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EPA OVERSIGHT: UNIMPLEMENTED INSPECTOR

GENERAL AND GAO RECOMMENDATIONS

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 2017

House of Representatives

Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

Committee on Energy and Commerce

Washington, D.C.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 10:15 a.m., in Room 2322 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Tim Murphy [chairman of the subcommittee] presiding.

Members present: Representatives Murphy, Griffith, Burgess, Brooks, Collins, Barton, Walters, Costello, Carter, Walden (ex officio), Castor, Tonko, Clarke, Ruiz, and Pallone (ex officio).

Staff present: Ray Baum, Staff Director; Mike Bloomquist, Deputy Staff Director; Jerry Couri, Chief Environmental Advisor; Lamar Echols, Counsel, Oversight and Investigations; Paul Edattel, Chief Counsel, Health; Ali Fulling, Legislative Clerk,

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3 Assistant; John Ohly, Professional Staff, Oversight and
4 Investigations; Christopher Santini, Counsel, Oversight and
5 Investigations; Sam Spector, Policy Coordinator, Oversight and
6 Investigations; Peter Spencer, Professional Staff Member,
7 Energy; Jeff Carroll, Minority Staff Director; Jacqueline Cohen,
8 Minority Chief Environment Counsel; Chris Knauer, Minority
9 Oversight Staff Director; Miles Lichtman, Minority Policy
10 Analyst; Jon Monger, Minority Counsel; Dino Papanastasiou,
11 Minority GAO Detailee; and C.J. Young, Minority Press Secretary.

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1 Mr. Murphy. [presiding] Good morning, everyone, and
2 welcome to our hearing of the Oversight and Investigations
3 Subcommittee on Energy and Commerce.

4 The subcommittee convenes this hearing today to examine
5 unimplemented recommendations by the Environmental Protection
6 Agency's Office of Inspector General and Government
7 Accountability Office. Acting on these recommendations would
8 improve EPA's ability to carry out its core mission, protecting
9 human health and the environment. This mission is never more
10 important than during times of natural disaster like the one the
11 Gulf Coast is experiencing right now in Hurricane Harvey, and we
12 are about to be hit with another hurricane on the Florida coast.

13 First of all, on behalf of the committee, I want to express
14 my sincere sorrow to everyone impacted by the storm. Hurricane
15 Harvey is one of the worst natural disasters the United States
16 has ever faced, and it is still too early to tell the full extent
17 of the devastation that has displaced thousands of people.
18 Members of this committee on both sides of the aisle represent
19 constituents experiencing loss and destruction from the storm,
20 and our thoughts and prayers are with these families as they begin
21 to rebuild their lives from this national tragedy.

22 During the storm and in the aftermath, EPA continues to play
23 a critical role in the federal response to Hurricane Harvey.
24 While EPA is still in the midst of initial response efforts, its
25 work has only just begun. We look forward to monitoring the

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1 agency's response to the disaster and learn the full extent of
2 the environmental impact and the challenges that lie ahead.

3 The loss and destruction of Hurricane Harvey make today's
4 hearing even more important. The committee has the opportunity
5 to learn about ways to strengthen the EPA, including highlighting
6 unimplemented recommendations that may improve the EPA's ability
7 to protect the environment and human health during recovery
8 efforts or future natural disasters. And I go back and reflect
9 on what we are about to face in Florida and Puerto Rico and the
10 disasters that are looming there.

11 Now the Constitution provides Congress with the authority
12 to conduct oversight of the Executive Branch, and in partnership
13 with the Government Accountability Office and Office of Inspector
14 General, we work together to root out waste, fraud, and abuse at
15 federal agencies such as the EPA. Through investigations and
16 audits, both GAO and OIG often make recommendations on ways to
17 improve the efficiency and effectiveness of EPA. And after these
18 recommendations are issued, GAO and OIG work with the agency to
19 ensure that EPA acts on their findings.

20 Today the committee will learn that, even when EPA agrees
21 with the recommendations, it may take years to implement them,
22 and some are never fully adopted by the agency. As a result, many
23 of the open recommendations span multiple administrations, some
24 dating as far back as the Bush administration. While EPA adopts
25 recommendations at a rate around the federal government average,

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1 there are still unimplemented recommendations in many critical
2 areas of the agency.

3 According to the OIG's most recent semiannual report to
4 Congress, released in May 2017, the EPA has the potential to save
5 \$103.3 million by implementing OIG's open recommendations. The
6 semiannual report showed 43 open recommendations with past due
7 completion dates and 56 with due dates set in the future.

8 The GAO will testify that EPA has implemented 191 of the 318
9 recommendations made since 2007, with 127 recommendations still
10 unimplemented. OIG and GAO have both highlighted deficiencies
11 in EPA's management and operations, including concerns about
12 EPA's information security posture, workforce management, and
13 grant administration.

14 For example, EPA OIG recently conducted an audit focusing
15 on flaws relating to EPA's information security posture during
16 fiscal years 2015 and 2016. The OIG reported that the agency
17 lacks an understanding of which contractors of the EPA have
18 significant information security responsibilities, raising
19 questions about the agency's network integrity. The OIG
20 recommended that EPA develop a process for identifying these
21 contractors. The EPA is not expected to implement this
22 recommendation until December 31st of 2018.

23 GAO and OIG have also uncovered waste and mismanagement in
24 EPA's grant programs. This is particularly troubling because
25 grants comprise almost half of the EPA's budget, about \$4 billion

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1 annually. In 2016, GAO found that EPA's grant-monitoring
2 practice may impact the agency's ability to efficiently monitor
3 results and increase administrative costs.

4 Additionally, in 2017, GAO reported that the EPA did not have
5 the information it needed to allocate grant management resources
6 effectively. GAO recommendations range from standardizing the
7 format of grant recipient progress reports to developing a process
8 to analyze workloads. All 12 recommendations in these two
9 reports remain unimplemented.

10 These are just some of the many reports and audits conducted
11 by the OIG and GAO. We will discuss more of them today. Both
12 the EPA OIG and GAO have done excellent work to highlight the
13 problems within EPA and find solutions to solve these issues. So,
14 I am grateful for your work and look forward to hearing more about
15 your findings.

16 I want to add here, with things looming in Florida and with
17 the tragedies in Texas, I can probably speak for the committee
18 that we better not find out that EPA has dawdled on anything that
19 is causing harm. We know there is a great deal of water pollution
20 that is out there because of overwhelming of sewer systems. We
21 are concerned about the increase in Zika mosquitoes in Texas. We
22 don't know if some of that has to do with some issues with water
23 management and other things within the jurisdiction of EPA. We
24 will keep a close watch on all of those and see if there are any
25 errors that have occurred related to weaknesses in the agency's

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1 implementing things that are causing these problems.

2 So, I thank our witnesses today for your dedication and work
3 to ensure that EPA is carrying out its mission. I want to
4 especially recognize Alfred Gomez, our witness from GAO. He is
5 a Houston native who has two nephews serving in the fire department
6 there. Are they doing okay? They are doing okay. Mr. Gomez
7 says they are. We appreciate their service and sacrifice during
8 Hurricane Harvey and its aftermath.

9 Now I turn to my colleague from Florida and recognize her
10 for an opening statement.

11 Ms. Castor. Mr. Chairman, thank you for convening this
12 hearing today, and thank you to our witnesses for their work.

13 The hearing subject, while important, pales in comparison
14 of the true oversight needed of the Trump Environmental Protection
15 Agency. EPA is, and always has been, a critical partner to our
16 states and communities back home. Most of what EPA does is to
17 support our communities back in cleaning up polluted sites,
18 helping protect the air we breathe and the water we drink. And
19 I thank the professionals and scientists at the Environmental
20 Protection Agency for their work.

21 But President Trump and Administrator Scott Pruitt have a
22 very different vision, unfortunately, and they have been acting
23 to weaken support for our communities back home that comes through
24 the EPA. And it is particularly troubling that EPA Administrator
25 Pruitt has not appeared before the Energy and Commerce Committee

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1 to date. This committee has direct oversight of the EPA, and it
2 is simply unprecedented and unacceptable that the Administrator
3 has not appeared before the committee.

4 Now the importance of the EPA is particularly clear as Texas
5 learns more about the scope and extent of the destruction caused
6 by Hurricane Harvey. There is nothing like a disaster response
7 that demonstrates how critical toxic chemical, Superfund, and
8 other EPA local initiatives are to the health and safety of our
9 neighbors.

10 As a Floridian, I know all too well the devastation that
11 massive hurricanes can bring to homes, businesses, and
12 communities, and the recovery from such a storm is long,
13 expensive, and challenging. And our thoughts are with the
14 residents of Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and Floridians as
15 they are in the path of another extremely dangerous storm in
16 Hurricane Irma.

17 Hurricane Harvey slammed into the Gulf Coast as a Category
18 4. So far, it has left at least 60 people dead and billions of
19 dollars in damage, and a death toll and estimated cost of recovery
20 is likely to continue to rise in the coming weeks.

21 Ranking member of the Subcommittee on Health, Representative
22 Gene Green -- I just saw him at the other subcommittee meeting
23 -- represents the city of Houston and has seen much of his district
24 flooded. And our thoughts are with him and his constituents at
25 this time.

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1 And, Mr. Gomez, I want to thank, recognize you for being here
2 today in what is surely a difficult time for you and your family.

3 The EPA has been a key agency responding to Harvey. And for
4 this reason, this hearing should be a timely and important step
5 in exploring how to strengthen the agency as it supports local
6 responders and begins to assess the possible environmental impact
7 of the flooding, toxic releases.

8 But this hearing, unfortunately, is devoted to a much less
9 significant topic. The scope of potential environmental risk
10 caused by this ongoing crisis, while still coming into focus, is
11 considerable. People are evacuating through dirty and
12 contaminated floodwaters that may contain bacteria and toxic
13 substances. There have also been reports of fires at chemical
14 facilities which may involve the release of toxic pollutants.
15 Additional reports have also suggested possible damage to leaking
16 gas tanks at fuel facilities which, if true, may pose
17 environmental concerns that the EPA will need to address.

18 And I am particularly concerned about reports of flooding
19 Superfund sites and what damage they may have caused. For
20 example, according to EPA, 13 of the 41 former and current toxic
21 waste sites in Harvey-impacted areas have flooded and may have
22 experienced some damage.

23 Additionally, the city of Houston contains approximately 450
24 petrochemical plants. News reports indicate these plants have
25 contributed to 74 instances of excess air pollution since Harvey

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1 hit, emitting more than 1 million pounds of hazardous substances
2 into the air.

3 See, our local communities need the expertise of the EPA to
4 prevent and mitigate such releases, but the Trump administration
5 has been working overtime to weaken EPA's ability to help back
6 home. And now, it is really showing at a time of disaster.

7 The storm also raises ongoing concerns of drinking water
8 safety. According to EPA, 4,500 drinking water systems are
9 potentially threatened by floodwaters, disrupted sewage systems.

10 Now, after Hurricane Katrina, Energy and Commerce
11 professional staff were on the ground to help, and this committee
12 should consider oversight hearings in Texas in the near term. But
13 today's hearing, rather than focusing on the big picture, examines
14 unimplemented recommendations for EPA, at a time when the real
15 issue is the decimation of the EPA professional workforce proposed
16 by President Trump and Administrator Pruitt. And yet, we respond
17 to the grave environmental and human health risk of Hurricane
18 Harvey and other catastrophes at this time, but the overall EPA
19 has never been more important.

20 Mr. Chairman, I am deeply troubled by the direction of the
21 agency under the Trump administration, and I implore you and my
22 Republican colleagues to conduct true oversight of the damage
23 being done to our bedrock environmental protections built through
24 decades of bipartisan work. And we need to do it before deep and
25 lasting damage is inflicted across America.

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1 The Trump EPA is waging an aggressive rollback of
2 environmental and human health protections through
3 politicization of the agency, extreme proposed budget and
4 staffing cuts, repealing or delaying rulemaking, and attacking
5 fundamental science. The Trump administration proposed extreme
6 budget cuts that cut to the heart of our local communities and
7 threaten the health and environment of Americans in every state.

8 The Trump budget would slash EPA's budget by nearly \$2.6
9 billion, reduce the professional workforce there by over 3,000
10 employees, and the damage will be done to our air quality, diesel
11 emission reductions, lead safety, and it goes on and on. Already
12 there is evidence of conflicts of interest, favoritism towards
13 certain businesses, and grants changed to exact political
14 revenge. This is not acceptable and this is what needs oversight.
15 The ongoing crisis unfolding on the Gulf Coast demonstrates the
16 dangers of the Trump administration's extreme assault on
17 environmental protection.

18 Mr. Chairman, we want to work with you to make sure the EPA
19 implements the workforce and contractor recommendations. But,
20 if we are serious about ensuring that the agency is able to protect
21 human health and the environment, then we must work together to
22 conduct true oversight of the fundamental damage being done to
23 this agency and our neighbors back home.

24 Thank you, and I yield back.

25 Mr. Murphy. Thank you.

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1 The Chair now recognizes the chairman of the full committee,
2 Mr. Walden, for 5 minutes.

3 The Chairman. I thank the gentleman.

4 Just in response to my friend from Florida, our Committee
5 staff, the Oversight Committee has worked diligently throughout
6 the last several weeks in clear communication with the various
7 agencies involved in the hurricane. This hearing was put
8 together before Harvey had a name. So, we will do our oversight
9 and continue to. At the appropriate time, I anticipate there will
10 be a delegation that will go and hold hearings or do appropriate
11 review.

12 I am one, when there is an emergency going on, who tries to
13 stay out of the way of the first responders and let them do their
14 job. And so, at the right time we will do that, and we will have
15 Administrator Pruitt before our committee sooner rather than
16 later. I share frustration that there has been a long delay in
17 getting some of these positions filled, partly by our friends in
18 the Senate, but the time has come for these agency heads to come
19 before our committee, and they will.

20 Now, as to this hearing, I appreciate Subcommittee Chairman
21 Murphy having this and his opening comments. We care deeply about
22 what has happened in Texas. We care deeply about what is about
23 to happen in Florida. My own district is on fire and much
24 destruction going on there. All these things matter.

25 You want to talk about air quality. We could use your

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1 support on some of our forestry legislation to reduce the fuel
2 loads, so we don't poison people with fires and destroy
3 watersheds.

4 Now we know that these recovery efforts will continue for
5 years. Recovering from any disaster, whether it is Hurricane
6 Harvey or Irma or the destructive wildfires burning out of control
7 throughout the West, requires coordination at every level of the
8 government, and the EPA is a critical part of that. The
9 challenges facing the EPA that pertain to Harvey are significant,
10 but I hope the agency seizes upon the lessons learned in responses
11 to previous natural disasters such as Hurricanes Katrina and
12 Sandy.

13 Today's hearing represents the first opportunity to hear
14 from the EPA Office of Inspector General and the Government
15 Accountability Office regarding any outstanding recommendations
16 that, if implemented, could enable the agency to better achieve
17 or do its job better.

18 We will also examine some of the areas of concern that have
19 been identified and commented upon by the OIG and the GAO, but
20 whose recommendations remain unimplemented by the EPA. We should
21 be mindful, however, that many of the OIG and GAO's unimplemented
22 recommendations span multiple administrations and, therefore,
23 represent longstanding challenges for the agency. For example,
24 we have learned the EPA has failed to complete an agencywide
25 workload analysis in more than 20 years.

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1 Similarly, both OIG and GAO have consistently identified
2 issues that generate serious concerns as to whether EPA has
3 knowledge of, or adequately monitors, the activities of its
4 contractors and grant recipients, despite the significant portion
5 of the agency's annual budget that is awarded to third parties.
6 Addressing these issues will increase transparency and
7 accountability to EPA in addition to enabling the agency to make
8 better-informed budgetary decisions. I believe that all
9 Americans want a healthy environment for themselves, their
10 families, and their communities.

11 And I would like to thank Alan Larsen from the EPA OIG and
12 Alfredo Gomez from the GAO for joining us today to provide
13 testimony and to expand upon their organizations' findings and
14 recommendations.

15 I would also like to recognize and thank Mr. Gomez's nephews
16 who I understand are serving the Houston Fire Department. Thank
17 you for their work as first responders who bravely have assisted
18 so many of their fellow citizens during Hurricane Harvey.

19 I am looking forward to productive discussion this morning
20 regarding actions EPA can take which will enable the agency to
21 better accomplish its core mission of protecting human health and
22 the environment.

23 With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

24 Mr. Murphy. I appreciate the gentleman's yielding back, and
25 I recognize the ranking member, Mr. Pallone, for 5 minutes.

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1 Mr. Pallone. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

2 It has been a week and a half since Hurricane Harvey hit
3 Texas, and as the scope of the environmental disaster only begins
4 to become known, thousands remain displaced, their homes and
5 businesses flooded. And I know firsthand the immense devastation
6 caused by such natural disasters. In 2012, my district was hit
7 hard by Hurricane Sandy, and I had never seen worse storm damage
8 in our area in my lifetime. For many, this storm was the
9 worst-case scenario, lives lost, homes flooded, businesses lost.
10 Our nation is now experiencing historic levels of destruction and
11 loss on the Gulf Coast in the wake of Hurricane Harvey.

12 Our fellow Members of Congress, including five members of
13 the Texas delegation on this committee, are working hard with
14 federal, state, and local officials, and first responders to help
15 those affected by the storm. And as the cleanup continues, many
16 grave environmental and human health risks exist. In the days
17 since Hurricane Harvey came to shore we have seen chemical plants
18 on fire, fuel tanks leaking, mass releases of toxic pollutants
19 into the air, and flooded federal Superfund sites. I am deeply
20 concerned of the potential risk to human health and the
21 environment caused by exposure to the hazardous materials kept
22 at these sites, and this committee must work to understand the
23 impact some of these facilities may have on public health.

24 The Trump administration recently delayed amendments to the
25 Risk Management Program which included safety requirements for

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1 companies that store large quantities of dangerous chemicals.
2 Moreover, the environmental issues resulting from the hurricane
3 also underscore the need for robust implementation of the
4 Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act, or EPCRA.
5 Communities have the right to know important details about the
6 type and amount of harmful chemicals released in their
7 neighborhoods. All of these risks underscore the need for a
8 strong and capable EPA.

9 Today we are discussing recommendations by the EPA Inspector
10 General and the Government Accountability Office regarding the
11 EPA, and I want to thank our witnesses for their testimony and
12 work on these recommendations. However, I would argue that
13 recommendations for improving EPA's performance are part of a much
14 wider need to ensure that the agency is high-performing,
15 efficient, and effective in accomplishing the agency's mission
16 of protecting human health and the environment. Over the last
17 six months EPA has been doing everything possible to operate in
18 secrecy. Administrator Pruitt has no interest in transparency,
19 and that should be unacceptable to every member of this committee.
20 Administrator Pruitt repeatedly disregards oversight inquiries
21 from the Democrats on this committee, and that should be
22 unacceptable to anyone who believes we have an oversight
23 responsibility.

