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APPROPRIATIONS
Homeland Security
RANKING MEMBER

BANKING, HOUSING, AND
URBAN AFFAIRS

RULES AND
ADMINISTRATION

November 9, 2024

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

The Honorable Deanne Criswell
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Secretary Mayorkas and Administrator Criswell:

I am writing to express my outrage with recent press reports that, in the aftermath of Hurricane Milton in Florida, a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) supervisor instructed relief workers to bypass houses displaying support for President Trump. According to these reports, the FEMA supervisor instructed staff to “avoid homes advertising Trump,” resulting in at least 20 houses with Trump flags or campaign signs being bypassed for outreach regarding possible federal disaster assistance. It is simply outrageous that any FEMA personnel, let alone a supervisor, would condition aid to victims based on their political views. I appreciate that Administrator Criswell has condemned these actions and fired the supervisor, but the American people need answers regarding how this happened and if anyone else was complicit, as well as assurance it will not happen again.

FEMA provides critical assistance to individuals and communities affected by presidentially declared disasters, and I commend the hardworking men and women of FEMA, as well as the volunteers from other Department of Homeland Security components, who have responded over the past six weeks to the catastrophic damage resulting from Hurricanes Helene and Milton. As Ranking Member of the Senate Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee, I have worked to ensure that FEMA’s Disaster Relief Fund (DRF) has sufficient resources to respond to disasters as they occur and to assist individuals and communities recovering in the aftermath.

The Biden-Harris Administration is reportedly planning to request that Congress provide tens of billions of dollars in additional funding to ensure FEMA and other federal agencies can provide needed assistance to those affected by recent disasters. Any disaster funding provided by Congress must be made available to all Americans who are victims of presidentially declared disasters, and cannot be conditioned or delayed based on their political views.

As a result, I ask that you respond to the following questions by Friday, November 15:

1. Does FEMA have any policies that condition or prioritize outreach in areas affected by disasters based on political or other affiliations?
2. Under what circumstances can FEMA personnel performing outreach in disaster areas choose to bypass homes?

3. Beyond outreach, has FEMA delayed response, recovery, or other assistance in any area affected by disasters based on the area's political affiliation?
4. Has FEMA identified, or had any whistleblower or other complaints regarding, any other instances of individuals being bypassed as a result of their political views?
5. How is FEMA identifying all homes improperly bypassed as a result of this supervisor's directions, and what steps is the agency taking to reach out to those bypassed individuals?
6. How many other FEMA personnel were aware of the supervisor's actions prior to press reports on November 8?
 - a) Did any personnel or volunteer alert FEMA to the supervisor's actions prior to press reporting?
 - b) When did FEMA management first become aware of the supervisor's actions?
7. What is FEMA doing to ensure personnel and volunteers do not take similar improper action when responding to future disasters?

I appreciate your prompt responses to these questions in order to reassure the American people that FEMA provides assistance to all affected by presidentially declared disasters, regardless of political affiliation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katie Boyd Britt". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Katie Boyd Britt
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Senate Appropriations Committee