

FEMA-funded crews a boon for PSEG LI

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As it worked to keep pace with a stormy winter season, PSEG Long Island was able to take advantage of something few utilities in the state or nation can: a federally funded force of hundreds of workers ready to respond.

After the devastation of superstorm Sandy, LIPA received hundreds of millions of dollars in federal aid to help harden the system in preparation for the next big storm.

The readily available workforce has helped PSEG quicken response times to outages, and cut costs associated with paying for crews to travel from far-away states. But what will happen to PSEG's increasing customer satisfaction levels when this force finishes its work, likely in summer 2019?

The Federal Emergency Management Agency approved the request, granting \$730 million — in addition to another \$700 million to pay for Sandy-related repairs — to reinforce the system with thicker, storm-resistant poles and wires, raise substations and implement new technology to help isolate outages.

Around 260 workers have been on the job since 2015, living on Long Island and working like an army from town to town. They've also been at PSEG's beck and call to respond to storms since that time.

While they are here primarily to do the federally funded work, they can be called upon when PSEG is preparing for, and responding to, big storms. It's a huge advantage, both in cost and time in responding to a storm; other utilities must call in workers, sometimes from faraway states, and pay their travel expenses when big storms threaten.

PSEG, which operates the system under a 12-year contract for LIPA, pays the workers from a

\$730M

Aid from Federal Emergency Management Agency

260

Workers living on Long Island for the job since 2015

separate storm budget funded by Long Island ratepayers when they go to work responding to an immediate repair.

Response times, costs down

But the workers help PSEG respond quicker to storms and have been partly responsible for the utility's generally high marks in responding to storms.

"It's better for the customers because they're here," said Daniel Eichhorn, president and chief operating officer of PSEG, in an interview last month. "We can swing them from doing FEMA work to storm restoration work on the same day. It keeps our costs lower [because] we're not getting crews from out of state that maybe have a day's worth of travel time before they even get here to do work."

Only public utilities such as LIPA are eligible for federal funding to reimburse storm costs or pay for storm hardening. Investor-owned utilities such as Con Edison or PSEG Long Island's sister company, PSE&G in New Jersey, must fund such repairs and grid-infrastructure investments through state-approved rate increases.

When Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo first began exploring ideas for overhauling LIPA in 2013, he initially called for privatizing LIPA. The concept was immediately criticized by those who understood the advantage of public ownership, and the federal funds available to it. The LIPA-PSEG arrangement gives

the utility the best of both worlds: tax exemptions and federal reimbursements of a public utility, with an investor-owned utility operating the grid. (PSEG and LIPA also are not subject to formal Public Service Commission jurisdiction.)

PSEG has an internal force of 379 overhead and underground line workers to handle the day-to-day task of maintaining the system and responding to storms when they arrive, Eichhorn said. When storms hit, PSEG also can deputize 103 low-voltage-electric personnel and 203 internal employees to do damage assessment during storms. The utility also has regular access to 60 to 120 on-Island contractors to help in repairs.

The FEMA force of 262 workers hasn't always been available. Last year, after Puerto Rico was devastated by Hurricane Maria, Cuomo requested that utilities across the state offer workers to that island to help in slow-moving repairs. That resulted not only in 10 PSEG workers heading south, but also around 40 contractors from the federal work. Some were not here to respond to the recent nor'easters.

Cuomo has directed the state Department of Public Service to investigate utility preparedness for recent winter storms, given hundreds of thousands of outages statewide. PSEG was among the six major utility companies to receive a letter requesting documentation about preparedness.

But what will happen when the FEMA workers leave? PSEG's customer satisfaction scores have steadily increased since taking over the system in 2014 — a low point after the dismal response from Sandy — and power quality has been an important part of that improvement. Eichhorn said the utility is keenly aware of the advantage the workers provide, and is making preparations for when they



PSEG Long Island can redirect crews on FEMA-funded post-Sandy

are gone, likely by summer 2019 — the height of storm season.

