

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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### **Opening Statement of Chairwoman Carolyn B. Maloney Hearing on “Hurricane Ida and Beyond: Readiness, Recovery, and Resilience” October 5, 2021**

The Committee is holding this hearing to address the serious and growing crises posed by natural disasters and extreme weather events driven by climate change.

Between August 29th and September 1st, Hurricane Ida devastated the United States from the Louisiana coast to New Jersey and my home state of New York. This deadly hurricane resulted in over 100 deaths including 13 in New York City.

In New York and New Jersey—more than a thousand miles from where this storm first made landfall—catastrophic flooding trapped people in flooded basement apartments and stranded vehicles.

In Louisiana, Hurricane Ida took down the electric grid—knocking out all eight transmission lines that deliver power to New Orleans and downing more than 30,000 utility poles—nearly twice as many as Hurricane Katrina.

More than one million people were left without power—some are still without power more than a month later.

The unprecedented destruction unleashed by Hurricane Ida is part of a growing trend that the federal government cannot ignore.

From record-breaking fires in the West, to devastating hurricanes in the South, to rising sea levels that threaten 40 percent of America’s population near our coastlines, the destructive impact of climate change is rapidly escalating.

And the cost of ignoring this problem is growing. During the first half of 2021, the United States experienced eight climate disasters with losses totaling more than \$1 billion dollars. Initial estimates put losses from Hurricane Ida at between \$53 and \$64 billion dollars.

The Government Accountability Office has had climate change on its High Risk List since 2013, in part because of concerns about the increasing costs of disaster response and recovery efforts.

Today, we are honored to be joined by FEMA Administrator Deanna Criswell.

Administrator Criswell, thank you for being here. I know you and your team are working around the clock to respond to the ongoing recovery efforts and other pressing issues.

Your testimony is crucial today because there are thousands of people in New York, New Jersey, Louisiana, Maryland, and other impacted communities who are desperate for information about how to get help and when they will get help.

That includes understanding what steps FEMA is taking to speed up the installation of temporary roofs on damaged homes in Louisiana and to work with vulnerable populations to make sure their applications are complete and approved quickly.

I am also interested in hearing about FEMA’s efforts to address inequities in disaster readiness and recovery. Vulnerable populations—like renters, people of color, people experiencing homelessness, and undocumented immigrants— are more likely to suffer the consequences of extreme weather events. Yet they often face the biggest barriers to getting help.

The Biden Administration has taken important steps to make it easier for disaster survivors to receive assistance, including waiving the requirement that survivors have a deed or other formal proof of homeownership to receive assistance. FEMA has also taken steps to assist vulnerable populations by developing fact sheets tailored to renters, undocumented immigrants, and non-English speakers.

These are important steps, but more needs to be done. It is critical that we invest in climate resilience and post-disaster assistance to advance racial and economic justice so that we do not leave behind our most vulnerable communities.

Administrator Criswell, I also would like to hear from you today about how we can improve efforts to build climate resilient communities.

One critical step the Administration could take is to improve federal data on the full extent of climate change on our communities. By leveraging data across the public and private sectors, we can better understand the future risk of flooding to communities and take action to keep people out of harm’s way.

Congress also must act. Today, I introduced the Federal Agency Climate PREP Act. This bill will ensure that communities have a say in how federal agencies implement their Climate Action Plans, which is critical in making sure our taxpayer dollars are put to work where they are most needed.

Last week, I was proud to support the \$28 billion dollars for victims of Hurricane Ida that Congress approved. But I was disappointed that 175 of my Republican colleagues voted against this bill—including many Members whose constituents are in dire need of the emergency funding approved by Democrats. I am hopeful that as extreme weather becomes more frequent and more deadly, we can agree on a bipartisan basis that impacted Americans deserve our help.

But recovery funds are not enough—Congress also needs to make long-term investments to stop global warming before it is too late.

That is why I call on my colleagues to support the Build Back Better Act. This transformational bill will make essential investments to solve the climate crisis, while also upgrading our infrastructure so that we can be better prepared for future disasters.

In the long run, these investments will save money by reducing the extraordinary cost from natural disasters and extreme weather caused by climate change.

I now recognize the distinguished Ranking Member, Mr. Comer, for an opening statement.

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