

Statement of Ranking Member Donald M. Payne, Jr.

Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response and Communications

The Future of FEMA: Recommendations of Former Administrators

Tuesday, February 28, 2017

Earlier this month, this Subcommittee asked various stakeholders to provide their insights on what FEMA is doing well and what issues the next FEMA Administrator must address. I was pleased that, in general, the stakeholder community had positive things to say about how FEMA, under the Obama Administration, carried out its emergency preparedness mission and engaged with its state, local, and non-government partners before, during, and after disaster strikes.

Each witness that testified before the panel earlier this month identified stakeholder engagement as a top priority for the incoming Administration. I am hopeful that FEMA's outreach and coordination will continue once a new Administrator takes the helm at FEMA and that President Trump will act swiftly to nominate a new person with the wealth of experience that the past two Administrators before us today had.

Over the past month, we have seen infrastructure failure compound the impact of heavy rain at the Oroville Dam spillway and a spike in vandalism Jewish Cemeteries and harassment at Jewish Community Centers.

At the same time, federal support for emergency responders has become uncertain in light of President Trump's politically-charged Executive Order that could render communities ineligible for certain DHS grants. First responders and their community partners need a steady hand at the helm of FEMA to provide guidance and clarity on how the Administration's policies will affect them.

And the Administration needs the expertise of a FEMA Administrator who can ensure that any future infrastructure development proposals include adequate resiliency measures. I look forward to a new Administrator carrying the torch on many of the important issues the previous Administrators made progress in addressing.

In particular, earlier this month, Save the Children lauded FEMA's efforts to tackle the challenges involved in ensuring that emergency plans are designed to accommodate children and expressed support for making the "Children's Technical Expert" a permanent position at FEMA.

On the day of the September 11th attacks, I was responsible for student transportation, essentially ensuring that 10,000 children made it to and from school safely each day. On that day, my last student did not get home until 11:30 at night because of the attack.

We have made a lot of progress integrating children into disaster planning activities since then, but we must do better. As Save the Children pointed out earlier this month, **80 percent** of the recommendations made by the National Commission on Children and Disasters in 2010 remain open.

I commend Administrator Fugate for designating a "Children's Technical Expert" to ensure that children remain a priority in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery planning. I hope to work with Members of this panel to formally authorize FEMA's Children's Technical Expert this Congress.