24 And the Trump EPA has proposed aggressive cuts to environment
25 and human health protections, dismissed scientists from important

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1 advisory boards, and proposed severe budget and staffing
2 reductions at EPA. These actions taken in totality serve to
3 directly undermine the agency's ability to effectively protect
4 human health and the environment.

5 A robust and effective EPA is key in responding to natural
6 disasters like Hurricane Harvey, and EPA currently has 143
7 personnel supporting the response efforts for Hurricane Harvey
8 and has established a unified command with state and local
9 partners, but that number is going to increase dramatically in
10 the coming weeks. At its peak after Hurricane Katrina, about 1600
11 EPA staff and contractors worked in the Gulf Coast region
12 assisting with response and cleanup activities, in addition to
13 thousands of additional EPA employees supporting response efforts
14 from EPA headquarters and regional offices around the country.
15 With the employee cuts and buyouts that the administration has
16 proposed, we need to ensure that EPA will actually have the
17 employees in place to conduct this critical work.

18 So, Mr. Chairman, I want to work with you to make sure we
19 have a robust and effective EPA. The committee must conduct
20 active oversight of the agency, particularly drinking water,
21 infrastructure, and regulation, clean air protections, and the
22 impacts of climate change. We must also conduct ongoing
23 oversight over EPA and other agencies' efforts to assist the Gulf
24 Coast rebuild.

25 And the Trump administration's ongoing efforts to weaken

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1 environmental health protections, attack fundamental science,
2 and also to propose extreme budget and staff reductions will do
3 nothing, in my opinion, but undermine EPA's efforts to protect
4 human health and the environment not only with regard to Hurricane
5 Harvey, but in so many other areas. So, I am concerned and I hope
6 that we can work together.

7 And again, thanks to everyone.

8 I yield back.

9 Looking forward to your comments to the panel.

10 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

11 Mr. Murphy. I thank the gentleman for his comments.

12 I ask unanimous consent that the members' written opening
13 statements be introduced into the record and, without objection,
14 the documents will be entered into the record.

15 I would now like to introduce our panel of federal witnesses
16 for today's hearing. First, we have Mr. Alan Larsen. He is the
17 counsel to the Inspector General for the Environmental Protection
18 Agency. We also have Mr. Alfredo Gomez who serves as the Director
19 of Natural Resources and Environment for the Government
20 Accountability Office.

21 And we thank you for being here today and providing
22 testimony. We look forward to the opportunity to discuss open
23 and unimplemented recommendations made to the EPA.

24 You are aware the committee is holding an investigative
25 hearing and, when doing so, has the practice of taking testimony

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1 under oath. Do you have any objections to taking testimony under
2 oath?

3 Seeing none, then, the Chair advises you under the rules of
4 the House and rules of the committee, you are entitled to be
5 advised by counsel. Do either of you desire to be advised by
6 counsel during the testimony today?

7 Neither one has asked for that. So, in that case, will you
8 please rise and raise your right hand, and I will swear you in.

9 [Witnesses sworn.]

10 Well, you have answered in the affirmative, and you are now
11 under oath and subject to the penalties set forth in Title 18,
12 Section 1001, of the United States Code.

13 I will ask that each of you give a 5-minute summary of your
14 written statement. We will begin with you, Mr. Larsen.

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1 STATEMENT OF ALAN S. LARSEN, COUNSEL TO THE INSPECTOR GENERAL,
2 U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY, AND ALFREDO GOMEZ, DIRECTOR
3 OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT, GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY
4 OFFICE

5
6 STATEMENT OF ALAN S. LARSEN

7 Mr. Larsen. Good morning, Chairman Murphy, Representative
8 Castor, and members of the subcommittee. I am Alan Larsen,
9 counsel to the Inspector General for both the Environmental
10 Protection Agency and the Chemical Safety and Hazard
11 Investigation Board.

12 I thank this committee for highlighting the importance of
13 acting on unimplemented OIG recommendations. As you know, an
14 Office of Inspector General cannot direct an agency's actions.
15 Our influence is through our recommendations, which can result
16 in substantial cost savings and major improvements in agency
17 programs, but only if an agency chooses to implement them.

18 Our OIG undertakes a risk-based work planning process to
19 determine which issues we will review during the coming year. Our
20 plan, however, is always subject to change, as we inevitably
21 receive hotline requests and congressional requests. We conduct
22 those reviews and issue final reports, which generally will
23 include one or more recommendations to address our findings.

24 As required by the Inspector General Act, the EPA OIG
25 publishes a cumulative list of unimplemented recommendations in

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1 our semiannual reports to Congress. Our most recent report cited
2 43 open recommendations with past due completion dates and 56 with
3 future dates. Notably, potential cost savings for the
4 unimplemented recommendations listed amount to over \$100 million.

5 Now I will briefly discuss some of the OIG's recommendations
6 to the EPA that remain unimplemented. You will see that some are
7 quite recent. I highlight them because of their potential
8 impact.

9 In July 2017, we completed a review of the processes the EPA
10 uses to verify that agency contractors have the training needed
11 to protect the agency from cyberattacks. We found that the EPA
12 is unaware of the number of contractors who require specialized
13 training. The OIG recommended that the EPA implement a process
14 to maintain a listing of contractors who require the specialized
15 training and that the agency report this information to its Chief
16 Information Security Officer. While the agency has committed to
17 implement a process for verifying that agency contractors are
18 appropriately trained, our recommendation remains unimplemented,
19 posing a continuing risk to the agency's information, data, and
20 network.

21 Through another audit completed in August of 2014, we looked
22 at the agency's oversight of cloud computing initiatives. We
23 found that the EPA's lack of oversight over vendors resulted in
24 missed opportunities for significant savings. The EPA paid over
25 \$2 million for services that were not fully rendered or did not

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1 comply with federal requirements. We recommended several
2 corrective actions to the agency, such as improving its policies
3 and performing documented cost-benefit analyses. To date, the
4 agency has not fully implemented all of our recommendations.

5 In April of 2017, we completed a review of Puerto Rico's state
6 revolving funds based on a hotline complaint from the EPA. The
7 EPA reported that the Puerto Rico Government Development Bank did
8 not have funds to honor a combined balance of approximately \$188
9 million. The OIG determined that over \$774 million is at risk
10 due to Puerto Rico's financial crisis and that the restoration
11 of funds in the near future is highly unlikely. The OIG
12 recommended that the EPA evaluate options to restore the viability
13 of the revolving funds or implement new strategies better suited
14 to the needs of Puerto Rico. While the agency has committed to
15 considering future approaches to grant funding, the OIG's
16 recommendation is as yet unimplemented.

17 These are just a few of the examples of OIG's recommendations
18 to the agency. We will continue to work actively with the EPA
19 and keep Congress fully advised regarding actions to address our
20 recommendations.

21 Accomplishing our work requires sufficient appropriated
22 funds from Congress. Our funding clearly represents a fruitful
23 investment for the American taxpayer, as the OIG returned \$22 for
24 every \$1 given to us in fiscal year 2016. While I'm aware that
25 this is not an appropriations committee, I respectfully ask for

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1 any help you can provide us in this regard.

2 Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared statement. I'm
3 happy to answer any questions. Thank you.

4 [The prepared statement of Mr. Larsen follows:]

5

6 ***** INSERT 1 *****

1 Mr. Murphy. Thank you, Mr. Larsen.

2 Mr. Gomez, you are recognized for 5 minutes, please.

1 STATEMENT OF ALFREDO GOMEZ

2
3 Mr. Gomez. Thank you.

4 Chairman Murphy, Congresswoman Castor, and members of the
5 subcommittee, good morning, and I'm pleased to be here today to
6 talk to you about the status of recommendations GAO has made to
7 the Environmental Protection Agency.

8 As you know, the mission of the EPA is to protect human health
9 and the environment. We have conducted reviews focused on
10 various aspects of EPA's operations, such as managing grants,
11 workforce planning, and its programs. And through these reviews,
12 we have made numerous recommendations to improve EPA's
13 performance and the efficiency and effectiveness of its
14 operations and programs.

15 My statement today will focus on two main areas. First, the
16 status of EPA's implementation of GAO's recommendations since
17 fiscal year 2007 and how these recommendations relate to EPA's
18 operations and programs. And, two, examples of benefits realized
19 by EPA and others based on our work.

20 As part of our process, we follow up on recommendations we
21 have made and report on their status to Congress. Agencies also
22 have a responsibility to monitor and maintain accurate records
23 on the status of our recommendations. We now follow up with EPA
24 twice a year to determine the extent to which our recommendations
25 have been implemented and the benefits that have been realized.

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1 We consider a recommendation implemented when the agency has taken
2 actions to address the issue or deficiency that we have
3 identified.

4 With regard to the first area on the status of GAO's
5 recommendations, we have found that, of the 318 recommendations
6 we made to EPA, they had implemented 191. The remaining 127
7 recommendations remain open or not implemented.

8 And just to give you some more information, for
9 recommendations that we made over four years ago, that is,
10 recommendations from fiscal year 2007 to 2012, EPA has implemented
11 77 percent. For recommendations we made within the last four
12 years, that is, since fiscal year 2013, the EPA has implemented
13 34 percent.

14 Experience has shown that it takes time for some
15 recommendations to be implemented. For this reason, we actively
16 track each unaddressed or open recommendation for four years.
17 The 318 recommendations we have made fall into six broad
18 categories, such as management and operations, water-related
19 issues, and environmental contamination and cleanup.

