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6 EPA OVERSIGHT: UNIMPLEMENTED INSPECTOR

7 GENERAL AND GAO RECOMMENDATIONS

8 WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 2017

9 House of Representatives

10 Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

11 Committee on Energy and Commerce

12 Washington, D.C.

13

14

15

16 The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 10:15 a.m., in  
17 Room 2322 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Tim Murphy [chairman  
18 of the subcommittee] presiding.

19 Members present: Representatives Murphy, Griffith, Burgess,  
20 Brooks, Collins, Barton, Walters, Costello, Carter, Walden (ex  
21 officio), Castor, Tonko, Clarke, Ruiz, and Pallone (ex officio).

22 Staff present: Ray Baum, Staff Director; Mike Bloomquist,  
23 Deputy Staff Director; Jerry Couri, Chief Environmental Advisor;

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1 Lamar Echols, Counsel, Oversight and Investigations; Paul  
2 Edattel, Chief Counsel, Health; Ali Fulling, Legislative Clerk,  
3 Oversight and Investigations, Digital Commerce and Consumer  
4 Protection; Alex Miller, Video Production Aide and Press  
5 Assistant; John Ohly, Professional Staff, Oversight and  
6 Investigations; Christopher Santini, Counsel, Oversight and  
7 Investigations; Sam Spector, Policy Coordinator, Oversight and  
8 Investigations; Peter Spencer, Professional Staff Member,  
9 Energy; Jeff Carroll, Minority Staff Director; Jacqueline Cohen,  
10 Minority Chief Environment Counsel; Chris Knauer, Minority  
11 Oversight Staff Director; Miles Lichtman, Minority Policy  
12 Analyst; Jon Monger, Minority Counsel; Dino Papanastasiou,  
13 Minority GAO Detailee; and C.J. Young, Minority Press Secretary.

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1           Mr. Murphy. [presiding] Good morning, everyone, and  
2 welcome to our hearing of the Oversight and Investigations  
3 Subcommittee on Energy and Commerce.

4           The subcommittee convenes this hearing today to examine  
5 unimplemented recommendations by the Environmental Protection  
6 Agency's Office of Inspector General and Government  
7 Accountability Office. Acting on these recommendations would  
8 improve EPA's ability to carry out its core mission, protecting  
9 human health and the environment. This mission is never more  
10 important than during times of natural disaster like the one the  
11 Gulf Coast is experiencing right now in Hurricane Harvey, and we  
12 are about to be hit with another hurricane on the Florida coast.

13           First of all, on behalf of the committee, I want to express  
14 my sincere sorrow to everyone impacted by the storm. Hurricane  
15 Harvey is one of the worst natural disasters the United States  
16 has ever faced, and it is still too early to tell the full extent  
17 of the devastation that has displaced thousands of people.  
18 Members of this committee on both sides of the aisle represent  
19 constituents experiencing loss and destruction from the storm,  
20 and our thoughts and prayers are with these families as they begin  
21 to rebuild their lives from this national tragedy.

22           During the storm and in the aftermath, EPA continues to play  
23 a critical role in the federal response to Hurricane Harvey.

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1 While EPA is still in the midst of initial response efforts, its  
2 work has only just begun. We look forward to monitoring the  
3 agency's response to the disaster and learn the full extent of  
4 the environmental impact and the challenges that lie ahead.

5 The loss and destruction of Hurricane Harvey make today's  
6 hearing even more important. The committee has the opportunity  
7 to learn about ways to strengthen the EPA, including highlighting  
8 unimplemented recommendations that may improve the EPA's ability  
9 to protect the environment and human health during recovery  
10 efforts or future natural disasters. And I go back and reflect  
11 on what we are about to face in Florida and Puerto Rico and the  
12 disasters that are looming there.

13 Now the Constitution provides Congress with the authority  
14 to conduct oversight of the Executive Branch, and in partnership  
15 with the Government Accountability Office and Office of Inspector  
16 General, we work together to root out waste, fraud, and abuse at  
17 federal agencies such as the EPA. Through investigations and  
18 audits, both GAO and OIG often make recommendations on ways to  
19 improve the efficiency and effectiveness of EPA. And after these  
20 recommendations are issued, GAO and OIG work with the agency to  
21 ensure that EPA acts on their findings.

22 Today the committee will learn that, even when EPA agrees  
23 with the recommendations, it may take years to implement them,

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1 and some are never fully adopted by the agency. As a result, many  
2 of the open recommendations span multiple administrations, some  
3 dating as far back as the Bush administration. While EPA adopts  
4 recommendations at a rate around the federal government average,  
5 there are still unimplemented recommendations in many critical  
6 areas of the agency.

7 According to the OIG's most recent semiannual report to  
8 Congress, released in May 2017, the EPA has the potential to save  
9 \$103.3 million by implementing OIG's open recommendations. The  
10 semiannual report showed 43 open recommendations with past due  
11 completion dates and 56 with due dates set in the future.

12 The GAO will testify that EPA has implemented 191 of the 318  
13 recommendations made since 2007, with 127 recommendations still  
14 unimplemented. OIG and GAO have both highlighted deficiencies  
15 in EPA's management and operations, including concerns about  
16 EPA's information security posture, workforce management, and  
17 grant administration.

18 For example, EPA OIG recently conducted an audit focusing  
19 on flaws relating to EPA's information security posture during  
20 fiscal years 2015 and 2016. The OIG reported that the agency  
21 lacks an understanding of which contractors of the EPA have  
22 significant information security responsibilities, raising  
23 questions about the agency's network integrity. The OIG

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1 recommended that EPA develop a process for identifying these  
2 contractors. The EPA is not expected to implement this  
3 recommendation until December 31st of 2018.

4 GAO and OIG have also uncovered waste and mismanagement in  
5 EPA's grant programs. This is particularly troubling because  
6 grants comprise almost half of the EPA's budget, about \$4 billion  
7 annually. In 2016, GAO found that EPA's grant-monitoring  
8 practice may impact the agency's ability to efficiently monitor  
9 results and increase administrative costs.

10 Additionally, in 2017, GAO reported that the EPA did not have  
11 the information it needed to allocate grant management resources  
12 effectively. GAO recommendations range from standardizing the  
13 format of grant recipient progress reports to developing a process  
14 to analyze workloads. All 12 recommendations in these two  
15 reports remain unimplemented.

16 These are just some of the many reports and audits conducted  
17 by the OIG and GAO. We will discuss more of them today. Both  
18 the EPA OIG and GAO have done excellent work to highlight the  
19 problems within EPA and find solutions to solve these issues. So,  
20 I am grateful for your work and look forward to hearing more about  
21 your findings.

22 I want to add here, with things looming in Florida and with  
23 the tragedies in Texas, I can probably speak for the committee

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1 that we better not find out that EPA has dawdled on anything that  
2 is causing harm. We know there is a great deal of water pollution  
3 that is out there because of overwhelming of sewer systems. We  
4 are concerned about the increase in Zika mosquitoes in Texas. We  
5 don't know if some of that has to do with some issues with water  
6 management and other things within the jurisdiction of EPA. We  
7 will keep a close watch on all of those and see if there are any  
8 errors that have occurred related to weaknesses in the agency's  
9 implementing things that are causing these problems.

10 So, I thank our witnesses today for your dedication and work  
11 to ensure that EPA is carrying out its mission. I want to  
12 especially recognize Alfred Gomez, our witness from GAO. He is  
13 a Houston native who has two nephews serving in the fire department  
14 there. Are they doing okay? They are doing okay. Mr. Gomez  
15 says they are. We appreciate their service and sacrifice during  
16 Hurricane Harvey and its aftermath.

17 Now I turn to my colleague from Florida and recognize her  
18 for an opening statement.

19 Ms. Castor. Mr. Chairman, thank you for convening this  
20 hearing today, and thank you to our witnesses for their work.

21 The hearing subject, while important, pales in comparison  
22 of the true oversight needed of the Trump Environmental Protection  
23 Agency. EPA is, and always has been, a critical partner to our

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1 states and communities back home. Most of what EPA does is to  
2 support our communities back in cleaning up polluted sites,  
3 helping protect the air we breathe and the water we drink. And  
4 I thank the professionals and scientists at the Environmental  
5 Protection Agency for their work.

6 But President Trump and Administrator Scott Pruitt have a  
7 very different vision, unfortunately, and they have been acting  
8 to weaken support for our communities back home that comes through  
9 the EPA. And it is particularly troubling that EPA Administrator  
10 Pruitt has not appeared before the Energy and Commerce Committee  
11 to date. This committee has direct oversight of the EPA, and it  
12 is simply unprecedented and unacceptable that the Administrator  
13 has not appeared before the committee.

14 Now the importance of the EPA is particularly clear as Texas  
15 learns more about the scope and extent of the destruction caused  
16 by Hurricane Harvey. There is nothing like a disaster response  
17 that demonstrates how critical toxic chemical, Superfund, and  
18 other EPA local initiatives are to the health and safety of our  
19 neighbors.

20 As a Floridian, I know all too well the devastation that  
21 massive hurricanes can bring to homes, businesses, and  
22 communities, and the recovery from such a storm is long,  
23 expensive, and challenging. And our thoughts are with the

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1 residents of Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and Floridians as  
2 they are in the path of another extremely dangerous storm in  
3 Hurricane Irma.

4 Hurricane Harvey slammed into the Gulf Coast as a Category  
5 4. So far, it has left at least 60 people dead and billions of  
6 dollars in damage, and a death total and estimated cost of recovery  
7 is likely to continue to rise in the coming weeks.

8 Ranking member of the Subcommittee on Health, Representative  
9 Gene Green -- I just saw him at the other subcommittee meeting  
10 -- represents the city of Houston and has seen much of his district  
11 flooded. And our thoughts are with him and his constituents at  
12 this time.

13 And, Mr. Gomez, I want to thank, recognize you for being here  
14 today in what is surely a difficult time for you and your family.

15 The EPA has been a key agency responding to Harvey. And for  
16 this reason, this hearing should be a timely and important step  
17 in exploring how to strengthen the agency as it supports local  
18 responders and begins to assess the possible environmental impact  
19 of the flooding, toxic releases.

20 But this hearing, unfortunately, is devoted to a much less  
21 significant topic. The scope of potential environmental risk  
22 caused by this ongoing crisis, while still coming into focus, is  
23 considerable. People are evacuating through dirty and

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1 contaminated floodwaters that may contain bacteria and toxic  
2 substances. There have also been reports of fires at chemical  
3 facilities which may involve the release of toxic pollutants.  
4 Additional reports have also suggested possible damage to leaking  
5 gas tanks at fuel facilities which, if true, may pose  
6 environmental concerns that the EPA will need to address.

7 And I am particularly concerned about reports of flooding  
8 Superfund sites and what damage they may have caused. For  
9 example, according to EPA, 13 of the 41 former and current toxic  
10 waste sites in Harvey-impacted areas have flooded and may have  
11 experienced some damage.

12 Additionally, the city of Houston contains approximately 450  
13 petrochemical plants. News reports indicate these plants have  
14 contributed to 74 instances of excess air pollution since Harvey  
15 hit, emitting more than 1 million pounds of hazardous substances  
16 into the air.

17 See, our local communities need the expertise of the EPA to  
18 prevent and mitigate such releases, but the Trump administration  
19 has been working overtime to weaken EPA's ability to help back  
20 home. And now, it is really showing at a time of disaster.

21 The storm also raises ongoing concerns of drinking water  
22 safety. According to EPA, 4,500 drinking water systems are  
23 potentially threatened by floodwaters, disrupted sewage systems.

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1           Now, after Hurricane Katrina, Energy and Commerce  
2 professional staff were on the ground to help, and this committee  
3 should consider oversight hearings in Texas in the near term. But  
4 today's hearing, rather than focusing on the big picture, examines  
5 unimplemented recommendations for EPA, at a time when the real  
6 issue is the decimation of the EPA professional workforce proposed  
7 by President Trump and Administrator Pruitt. And yet, we respond  
8 to the grave environmental and human health risk of Hurricane  
9 Harvey and other catastrophes at this time, but the overall EPA  
10 has never been more important.

11           Mr. Chairman, I am deeply troubled by the direction of the  
12 agency under the Trump administration, and I implore you and my  
13 Republican colleagues to conduct true oversight of the damage  
14 being done to our bedrock environmental protections built through  
15 decades of bipartisan work. And we need to do it before deep and  
16 lasting damage is inflicted across America.

17           The Trump EPA is waging an aggressive rollback of  
18 environmental and human health protections through  
19 politicization of the agency, extreme proposed budget and  
20 staffing cuts, repealing or delaying rulemaking, and attacking  
21 fundamental science. The Trump administration proposed extreme  
22 budget cuts that cut to the heart of our local communities and  
23 threaten the health and environment of Americans in every state.

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1           The Trump budget would slash EPA's budget by nearly \$2.6  
2 billion, reduce the professional workforce there by over 3,000  
3 employees, and the damage will be done to our air quality, diesel  
4 emission reductions, lead safety, and it goes on and on. Already  
5 there is evidence of conflicts of interest, favoritism towards  
6 certain businesses, and grants changed to exact political  
7 revenge. This is not acceptable and this is what needs oversight.  
8 The ongoing crisis unfolding on the Gulf Coast demonstrates the  
9 dangers of the Trump administration's extreme assault on  
10 environmental protection.

11           Mr. Chairman, we want to work with you to make sure the EPA  
12 implements the workforce and contractor recommendations. But,  
13 if we are serious about ensuring that the agency is able to protect  
14 human health and the environment, then we must work together to  
15 conduct true oversight of the fundamental damage being done to  
16 this agency and our neighbors back home.

17           Thank you, and I yield back.

18           Mr. Murphy. Thank you.

19           The Chair now recognizes the chairman of the full committee,  
20 Mr. Walden, for 5 minutes.

21           The Chairman. I thank the gentleman.

22           Just in response to my friend from Florida, our Committee  
23 staff, the Oversight Committee has worked diligently throughout

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1 the last several weeks in clear communication with the various  
2 agencies involved in the hurricane. This hearing was put  
3 together before Harvey had a name. So, we will do our oversight  
4 and continue to. At the appropriate time, I anticipate there will  
5 be a delegation that will go and hold hearings or do appropriate  
6 review.

7 I am one, when there is an emergency going on, who tries to  
8 stay out of the way of the first responders and let them do their  
9 job. And so, at the right time we will do that, and we will have  
10 Administrator Pruitt before our committee sooner rather than  
11 later. I share frustration that there has been a long delay in  
12 getting some of these positions filled, partly by our friends in  
13 the Senate, but the time has come for these agency heads to come  
14 before our committee, and they will.

15 Now, as to this hearing, I appreciate Subcommittee Chairman  
16 Murphy having this and his opening comments. We care deeply about  
17 what has happened in Texas. We care deeply about what is about  
18 to happen in Florida. My own district is on fire and much  
19 destruction going on there. All these things matter.

20 You want to talk about air quality. We could use your  
21 support on some of our forestry legislation to reduce the fuel  
22 loads, so we don't poison people with fires and destroy  
23 watersheds.

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1           Now we know that these recovery efforts will continue for  
2 years. Recovering from any disaster, whether it is Hurricane  
3 Harvey or Irma or the destructive wildfires burning out of control  
4 throughout the West, requires coordination at every level of the  
5 government, and the EPA is a critical part of that. The  
6 challenges facing the EPA that pertain to Harvey are significant,  
7 but I hope the agency seizes upon the lessons learned in responses  
8 to previous natural disasters such as Hurricanes Katrina and  
9 Sandy.

10           Today's hearing represents the first opportunity to hear  
11 from the EPA Office of Inspector General and the Government  
12 Accountability Office regarding any outstanding recommendations  
13 that, if implemented, could enable the agency to better achieve  
14 or do its job better.

15           We will also examine some of the areas of concern that have  
16 been identified and commented upon by the OIG and the GAO, but  
17 whose recommendations remain unimplemented by the EPA. We should  
18 be mindful, however, that many of the OIG and GAO's unimplemented  
19 recommendations span multiple administrations and, therefore,  
20 represent longstanding challenges for the agency. For example,  
21 we have learned the EPA has failed to complete an agencywide  
22 workload analysis in more than 20 years.

23           Similarly, both OIG and GAO have consistently identified

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1 issues that generate serious concerns as to whether EPA has  
2 knowledge of, or adequately monitors, the activities of its  
3 contractors and grant recipients, despite the significant portion  
4 of the agency's annual budget that is awarded to third parties.  
5 Addressing these issues will increase transparency and  
6 accountability to EPA in addition to enabling the agency to make  
7 better-informed budgetary decisions. I believe that all  
8 Americans want a healthy environment for themselves, their  
9 families, and their communities.

10 And I would like to thank Alan Larsen from the EPA OIG and  
11 Alfredo Gomez from the GAO for joining us today to provide  
12 testimony and to expand upon their organizations' findings and  
13 recommendations.

14 I would also like to recognize and thank Mr. Gomez's nephews  
15 who I understand are serving the Houston Fire Department. Thank  
16 you for their work as first responders who bravely have assisted  
17 so many of their fellow citizens during Hurricane Harvey.

18 I am looking forward to productive discussion this morning  
19 regarding actions EPA can take which will enable the agency to  
20 better accomplish its core mission of protecting human health and  
21 the environment.

22 With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

23 Mr. Murphy. I appreciate the gentleman's yielding back, and

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1 I recognize the ranking member, Mr. Pallone, for 5 minutes.

2 Mr. Pallone. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

3 It has been a week and a half since Hurricane Harvey hit  
4 Texas, and as the scope of the environmental disaster only begins  
5 to become known, thousands remain displaced, their homes and  
6 businesses flooded. And I know firsthand the immense devastation  
7 caused by such natural disasters. In 2012, my district was hit  
8 hard by Hurricane Sandy, and I had never seen worse storm damage  
9 in our area in my lifetime. For many, this storm was the  
10 worst-case scenario, lives lost, homes flooded, businesses lost.  
11 Our nation is now experiencing historic levels of destruction and  
12 loss on the Gulf Coast in the wake of Hurricane Harvey.

13 Our fellow Members of Congress, including five members of  
14 the Texas delegation on this committee, are working hard with  
15 federal, state, and local officials, and first responders to help  
16 those affected by the storm. And as the cleanup continues, many  
17 grave environmental and human health risks exist. In the days  
18 since Hurricane Harvey came to shore we have seen chemical plants  
19 on fire, fuel tanks leaking, mass releases of toxic pollutants  
20 into the air, and flooded federal Superfund sites. I am deeply  
21 concerned of the potential risk to human health and the  
22 environment caused by exposure to the hazardous materials kept  
23 at these sites, and this committee must work to understand the

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1 impact some of these facilities may have on public health.

2 The Trump administration recently delayed amendments to the  
3 Risk Management Program which included safety requirements for  
4 companies that store large quantities of dangerous chemicals.  
5 Moreover, the environmental issues resulting from the hurricane  
6 also underscore the need for robust implementation of the  
7 Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act, or EPCRA.  
8 Communities have the right to know important details about the  
9 type and amount of harmful chemicals released in their  
10 neighborhoods. All of these risks underscore the need for a  
11 strong and capable EPA.

12 Today we are discussing recommendations by the EPA Inspector  
13 General and the Government Accountability Office regarding the  
14 EPA, and I want to thank our witnesses for their testimony and  
15 work on these recommendations. However, I would argue that  
16 recommendations for improving EPA's performance are part of a much  
17 wider need to ensure that the agency is high-performing,  
18 efficient, and effective in accomplishing the agency's mission  
19 of protecting human health and the environment. Over the last  
20 six months EPA has been doing everything possible to operate in  
21 secrecy. Administrator Pruitt has no interest in transparency,  
22 and that should be unacceptable to every member of this committee.  
23 Administrator Pruitt repeatedly disregards oversight inquiries

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1 from the Democrats on this committee, and that should be  
2 unacceptable to anyone who believes we have an oversight  
3 responsibility.

