

Congress of the United States

July 21, 2020

The Honorable Peter T. Gaynor
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street SW
Washington, DC 20024-2523

Dear Administrator Gaynor:

We write today to formally express our concern regarding vacancies in senior leadership positions at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as well as disappointment with the Agency's compliance with its own succession plan, signed by you earlier this year and approved by the Department of Homeland Security.

Despite both the primary and secondary Deputy Administrator roles being vacant for six months – one as a result of your confirmation to be Administrator, and the other a result of the departure of Daniel Kaniewski – President Trump has failed to name nominees to fill either of the Deputy Administrator positions. Further, we recently learned that the senior FEMA official performing the responsibilities of the primary Deputy Administrator, Carlos Castillo – who is concurrently serving as the Acting Deputy Administrator for Resilience, which is the secondary Deputy Administrator position – will be departing FEMA before the end of the month.

Given the responsibilities entrusted to FEMA by Presidential Policy Directive-40, you and your Agency know the importance of continuity planning. In January, you approved updates to FEMA's leadership succession charts, contained in Annexes J, AB, and AC of the DHS Orders of Succession and Delegations of Authorities for Named Positions, Delegation No. 00106. Rather than follow your own succession plan, FEMA instead established a new, career position with a nearly identical set of roles and responsibilities as the primary Deputy Administrator, which was then filled in a non-competitive manner.

We have strong concerns that unless experienced and qualified personnel are selected for the myriad of senior leadership vacancies at your Agency, FEMA will be ill prepared to fulfill its responsibilities to the American public should additional events transpire requiring Federal emergency management support.

As you know, FEMA's capabilities are already stretched thin due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the countless ongoing recoveries from significant disaster activity in recent years. To make matters worse, we are about to enter month three of hurricane season, wildfire season is underway, and earthquakes are a persistent threat along various major and minor faults across the country.

Any of these vacancies or decisions in isolation could be understandable, but together they are indicative of a pattern of neglect. Given FEMA's critical mission, these vacancies are simply unacceptable, and we urge you to work with the Acting Secretary of Homeland Security and the

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White House to identify qualified emergency managers to fill these vacancies before a catastrophic disaster befalls our nation.

Sincerely,



PETER A. DeFAZIO
Chair
House Transportation and
Infrastructure Committee



BENNIE G. THOMPSON
Chair
House Homeland Security
Committee



GARY C. PETERS
Ranking Member
Senate Homeland Security and
Governmental Affairs
Committee



DINA TITUS
Chair
Subcommittee on Economic
Development, Public Buildings,
and Emergency Management
House Transportation and
Infrastructure Committee



DONALD M. PAYNE, JR.
Chair
Subcommittee on Emergency
Preparedness, Response, and
Recovery
House Homeland Security
Committee

cc: The Honorable Chad Wolf, Acting Secretary, U.S. Department of Homeland Security

The Honorable Sam Graves, Ranking Member, House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee

The Honorable John Katko, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings and Emergency Management

The Honorable Ron Johnson, Chair, Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee