

Deputy Administrator Hooks Keynote Remarks for the Region 4 Public Private Partnership Summit

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Thank you, Robert, for that introduction. It is great to be here in Mississippi for this very important summit.

I am pleased to see so many attendees from the public and private sector sides of the emergency management community.

There is such great value in getting everyone in the same room to discuss our common goals and challenges.

Before I get started with my remarks today, let me take a point of personal privilege to commend Robert for his outstanding leadership in Region 4.

Robert has been working in the region for more than a decade. He has overseen operations for over 200 presidentially declared disasters, some of which were the most complex in agency history, during his tenure as Deputy Administrator and now Administrator of the Region.

Robert has been serving FEMA for nearly a quarter of a century, and has been at the forefront of improving cooperation and coordination between FEMA and our stakeholders, and has built and enhanced key partnerships in the region and beyond.

I'm lucky to have worked with Robert when I was in North Carolina too, we go way back.

So, Robert, we appreciate your leadership, your role in convening this important summit, and your continued support of our public-private partnership efforts.



When I received the invitation to join you, I was impressed to learn that this summit has been running for seven years.

You even held a virtual summit during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic to keep the conversation going! I want to applaud you for these efforts and reiterate how great it is to be here with you, in person, for your 2024 meeting.

The pandemic spurred one of the most challenging times in our nation's history. It required us to lean on our partners across sectors to keep our communities safe and healthy. And you were all at the forefront of solidifying these connections.

There were lessons learned from our shared experience during the peak of COVID-19 that we will carry forward as we navigate new and unprecedented challenges. Most importantly we learned we are better together.

I'm no stranger to the value of partnerships. When I served my home state of North Carolina as Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security, we weathered our state's strongest storm of record, Hurricane Florence.

I was able to lean on partners during all phases of the event, before, during, and especially after.

We had an end-of-life care facility that was cut off from aid the hurricane. We were quickly able to mobilize retailers, the Air National Guard, the Long-Term Care Association, and others to do a quick needs assessment and organize a supply drop.

Together we were able to get patients and staff the resources they needed to survive. We were able to reassure frantic relatives that their loved ones were not forgotten.

This underscores the point I want to make and keep making.

Government cannot do it alone. We need you.

At FEMA, we value our partners and understand how important it is to continue this important outreach. We need to nurture existing relationships and build new ones.



We need everyone to pull a chair up to the table so we can better serve our nation.

All of you in this room are woven into the fabric of your communities.

You are partners in building resilience. You are teammates in the response. And you march with us, hand-in-hand, toward recovery.

We at FEMA are working harder to engage our private sector partners **before** a disaster to ensure the viability of our pre- and post-disaster supply chains and resources.

Let me quickly recognize our Office of Industry, Infrastructure, and Business Integration or OB3I.

This team is a huge resource to you and is instrumental in galvanizing support from the business community during all phases of disasters.

They network with you ahead of an approaching storm to make sure you have what you need. They assist our regional staff, providing data to find food deserts, and ensuring food resources get where they are most needed. They deploy people to augment our regions and aid response efforts.

Some of their representatives are here with us today. If you haven't connected with them, I hope you will reach out and make that connection.

Because involving the business community ahead of major events, can truly mean the difference between a recovery that takes months and one that takes years.

For example, before Hurricane Ian, there was a huge, cross-sector effort to pre-stage resources.

Which meant that before the hurricane even made landfall, we were able to pre-position necessities like water, fuel, meals, and ambulances, just outside storm's path to help survivors as fast as possible.

As partners, I always see you jumping in to lend your time, expertise, and resources to communities after disasters.



Truckloads of lifesaving and life sustaining commodities always arrive just in time. Laundry services and personal hygiene kits are consistently distributed to weary survivors, many who have lost everything.

You also share data resources with us. For example, credit card usage reports from gas stations and grocery stores during Hurricane Ida in Louisiana helped us track our response and supply chain issues and get resources where they were needed.

You are there with us, no matter the disaster, to help survivors get back on their feet.

As you know, not all our threats come from natural hazards. We are now facing new challenges in the cyber landscape that require us all to wear new hats.

For example, after the Maui fires, we battled an onslaught of rumors and contested information. It confused survivors and fostered mistrust in our efforts to register people for assistance.

Our local government and business partners worked with us to restore trust and reassure survivors.

With all that's going on in the cyberspace, we know that we need to involve you early and often to help find solutions.

We are working on better ways to share critical information not only with our state, local, territorial, and tribal partners, but with our trusted private sector partners as well.

As you know, cyber threats to our critical infrastructure are very real. What could start off as a power outage in one area could quickly create real, physical impacts with lasting consequences.

Many of you in this region have port cities vulnerable to cyber threats and health care systems where a cyberattack could limit patient care.

It's a significant problem, but I am confident that if we work together across sectors, share our resources and our knowledge, we can find ready-solutions to keep our communities, and our nation safe.



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And I hope you will use today's summit as a place to ask your questions and discuss the what ifs related to these emerging threats.

As I close out my remarks today, I want to end with a call to action.

As I mentioned before, you walk with us during response and recovery, but you are also critical partners in our efforts building resilience.

In fact, Administrator Criswell has recently declared 2024 the "Year of Resilience." What does that mean?

It means that everything FEMA does this year will tie back to the importance of building more resilient, prepared and ready communities.

And we will need your help to reinforce this messaging and elevate opportunities to mitigate risk.

Together we must invest in resilience, and the return is well worth the money: For every dollar invested in resilience, there are \$6 government dollars saved in disaster costs. That's not including private sector costs.

Let's not forget the real-world impacts from this work as well.

Like Babcock Ranch, Florida which was built to survive hurricanes, and made it through Ian with just a few downed trees and loose roof tiles while neighboring communities suffered extreme destruction.

We need to continue to build state and local capacity, invest in hazard mitigation, floodplain management, supply chain security, and more.

We need more Babcock Ranches, more risk-ready, prepared and resilient communities.

And it starts here.

Region 4 has always been a leader in bringing people together. In giving all of us new opportunities to learn from one another.

Let's look around and see who isn't here. Who else needs to be at our table? What other partners will enhance our resilience efforts?



I hope you will stay engaged and bring the important lessons, connections, and ideas you gain here back to your communities so that we can continue this important work of keeping our loved ones, our families and yes, our nation, safe.

It's a lofty goal, but one that I know we can achieve, together.

Thank you, now let's enjoy the rest of the summit.



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