4 And the Trump EPA has proposed aggressive cuts to environment  
5 and human health protections, dismissed scientists from important  
6 advisory boards, and proposed severe budget and staffing  
7 reductions at EPA. These actions taken in totality serve to  
8 directly undermine the agency's ability to effectively protect  
9 human health and the environment.

10 A robust and effective EPA is key in responding to natural  
11 disasters like Hurricane Harvey, and EPA currently has 143  
12 personnel supporting the response efforts for Hurricane Harvey  
13 and has established a unified command with state and local  
14 partners, but that number is going to increase dramatically in  
15 the coming weeks. At its peak after Hurricane Katrina, about 1600  
16 EPA staff and contractors worked in the Gulf Coast region  
17 assisting with response and cleanup activities, in addition to  
18 thousands of additional EPA employees supporting response efforts  
19 from EPA headquarters and regional offices around the country.  
20 With the employee cuts and buyouts that the administration has  
21 proposed, we need to ensure that EPA will actually have the  
22 employees in place to conduct this critical work.

23 So, Mr. Chairman, I want to work with you to make sure we

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1 have a robust and effective EPA. The committee must conduct  
2 active oversight of the agency, particularly drinking water,  
3 infrastructure, and regulation, clean air protections, and the  
4 impacts of climate change. We must also conduct ongoing  
5 oversight over EPA and other agencies' efforts to assist the Gulf  
6 Coast rebuild.

7 And the Trump administration's ongoing efforts to weaken  
8 environmental health protections, attack fundamental science,  
9 and also to propose extreme budget and staff reductions will do  
10 nothing, in my opinion, but undermine EPA's efforts to protect  
11 human health and the environment not only with regard to Hurricane  
12 Harvey, but in so many other areas. So, I am concerned and I hope  
13 that we can work together.

14 And again, thanks to everyone.

15 I yield back.

16 Looking forward to your comments to the panel.

17 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

18 Mr. Murphy. I thank the gentleman for his comments.

19 I ask unanimous consent that the members' written opening  
20 statements be introduced into the record and, without objection,  
21 the documents will be entered into the record.

22 I would now like to introduce our panel of federal witnesses  
23 for today's hearing. First, we have Mr. Alan Larsen. He is the

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1 counsel to the Inspector General for the Environmental Protection  
2 Agency. We also have Mr. Alfredo Gomez who serves as the Director  
3 of Natural Resources and Environment for the Government  
4 Accountability Office.

5 And we thank you for being here today and providing  
6 testimony. We look forward to the opportunity to discuss open  
7 and unimplemented recommendations made to the EPA.

8 You are aware the committee is holding an investigative  
9 hearing and, when doing so, has the practice of taking testimony  
10 under oath. Do you have any objections to taking testimony under  
11 oath?

12 Seeing none, then, the Chair advises you under the rules of  
13 the House and rules of the committee, you are entitled to be  
14 advised by counsel. Do either of you desire to be advised by  
15 counsel during the testimony today?

16 Neither one has asked for that. So, in that case, will you  
17 please rise and raise your right hand, and I will swear you in.

18 [Witnesses sworn.]

19 Well, you have answered in the affirmative, and you are now  
20 under oath and subject to the penalties set forth in Title 18,  
21 Section 1001, of the United States Code.

22 I will ask that each of you give a 5-minute summary of your  
23 written statement. We will begin with you, Mr. Larsen.

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1 STATEMENT OF ALAN S. LARSEN, COUNSEL TO THE INSPECTOR GENERAL,  
2 U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY, AND ALFREDO GOMEZ, DIRECTOR  
3 OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT, GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY  
4 OFFICE

5  
6 STATEMENT OF ALAN S. LARSEN

7 Mr. Larsen. Good morning, Chairman Murphy, Representative  
8 Castor, and members of the subcommittee. I am Alan Larsen,  
9 counsel to the Inspector General for both the Environmental  
10 Protection Agency and the Chemical Safety and Hazard  
11 Investigation Board.

12 I thank this committee for highlighting the importance of  
13 acting on unimplemented OIG recommendations. As you know, an  
14 Office of Inspector General cannot direct an agency's actions.  
15 Our influence is through our recommendations, which can result  
16 in substantial cost savings and major improvements in agency  
17 programs, but only if an agency chooses to implement them.

18 Our OIG undertakes a risk-based work planning process to  
19 determine which issues we will review during the coming year. Our  
20 plan, however, is always subject to change, as we inevitably  
21 receive hotline requests and congressional requests. We conduct  
22 those reviews and issue final reports, which generally will  
23 include one or more recommendations to address our findings.

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1           As required by the Inspector General Act, the EPA OIG  
2 publishes a cumulative list of unimplemented recommendations in  
3 our semiannual reports to Congress. Our most recent report cited  
4 43 open recommendations with past due completion dates and 56 with  
5 future dates. Notably, potential cost savings for the  
6 unimplemented recommendations listed amount to over \$100 million.

7           Now I will briefly discuss some of the OIG's recommendations  
8 to the EPA that remain unimplemented. You will see that some are  
9 quite recent. I highlight them because of their potential  
10 impact.

11           In July 2017, we completed a review of the processes the EPA  
12 uses to verify that agency contractors have the training needed  
13 to protect the agency from cyberattacks. We found that the EPA  
14 is unaware of the number of contractors who require specialized  
15 training. The OIG recommended that the EPA implement a process  
16 to maintain a listing of contractors who require the specialized  
17 training and that the agency report this information to its Chief  
18 Information Security Officer. While the agency has committed to  
19 implement a process for verifying that agency contractors are  
20 appropriately trained, our recommendation remains unimplemented,  
21 posing a continuing risk to the agency's information, data, and  
22 network.

23           Through another audit completed in August of 2014, we looked

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1 at the agency's oversight of cloud computing initiatives. We  
2 found that the EPA's lack of oversight over vendors resulted in  
3 missed opportunities for significant savings. The EPA paid over  
4 \$2 million for services that were not fully rendered or did not  
5 comply with federal requirements. We recommended several  
6 corrective actions to the agency, such as improving its policies  
7 and performing documented cost-benefit analyses. To date, the  
8 agency has not fully implemented all of our recommendations.

9 In April of 2017, we completed a review of Puerto Rico's state  
10 revolving funds based on a hotline complaint from the EPA. The  
11 EPA reported that the Puerto Rico Government Development Bank did  
12 not have funds to honor a combined balance of approximately \$188  
13 million. The OIG determined that over \$774 million is at risk  
14 due to Puerto Rico's financial crisis and that the restoration  
15 of funds in the near future is highly unlikely. The OIG  
16 recommended that the EPA evaluate options to restore the viability  
17 of the revolving funds or implement new strategies better suited  
18 to the needs of Puerto Rico. While the agency has committed to  
19 considering future approaches to grant funding, the OIG's  
20 recommendation is as yet unimplemented.

21 These are just a few of the examples of OIG's recommendations  
22 to the agency. We will continue to work actively with the EPA  
23 and keep Congress fully advised regarding actions to address our

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1 recommendations.

2 Accomplishing our work requires sufficient appropriated  
3 funds from Congress. Our funding clearly represents a fruitful  
4 investment for the American taxpayer, as the OIG returned \$22 for  
5 every \$1 given to us in fiscal year 2016. While I'm aware that  
6 this is not an appropriations committee, I respectfully ask for  
7 any help you can provide us in this regard.

8 Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared statement. I'm  
9 happy to answer any questions. Thank you.

10 [The prepared statement of Mr. Larsen follows:]

11  
12 \*\*\*\*\* INSERT 1 \*\*\*\*\*



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1           Mr. Murphy. Thank you, Mr. Larsen.

2           Mr. Gomez, you are recognized for 5 minutes, please.

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1 STATEMENT OF ALFREDO GOMEZ

2  
3 Mr. Gomez. Thank you.

4 Chairman Murphy, Congresswoman Castor, and members of the  
5 subcommittee, good morning, and I'm pleased to be here today to  
6 talk to you about the status of recommendations GAO has made to  
7 the Environmental Protection Agency.

8 As you know, the mission of the EPA is to protect human health  
9 and the environment. We have conducted reviews focused on  
10 various aspects of EPA's operations, such as managing grants,  
11 workforce planning, and its programs. And through these reviews,  
12 we have made numerous recommendations to improve EPA's  
13 performance and the efficiency and effectiveness of its  
14 operations and programs.

15 My statement today will focus on two main areas. First, the  
16 status of EPA's implementation of GAO's recommendations since  
17 fiscal year 2007 and how these recommendations relate to EPA's  
18 operations and programs. And, two, examples of benefits realized  
19 by EPA and others based on our work.

20 As part of our process, we follow up on recommendations we  
21 have made and report on their status to Congress. Agencies also  
22 have a responsibility to monitor and maintain accurate records  
23 on the status of our recommendations. We now follow up with EPA

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1 twice a year to determine the extent to which our recommendations  
2 have been implemented and the benefits that have been realized.  
3 We consider a recommendation implemented when the agency has taken  
4 actions to address the issue or deficiency that we have  
5 identified.

6 With regard to the first area on the status of GAO's  
7 recommendations, we have found that, of the 318 recommendations  
8 we made to EPA, they had implemented 191. The remaining 127  
9 recommendations remain open or not implemented.

10 And just to give you some more information, for  
11 recommendations that we made over four years ago, that is,  
12 recommendations from fiscal year 2007 to 2012, EPA has implemented  
13 77 percent. For recommendations we made within the last four  
14 years, that is, since fiscal year 2013, the EPA has implemented  
15 34 percent.

16 Experience has shown that it takes time for some  
17 recommendations to be implemented. For this reason, we actively  
18 track each unaddressed or open recommendation for four years.  
19 The 318 recommendations we have made fall into six broad  
20 categories, such as management and operations, water-related  
21 issues, and environmental contamination and cleanup.

22 For example, in January 2017, we reported on EPA's management  
23 of grants to states, local governments, and others which make up

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1 almost 50 percent of the agency's budget. We found that EPA does  
2 not have sufficient information about the workload associated  
3 with these grants. Consequently, the agency is not able to  
4 effectively and efficiently allocate staff across its offices and  
5 regions to manage these grants.

6 Because the agency did not know its grants workload, it  
7 sometimes has to shift staff from other mission areas to address  
8 the work. We recommended that EPA collect and analyze data about  
9 grants management workloads and use these data to inform staff  
10 allocations. EPA agreed with this recommendation and has  
11 initiated steps to address it, and we will continue to monitor  
12 EPA's actions to figure out what the status of the recs are.

13 We have also identified many benefits such as programmatic  
14 and process improvements based on EPA taking actions on our  
15 recommendations. For example, we issued several reports on  
16 drinking water and wastewater infrastructure issues. In  
17 particular, we reported on drinking water and wastewater  
18 infrastructure needs of rural and small communities. We found  
19 that some communities faced potentially duplicative application  
20 requirements such as separate environmental analyses for each  
21 program that they applied for, resulting in delays and increased  
22 cost to communities. We recommended that EPA and the Department  
23 of Agriculture work together with state and other officials to

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1 develop guidelines to assist states in developing uniform  
2 environmental analyses, and they have done so.

3 In summary, our recommendations provide a good opportunity  
4 to improve the government's fiscal position, better serve the  
5 public, and make government programs more effective and  
6 efficient. The EPA's implementation of our recommendations will  
7 help the agency continue to improve its performance and the  
8 efficiency and effectiveness of its operations, and we will  
9 continue to work with Congress to monitor and draw attention to  
10 these important issues.

11 Chairman Murphy, Congresswoman Castor, members of the  
12 subcommittee, this concludes my statement. I'd be happy to  
13 answer any questions.

14 And I also just wanted to add thank you for your words of  
15 support to my family in Texas and my nephews, but also all the  
16 other families in Texas. Thank you.

17 [The prepared statement of Mr. Gomez follows:]  
18

19 \*\*\*\*\* INSERT 2 \*\*\*\*\*

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1           Mr. Murphy. Thank you, Mr. Larsen and Mr. Gomez.

2           I will recognize myself for 5 minutes here for questions.

3           First of all, your organizations have consistently  
4 highlighted EPA's failures to perform adequate workforce and  
5 workload analysis as being an area of concern warranting some  
6 corrective action by the agency, which has not occurred. So, Mr.  
7 Gomez, I will start with you. Could you explain how EPA's failure  
8 to assess its workforce and workload, grants, whatever, hinders  
9 its ability to respond in natural disasters like Hurricane Harvey  
10 and Irma?

11           Mr. Gomez. So, what we've talked in our work looking at  
12 workforce planning and grants management is that it's really  
13 important for the agency, as you said, to have good information  
14 on workload. So, data on workload is important because the agency  
15 doesn't really ensure that it has the right people in the right  
16 places with the right skills and competencies to accomplish the  
17 mission of the agency, whether that is to focus on areas that are  
18 short term or long term. We want to make sure that the agency  
19 has that information. It is something that the agency has  
20 struggled with for decades. So, we continue to make those  
21 recommendations. I know the IG has made recommendations in the  
22 past. So, we think that's really important, again, to ensure that  
23 it has the right people in the right places with the right skill

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1 sets in the right locations.

2 Mr. Murphy. Mr. Larsen, could you comment on that, how it  
3 affects our ability to respond to these hurricanes?

4 Mr. Larsen. The IG's work I think is directly aligned with  
5 the GAO's work in this area. We've issued reports with  
6 recommendations. As of July of this year, the agency has  
7 responded to and acted on the last of the open recommendations.  
8 However, for the last several years, including the current  
9 management challenges report that we gave to the agency, we  
10 continue to highlight workforce planning as a challenge that the  
11 agency needs to address.

12 I guess the simple answer to your question, Mr. Chairman,  
13 is that if the agency doesn't know what its work requirements are,  
14 it cannot assign and align people to those requirements. And we  
15 are urging them to, as Mr. Gomez says, identify the data that  
16 allows them to make those comparisons and align their work with  
17 their workforce.

18 Mr. Murphy. And will you oftentimes find weaknesses when  
19 it is a time of challenge, which we are facing now? Now every  
20 year since 2015 the GAO has sent a letter to the EPA highlighting  
21 high-priority recommendations, and GAO considers these  
22 recommendations to be critical to EPA's mission of protecting  
23 human health and the environment.

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1           So, Mr. Gomez, as EPA responds to Hurricane Harvey, as it  
2 prepares to respond to Hurricane Irma, are there any high-priority  
3 recommendations that, if implemented, could have impacted EPA's  
4 response to the hurricane? I mean, what are their high priorities  
5 right now that need to be done?

6           Mr. Gomez. So, this high-priority letter that we've sent  
7 to EPA, we've done that since 2015. And what we've done is really  
8 looked at the recommendations that GAO has made and identified  
9 those areas that we saw as high priority, either areas that GAO  
10 has identified as high risk. We have a number of recommendations  
11 that are focusing on water infrastructure.

12           So, I think one of the priority recommendations that we think  
13 does have relevance to Harvey and other future disasters is the  
14 area of water infrastructure. So, for example, we've done work  
15 looking at how small and rural utilities use asset management,  
16 which is a really important tool to understand what infrastructure  
17 these utilities have, perhaps where the areas are in that  
18 infrastructure that are vulnerable or at high risk. So that, when  
19 a disaster does take place, they're better prepared, both to  
20 respond to it, but also, if they have to rebuild, they can rebuild  
21 with resilience in mind.

22           So, we've made a number of recommendations to EPA, getting  
23 EPA to work with the Department of Agriculture to come up with

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1 better guidelines and information and to encourage the states and  
2 the utilities to use asset management. Small utilities are  
3 challenged because they don't have the technical expertise  
4 necessarily. But we should do whatever we can in the federal  
5 family and others to help these communities better prepare for  
6 these disasters.

7 Mr. Murphy. Finally, in June of 2007, GAO released a report  
8 on Hurricane Katrina that made several recommendations related  
9 to enhancing disaster response. One of these recommendations is  
10 still open after 10 years. Mr. Gomez, why is that recommendation  
11 still open? What was it, and is going to affect how things are  
12 in Texas, Louisiana, Florida, and Puerto Rico?

13 Mr. Gomez. Sure. So, what we did in that report from 2007  
14 is we were looking at EPA's response to Katrina and, also, to the  
15 subsequent cleanup. One of the recommendations that we kept open  
16 over the years was we had recommended that EPA work with other  
17 federal land management agencies, DHS, and FEMA to better  
18 coordinate responses to cleanup. And the reason we did that is  
19 because we found in the work that National Wildlife Refuges, which  
20 there are several in Louisiana, had been contaminated and the  
21 contamination lasted over a year. And so, there was not really  
22 good planning to come together and clean up that contamination.  
23 Some of the refuges were closed for over a year.

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1           So now, what's happened since then is Congress passed the  
2 Post-Katrina Act which put in place better national preparedness  
3 and, also, put in place the National Response Framework, of which  
4 EPA has a key role now in responding to hazardous waste and oil  
5 spills. So, in theory, we expect that EPA is putting in place,  
6 for example, in Florida any response that's needed as the  
7 hurricane may come to that region. So, we're going to look at  
8 that recommendation based on what's happened now and potentially  
9 close it because we think it might address what we had been talking  
10 about.

11           Mr. Murphy. Thank you.

12           And I see my time has expired. Ms. Castor, you are  
13 recognized for 5 minutes.

14           Ms. Castor. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

15           Thanks again, gentlemen.

16           As the agency goes forward to implement what has not been  
17 implemented to date, it would seem that the Trump administration's  
18 kind of assault on the professional staff there and personnel  
19 would have a real impact on the ability to follow through with  
20 your recommendations. The Trump administration has still failed  
21 to provide nominees for almost all Senate-confirmed leadership  
22 positions at EPA. Most Regional Administrator positions are also  
23 without political leadership, including EPA Region 6 in Dallas

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1 responding to Hurricane Harvey.

2 The Trump administration, a lot of this, we blame a lot on  
3 the Senate, but you can't put too much blame on the Senate here  
4 because the Trump administration has not nominated people for  
5 Deputy Administrator, Assistant Administrator for the Office of  
6 Air and Radiation, Assistant Administrator for the Office of  
7 Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention, the Chief Financial  
8 Officer, the Assistant Administrator for Environmental  
9 Information, International and Tribal Affairs, Land and Emergency  
10 Management, Research and Development, and Water.

11 Do you all agree that when you don't have folks in charge  
12 that it complicates the ability of the agency to follow through  
13 with your recommendations?

14 Mr. Larsen. Well, the short answer is yes. The longer  
15 answer is we have career people who remain in place who do carry  
16 out the work of the agency. But, as you indicate, the statutory  
17 mandates remain in place, and it's up to the agency to figure out  
18 a way to carry out those mandates. And it is more difficult if  
19 you don't have the leadership.

20 Ms. Castor. Yes?

21 Mr. Gomez. Yes, I would agree that it's important to have  
22 all the staff that you need at all levels of the agency to carry  
23 out its mission.

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1           Ms. Castor. And, Mr. Gomez, you said that GAO meets with  
2 folks at EPA every six months. Have you met with Administrator  
3 Pruitt? Is it typical that you would meet with the Administrator  
4 or leadership to go over recommendations from GAO?

5           Mr. Gomez. So, what our Comptroller General likes to do is  
6 he likes to meet with all of the new Cabinet Secretaries and  
7 leaders of other offices. So, GAO is in the process of scheduling  
8 a meeting with Administrator Pruitt, and I would go to that meeting  
9 as well with --

10          Ms. Castor. But that has not been done here in the first  
11 nine-month --

12          Mr. Gomez. We have not scheduled it, yes.

13          Ms. Castor. You are just like the Energy and Commerce  
14 Committee that has yet to see the EPA Administrator.

15          Gentlemen, there is a very disturbing press report that came  
16 out just a few days ago that the EPA has taken the unusual step  
17 of putting a political operative in charge of vetting hundreds  
18 of millions of dollars in grants that the EPA distributes  
19 annually, assigning the funding decisions to a former Trump  
20 campaign aide with little environmental policy experience, who  
21 has already cancelled close to \$2 million in  
22 competitively-awarded grants to university and nonprofit  
23 organizations. It really does appear like this is being

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1 politicized.

2           It says -- this is from The Washington Post on September 4th  
3 -- "Earlier this summer, on the same day that Senator Lisa  
4 Murkowski of Alaska joined with two other Republicans in voting  
5 down a GOP healthcare bill, EPA staffers were instructed, without  
6 any explanation, to halt all grants to the regional office that  
7 covers Alaska, Washington, Oregon, and Ohio. That hole was  
8 quickly narrowed to just Alaska and remained in place for nearly  
9 two weeks."

10           The former Bush EPA Administrator, Christine Todd Whitman,  
11 said, "This is out of the ordinary. We didn't do a political  
12 screening on every grant because many of them were based on  
13 science, and political appointees don't have that kind of  
14 background."

15           Have you all opened any kind of investigation into what is  
16 happening here yet?

17           Mr. Larsen. We've read those reports. We've not received  
18 complaints from Congress so far or from members of the public or  
19 from organizations about this.

20           Ms. Castor. Okay.

21           Mr. Larsen. If you could or if you would, I'd offer a general  
22 and a specific answer to your question.

23           Ms. Castor. Quickly, because I have one more question.

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1           Mr. Larsen.   Okay.   The general answer is EPA has always  
2   been a lightning rod.   We get complaints, on the one hand, that  
3   EPA is ignoring its statutory obligations and allowing --

4           Ms. Castor.   Let me ask -- I thank you for that.   You have,  
5   I believe, opened an investigation last week into Administrator  
6   Pruitt's travel because it is so out of the ordinary.   It says,  
7   "Officials in the EPA's Office of Inspector General notified  
8   agency leadership last week that Pruitt was in Oklahoma, or en  
9   route there, for nearly half of his first three months in office."  
10   Maybe that is why GAO can't get a meeting and he can't appear before  
11   the Energy and Commerce Committee.   But the problem is that it  
12   looks like he has been using taxpayer funds for this excessive  
13   travel.

14           How long will it take for the OIG to get to the bottom of  
15   this investigation?

16           Mr. Larsen.   Ma'am, in our world we distinguish between  
17   investigations and audits and it's probably a distinction most  
18   people don't care about.   But we are doing an audit.   They tend  
19   to take longer.   We're going to look not only at the specifics  
20   of Mr. Pruitt's travel, but the robustness of the controls that  
21   govern travel generally and whether they're sufficient.

22           Ms. Castor.   Thank you very much.

23           I yield back.

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1           Mr. Murphy. Thank you.

2           The Chair recognizes Mr. Griffith for 5 minutes.

3           Mr. Griffith. Let me follow up on that real quick. And  
4 correct me if I am wrong, but an investigation means you are  
5 looking into something that might have wrongdoing and an audit  
6 means you are checking into the money to see whether or not we  
7 need to put different parameters around it? Would that be a fair  
8 assessment or something along those lines?

9           Mr. Larsen. That, generally, yes. Investigations tend to  
10 look at criminality. They can look at administrative violations.  
11 This is not either of those.

12          Mr. Griffith. This is just an audit to see what we can do  
13 better?

14          Mr. Larsen. Well, it's also going to look at whether there  
15 were violations of agency requirements.

16          Mr. Griffith. Okay. All right. I appreciate that.  
17 Thank you.

18          Let me get down to where I was going to go initially, and  
19 that would be that I am concerned about the workforce and the  
20 workload questions. EPA's Office of Inspector General -- that  
21 would be you all -- reported, "EPA has not conducted workload  
22 analysis in over 20 years, making it difficult for EPA to implement  
23 corrective actions and allocate its budget effectively."

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1           And I guess what I am looking at there is that we have heard  
2 talk today about a few months where certain positions aren't  
3 filled, but here we are looking at 20 years, both Republican and  
4 Democrat administrations that have not at the EPA gone in and  
5 looked at their workload analysis. And then, we see with  
6 Hurricane Harvey that we had 13 Superfund sites that were  
7 affected. Am I not correct that, if we had performed a workload  
8 analysis over time, I am not saying all 13 of them would have been  
9 cleaned up, but that we might have more of these Superfunds being  
10 cleaned up?

11           And I also referenced, because we are talking about Harvey  
12 so much now, but I remember testimony in a previous hearing in  
13 a different subcommittee where they were talking about a site in  
14 St. Louis that hadn't been acted on or in the St. Louis vicinity  
15 that had not been acted on in decades as well that was a Superfund  
16 site.

17           So, can you help me out? Of those things that would have  
18 helped both before a disaster and just in general, if we had a  
19 workload analysis, so we could say these were the worst ones, let's  
20 put most of our people there? And I am happy to take answers from  
21 either of you.

22           Mr. Larsen. Sure. I'll give my short answer, and, then,  
23 Mr. Gomez can respond. My short answer is it's difficult to draw

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1 a direct line between the lack of a workforce plan and a specific  
2 failure to be able to cover something. I think we can all say,  
3 if you knew more precisely where your requirements are and how  
4 many people, and what kinds of people you need to address those,  
5 you would probably have a better result. But I can't draw a direct  
6 one-to-one correlation.

7 Mr. Griffith. Mr. Gomez?

8 Mr. Gomez. And I'll just pivot from that last comment. And  
9 I think that our point on our work on workforce planning has been  
10 exactly that point, is to understand, again, from data where your  
11 people are, what skill sets you need, the locations you need them  
12 in. So that you have a better sense of how to meet that mission.  
13 And that mission could be that you focus on cleaning up hazardous  
14 waste sites. But doing a workforce analysis I think would help  
15 you, hopefully, do that better.

16 Mr. Griffith. Well, and a workforce analysis would help us,  
17 as legislators, as well. Although this is not an appropriating  
18 committee, we hear all the time that folks need more money. Well,  
19 if I know that you need more money because you are going to help  
20 rural communities -- and I appreciated, as you mentioned, rural  
21 communities with water and wastewater -- help those communities  
22 instead of just send edicts down from the alabaster towers in  
23 Washington, "Here's what you've got to do," without helping those

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1 folks figure out how they are going to do with the money that they  
2 have. That creates big problems.

3 If you had a workload analysis, we might be able to figure  
4 out where we could appropriate the money more advantageously to  
5 prevent problems before they happen, whether it be after a  
6 hurricane or when you have got a serious problem like we had in  
7 Flint, Michigan, or issues in my very rural, mountainous district  
8 where there are problems we don't know how to solve and we are  
9 afraid to ask, for fear that, instead of coming in to help us,  
10 they will just come in and try to punish folks who are trying to  
11 do the best they can under limited circumstances in a rural areas.  
12 So, I do appreciate that as well.

13 So, thank you, and thank you for putting that in both your  
14 oral and your written testimony.

15 Mr. Larsen. Sir, I have one more comment --

16 Mr. Griffith. Yes, sir?

17 Mr. Larsen. -- that's responsive to your question. That  
18 is, our OIG Office of Program Evaluations, similar to audits, has  
19 a current project underway looking at Superfund workforce  
20 planning. And we'll keep you and your staff informed on the  
21 progress of that effort.

22 Mr. Griffith. Well, I greatly appreciate that very much.

23 You know, we are just beginning the Hurricane Harvey efforts,

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1 and that will continue for years, and the environmental impacts  
2 that are already occurring and yet to be seen. And we talked about  
3 the Superfund sites there. Is there anything that you see that  
4 is not being done by the EPA currently -- and I know it is really  
5 early -- in the Hurricane Harvey area that we ought to be concerned  
6 about?

7 Mr. Larsen. Again, I'll give my answer. It's always a  
8 dilemma for us. As Chairman Walden said, you don't want to wade  
9 into the middle of the cleanup effort. On the other hand, you  
10 don't want to wait so long that your efforts are valueless. So,  
11 we're always trying to figure out when it is that we get into it.

12 I guess what I fall back on is the National Response Framework  
13 that Mr. Gomez alluded to, and it does give certain  
14 responsibilities to the EPA. We cannot mandate that EPA take any  
15 specific steps. After the fact, I think we would evaluate whether  
16 they took the appropriate steps under the Framework. But I don't  
17 see a role for the OIG jumping in right now in the middle of a  
18 cleanup effort.

19 Mr. Griffith. Thank you. And unfortunately, my time is up,  
20 and I yield back.

21 Mr. Murphy. Thank you.

22 Mr. Pallone, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

23 Mr. Pallone. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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1 I just want to remind my colleagues, I heard my colleague  
2 from Virginia talk about Superfund or Superfund cleanup in action.  
3 I mean, in reality, there is no Superfund. I have had a bill for  
4 years to try to get the Superfund, the trust fund, if you will.  
5 There is a Superfund Program, but there is, essentially, no  
6 Superfund trust fund anymore to pay for anything.

7 And that, you know, back when the Republicans first took the  
8 Congress -- I know it is ancient history now -- with Newt Gingrich  
9 as the Speaker, it expired. And I begged him and Democrats begged  
10 him at the time to renew, and he refused.

11 I still have the bill out there, and I would ask at anytime  
12 if our chairman or the Speaker would allow us to reauthorize the  
13 Superfund trust fund, because, then, we would have the money to  
14 do these cleanups. On an annual basis, I go before the  
15 appropriators, because that is the only way to get the money now,  
16 through general revenue, unfortunately, and ask for more funding.  
17 And we always get less, significantly less, than what we ask for.

