



FEMA

TESTIMONY

OF

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BEFORE

THE

HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE -
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ON

“Oversight Hearing – The Federal Emergency Management Agency”

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Washington, D.C.

Chairman Amodei, Ranking Member Underwood, and Members of the Subcommittee: Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) priorities.

I am the Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency was established to provide focused support during truly catastrophic disasters. It has strayed far from its core mission and evolved into an overextended federal bureaucracy attempting to manage every type of emergency – no matter how minor. Instead of being a last resort, FEMA is now frequently used by States as a first responder and a financial backstop for routine issues that should be handled locally. This misalignment has fostered a culture of dependency, waste, and inefficiency, while delaying critical aid to Americans in genuine need. Red tape, bureaucratic inertia, and top-down micromanagement have turned disaster recovery into a slow, costly, and frustrating process. Thanks to President Trump and Secretary Noem, we are now empowered to restore accountability and federalism to disaster relief – FEMA must return to its rightful role: supporting States only when disasters truly exceed their capacity, while empowering local leadership, simplifying recovery processes, and safeguarding taxpayer dollars through commonsense reforms.

Consistent with this vision and guidance provided by President Trump and United States Homeland Security Secretary Noem, I have directed FEMA to focus on three operational priorities.

First, the nation must return to its roots where response to disaster is locally led, State managed, and Federally supported. Building State and local capacity is a critical step towards empowering jurisdictions to lead and manage. Such empowerment requires substantial planning and preparation; therefore, the nation will continue to rely on resources from the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF) before, during, and after disasters. It is essential that FEMA have sufficient funding in the DRF to provide timely support to communities and American citizens during their time of greatest need.

As the President has said, FEMA needs to cut the red tape. We should never let the bureaucracy of Washington, D.C. delay timely and effective delivery of life-saving or life-sustaining assistance. It is crucial that FEMA help and mentor State, local, tribal, and territorial partners to build their disaster resilience, preparedness, response, and recovery capacity, and provide resources and assistance when they are overwhelmed by the scope of a disaster. This means expanding our partnerships, improving our programs, and enhancing our technology to deliver the resources communities and Americans need during their darkest days. The more our partners build resilience, with federal help as appropriate, the more prepared our nation and our fellow Americans will be in the future.

Second, we need to focus on survivors. We have to find the most innovative and creative methods available to deliver assistance to each and every survivor who qualifies for it. We must communicate to survivors with greater speed and clarity, and through more modern means. As

the President has said, FEMA needs to remove cumbersome processes to enable more expeditious response to disaster, so people can return to their homes and so communities can rebuild. Updating our information technology systems is key to accomplishing this priority. Our personnel must stay ready and prepared to respond to a disaster at any moment, whether a hurricane, tornado, flood, or other event. I can assure you the FEMA workforce is focused on assisting survivors during the most traumatic days of their lives. I can recall a story about a woman who lost her home and her husband all in the same event, only to struggle to navigate her application for assistance. The American people deserve to be treated as the highest priority, which is why I have directed my workforce to review and improve on all methods of customer service.

And third, we must enhance our operational readiness by leveraging advanced information technology tools to build national resilience against global and dynamic threats and their associated risks in perpetuity. Our communities look to FEMA during their greatest times of need, and it remains imperative that we remain ready to respond to these challenges. This means modernizing FEMA's antiquated systems and assets used to execute our mission efficiently. FEMA requires funding resources and the expertise to improve and replace dated information technology and security services. Upgrades to these systems will directly enable and sustain mission essential functions, disaster response and recovery, agency operations, and other mission-related activities that rely on such services. In tandem with the IT modernization efforts, FEMA also requires additional support to the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System. Collectively, these enhancements will better position FEMA to put vital resources in the hands of the workforce, our partners and the communities as they work to recover from a disaster.

Our focus at FEMA is about making sure that resources are brought to bear to help communities on their worst day, ensuring we cut red tape. It's about making sure that, when Federal assistance is warranted, we deliver assistance to survivors rapidly, regardless of political affiliation, race, or creed.

To that end, we've increased resources for disaster response and recovery, making available within the DRF funds that were previously set-aside for Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) projects that would not take place for many years. As prudent stewards of taxpayer resources, we will prioritize efforts to identify and recover excess funds from contracts, grants, and mission assignments. We will also closely monitor the DRF balance and will continue to communicate with Congress on a regular basis regarding funding in the DRF.

I can attest to the fact that the DRF's sustainability is vital to the ongoing work that these communities and American citizens endure across our country.

In my current role, I have been intentional in meeting with FEMA employees at headquarters and at each of our FEMA regions, and meeting with disaster survivors. I joined Secretary Noem on her visit to communities in North Carolina impacted by Hurricane Helene earlier this year.

I saw firsthand how FEMA needs to have a top-to-bottom assessment, and the President, by Executive Order, has directed the creation of a FEMA Review Council to conduct a deeply

needed comprehensive review of the agency. We respect the independence of the Council's review and will welcome its recommendations. I will ensure that FEMA is fully cooperative with the Review Council and our congressional oversight and will participate as appropriate. I know the President and Secretary Noem look forward to the FEMA Review Council's findings and recommendations. The President has also issued a number of Executive Orders to streamline government: Secretary Noem and I are committed to ensuring those executive orders are carried out, in both letter and spirit.

Emergency management is at a critical crossroad in our country as we seek to improve our methods of serving American communities and citizens first. While FEMA works to return to its core missions, consistent with the President Trump and Secretary Noem's vision, the tools and methods we use to assist our communities must be modernized. This Committee has an important voice in this process of change and provides the vital resources we need to implement efficiencies. I look forward to answering your questions.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today, and I look forward to your questions.