20 For example, in January 2017, we reported on EPA's management
21 of grants to states, local governments, and others which make up
22 almost 50 percent of the agency's budget. We found that EPA does
23 not have sufficient information about the workload associated
24 with these grants. Consequently, the agency is not able to
25 effectively and efficiently allocate staff across its offices and

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1 regions to manage these grants.

2 Because the agency did not know its grants workload, it
3 sometimes has to shift staff from other mission areas to address
4 the work. We recommended that EPA collect and analyze data about
5 grants management workloads and use these data to inform staff
6 allocations. EPA agreed with this recommendation and has
7 initiated steps to address it, and we will continue to monitor
8 EPA's actions to figure out what the status of the recs are.

9 We have also identified many benefits such as programmatic
10 and process improvements based on EPA taking actions on our
11 recommendations. For example, we issued several reports on
12 drinking water and wastewater infrastructure issues. In
13 particular, we reported on drinking water and wastewater
14 infrastructure needs of rural and small communities. We found
15 that some communities faced potentially duplicative application
16 requirements such as separate environmental analyses for each
17 program that they applied for, resulting in delays and increased
18 cost to communities. We recommended that EPA and the Department
19 of Agriculture work together with state and other officials to
20 develop guidelines to assist states in developing uniform
21 environmental analyses, and they have done so.

22 In summary, our recommendations provide a good opportunity
23 to improve the government's fiscal position, better serve the
24 public, and make government programs more effective and
25 efficient. The EPA's implementation of our recommendations will

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1 help the agency continue to improve its performance and the
2 efficiency and effectiveness of its operations, and we will
3 continue to work with Congress to monitor and draw attention to
4 these important issues.

5 Chairman Murphy, Congresswoman Castor, members of the
6 subcommittee, this concludes my statement. I'd be happy to
7 answer any questions.

8 And I also just wanted to add thank you for your words of
9 support to my family in Texas and my nephews, but also all the
10 other families in Texas. Thank you.

11 [The prepared statement of Mr. Gomez follows:]

12
13 ***** INSERT 2 *****

1 Mr. Murphy. Thank you, Mr. Larsen and Mr. Gomez.

2 I will recognize myself for 5 minutes here for questions.

3 First of all, your organizations have consistently
4 highlighted EPA's failures to perform adequate workforce and
5 workload analysis as being an area of concern warranting some
6 corrective action by the agency, which has not occurred. So, Mr.
7 Gomez, I will start with you. Could you explain how EPA's failure
8 to assess its workforce and workload, grants, whatever, hinders
9 its ability to respond in natural disasters like Hurricane Harvey
10 and Irma?

11 Mr. Gomez. So, what we've talked in our work looking at
12 workforce planning and grants management is that it's really
13 important for the agency, as you said, to have good information
14 on workload. So, data on workload is important because the agency
15 doesn't really ensure that it has the right people in the right
16 places with the right skills and competencies to accomplish the
17 mission of the agency, whether that is to focus on areas that are
18 short term or long term. We want to make sure that the agency
19 has that information. It is something that the agency has
20 struggled with for decades. So, we continue to make those
21 recommendations. I know the IG has made recommendations in the
22 past. So, we think that's really important, again, to ensure that
23 it has the right people in the right places with the right skill
24 sets in the right locations.

25 Mr. Murphy. Mr. Larsen, could you comment on that, how it

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1 affects our ability to respond to these hurricanes?

2 Mr. Larsen. The IG's work I think is directly aligned with
3 the GAO's work in this area. We've issued reports with
4 recommendations. As of July of this year, the agency has
5 responded to and acted on the last of the open recommendations.
6 However, for the last several years, including the current
7 management challenges report that we gave to the agency, we
8 continue to highlight workforce planning as a challenge that the
9 agency needs to address.

10 I guess the simple answer to your question, Mr. Chairman,
11 is that if the agency doesn't know what its work requirements are,
12 it cannot assign and align people to those requirements. And we
13 are urging them to, as Mr. Gomez says, identify the data that
14 allows them to make those comparisons and align their work with
15 their workforce.

16 Mr. Murphy. And will you oftentimes find weaknesses when
17 it is a time of challenge, which we are facing now? Now every
18 year since 2015 the GAO has sent a letter to the EPA highlighting
19 high-priority recommendations, and GAO considers these
20 recommendations to be critical to EPA's mission of protecting
21 human health and the environment.

22 So, Mr. Gomez, as EPA responds to Hurricane Harvey, as it
23 prepares to respond to Hurricane Irma, are there any high-priority
24 recommendations that, if implemented, could have impacted EPA's
25 response to the hurricane? I mean, what are their high priorities

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1 right now that need to be done?

2 Mr. Gomez. So, this high-priority letter that we've sent
3 to EPA, we've done that since 2015. And what we've done is really
4 looked at the recommendations that GAO has made and identified
5 those areas that we saw as high priority, either areas that GAO
6 has identified as high risk. We have a number of recommendations
7 that are focusing on water infrastructure.

8 So, I think one of the priority recommendations that we think
9 does have relevance to Harvey and other future disasters is the
10 area of water infrastructure. So, for example, we've done work
11 looking at how small and rural utilities use asset management,
12 which is a really important tool to understand what infrastructure
13 these utilities have, perhaps where the areas are in that
14 infrastructure that are vulnerable or at high risk. So that, when
15 a disaster does take place, they're better prepared, both to
16 respond to it, but also, if they have to rebuild, they can rebuild
17 with resilience in mind.

18 So, we've made a number of recommendations to EPA, getting
19 EPA to work with the Department of Agriculture to come up with
20 better guidelines and information and to encourage the states and
21 the utilities to use asset management. Small utilities are
22 challenged because they don't have the technical expertise
23 necessarily. But we should do whatever we can in the federal
24 family and others to help these communities better prepare for
25 these disasters.

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1 Mr. Murphy. Finally, in June of 2007, GAO released a report
2 on Hurricane Katrina that made several recommendations related
3 to enhancing disaster response. One of these recommendations is
4 still open after 10 years. Mr. Gomez, why is that recommendation
5 still open? What was it, and is going to affect how things are
6 in Texas, Louisiana, Florida, and Puerto Rico?

7 Mr. Gomez. Sure. So, what we did in that report from 2007
8 is we were looking at EPA's response to Katrina and, also, to the
9 subsequent cleanup. One of the recommendations that we kept open
10 over the years was we had recommended that EPA work with other
11 federal land management agencies, DHS, and FEMA to better
12 coordinate responses to cleanup. And the reason we did that is
13 because we found in the work that National Wildlife Refuges, which
14 there are several in Louisiana, had been contaminated and the
15 contamination lasted over a year. And so, there was not really
16 good planning to come together and clean up that contamination.
17 Some of the refuges were closed for over a year.

18 So now, what's happened since then is Congress passed the
19 Post-Katrina Act which put in place better national preparedness
20 and, also, put in place the National Response Framework, of which
21 EPA has a key role now in responding to hazardous waste and oil
22 spills. So, in theory, we expect that EPA is putting in place,
23 for example, in Florida any response that's needed as the
24 hurricane may come to that region. So, we're going to look at
25 that recommendation based on what's happened now and potentially

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1 close it because we think it might address what we had been talking
2 about.

3 Mr. Murphy. Thank you.

4 And I see my time has expired. Ms. Castor, you are
5 recognized for 5 minutes.

6 Ms. Castor. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

7 Thanks again, gentlemen.

8 As the agency goes forward to implement what has not been
9 implemented to date, it would seem that the Trump administration's
10 kind of assault on the professional staff there and personnel
11 would have a real impact on the ability to follow through with
12 your recommendations. The Trump administration has still failed
13 to provide nominees for almost all Senate-confirmed leadership
14 positions at EPA. Most Regional Administrator positions are also
15 without political leadership, including EPA Region 6 in Dallas
16 responding to Hurricane Harvey.

17 The Trump administration, a lot of this, we blame a lot on
18 the Senate, but you can't put too much blame on the Senate here
19 because the Trump administration has not nominated people for
20 Deputy Administrator, Assistant Administrator for the Office of
21 Air and Radiation, Assistant Administrator for the Office of
22 Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention, the Chief Financial
23 Officer, the Assistant Administrator for Environmental
24 Information, International and Tribal Affairs, Land and Emergency
25 Management, Research and Development, and Water.

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1 Do you all agree that when you don't have folks in charge
2 that it complicates the ability of the agency to follow through
3 with your recommendations?

4 Mr. Larsen. Well, the short answer is yes. The longer
5 answer is we have career people who remain in place who do carry
6 out the work of the agency. But, as you indicate, the statutory
7 mandates remain in place, and it's up to the agency to figure out
8 a way to carry out those mandates. And it is more difficult if
9 you don't have the leadership.

10 Ms. Castor. Yes?

11 Mr. Gomez. Yes, I would agree that it's important to have
12 all the staff that you need at all levels of the agency to carry
13 out its mission.

14 Ms. Castor. And, Mr. Gomez, you said that GAO meets with
15 folks at EPA every six months. Have you met with Administrator
16 Pruitt? Is it typical that you would meet with the Administrator
17 or leadership to go over recommendations from GAO?

18 Mr. Gomez. So, what our Comptroller General likes to do is
19 he likes to meet with all of the new Cabinet Secretaries and
20 leaders of other offices. So, GAO is in the process of scheduling
21 a meeting with Administrator Pruitt, and I would go to that meeting
22 as well with --

23 Ms. Castor. But that has not been done here in the first
24 nine-month --

25 Mr. Gomez. We have not scheduled it, yes.

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1 Ms. Castor. You are just like the Energy and Commerce
2 Committee that has yet to see the EPA Administrator.