18 So, it is nice to talk about Superfund cleanup, but the  
19 reality is it was essentially stopped by the Republican Congress,  
20 but not to say that they are totally to blame, but they certainly  
21 were the ones. And you could bring it up anytime and I will  
22 support you, passing it in committee or on the Floor.

23 I just wanted to say, I wanted to thank the EPA OIG for

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1 recently accepting the committee's request to review the  
2 propriety of Administrator Pruitt's use of taxpayer funds for  
3 travel to and from his home state of Oklahoma. I know that we  
4 have already mentioned that.

5 But, unfortunately, the Trump administration has launched  
6 a continuous assault against fundamental science and proposed  
7 significant cuts to EPA's budget and staff that threaten to  
8 undermine the agency's ongoing efforts to protect human health  
9 and the environment.

10 Mr. Gomez, in your testimony you state that GAO has made 318  
11 recommendations to EPA since fiscal year 2007, including 49  
12 recommendations focused on environmental contamination and  
13 cleanup. And these include taking actions for improving cleanup  
14 management of hazardous waste sites, enhancing responses to  
15 disasters such as Hurricane Katrina. My question is, is that  
16 correct, and how might GAO's recommendations regarding enhancing  
17 EPA's response to disasters inform the agency's ongoing response  
18 to Hurricane Harvey?

19 Mr. Gomez. Yes, that is correct. And again, I think, as  
20 I mentioned earlier, one of the areas where we see EPA's  
21 recommendations contributing to the response in Harvey and other  
22 future disasters is in the area of water infrastructure, where  
23 we have recommended that EPA work with states and others to really

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1 assist the small communities.

2 We have all heard that in Texas there were many water systems  
3 that were under boiled water notices and, then, over 50 systems,  
4 I believe, were actually shut down. So, we think that it's really  
5 important in the area of asset management, which is a really  
6 important tool for these utilities to use, to understand, again,  
7 what they have, what are the areas that are vulnerable, so they  
8 can address them and they can use funds to, then, build them or  
9 restore them, and, again, building in resilience, so that they're  
10 better prepared. So, I think that's the one area where I would  
11 sort of call attention, based on our recommendations, where  
12 there's some immediate benefit.

13 Mr. Pallone. All right. Thank you.

14 I don't want to keep repeating all the budget cuts that the  
15 Trump administration has proposed to the EPA, buyouts, all kinds  
16 of things that would result in fewer employees. And that could  
17 include hundreds of positions in EPA's Region 6 headquarters in  
18 Dallas, where employees are currently responding to Hurricane  
19 Harvey.

20 So, let me ask you about these proposed cuts to your office,  
21 to Mr. Larsen. How are current and expected budget limitations  
22 impacting staffing levels and the ability of EPA's Office of  
23 Inspector General? Specifically, how are they impacting your

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1 ability to conduct audits, evaluations, and investigations, if  
2 you will.

3 Mr. Larsen. Thank you for that question. It's a serious  
4 challenge to us. We have had to cut our workforce year by year  
5 by year, and we are down from 360 or so, down to 270, and we  
6 anticipate having to go fewer than that, based on the most likely  
7 budget scenarios.

8 If the original President's budget proposal were to be  
9 adopted by Congress, we'd have to cut very substantially the  
10 amount of work we did. As you know, we gave you a fairly detailed  
11 explanation of where those cuts would occur, which offices, which  
12 kinds of projects.

13 What we do is, on an annual basis, plan for the work that  
14 we would hope to do based on how much value the project would bring  
15 in terms of cost savings or changes in how EPA does business. We  
16 will have to do many fewer such projects in any given year, based  
17 on the likely budget outcomes.

18 Mr. Pallone. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

19 Mr. Murphy. Mr. Collins, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

20 Mr. Collins. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

21 Maybe I am going to go down a little bit different road, but  
22 really talking about, Mr. Gomez, if I look back over 10 years,  
23 and I am looking right now just in the environmental area. I am

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1 looking at the suggestions you made for spill prevention, none  
2 of which have been implemented.

3 So, I guess the question is this: you are doing these  
4 audits, making these recommendations. Do you prioritize them in  
5 some way with any kind of ranking system, like one star to five  
6 stars? And when you see something like this, and now 10 years  
7 have gone by, could I assume these would have been considered  
8 perhaps lower priority? And then, at some point do you go revisit  
9 that with someone, and who is that someone, to say, "Hey, it's  
10 been 10 years. You haven't done any of these things."? Or are  
11 these just thrown into the hopper and, then, kind of catch as catch  
12 can, they work on these; they don't work on those?

13 I am trying to just kind of wrap my mind around the  
14 day-by-day, year-by-year interaction between your agency and  
15 those folks that are supposed to implement it, to make sure  
16 high-priority things are done and, you know, squeaky wheel, that  
17 you are kind of jabbing at them, "Why didn't you get this done?",  
18 and so forth. Could you maybe just help us all a little better  
19 understand how that all works, the interaction?

20 Mr. Gomez. Sure. So, first of all, I just want to say that  
21 we take recommendations to EPA very seriously. And so, what we  
22 do is we have a process in place where we're actively following  
23 recommendations that we've made in the last four years.

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1           What can happen to some of the older recommendations is, if  
2 we learn from the agency that either they're not going to implement  
3 it or that we make an assessment that things have changed or it's  
4 no longer a priority, we'll go ahead and close it. It's not  
5 implemented.

6           Now there are recommendations, though, that are old, older  
7 than four years, that we're still keeping track of because we have  
8 an indication that EPA is still working and we hope that they  
9 actually do take action. We can go back at anytime and open up  
10 any old recommendation that was not implemented if we think it's  
11 important or if others have brought it to our attention.

12           Our recommendations and the status of the recommendations  
13 are public. So, you can go to any of our reports. You can click  
14 on the recommendation status. You can see what the rec was and  
15 what the status was.

16           So, we do have this separate letter that we mentioned  
17 earlier, which is a priority rec letter that our Comptroller  
18 General sends to all of the Cabinet agencies and other offices  
19 calling attention to recommendations that we see as a high  
20 priority.

21           And for EPA, we've identified those recommendations that  
22 deal with the high-risk area of managing toxic chemicals and,  
23 then, some of the recommendations that deal with water

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1 infrastructure and also pollution of our waters.

2 So, that letter can also change year from year if we go  
3 through the history and identify other recs that we think are  
4 important. So, we do that process as well.

5 Now I also mentioned that we work with EPA sort of on an  
6 ongoing basis as we are doing audits, but, formally, we go to them  
7 twice a year with a long list of all our recommendations to say,  
8 "Here they are; they're still open. Let us know what's happening.  
9 Let us know which we can close." So, we do that twice a year  
10 formally, but we're in contact with them throughout the year.

11 Mr. Collins. That is really helpful because I think  
12 sometimes we may not understand how that all works and think you  
13 just throw it in and go on about your business. And I think it  
14 is actually reassuring to me, certainly for one, that you have  
15 got it sounds like pretty good interaction. Would you say that?

16 Mr. Gomez. Yes. Yes.

17 Mr. Collins. That you are making them aware; they are  
18 listening. It is back and forth?

19 Mr. Gomez. Right. I mean, there are some recommendations  
20 where the agency will disagree with us. And so, we may be at a  
21 point where they disagree; we disagree. We still think it's a  
22 good recommendation. And so, there's some like that, and those  
23 might be closed as not implemented.

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1 But EPA has taken our recommendations seriously and they want  
2 to close them out. They want to do what we're saying. It's just  
3 in some cases some of our recommendations might take a little  
4 longer to do. For example, if we're recommending that an IT  
5 system, for example, be revised or a new IT system be put in place,  
6 that may take a while longer than if we just recommend that the  
7 agency use existing web tools, for example, to provide better  
8 information to the public. We don't see that as taking a long  
9 time or it shouldn't take a long time.

10 Mr. Collins. Well, I appreciate that overview. That was  
11 very helpful for me.

12 And, Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

13 Mr. Murphy. I now recognize Ms. Clarke for 5 minutes.

14 Ms. Clarke. I thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I thank our  
15 ranking member, Ms. Castor, and I thank our witnesses for joining  
16 us today.

17 Like Mr. Pallone, my district in New York sustained very  
18 substantial damage as a result of Superstorm Sandy. So, I am very  
19 sensitive to the conditions on the ground in Houston as well as  
20 concerned about the rest of hurricane season, quite frankly. And  
21 so, standing up a robust operation with the EPA I know is critical  
22 at this time.

23 There have been a number of reports about unfolding

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1 environmental concerns stemming from Harvey right now. And so,  
2 Mr. Larsen, I recognize that your role at EPA may not directly  
3 involve you in emergency response efforts. However, to the  
4 extent that you are able, could you please inform us of the EPA's  
5 role in responding to unfolding environmental threats?

6 Mr. Larsen. Sure. As Mr. Gomez alluded to earlier, I think  
7 the primary set of responsibilities that EPA has here stem from  
8 the National Response Framework, which came after some of the  
9 earlier natural disasters. And that means that EPA has  
10 responsibility as a support agency for certain functions, and it's  
11 got a primary responsibility for certain functions. And the  
12 areas where we would expect to see EPA involved are assessing and  
13 addressing fuel shortages, monitoring public water systems,  
14 securing Superfund sites, and assessing conditions at major  
15 industrial facilities.

16 Ms. Clarke. Very well. And, Mr. Gomez, how will GAO  
17 evaluate the EPA's efforts to respond to the environmental threats  
18 posed by hurricane season, Hurricane Harvey being the most recent  
19 example?

20 Mr. Gomez. So, GAO in the past, you know, we looked at the  
21 Katrina recovery efforts. So, that was something that we did.  
22 We're happy to assist Congress in any reviews or oversight that  
23 you would like us to do as a result of Hurricane Harvey.

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1           Ms. Clarke. Mr. Larsen, addressing the numerous cleanup  
2 issues related to Harvey's flooding will likely be very costly  
3 to both local and the federal government. What roles do you  
4 envision your office will be playing to ensure that federal money  
5 the EPA uses to contract for Harvey cleanup will be safeguarded  
6 from fraud and abuse?

7           Mr. Larsen. Yes. Thank you.

8           We're going to do two things. One is EPA OIG specific work.  
9 The other thing I wanted to mention is that the organization of  
10 IGs across the federal government, the CIGIE, has learned from  
11 the past and in the past had a Disaster Assistance Working Group  
12 which is basically the IGs from the various agencies that are going  
13 to have to play a role here. And so, EPA will be participating  
14 in that effort, this agencywide IG or governmentwide OIG effort  
15 to make sure that everybody's doing what they need to do and not  
16 duplicating each other.

17           For ourselves, we'll probably, as you allude to, be looking  
18 at contracting issues, whether there was fraud involved. That  
19 could take the form of audits or investigations, as we  
20 distinguished earlier. That is, was there criminal activity  
21 going on or was there sloppy practice with regard to contracting?  
22 So, those are the areas that we would see fairly early on getting  
23 involved in.

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1 Ms. Clarke. Very well.

2 And, Mr. Gomez, given that post-Harvey cleanup will be  
3 lengthy and costly, and I am assuming if we are hit with Irma and  
4 any other hurricanes coming down the pike, what areas do you  
5 anticipate your GAO team will be interested in examining?

6 Mr. Gomez. Well, again, you know, we're here to assist  
7 Congress. So, whatever Congress asks us to do, as we've seen from  
8 at least what's becoming clear in Texas with the Superfund sites  
9 and all the water infrastructure systems that are down, that maybe  
10 those are areas where potentially we could look at. But, again,  
11 we can have discussions with anyone in Congress who's interested  
12 in having GAO look at the response efforts.

13 Ms. Clarke. Very well. I cannot emphasize enough that we  
14 need to address any environmental threats posed to the residents  
15 of the Harvey-affected region and perhaps even Florida coming down  
16 the pike. My thoughts are with the people of Houston, the  
17 responders assisting on the scene, and let's be sure to get these  
18 folks what they need to help them get back on their feet.

19 With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

20 Mr. Murphy. The gentlelady yields back, and I now recognize  
21 the gentleman from Pennsylvania, Mr. Costello, for 5 minutes.

22 Mr. Costello. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

23 Thank you for your testimony here today.

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1           Mr. Gomez, I would like to start with you. Your written  
2 testimony mentions that in 2015 the EPA awarded approximately \$3.9  
3 billion, or nearly half of its budget, in grants to state and local  
4 governments for important projects such as repairing aging wood  
5 or infrastructure, preventing pollution, improving air quality,  
6 and cleaning up hazardous waste sites. However, GAO found  
7 weaknesses in EPA's ability to manage these grants efficiently  
8 and effectively.

9           My question is, would you please elaborate on the weaknesses  
10 GAO identified in EPA's grant management procedures? Second, how  
11 have these grant management inefficiencies and weaknesses  
12 impacted grant recipients? I think that is a very important  
13 question. And then, finally, have these inefficiencies  
14 contributed to the wasting of grant money or made it more difficult  
15 for recipients to use grant funding for its intended purposes?

16           Mr. Gomez. Sure. Thank you for those questions.

17           So, we have done a body of work on grants management. And  
18 that particular report, well, we looked at also, we are looking  
19 to see for recipients, for example, where they were doing  
20 duplicative reporting. So, currently, under the grants  
21 management at EPA, recipients, grant recipients, have to provide  
22 performance reports and, then, they also have to provide more  
23 information and data when EPA asks for it.

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1           So, we identified a number of places where there was  
2           duplicative reporting by the recipients. And so, we've  
3           recommended that EPA identify all of those places and try to do  
4           away with the duplication, so that recipients aren't having to  
5           spend additional time and resources in doing the reporting. So,  
6           that's one area where we called attention to it.

7           And really for EPA also to streamline, and EPA does have a  
8           streamline initiative in place in its grants management. But we  
9           were calling attention to those places where they can do away with  
10          duplication, so that the recipients can carry on with the grants  
11          and not have to do a lot of reporting.

12          Mr. Costello. Mr. Larsen, the OIG made similar findings  
13          with respect to areas for improvement in EPA's management of  
14          grants. Do you have anything to add to the line of questioning  
15          that I have posed to Mr. Gomez relative to the management of  
16          grants?

17          Mr. Larsen. I wish I did. As Representative Clarke noted,  
18          I'm an expert in some areas, not so much in others.

19          Mr. Costello. I often say that myself.

20          Mr. Larsen. But what I would be happy to do is organize and  
21          get back to you and your staff with the primary findings that we've  
22          had in those areas.

23          Mr. Costello. Thank you. I will yield back the balance of

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1 my time.

2 Mr. Murphy. The gentleman yields back.

3 I now recognize Dr. Ruiz of California for 5 minutes.

4 Mr. Ruiz. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

5 Thank you to our witnesses for taking the time in joining  
6 us this morning.

7 We have heard about the EPA's role in the emergency response  
8 programs for natural disasters like Hurricane Harvey and your  
9 coordinating efforts with FEMA, state, local. I am interested  
10 in your efforts to coordinate with tribes. And what have you done  
11 to reach out and engage tribes with your efforts in Hurricane  
12 Harvey?

13 Mr. Larsen. So far, we've not reached out to anybody. As  
14 I said, at this point we don't want to wander onto the battlefield  
15 while the battle is underway.

16 The CIGIE -- that is the IG community-wide effort that I  
17 alluded to earlier -- is, among other things, going to coordinate  
18 among the various IGs and also with the tribes and the states.

19 Mr. Ruiz. Well, I think that is important to take back to  
20 this group not to neglect the sovereignty of tribes and the role  
21 that tribes have in order to maintain their environment during  
22 natural disasters as well. And so, reaching out to them and  
23 coordinating. Some tribes actually have equipment and the

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1 technology that can help the disaster response, like we have seen  
2 in my district with the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians  
3 utilizing helicopters and other surveillance technology in  
4 coordination with the fire departments to put out some wildfires.  
5 So, I would highly recommend that you take it back and you start  
6 coordinating, also, with tribes as a sovereign nation and a  
7 governmental entity themselves. They can be very, very helpful  
8 for the region.

9         Given the OIG's review of the EPA's response to environmental  
10 threats, what are some of the lessons learned that we might see  
11 for future storm threats in an area where the IG might consider  
12 additional audit work?

13         Mr. Larsen. Sure. We've, unfortunately, had Katrina.  
14 We've had Superstorm Sandy. We've learned from both. Among the  
15 things that we learned were that the coordination between EPA and  
16 the Corps of Engineers wasn't necessarily what it could have been  
17 or should have been. Coordination with state and local officials  
18 probably could have been done better.

19         We've addressed those to the agency. Presumably, this time  
20 around you'll see better coordination. Most likely, we'll be  
21 coming in and seeing whether, in fact, that occurred.

22         Mr. Ruiz. Are you, then, prepared to assess that?

23         Mr. Larsen. Yes.

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1           Mr. Ruiz. And the difference on whether or not those  
2 recommendations were followed?

3           Mr. Larsen. I can't commit that we're going to; I expect  
4 that we will. To Mr. Pallone's question earlier, we're  
5 resources-constrained, but that would be a high priority for us.

6           Mr. Ruiz. So, if you were to pick -- and this is a question  
7 for both of you -- if you were to pick a No. 1 barrier for you  
8 to do your jobs, is EPA involved either in coordination or  
9 protecting Superfund sites or protecting water infrastructure,  
10 et cetera, so that they're not contaminated, what would that  
11 barrier be? If you were to pick the biggest barrier, what would  
12 it be, Mr. Larsen?

13           Mr. Larsen. I'm sorry, I don't mean to sound dense, but are  
14 you talking about EPA's response or the OIG's evaluation of the  
15 EPA's response?

16           Mr. Ruiz. Well, the EPA's response.

17           Mr. Larsen. Okay.

18           Mr. Ruiz. You evaluate the EPA. So, what would you say  
19 would be the EPA's barrier in doing its job in these --

20           Mr. Larsen. Boy, you're putting me in the position of  
21 speaking for them, but I would think it's the resources, people  
22 and money.

23           Mr. Ruiz. People and money.

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1 Mr. Gomez?

2 Mr. Gomez. So, I would say, in the areas that we're seeing  
3 unfolding, right, which is in water infrastructure and in the  
4 Superfund sites, at least in Texas, that are flooded, it is making  
5 sure that they have enough people there on the ground to respond  
6 to those two immediate areas where potentially there are risks  
7 involved. So, I would say that that would be, if that is a  
8 barrier, that they should have enough folks there to address it  
9 right now.

10 Mr. Ruiz. And so, what can Congress do to address that  
11 barrier? Mr. Larsen?

12 Mr. Larsen. Well, in my view, you've already got the  
13 substantive requirements in place. You've got the Clean Air Act.  
14 You've got the Clean Water Act. And it's up to EPA to execute  
15 on that. They need the people, and they need the policy  
16 determination to carry forward.

17 Mr. Gomez. I think it's what you're doing now. It's the  
18 oversight, right, of looking to see how that's being done, and  
19 even after the fact, how was it done and could something be done  
20 better.

21 Mr. Ruiz. So, the oversight is the diagnostic workup,  
22 right? And you're telling us that the diagnosis is lack of  
23 funding, lack of people. So, the treatment is the next step. So,

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1 you can't just diagnose a problem and walk away. You have to act  
2 on it and give the treatment to the patient. And so, the treatment  
3 is the funding and policies that will help bring more people onsite  
4 to manage the situation, not only in the short, acute disaster,  
5 but in the long-term public health recuperation.

6 I have disaster training in my background. I did a  
7 fellowship at Harvard in the humanitarian disaster response. So,  
8 that is where I am speaking from.

9 Thank you very much. I yield back.

10 Mr. Murphy. Thank you, and I recognize Ms. Brooks for 5  
11 minutes.

12 Ms. Brooks. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

13 And I want to thank our panelists for being here today and  
14 for your work to improve the EPA.

15 We have been very focused on the people, and agencies aren't  
16 just agencies; they are people. And as my colleagues have noted,  
17 it is about the people. But I am concerned that this agency for  
18 a long period of time has not accepted your recommendations when  
19 it comes to people and when it comes to their workforce.

20 In 2010, GAO issued a report recommending the EPA establish  
21 mechanisms to evaluate workforce planning, which are people,  
22 placement of people, but the recommendation is currently closed  
23 and unimplemented.

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1           So, Mr. Gomez, why was this recommendation closed before EPA  
2 was able to implement it, if you know?

3           Mr. Gomez. So, again, we track recommendations for four  
4 years. And if we have an indication that the agency is not going  
5 to do it, we close it as not implemented. Obviously, we've done  
6 some recent work that's focused on grants management, but also  
7 looking at workforce issues, in particular, which is a large part  
8 of EPA.

9           So, EPA has told us that, currently, they are giving  
10 workforce planning a priority. So, we are going to look to see  
11 how much of a priority that is and, in fact, what they're going  
12 to do.

13           You know, we've been talking about that it's basically about  
14 data. They don't have good workforce data. They don't have good  
15 information on the types of work that each of their staff is doing  
16 across offices and across regions. So, if you don't have that  
17 data, then you, again, don't ensure that you have the right people  
18 in the right places with the right skill sets to accomplish the  
19 mission that's needed.

20           Ms. Brooks. Those are the management challenges that you  
21 are dealing with them and have dealt with them for years. It  
22 sounds like this is not new. Is that correct?

23           Mr. Gomez. That is correct.

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1           Ms. Brooks. And do you have any sense what percentage of  
2 EPA's funding goes to private sector contract work versus the  
3 public sector work?

4           Mr. Gomez. So, in our 2010 report we did look at  
5 contractors, and at the time there were 6,000 contractors at EPA.  
6 And so, I'm not sure exactly what that translates to in terms of  
7 budget, but I think it's a considerable chunk of their budget.

8           And so, what we also found in that report was that contractors  
9 were not part of EPA's planning, either, were not incorporated.  
10 And we learned from EPA recently that they're still not  
11 incorporated in their planning, and we think that that should be  
12 something that they should do.

13          Ms. Brooks. When they employ 6,000 contractors, they're not  
14 taken into consideration in their strategic plans?

15          Mr. Gomez. Correct.

16          Ms. Brooks. And have they agreed recently to take all of  
17 those thousands of contractors into account in their plans?

18          Mr. Gomez. So far, what we've learned is that they haven't  
19 done it yet still. So, I'm sure if they're agreeing or  
20 disagreeing. The explanation they gave us was that OMB didn't  
21 require them in their planning to include contractors. And so,  
22 that's why they didn't do it.

23          Ms. Brooks. Is it fair to say -- and I am going to ask you,

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1 Mr. Larsen -- relative to I have also been very concerned about  
2 information security issues. And for the IG, that is what you  
3 focus on as well. And there are a number of contractors, as I  
4 understand, and if some bad actors were wrong, you know,  
5 wrongdoers want to wreak a bit of havoc in systems, they could  
6 certainly do it through information technology. Can you talk  
7 with us about the lack of understanding at EPA relative to  
8 sensitive data, the access to sensitive data, and what you have  
9 found about the information, or lack of information, about the  
10 knowledge of EPA and the access to sensitive data?

11 Mr. Larsen. Sure. I think what we talk about is risk as  
12 opposed to actual problems that have manifested. That is, we have  
13 not investigated an insider threat where an individual breached  
14 his obligations and created a vulnerability.

15 What we're talking about is, if we don't address the  
16 vulnerabilities, then the potential is out there. So, that's  
17 what we've been looking at, and we find that the agency doesn't  
18 know how serious a problem that is and they haven't taken the steps  
19 to mitigate the potential risks that we've identified.

20 Ms. Brooks. And that was just in your July of 2017 report  
21 that the agency just issued?

22 Mr. Larsen. That's correct.

23 Ms. Brooks. Okay. Thank you. I yield back.

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1           Mr. Murphy. The gentlelady yields back.

2           I recognize Mr. Tonko for 5 minutes.

3           Mr. Tonko. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

4           First, I want to express my deepest condolences to our fellow  
5 Americans who are suffering from the devastation of Hurricane  
6 Harvey. Everyone has witnessed this day-by-day reporting with  
7 just deep concern and sadness for the folks who are enduring.

8           EPA has, therefore, an important role to play in disaster  
9 response and recovery, ensuring the environmental monitoring and  
10 remediation needed to protect public health. And these storms,  
11 these natural disasters don't know for Republican or Democrat.  
12 So, it ought to be a universally agreed-to approach that we take  
13 here in Washington.

14           But that can only be done if EPA has the resources and  
15 personnel to do so. This weekend the EPA released statements  
16 highlighting just some of the work they will need to do in the  
17 days, weeks, and months ahead. That includes assessing 13  
18 existing Superfund sites that were flooded and could be damaged,  
19 addressing the many drinking and wastewater systems that remain  
20 shut down or damaged or are dealing with health advisories,  
21 assisting with testing for private wells, and supporting local  
22 first responders with monitoring and cleanup following chemical  
23 fires at the Arkema facility in Crosby, Texas.

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1           The need for a strong, robust EPA is outstandingly clear,  
2 and massive budget and workforce cuts, and proposals to weaken  
3 understaffed or even eliminate regional offices are not the  
4 answer. Beyond that, I have to believe it is tremendously  
5 demoralizing to the professional staff of the agency, many of whom  
6 offer their lifetime career to the agency and to the betterment  
7 of Americans across the country.

8           So, I want to thank you, Mr. Gomez and Mr. Larsen, for being  
9 here this morning. The recommendations proposed by GAO and the  
10 IG's office can continue to make EPA a more efficient and  
11 successful agency.

12           Sadly, this administration, the Trump administration, is  
13 aggressively working to dismantle the EPA through regulatory  
14 rollbacks, extreme budget cuts, and staff eliminations, and  
15 ongoing assault on science. These are foolish cuts, proven to  
16 be very foolish when we see disasters displayed right before our  
17 very eyes.

18           Mr. Gomez, GAO released a report on EPA, Interior, and Forest  
19 Service workforce planning in March of 2010 which concluded that  
20 the agencies' efforts have, I quote, "particularly fallen short  
21 in aligning the agency's workforce plans with their strategic  
22 plans." The report concludes that agencies are at risk of not  
23 having the appropriately-skilled workforce they need to

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1 effectively achieve their missions.

2 So, are you generally familiar with that report of 2010?

3 Mr. Gomez. Yes.

4 Mr. Tonko. Mr. Gomez, did EPA take action to address that?

5 Mr. Gomez. They have not yet.

6 Mr. Tonko. What about further actions? Will they be doing  
7 anything that you know of in respect to workforce planning to  
8 correct the numbers that they require?

9 Mr. Gomez. No. That's still an outstanding  
10 recommendation, again, to properly align its workforce plan with  
11 its strategic plan and its budget.

12 Mr. Tonko. And the Trump administration proposed cutting  
13 funding to the agency by nearly \$2.6 billion -- that's about a  
14 31-percent reduction -- and proposed reducing the workforce by  
15 some 3800 employees. Nearly 50 programs to protect our air and  
16 water, address climate change, and strengthen chemical safety  
17 were highlighted for elimination. Just unbelievable cuts. This  
18 included the Chemical Safety Board, the independent federal  
19 agency tasked with investigating chemical accidents such as the  
20 recent fires at the Arkema chemical plant in Crosby, Texas.

21 Mr. Gomez, in your testimony today you note that the March  
22 2010 report found that, I quote, "The ability of federal agencies  
23 to achieve their mission and carry out their responsibilities

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1 depends in large part on whether they can sustain a workforce that  
2 possesses the necessary education, knowledge, skills, and other  
3 competencies." Is that correct?

4 Mr. Gomez. Yes, that's correct.

5 Mr. Tonko. Well, I thank you, Mr. Chair.

6 We should all be concerned about how extreme the budget cuts  
7 proposed are and that the staffing reductions proposed would  
8 undermine EPA's ability to accomplish its mission, especially in  
9 the face of disasters. These are troubling cuts and proven day  
10 by day now with these disasters to be the most foolish approach  
11 to an agency that was envisioned by President Nixon to address  
12 safe water that we drink, clean air that we breathe, and all the  
13 environmental benefits that should be associated with our rights  
14 as Americans to enjoy that environment as fully as possible.

15 So, I do appreciate the work you are doing to draw the  
16 attention of the American public to these cuts and to the essential  
17 elements that these agencies require in order to respond fully  
18 and effectively to their mission.

19 And with that, I yield back.

20 Mr. Murphy. The gentleman yields back.

21 And seeing we have no more members here, we will conclude  
22 this hearing.

23 I would like to thank all the witnesses and members who have

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1 participated in today's hearing.

2 I realize a lot of this was along the lines of what else are  
3 we going to be doing. We felt that very important to get it on  
4 the record for EPA to hear. We expect them to take care of these  
5 issues, to fill those positions that are needed, to take some  
6 accounting of what is going on, because we will be asking more  
7 questions about what has happened in terms of preparedness and  
8 response here. None of us want to see any loss of life or property  
9 caused by some problems with an agency fulfilling their duties  
10 as you have outlined them for us.

11 So, we thank you for your observations and your comments  
12 today.

13 I remember members they have 10 business days to submit  
14 questions for the record. I ask that the witnesses all agree to  
15 respond promptly to the questions.

16 With that, this committee is adjourned.

17 [Whereupon, at 11:46 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]