." You can change that over to Trump supporters in MAGA." So, I guess that explains why FEMA has never stopped in my house over the six hurricanes that we have had because I check all three of your boxes: a Trump supporter, a white male, and a cowboy.

Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent to enter *The Daily Signal* article into the record.

Chairman COMER. Without objection, so ordered.

Mr. STEUBE. After the initial story broke, we sent an email to my district requesting any of my constituents who felt like they had been politically discriminated by FEMA. And just since last week, we have had over 35 people who live and reside in my district, who are citizens in my district, who have given us specific instances, factual instances, where they were either overlooked or specifically discriminated against because of their political affiliation.

This is the exact type of weaponization of the Federal Government that put Trump back in the White House. Starting with the DOJ, the FBI, the intelligence agencies, the weaponization of the Justice Department against President Trump, and now it has been weaponizing the American people in the form of disaster aid, and it is atrocious. Thank God President Trump won, and he can restore this Department into what it should be—not partisan, helping every American that has been affected by a disaster, and I yield back.

Mr. RASKIN. Will the gentleman yield for one question?

Mr. STEUBE. Sure.

Mr. RASKIN. You were kind enough to quote me at the beginning of your remarks, Mr. Steube, saying that partisanship should not enter into the distribution of disaster aid, and I think we found unanimous agreement on that point with respect to this discrete episode that took place in Florida. But several Members on our side have cited the President-elect, when he was President before, withholding aid and altering the distribution of aid, or attempting to, to California, to Puerto Rico, other places, on precisely the basis of partisanship, and no one on your side spoke up about that. But since you endorsed the general principle, I wonder if you would agree that if such a thing were to take place by a President, perhaps you disagree with the reporting on it, but if it were to take place, that would be equally or even more wrong than one person doing it on a particular city block.

Mr. STEUBE. I do not care who the administration is or what Agency it is. If they are discriminating against political party beliefs and not getting Federal Government aid for that, that is wrong, which is why Ashley Moody, our Attorney General for the state of Florida, is suing FEMA exactly for that reason.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you very much.

Chairman COMER. Madam Administrator, that concludes our hearing today. I want to thank you for your testimony today. I know there were many questions. There are going to be some follow-up questions. We are in communication with other Members and other people who have suggested that maybe the incident here was not an isolated incident, so we are going to have communication back and forth. We look forward to that IG report coming very soon.

And with that, and without objection, all Members have 5 legislative days within which to submit materials and additional written questions for the witnesses, which will be forwarded to the witness.

If there is no further business, without objection, the Committee stands adjourned. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 7:04 p.m., the Committee was adjourned.]