3 Gentlemen, there is a very disturbing press report that came
4 out just a few days ago that the EPA has taken the unusual step
5 of putting a political operative in charge of vetting hundreds
6 of millions of dollars in grants that the EPA distributes
7 annually, assigning the funding decisions to a former Trump
8 campaign aide with little environmental policy experience, who
9 has already cancelled close to \$2 million in
10 competitively-awarded grants to university and nonprofit
11 organizations. It really does appear like this is being
12 politicized.

13 It says -- this is from The Washington Post on September 4th
14 -- "Earlier this summer, on the same day that Senator Lisa
15 Murkowski of Alaska joined with two other Republicans in voting
16 down a GOP healthcare bill, EPA staffers were instructed, without
17 any explanation, to halt all grants to the regional office that
18 covers Alaska, Washington, Oregon, and Ohio. That hole was
19 quickly narrowed to just Alaska and remained in place for nearly
20 two weeks."

21 The former Bush EPA Administrator, Christine Todd Whitman,
22 said, "This is out of the ordinary. We didn't do a political
23 screening on every grant because many of them were based on
24 science, and political appointees don't have that kind of
25 background."

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1 Have you all opened any kind of investigation into what is
2 happening here yet?

3 Mr. Larsen. We've read those reports. We've not received
4 complaints from Congress so far or from members of the public or
5 from organizations about this.

6 Ms. Castor. Okay.

7 Mr. Larsen. If you could or if you would, I'd offer a general
8 and a specific answer to your question.

9 Ms. Castor. Quickly, because I have one more question.

10 Mr. Larsen. Okay. The general answer is EPA has always
11 been a lightning rod. We get complaints, on the one hand, that
12 EPA is ignoring its statutory obligations and allowing --

13 Ms. Castor. Let me ask -- I thank you for that. You have,
14 I believe, opened an investigation last week into Administrator
15 Pruitt's travel because it is so out of the ordinary. It says,
16 "Officials in the EPA's Office of Inspector General notified
17 agency leadership last week that Pruitt was in Oklahoma, or en
18 route there, for nearly half of his first three months in office."
19 Maybe that is why GAO can't get a meeting and he can't appear before
20 the Energy and Commerce Committee. But the problem is that it
21 looks like he has been using taxpayer funds for this excessive
22 travel.

23 How long will it take for the OIG to get to the bottom of
24 this investigation?

25 Mr. Larsen. Ma'am, in our world we distinguish between

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1 investigations and audits and it's probably a distinction most
2 people don't care about. But we are doing an audit. They tend
3 to take longer. We're going to look not only at the specifics
4 of Mr. Pruitt's travel, but the robustness of the controls that
5 govern travel generally and whether they're sufficient.

6 Ms. Castor. Thank you very much.

7 I yield back.

8 Mr. Murphy. Thank you.

9 The Chair recognizes Mr. Griffith for 5 minutes.

10 Mr. Griffith. Let me follow up on that real quick. And
11 correct me if I am wrong, but an investigation means you are
12 looking into something that might have wrongdoing and an audit
13 means you are checking into the money to see whether or not we
14 need to put different parameters around it? Would that be a fair
15 assessment or something along those lines?

16 Mr. Larsen. That, generally, yes. Investigations tend to
17 look at criminality. They can look at administrative violations.
18 This is not either of those.

19 Mr. Griffith. This is just an audit to see what we can do
20 better?

21 Mr. Larsen. Well, it's also going to look at whether there
22 were violations of agency requirements.

23 Mr. Griffith. Okay. All right. I appreciate that.
24 Thank you.

25 Let me get down to where I was going to go initially, and

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1 that would be that I am concerned about the workforce and the
2 workload questions. EPA's Office of Inspector General -- that
3 would be you all -- reported, "EPA has not conducted workload
4 analysis in over 20 years, making it difficult for EPA to implement
5 corrective actions and allocate its budget effectively."

6 And I guess what I am looking at there is that we have heard
7 talk today about a few months where certain positions aren't
8 filled, but here we are looking at 20 years, both Republican and
9 Democrat administrations that have not at the EPA gone in and
10 looked at their workload analysis. And then, we see with
11 Hurricane Harvey that we had 13 Superfund sites that were
12 affected. Am I not correct that, if we had performed a workload
13 analysis over time, I am not saying all 13 of them would have been
14 cleaned up, but that we might have more of these Superfunds being
15 cleaned up?

16 And I also referenced, because we are talking about Harvey
17 so much now, but I remember testimony in a previous hearing in
18 a different subcommittee where they were talking about a site in
19 St. Louis that hadn't been acted on or in the St. Louis vicinity
20 that had not been acted on in decades as well that was a Superfund
21 site.

22 So, can you help me out? Of those things that would have
23 helped both before a disaster and just in general, if we had a
24 workload analysis, so we could say these were the worst ones, let's
25 put most of our people there? And I am happy to take answers from

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1 either of you.

2 Mr. Larsen. Sure. I'll give my short answer, and, then,
3 Mr. Gomez can respond. My short answer is it's difficult to draw
4 a direct line between the lack of a workforce plan and a specific
5 failure to be able to cover something. I think we can all say,
6 if you knew more precisely where your requirements are and how
7 many people, and what kinds of people you need to address those,
8 you would probably have a better result. But I can't draw a direct
9 one-to-one correlation.

10 Mr. Griffith. Mr. Gomez?

11 Mr. Gomez. And I'll just pivot from that last comment. And
12 I think that our point on our work on workforce planning has been
13 exactly that point, is to understand, again, from data where your
14 people are, what skill sets you need, the locations you need them
15 in. So that you have a better sense of how to meet that mission.
16 And that mission could be that you focus on cleaning up hazardous
17 waste sites. But doing a workforce analysis I think would help
18 you, hopefully, do that better.

19 Mr. Griffith. Well, and a workforce analysis would help us,
20 as legislators, as well. Although this is not an appropriating
21 committee, we hear all the time that folks need more money. Well,
22 if I know that you need more money because you are going to help
23 rural communities -- and I appreciated, as you mentioned, rural
24 communities with water and wastewater -- help those communities
25 instead of just send edicts down from the alabaster towers in

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1 Washington, "Here's what you've got to do," without helping those
2 folks figure out how they are going to do with the money that they
3 have. That creates big problems.

4 If you had a workload analysis, we might be able to figure
5 out where we could appropriate the money more advantageously to
6 prevent problems before they happen, whether it be after a
7 hurricane or when you have got a serious problem like we had in
8 Flint, Michigan, or issues in my very rural, mountainous district
9 where there are problems we don't know how to solve and we are
10 afraid to ask, for fear that, instead of coming in to help us,
11 they will just come in and try to punish folks who are trying to
12 do the best they can under limited circumstances in a rural areas.
13 So, I do appreciate that as well.

14 So, thank you, and thank you for putting that in both your
15 oral and your written testimony.

16 Mr. Larsen. Sir, I have one more comment --

17 Mr. Griffith. Yes, sir?

18 Mr. Larsen. -- that's responsive to your question. That
19 is, our OIG Office of Program Evaluations, similar to audits, has
20 a current project underway looking at Superfund workforce
21 planning. And we'll keep you and your staff informed on the
22 progress of that effort.

23 Mr. Griffith. Well, I greatly appreciate that very much.

24 You know, we are just beginning the Hurricane Harvey efforts,
25 and that will continue for years, and the environmental impacts

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1 that are already occurring and yet to be seen. And we talked about
2 the Superfund sites there. Is there anything that you see that
3 is not being done by the EPA currently -- and I know it is really
4 early -- in the Hurricane Harvey area that we ought to be concerned
5 about?

6 Mr. Larsen. Again, I'll give my answer. It's always a
7 dilemma for us. As Chairman Walden said, you don't want to wade
8 into the middle of the cleanup effort. On the other hand, you
9 don't want to wait so long that your efforts are valueless. So,
10 we're always trying to figure out when it is that we get into it.

11 I guess what I fall back on is the National Response Framework
12 that Mr. Gomez alluded to, and it does give certain
13 responsibilities to the EPA. We cannot mandate that EPA take any
14 specific steps. After the fact, I think we would evaluate whether
15 they took the appropriate steps under the Framework. But I don't
16 see a role for the OIG jumping in right now in the middle of a
17 cleanup effort.

18 Mr. Griffith. Thank you. And unfortunately, my time is up,
19 and I yield back.

20 Mr. Murphy. Thank you.

21 Mr. Pallone, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

22 Mr. Pallone. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

23 I just want to remind my colleagues, I heard my colleague
24 from Virginia talk about Superfund or Superfund cleanup in action.
25 I mean, in reality, there is no Superfund. I have had a bill for

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1 years to try to get the Superfund, the trust fund, if you will.
2 There is a Superfund Program, but there is, essentially, no
3 Superfund trust fund anymore to pay for anything.

4 And that, you know, back when the Republicans first took the
5 Congress -- I know it is ancient history now -- with Newt Gingrich
6 as the Speaker, it expired. And I begged him and Democrats begged
7 him at the time to renew, and he refused.

8 I still have the bill out there, and I would ask at anytime
9 if our chairman or the Speaker would allow us to reauthorize the
10 Superfund trust fund, because, then, we would have the money to
11 do these cleanups. On an annual basis, I go before the
12 appropriators, because that is the only way to get the money now,
13 through general revenue, unfortunately, and ask for more funding.
14 And we always get less, significantly less, than what we ask for.

15 So, it is nice to talk about Superfund cleanup, but the
16 reality is it was essentially stopped by the Republican Congress,
17 but not to say that they are totally to blame, but they certainly
18 were the ones. And you could bring it up anytime and I will
19 support you, passing it in committee or on the Floor.

20 I just wanted to say, I wanted to thank the EPA OIG for
21 recently accepting the committee's request to review the
22 propriety of Administrator Pruitt's use of taxpayer funds for
23 travel to and from his home state of Oklahoma. I know that we
24 have already mentioned that.

25 But, unfortunately, the Trump administration has launched

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1 a continuous assault against fundamental science and proposed
2 significant cuts to EPA's budget and staff that threaten to
3 undermine the agency's ongoing efforts to protect human health
4 and the environment.

5 Mr. Gomez, in your testimony you state that GAO has made 318
6 recommendations to EPA since fiscal year 2007, including 49
7 recommendations focused on environmental contamination and
8 cleanup. And these include taking actions for improving cleanup
9 management of hazardous waste sites, enhancing responses to
10 disasters such as Hurricane Katrina. My question is, is that
11 correct, and how might GAO's recommendations regarding enhancing
12 EPA's response to disasters inform the agency's ongoing response
13 to Hurricane Harvey?

14 Mr. Gomez. Yes, that is correct. And again, I think, as
15 I mentioned earlier, one of the areas where we see EPA's
16 recommendations contributing to the response in Harvey and other
17 future disasters is in the area of water infrastructure, where
18 we have recommended that EPA work with states and others to really
19 assist the small communities.

20 We have all heard that in Texas there were many water systems
21 that were under boiled water notices and, then, over 50 systems,
22 I believe, were actually shut down. So, we think that it's really
23 important in the area of asset management, which is a really
24 important tool for these utilities to use, to understand, again,
25 what they have, what are the areas that are vulnerable, so they

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1 can address them and they can use funds to, then, build them or
2 restore them, and, again, building in resilience, so that they're
3 better prepared. So, I think that's the one area where I would
4 sort of call attention, based on our recommendations, where
5 there's some immediate benefit.

6 Mr. Pallone. All right. Thank you.

7 I don't want to keep repeating all the budget cuts that the
8 Trump administration has proposed to the EPA, buyouts, all kinds
9 of things that would result in fewer employees. And that could
10 include hundreds of positions in EPA's Region 6 headquarters in
11 Dallas, where employees are currently responding to Hurricane
12 Harvey.

13 So, let me ask you about these proposed cuts to your office,
14 to Mr. Larsen. How are current and expected budget limitations
15 impacting staffing levels and the ability of EPA's Office of
16 Inspector General? Specifically, how are they impacting your
17 ability to conduct audits, evaluations, and investigations, if
18 you will.

19 Mr. Larsen. Thank you for that question. It's a serious
20 challenge to us. We have had to cut our workforce year by year
21 by year, and we are down from 360 or so, down to 270, and we
22 anticipate having to go fewer than that, based on the most likely
23 budget scenarios.

24 If the original President's budget proposal were to be
25 adopted by Congress, we'd have to cut very substantially the

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1 amount of work we did. As you know, we gave you a fairly detailed
2 explanation of where those cuts would occur, which offices, which
3 kinds of projects.

4 What we do is, on an annual basis, plan for the work that
5 we would hope to do based on how much value the project would bring
6 in terms of cost savings or changes in how EPA does business. We
7 will have to do many fewer such projects in any given year, based
8 on the likely budget outcomes.

9 Mr. Pallone. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

10 Mr. Murphy. Mr. Collins, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

11 Mr. Collins. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

12 Maybe I am going to go down a little bit different road, but
13 really talking about, Mr. Gomez, if I look back over 10 years,
14 and I am looking right now just in the environmental area. I am
15 looking at the suggestions you made for spill prevention, none
16 of which have been implemented.

17 So, I guess the question is this: you are doing these
18 audits, making these recommendations. Do you prioritize them in
19 some way with any kind of ranking system, like one star to five
20 stars? And when you see something like this, and now 10 years
21 have gone by, could I assume these would have been considered
22 perhaps lower priority? And then, at some point do you go revisit
23 that with someone, and who is that someone, to say, "Hey, it's
24 been 10 years. You haven't done any of these things."? Or are
25 these just thrown into the hopper and, then, kind of catch as catch

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1 can, they work on these; they don't work on those?

2 I am trying to just kind of wrap my mind around the
3 day-by-day, year-by-year interaction between your agency and
4 those folks that are supposed to implement it, to make sure
5 high-priority things are done and, you know, squeaky wheel, that
6 you are kind of jabbing at them, "Why didn't you get this done?",
7 and so forth. Could you maybe just help us all a little better
8 understand how that all works, the interaction?

9 Mr. Gomez. Sure. So, first of all, I just want to say that
10 we take recommendations to EPA very seriously. And so, what we
11 do is we have a process in place where we're actively following
12 recommendations that we've made in the last four years.

13 What can happen to some of the older recommendations is, if
14 we learn from the agency that either they're not going to implement
15 it or that we make an assessment that things have changed or it's
16 no longer a priority, we'll go ahead and close it. It's not
17 implemented.

18 Now there are recommendations, though, that are old, older
19 than four years, that we're still keeping track of because we have
20 an indication that EPA is still working and we hope that they
21 actually do take action. We can go back at anytime and open up
22 any old recommendation that was not implemented if we think it's
23 important or if others have brought it to our attention.

24 Our recommendations and the status of the recommendations
25 are public. So, you can go to any of our reports. You can click

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1 on the recommendation status. You can see what the rec was and
2 what the status was.

3 So, we do have this separate letter that we mentioned
4 earlier, which is a priority rec letter that our Comptroller
5 General sends to all of the Cabinet agencies and other offices
6 calling attention to recommendations that we see as a high
7 priority.

8 And for EPA, we've identified those recommendations that
9 deal with the high-risk area of managing toxic chemicals and,
10 then, some of the recommendations that deal with water
11 infrastructure and also pollution of our waters.

12 So, that letter can also change year from year if we go
13 through the history and identify other recs that we think are
14 important. So, we do that process as well.

15 Now I also mentioned that we work with EPA sort of on an
16 ongoing basis as we are doing audits, but, formally, we go to them
17 twice a year with a long list of all our recommendations to say,
18 "Here they are; they're still open. Let us know what's happening.
19 Let us know which we can close." So, we do that twice a year
20 formally, but we're in contact with them throughout the year.

21 Mr. Collins. That is really helpful because I think
22 sometimes we may not understand how that all works and think you
23 just throw it in and go on about your business. And I think it
24 is actually reassuring to me, certainly for one, that you have
25 got it sounds like pretty good interaction. Would you say that?

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1 Mr. Gomez. Yes. Yes.

2 Mr. Collins. That you are making them aware; they are
3 listening. It is back and forth?

4 Mr. Gomez. Right. I mean, there are some recommendations
5 where the agency will disagree with us. And so, we may be at a
6 point where they disagree; we disagree. We still think it's a
7 good recommendation. And so, there's some like that, and those
8 might be closed as not implemented.

9 But EPA has taken our recommendations seriously and they want
10 to close them out. They want to do what we're saying. It's just
11 in some cases some of our recommendations might take a little
12 longer to do. For example, if we're recommending that an IT
13 system, for example, be revised or a new IT system be put in place,
14 that may take a while longer than if we just recommend that the
15 agency use existing web tools, for example, to provide better
16 information to the public. We don't see that as taking a long
17 time or it shouldn't take a long time.

18 Mr. Collins. Well, I appreciate that overview. That was
19 very helpful for me.

20 And, Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

21 Mr. Murphy. I now recognize Ms. Clarke for 5 minutes.

22 Ms. Clarke. I thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I thank our
23 ranking member, Ms. Castor, and I thank our witnesses for joining
24 us today.

25 Like Mr. Pallone, my district in New York sustained very

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1 substantial damage as a result of Superstorm Sandy. So, I am very
2 sensitive to the conditions on the ground in Houston as well as
3 concerned about the rest of hurricane season, quite frankly. And
4 so, standing up a robust operation with the EPA I know is critical
5 at this time.

6 There have been a number of reports about unfolding
7 environmental concerns stemming from Harvey right now. And so,
8 Mr. Larsen, I recognize that your role at EPA may not directly
9 involve you in emergency response efforts. However, to the
10 extent that you are able, could you please inform us of the EPA's
11 role in responding to unfolding environmental threats?

12 Mr. Larsen. Sure. As Mr. Gomez alluded to earlier, I think
13 the primary set of responsibilities that EPA has here stem from
14 the National Response Framework, which came after some of the
15 earlier natural disasters. And that means that EPA has
16 responsibility as a support agency for certain functions, and it's
17 got a primary responsibility for certain functions. And the
18 areas where we would expect to see EPA involved are assessing and
19 addressing fuel shortages, monitoring public water systems,
20 securing Superfund sites, and assessing conditions at major
21 industrial facilities.

22 Ms. Clarke. Very well. And, Mr. Gomez, how will GAO
23 evaluate the EPA's efforts to respond to the environmental threats
24 posed by hurricane season, Hurricane Harvey being the most recent
25 example?

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1 Mr. Gomez. So, GAO in the past, you know, we looked at the
2 Katrina recovery efforts. So, that was something that we did.
3 We're happy to assist Congress in any reviews or oversight that
4 you would like us to do as a result of Hurricane Harvey.

5 Ms. Clarke. Mr. Larsen, addressing the numerous cleanup
6 issues related to Harvey's flooding will likely be very costly
7 to both local and the federal government. What roles do you
8 envision your office will be playing to ensure that federal money
9 the EPA uses to contract for Harvey cleanup will be safeguarded
10 from fraud and abuse?

11 Mr. Larsen. Yes. Thank you.

12 We're going to do two things. One is EPA OIG specific work.
13 The other thing I wanted to mention is that the organization of
14 IGs across the federal government, the CIGIE, has learned from
15 the past and in the past had a Disaster Assistance Working Group
16 which is basically the IGs from the various agencies that are going
17 to have to play a role here. And so, EPA will be participating
18 in that effort, this agencywide IG or governmentwide OIG effort
19 to make sure that everybody's doing what they need to do and not
20 duplicating each other.

21 For ourselves, we'll probably, as you allude to, be looking
22 at contracting issues, whether there was fraud involved. That
23 could take the form of audits or investigations, as we
24 distinguished earlier. That is, was there criminal activity
25 going on or was there sloppy practice with regard to contracting?

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1 So, those are the areas that we would see fairly early on getting
2 involved in.

3 Ms. Clarke. Very well.

4 And, Mr. Gomez, given that post-Harvey cleanup will be
5 lengthy and costly, and I am assuming if we are hit with Irma and
6 any other hurricanes coming down the pike, what areas do you
7 anticipate your GAO team will be interested in examining?

8 Mr. Gomez. Well, again, you know, we're here to assist
9 Congress. So, whatever Congress asks us to do, as we've seen from
10 at least what's becoming clear in Texas with the Superfund sites
11 and all the water infrastructure systems that are down, that maybe
12 those are areas where potentially we could look at. But, again,
13 we can have discussions with anyone in Congress who's interested
14 in having GAO look at the response efforts.

15 Ms. Clarke. Very well. I cannot emphasize enough that we
16 need to address any environmental threats posed to the residents
17 of the Harvey-affected region and perhaps even Florida coming down
18 the pike. My thoughts are with the people of Houston, the
19 responders assisting on the scene, and let's be sure to get these
20 folks what they need to help them get back on their feet.

21 With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

22 Mr. Murphy. The gentlelady yields back, and I now recognize
23 the gentleman from Pennsylvania, Mr. Costello, for 5 minutes.

24 Mr. Costello. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

25 Thank you for your testimony here today.

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1 Mr. Gomez, I would like to start with you. Your written
2 testimony mentions that in 2015 the EPA awarded approximately \$3.9
3 billion, or nearly half of its budget, in grants to state and local
4 governments for important projects such as repairing aging wood
5 or infrastructure, preventing pollution, improving air quality,
6 and cleaning up hazardous waste sites. However, GAO found
7 weaknesses in EPA's ability to manage these grants efficiently
8 and effectively.

9 My question is, would you please elaborate on the weaknesses
10 GAO identified in EPA's grant management procedures? Second, how
11 have these grant management inefficiencies and weaknesses
12 impacted grant recipients? I think that is a very important
13 question. And then, finally, have these inefficiencies
14 contributed to the wasting of grant money or made it more difficult
15 for recipients to use grant funding for its intended purposes?

16 Mr. Gomez. Sure. Thank you for those questions.

17 So, we have done a body of work on grants management. And
18 that particular report, well, we looked at also, we are looking
19 to see for recipients, for example, where they were doing
20 duplicative reporting. So, currently, under the grants
21 management at EPA, recipients, grant recipients, have to provide
22 performance reports and, then, they also have to provide more
23 information and data when EPA asks for it.

24 So, we identified a number of places where there was
25 duplicative reporting by the recipients. And so, we've

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1 recommended that EPA identify all of those places and try to do
2 away with the duplication, so that recipients aren't having to
3 spend additional time and resources in doing the reporting. So,
4 that's one area where we called attention to it.

5 And really for EPA also to streamline, and EPA does have a
6 streamline initiative in place in its grants management. But we
7 were calling attention to those places where they can do away with
8 duplication, so that the recipients can carry on with the grants
9 and not have to do a lot of reporting.

10 Mr. Costello. Mr. Larsen, the OIG made similar findings
11 with respect to areas for improvement in EPA's management of
12 grants. Do you have anything to add to the line of questioning
13 that I have posed to Mr. Gomez relative to the management of
14 grants?

15 Mr. Larsen. I wish I did. As Representative Clarke noted,
16 I'm an expert in some areas, not so much in others.

17 Mr. Costello. I often say that myself.

18 Mr. Larsen. But what I would be happy to do is organize and
19 get back to you and your staff with the primary findings that we've
20 had in those areas.

21 Mr. Costello. Thank you. I will yield back the balance of
22 my time.

23 Mr. Murphy. The gentleman yields back.

24 I now recognize Dr. Ruiz of California for 5 minutes.

25 Mr. Ruiz. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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1 Thank you to our witnesses for taking the time in joining
2 us this morning.

3 We have heard about the EPA's role in the emergency response
4 programs for natural disasters like Hurricane Harvey and your
5 coordinating efforts with FEMA, state, local. I am interested
6 in your efforts to coordinate with tribes. And what have you done
7 to reach out and engage tribes with your efforts in Hurricane
8 Harvey?

9 Mr. Larsen. So far, we've not reached out to anybody. As
10 I said, at this point we don't want to wander onto the battlefield
11 while the battle is underway.

12 The CIGIE -- that is the IG community-wide effort that I
13 alluded to earlier -- is, among other things, going to coordinate
14 among the various IGs and also with the tribes and the states.

15 Mr. Ruiz. Well, I think that is important to take back to
16 this group not to neglect the sovereignty of tribes and the role
17 that tribes have in order to maintain their environment during
18 natural disasters as well. And so, reaching out to them and
19 coordinating. Some tribes actually have equipment and the
20 technology that can help the disaster response, like we have seen
21 in my district with the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians
22 utilizing helicopters and other surveillance technology in
23 coordination with the fire departments to put out some wildfires.
24 So, I would highly recommend that you take it back and you start
25 coordinating, also, with tribes as a sovereign nation and a

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1 governmental entity themselves. They can be very, very helpful
2 for the region.

3 Given the OIG's review of the EPA's response to environmental
4 threats, what are some of the lessons learned that we might see
5 for future storm threats in an area where the IG might consider
6 additional audit work?

7 Mr. Larsen. Sure. We've, unfortunately, had Katrina.
8 We've had Superstorm Sandy. We've learned from both. Among the
9 things that we learned were that the coordination between EPA and
10 the Corps of Engineers wasn't necessarily what it could have been
11 or should have been. Coordination with state and local officials
12 probably could have been done better.

13 We've addressed those to the agency. Presumably, this time
14 around you'll see better coordination. Most likely, we'll be
15 coming in and seeing whether, in fact, that occurred.

16 Mr. Ruiz. Are you, then, prepared to assess that?

17 Mr. Larsen. Yes.

18 Mr. Ruiz. And the difference on whether or not those
19 recommendations were followed?

20 Mr. Larsen. I can't commit that we're going to; I expect
21 that we will. To Mr. Pallone's question earlier, we're
22 resources-constrained, but that would be a high priority for us.

23 Mr. Ruiz. So, if you were to pick -- and this is a question
24 for both of you -- if you were to pick a No. 1 barrier for you
25 to do your jobs, is EPA involved either in coordination or

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1 protecting Superfund sites or protecting water infrastructure,
2 et cetera, so that they're not contaminated, what would that
3 barrier be? If you were to pick the biggest barrier, what would
4 it be, Mr. Larsen?

5 Mr. Larsen. I'm sorry, I don't mean to sound dense, but are
6 you talking about EPA's response or the OIG's evaluation of the
7 EPA's response?

8 Mr. Ruiz. Well, the EPA's response.

9 Mr. Larsen. Okay.

10 Mr. Ruiz. You evaluate the EPA. So, what would you say
11 would be the EPA's barrier in doing its job in these --

12 Mr. Larsen. Boy, you're putting me in the position of
13 speaking for them, but I would think it's the resources, people
14 and money.

15 Mr. Ruiz. People and money.

16 Mr. Gomez?

17 Mr. Gomez. So, I would say, in the areas that we're seeing
18 unfolding, right, which is in water infrastructure and in the
19 Superfund sites, at least in Texas, that are flooded, it is making
20 sure that they have enough people there on the ground to respond
21 to those two immediate areas where potentially there are risks
22 involved. So, I would say that that would be, if that is a
23 barrier, that they should have enough folks there to address it
24 right now.

25 Mr. Ruiz. And so, what can Congress do to address that

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1 barrier? Mr. Larsen?

2 Mr. Larsen. Well, in my view, you've already got the
3 substantive requirements in place. You've got the Clean Air Act.
4 You've got the Clean Water Act. And it's up to EPA to execute
5 on that. They need the people, and they need the policy
6 determination to carry forward.

7 Mr. Gomez. I think it's what you're doing now. It's the
8 oversight, right, of looking to see how that's being done, and
9 even after the fact, how was it done and could something be done
10 better.

11 Mr. Ruiz. So, the oversight is the diagnostic workup,
12 right? And you're telling us that the diagnosis is lack of
13 funding, lack of people. So, the treatment is the next step. So,
14 you can't just diagnose a problem and walk away. You have to act
15 on it and give the treatment to the patient. And so, the treatment
16 is the funding and policies that will help bring more people onsite
17 to manage the situation, not only in the short, acute disaster,
18 but in the long-term public health recuperation.

19 I have disaster training in my background. I did a
20 fellowship at Harvard in the humanitarian disaster response. So,
21 that is where I am speaking from.

