

**HSGAC Subcommittee on Emerging Threats
and Spending Oversight
Chair Maggie Hassan
Opening Statement As Prepared
March 24, 2021**

Good morning. I want to thank our witnesses for joining us today, and for volunteering to serve on the Business Executives for National Security (BENS) Commission on the National Response Enterprise. The Commission's purpose was to bring former government leaders together with business executives to find ways to better prepare for, and respond to, future crises. Thank you all for answering that call to service.

I also want to thank Senator Paul as well as his staff, for working together with me to hold the Emerging Threats and Spending Oversight subcommittee's first hearing of the 117th Congress. I look forward to working together to address the emerging national, economic, and homeland security threats facing the United States, and identifying ways to prevent waste, fraud, and abuse related to federal spending. I will work with Ranking Member Paul and all of my colleagues on the committee on a bipartisan basis to make our country safer and more fiscally responsible.

The Business Executives for National Security was founded nearly 40 years ago as a national and non-partisan organization to bring senior, private-sector executives together with government policymakers to discuss business challenges faced by public and private sector organizations dealing with national security issues. While some members of the Business Executives for National Security have previously served in government, many have spent much or all of their careers in the private sector, and bring fresh perspectives to pressing national security issues.

In the summer of 2020, with the United States and the rest of the world battling the Covid-19 pandemic, the organization convened a Commission on the National Response Enterprise. They brought together some of the most respected and accomplished leaders from government and corporations to research and analyze many of the factors that lead to effective emergency preparedness and response. The Commission was prompted to make sure that it did not view issues too narrowly through the lens of the current pandemic, but to understand what needs to be done to improve preparedness and response to virtually any type of future crisis, whether it be a pandemic, natural disaster, a coordinated cyberattack, or an act of terror.

The BENS Commission was co-chaired by Jeh Johnson, the former Secretary of Homeland Security; Alex Gorsky, the Chairman and CEO of Johnson & Johnson; and Mark Gerencser, the former managing director of Booz Allen Hamilton, and the BENS Chairman of the Board. 33 additional Commissioners from government, business, and civil society joined these co-chairs, in

addition to General Votel, the President and CEO of BENS, to identify ways to increase U.S. resiliency for future crises. I was honored to be included in this process as a guest to provide a congressional perspective alongside my colleague, Senator Cassidy, who is also joining us today.

In just a few months, the Commission interviewed 165 government, private sector, and other stakeholders, and develop 11 recommendations for ways to improve our preparedness and response capabilities. The Commission's recommendations focused on 3 key areas: facilitating communication and coordination, delivering supplies and volunteer resources, and leveraging emerging technology. Recommendations range from amending the Stafford Act to include pandemics, cyber events, and other emergencies of extended duration, to expanding the inclusion of non-traditional partners by DHS and FEMA in response efforts. The Commission also recommended consistent and pervasive exercises across the emergency response enterprise, and enhancing stockpile resilience by investing in cutting-edge technology that can enable real-time information sharing and rapid decision-making.

The Commission's report and the testimony provided today will provide a foundation for action for this subcommittee. I will work with the Commission, Senator Cassidy, and the members of the subcommittee to introduce legislation to address the issues we will discuss today, to better prepare communities all across the United States to manage future crises.