

**Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee
Nomination Hearing of Peter Gaynor to be FEMA Administrator**

**Opening Statement
Senator Maggie Hassan
November 14, 2019**

Mr. Chairman, thank you.

And I would like to thank Ranking Member Peters for the opportunity to serve as Ranking Member at this important hearing.

Mr. Gaynor, I want to thank you, as well, not only for being here this morning but for your service to our nation as a Marine, as an emergency manager, and—for the past year—as Deputy and then Acting Administrator for FEMA.

And I would be remiss if I didn't also thank your family. Public service is a family business, and they're support is incredibly important and has made your service possible. So, a special thank you to them.

Our nation faces serious challenges when it comes to emergency management.

And I also want to take a moment to acknowledge the incredibly hard working men and women at FEMA who really do extraordinary service in very difficult circumstances.

But I want to focus a little on the challenges that I think are before FEMA that you're going to be asked to address.

The science definitively shows that climate change is causing more intense weather events with ever-increasing frequency.

If FEMA ignores these realities, then it does so at the peril of the Americans who depend on the agency for mitigating and recovering from extreme natural disasters.

We only have to look to the 2017 hurricane season—when major disasters concurrently struck Puerto Rico, Texas, Florida, and California and overwhelmed FEMA's capabilities—to give us a view of the future of effects of global climate change on U.S. safety and security.

And beyond natural disasters, state and local governments are contending with a wide range of other catastrophic events.

Across the country, schools, hospitals, municipalities, county governments, and state agencies have been hit by an outbreak of ransomware attacks that are affecting key services and disrupting our economy.

FEMA must work with its fellow agencies—including the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency—in order to help state and local governments prevent and recover from these cyberattacks. The next Administrator must make this cooperation and coordination a key priority.

Finally, FEMA must get its own house in order. Eighteen months ago, then-Administrator Long announced that sexual harassment at FEMA was a “systemic problem going on for years” and that senior officials at FEMA must work toward “the eradication of this cancer.”

Yet, only now is FEMA’s key management tool for addressing sexual harassment in the workplace—the Office of Professional Responsibility—being fully stood up and staffed.

While steps are apparently underway toward changing FEMA’s toxic culture, progress has not come fast enough and much more work needs to be done.

I appreciated our discussion yesterday in my office about these critical issues.

I look forward to your testimony today and working with you to ensure that our country has a healthy and fully functional emergency management component.

Thank you.