22 Thank you very much. I yield back.

23 Mr. Murphy. Thank you, and I recognize Ms. Brooks for 5
24 minutes.

25 Ms. Brooks. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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1 And I want to thank our panelists for being here today and
2 for your work to improve the EPA.

3 We have been very focused on the people, and agencies aren't
4 just agencies; they are people. And as my colleagues have noted,
5 it is about the people. But I am concerned that this agency for
6 a long period of time has not accepted your recommendations when
7 it comes to people and when it comes to their workforce.

8 In 2010, GAO issued a report recommending the EPA establish
9 mechanisms to evaluate workforce planning, which are people,
10 placement of people, but the recommendation is currently closed
11 and unimplemented.

12 So, Mr. Gomez, why was this recommendation closed before EPA
13 was able to implement it, if you know?

14 Mr. Gomez. So, again, we track recommendations for four
15 years. And if we have an indication that the agency is not going
16 to do it, we close it as not implemented. Obviously, we've done
17 some recent work that's focused on grants management, but also
18 looking at workforce issues, in particular, which is a large part
19 of EPA.

20 So, EPA has told us that, currently, they are giving
21 workforce planning a priority. So, we are going to look to see
22 how much of a priority that is and, in fact, what they're going
23 to do.

24 You know, we've been talking about that it's basically about
25 data. They don't have good workforce data. They don't have good

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1 information on the types of work that each of their staff is doing
2 across offices and across regions. So, if you don't have that
3 data, then you, again, don't ensure that you have the right people
4 in the right places with the right skill sets to accomplish the
5 mission that's needed.

6 Ms. Brooks. Those are the management challenges that you
7 are dealing with them and have dealt with them for years. It
8 sounds like this is not new. Is that correct?

9 Mr. Gomez. That is correct.

10 Ms. Brooks. And do you have any sense what percentage of
11 EPA's funding goes to private sector contract work versus the
12 public sector work?

13 Mr. Gomez. So, in our 2010 report we did look at
14 contractors, and at the time there were 6,000 contractors at EPA.
15 And so, I'm not sure exactly what that translates to in terms of
16 budget, but I think it's a considerable chunk of their budget.

17 And so, what we also found in that report was that contractors
18 were not part of EPA's planning, either, were not incorporated.
19 And we learned from EPA recently that they're still not
20 incorporated in their planning, and we think that that should be
21 something that they should do.

22 Ms. Brooks. When they employ 6,000 contractors, they're not
23 taken into consideration in their strategic plans?

24 Mr. Gomez. Correct.

25 Ms. Brooks. And have they agreed recently to take all of

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1 those thousands of contractors into account in their plans?

2 Mr. Gomez. So far, what we've learned is that they haven't
3 done it yet still. So, I'm sure if they're agreeing or
4 disagreeing. The explanation they gave us was that OMB didn't
5 require them in their planning to include contractors. And so,
6 that's why they didn't do it.

7 Ms. Brooks. Is it fair to say -- and I am going to ask you,
8 Mr. Larsen -- relative to I have also been very concerned about
9 information security issues. And for the IG, that is what you
10 focus on as well. And there are a number of contractors, as I
11 understand, and if some bad actors were wrong, you know,
12 wrongdoers want to wreak a bit of havoc in systems, they could
13 certainly do it through information technology. Can you talk
14 with us about the lack of understanding at EPA relative to
15 sensitive data, the access to sensitive data, and what you have
16 found about the information, or lack of information, about the
17 knowledge of EPA and the access to sensitive data?

18 Mr. Larsen. Sure. I think what we talk about is risk as
19 opposed to actual problems that have manifested. That is, we have
20 not investigated an insider threat where an individual breached
21 his obligations and created a vulnerability.

22 What we're talking about is, if we don't address the
23 vulnerabilities, then the potential is out there. So, that's
24 what we've been looking at, and we find that the agency doesn't
25 know how serious a problem that is and they haven't taken the steps

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1 to mitigate the potential risks that we've identified.

2 Ms. Brooks. And that was just in your July of 2017 report
3 that the agency just issued?

4 Mr. Larsen. That's correct.

5 Ms. Brooks. Okay. Thank you. I yield back.

6 Mr. Murphy. The gentlelady yields back.

7 I recognize Mr. Tonko for 5 minutes.

8 Mr. Tonko. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

9 First, I want to express my deepest condolences to our fellow
10 Americans who are suffering from the devastation of Hurricane
11 Harvey. Everyone has witnessed this day-by-day reporting with
12 just deep concern and sadness for the folks who are enduring.

13 EPA has, therefore, an important role to play in disaster
14 response and recovery, ensuring the environmental monitoring and
15 remediation needed to protect public health. And these storms,
16 these natural disasters don't know for Republican or Democrat.
17 So, it ought to be a universally agreed-to approach that we take
18 here in Washington.

19 But that can only be done if EPA has the resources and
20 personnel to do so. This weekend the EPA released statements
21 highlighting just some of the work they will need to do in the
22 days, weeks, and months ahead. That includes assessing 13
23 existing Superfund sites that were flooded and could be damaged,
24 addressing the many drinking and wastewater systems that remain
25 shut down or damaged or are dealing with health advisories,

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1 assisting with testing for private wells, and supporting local
2 first responders with monitoring and cleanup following chemical
3 fires at the Arkema facility in Crosby, Texas.

4 The need for a strong, robust EPA is outstandingly clear,
5 and massive budget and workforce cuts, and proposals to weaken
6 understaffed or even eliminate regional offices are not the
7 answer. Beyond that, I have to believe it is tremendously
8 demoralizing to the professional staff of the agency, many of whom
9 offer their lifetime career to the agency and to the betterment
10 of Americans across the country.

11 So, I want to thank you, Mr. Gomez and Mr. Larsen, for being
12 here this morning. The recommendations proposed by GAO and the
13 IG's office can continue to make EPA a more efficient and
14 successful agency.

15 Sadly, this administration, the Trump administration, is
16 aggressively working to dismantle the EPA through regulatory
17 rollbacks, extreme budget cuts, and staff eliminations, and
18 ongoing assault on science. These are foolish cuts, proven to
19 be very foolish when we see disasters displayed right before our
20 very eyes.

21 Mr. Gomez, GAO released a report on EPA, Interior, and Forest
22 Service workforce planning in March of 2010 which concluded that
23 the agencies' efforts have, I quote, "particularly fallen short
24 in aligning the agency's workforce plans with their strategic
25 plans." The report concludes that agencies are at risk of not

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1 having the appropriately-skilled workforce they need to
2 effectively achieve their missions.

3 So, are you generally familiar with that report of 2010?

4 Mr. Gomez. Yes.

5 Mr. Tonko. Mr. Gomez, did EPA take action to address that?

6 Mr. Gomez. They have not yet.

7 Mr. Tonko. What about further actions? Will they be doing
8 anything that you know of in respect to workforce planning to
9 correct the numbers that they require?

10 Mr. Gomez. No. That's still an outstanding
11 recommendation, again, to properly align its workforce plan with
12 its strategic plan and its budget.

13 Mr. Tonko. And the Trump administration proposed cutting
14 funding to the agency by nearly \$2.6 billion -- that's about a
15 31-percent reduction -- and proposed reducing the workforce by
16 some 3800 employees. Nearly 50 programs to protect our air and
17 water, address climate change, and strengthen chemical safety
18 were highlighted for elimination. Just unbelievable cuts. This
19 included the Chemical Safety Board, the independent federal
20 agency tasked with investigating chemical accidents such as the
21 recent fires at the Arkema chemical plant in Crosby, Texas.

22 Mr. Gomez, in your testimony today you note that the March
23 2010 report found that, I quote, "The ability of federal agencies
24 to achieve their mission and carry out their responsibilities
25 depends in large part on whether they can sustain a workforce that

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1 possesses the necessary education, knowledge, skills, and other
2 competencies." Is that correct?

3 Mr. Gomez. Yes, that's correct.

4 Mr. Tonko. Well, I thank you, Mr. Chair.

5 We should all be concerned about how extreme the budget cuts
6 proposed are and that the staffing reductions proposed would
7 undermine EPA's ability to accomplish its mission, especially in
8 the face of disasters. These are troubling cuts and proven day
9 by day now with these disasters to be the most foolish approach
10 to an agency that was envisioned by President Nixon to address
11 safe water that we drink, clean air that we breathe, and all the
12 environmental benefits that should be associated with our rights
13 as Americans to enjoy that environment as fully as possible.

14 So, I do appreciate the work you are doing to draw the
15 attention of the American public to these cuts and to the essential
16 elements that these agencies require in order to respond fully
17 and effectively to their mission.

18 And with that, I yield back.

19 Mr. Murphy. The gentleman yields back.

20 And seeing we have no more members here, we will conclude
21 this hearing.

22 I would like to thank all the witnesses and members who have
23 participated in today's hearing.

24 I realize a lot of this was along the lines of what else are
25 we going to be doing. We felt that very important to get it on

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1 the record for EPA to hear. We expect them to take care of these
2 issues, to fill those positions that are needed, to take some
3 accounting of what is going on, because we will be asking more
4 questions about what has happened in terms of preparedness and
5 response here. None of us want to see any loss of life or property
6 caused by some problems with an agency fulfilling their duties
7 as you have outlined them for us.

8 So, we thank you for your observations and your comments
9 today.

10 I remember members they have 10 business days to submit
11 questions for the record. I ask that the witnesses all agree to
12 respond promptly to the questions.

13 With that, this committee is adjourned.

14 [Whereupon, at 11:46 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

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