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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

May 2, 2019

GABRIELLE D'ADAMO SINGER, STAFF DIRECTOR
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Lieutenant General Todd T. Semonite
Chief of Engineers and Commanding General
United States Army Corps of Engineers
441 G Street NW
Washington, DC 20314-1000

Dear Lieutenant General Semonite:

Following any natural disaster, our leaders are responsible for working to protect consumers from businesses who attempt to take advantage of disaster-stricken communities in their most vulnerable times. For example, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Congress discovered a rash of waste, fraud, and abuse of disaster funds intended to help victims, including evidence that 19 contracts, worth more than \$8.75 billion, had significant overcharges, wasteful spending, or mismanagement.¹

We are responsible for helping to ensure that taxpayer dollars are being spent wisely and efficiently during response and recovery efforts following natural disasters. In a December 2018 report, the Government Accountability Office reported that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) executed \$4.5 billion in advance contract obligations—about 56 percent of the total obligations made by these agencies for response and recovery efforts—for three hurricanes and California wildfires.

At a recent Committee hearing, Senator Scott shared an area of concern during his governorship in regards to debris removal contracts.² After Hurricanes Irma and Michael, both the federal government and local governments requested proposals for similar debris removal work because of, at least in part, problems with advance contracts. During this process, Senator Scott noticed debris removal companies providing substantially higher price quotes to federal contracting officials than were provided to local government officials. Florida's Department of Transportation ultimately chose to work with local governments for debris removal contracts, thereby saving the federal government and U.S. taxpayers millions of dollars.

To better understand USACE's experience with debris removal contracts in the aftermath of those 2017 and 2018 hurricanes, we respectfully request the following information in regards to response and recovery efforts following Hurricanes Irma and Michael:

¹ Minority Staff Special Investigations Division H.R. Comm. on Gov't Reform, 109th cong., Rep. on Waste, Fraud, and Abuse in Hurricane Katrina Contracts (Comm. Print 2006).

² *Nomination of Joseph V. Cuffari to be Inspector General, U.S. Department of Homeland Security: Hearing on PN2624 Before the Sen. Comm. on Homeland Sec. and Gov't Affairs*, 116th Cong. (2019) (statement of Sen. Scott).


1. In light of Senator Scott's experience, please provide us with the USACE's debris removal bids and contracts, advance or otherwise, that were considered as part of the response to Hurricanes Irma and Michael.
2. Please provide us with information of any other contracts/bids related to any other federally-declared disaster relief effort that the USACE received and—like the debris removal contracts received by then-Governor Scott—included substantially higher price quotes than were provided to local officials

Please provide a response as soon as possible but no later than 5:00pm on May 16, 2019.

The Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs is authorized by Rule XXV of the Standing Rules of the Senate to investigate “the efficiency, economy, and effectiveness of all agencies and departments of the Government.”³ Additionally, Senate Resolution 70 (116th Congress) authorizes the Committee to examine “the efficiency and economy of operations of all branches of the Government including the possible existence of fraud, misfeasance, malfeasance, collusion, mismanagement, incompetence, corruption, or unethical practices, waste, extravagance, conflicts of interest, and the improper expenditure of Government funds in transactions, contracts, and activities of the Government[.]”⁴

If you have any questions about this request, please contact Barrett Percival of Chairman Johnson's staff at (202) 224-4751 or Christine Diaz of Senator Scott's staff at (202) 224-5274. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Ron Johnson
Chairman



Rick Scott
United States Senator

cc: The Honorable Gary Peters
Ranking Member

Enclosure.

³ S. Rule XXV(k); *see also* S. Res. 445, 108th Cong. (2004).

⁴ S. Res. 70 § 12(e)(A), 116th Cong. (2019).