

Chairman Peters Opening Statement As Prepared for Delivery
Full Committee Hearing: Examining FEMA's Strategic Priorities and Disaster Preparedness
June 22, 2022

Administrator Criswell, welcome back to the committee and thank you for your dedicated service to our country.

From FEMA's work to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, to helping communities recover from catastrophic storms and disasters, I appreciate your continued efforts, along with FEMA's dedicated workforce, to address serious emergencies.

While this Administration has improved federal preparedness and response efforts, there is more we can do together to ensure our communities can stay safe, and quickly recover, when disaster strikes.

Today's hearing is an important opportunity to discuss what resources and authorities FEMA needs to address worsening emergencies, including increasingly destructive natural disasters.

And, as we just saw from a damaging tornado in my home state of Michigan, these natural disasters have only continued to worsen due to climate change. There is no question this is a long-term threat that continues to cause deaths and injuries, destroy property and small businesses, and harm livelihoods.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, weather and climate-related disasters cost the United States more than \$300 billion dollars over the past three years alone.

To ensure FEMA can effectively respond to these increasingly frequent and destructive events, we must address the alarming shortage of FEMA personnel who are instrumental to response and recovery efforts. That is why Ranking Member Portman and I have authored bipartisan legislation to help FEMA recruit and retain Reservists, who ensure that FEMA can deploy additional emergency personnel quickly.

This bill, which has already passed the Senate, will protect dedicated disaster response workers from losing their full-time employment when they are called up to assist communities that are facing dire emergencies. I urge my colleagues in the House to send it to the President's desk.

And as we work to strengthen FEMA's ability to respond to disasters, we must also ensure every community has equitable access to federal disaster aid before, during, and after extreme weather events and other emergencies.

We have all seen troubling reports of minority, rural, and disabled communities receiving lower quality, and less disaster assistance. These communities, who are often disproportionately impacted by disasters, need us to finally act and address long-standing disparities in our federal disaster response.

To address this issue, I introduced legislation to establish a high-level office within FEMA that would be dedicated to understanding and advocating for the needs of underserved communities, and coordinating FEMA efforts to ensure the delivery of disaster assistance is equitable. I'm proud that, on a bipartisan basis, this Committee voted to advance this important bill, and I am working to ensure it passes the full Senate as soon as possible.

In addition to passing commonsense reforms, our nation's response to worsening floods, hurricanes, storms, and coastal erosion will not be complete without investing in infrastructure that will withstand extreme weather events and natural hazards for generations to come.

Ensuring that communities can fund resilience projects such as flood walls, breakers, and modern drainage systems will not only protect the lives and livelihoods of small business owners and families, but will also help save taxpayer dollars.

In fact, studies have shown that every \$1 invested in hazard mitigation or prevention saves an average of \$6 in recovery costs for taxpayers.

That is why, through my bipartisan STORM Act that is now law, I worked to establish revolving loan programs that local governments can access to fund mitigation projects. Through the bipartisan infrastructure law, I secured \$500 million to help kick-start this impactful program. I look forward to working with FEMA to swiftly implement the STORM Act program and ensure it receives additional funding as necessary.

Finally, while taking steps to strengthen our response and mitigation efforts will help address disasters and emergencies, we must also do more to combat climate change.

Administrator Criswell, I look forward to our discussion on FEMA's strategic priorities and what more your agency needs to respond to current and future disasters and emergencies.