"Yes, we're looking at that," he said. "We're looking at our mix of contractors that we use versus employees and what will happen when the FEMA crews leave. It's definitely good to have."

Longer-term solutions

One expectation is that the work being done by FEMA-funded crews will greatly improve the reliability of the system by the time it's finished next year, leaving less of the system vulnerable to storms. PSEG also

has completed a full cycle of tree trimming and is starting on a second four-year cycle that will further help cut storm outages.

Eichhorn also said the utility has been improving its storm forecasting, helping to better prepare for storms by calling outside crews earlier in the cycle. "I think we're getting much better with forecasting," he said, at predicting "what's the likely number of outages? And we plan to that. We make that call typically two to three days in advance. If there's a storm coming and we need those crews, we're making

TRUMP TAKES A DIRECT DIG

First mentions of Mueller in tweets amid speculation

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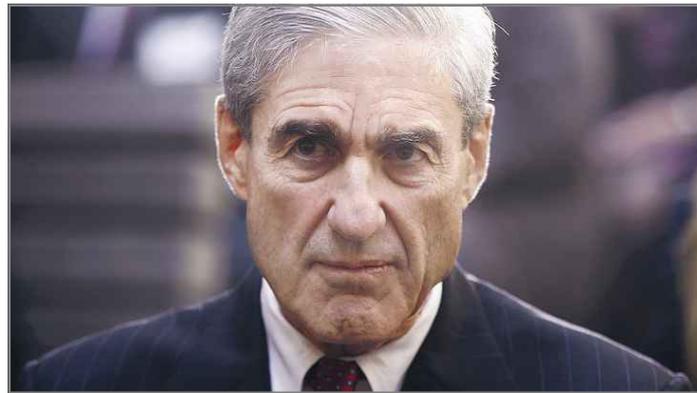
President Donald Trump stepped up his attacks on special counsel Robert Mueller's Russia probe on Sunday, in a series of tweets that took direct aim at Mueller and sought to cast the Justice Department's ongoing investigation as partisan and unfair.

"Why does the Mueller team have 13 hardened Democrats, some big Crooked Hillary supporters, and Zero Republicans? Another Dem recently added . . . does anyone think this is fair? And yet, there is NO COLLUSION!" Trump tweeted Sunday.

Trump's tweet directed at Mueller, a registered Republican leading a 17-member staff, came a day after the president's personal attorney John Dowd called for an end to the special counsel's investigation.

While the president has described the probe into purported ties between Russia and Trump's 2016 campaign associates as a "witch hunt" and a "hoax," Sunday's tweet and another on Saturday describing the investigation as the "Mueller probe," marked the first occasions Trump directly named Mueller on Twitter. Several Republican and Democratic lawmakers alike responded by pre-emptively calling for the special counsel to remain. Later Sunday, the White House rejected the speculation.

Earlier Sunday, House Speaker



AP / CHARLES DHARAPAK

The White House rejected speculation that Mueller would be fired.



@realDonaldTrump

"Why does the Mueller team have 13 hardened Democrats, some big Crooked Hillary supporters, and Zero Republicans? Another Dem recently added . . . does anyone think this is fair? And yet, there is NO COLLUSION!"



Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) said in a statement: "Mr. Mueller and his team should be able to do their job."

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) said Republicans "particularly the leadership, have an obligation to our country to stand up now and make it clear that firing Mueller is a red line for our democracy that cannot be crossed."

Rep. Peter King (R-Seaford), said he had "questions about some of the people" on Mueller's staff, but called Mueller himself "totally honest, totally professional."

"I've seen no evidence at all of any collusion," King said, referring to the GOP-led House Intelligence Committee's recent report stating it found no evidence the Trump campaign colluded with Russia in 2016. "It's possible that Bob Mueller has informa-

tion that we don't have . . . he should be allowed to continue it, but on the other hand I believe he has an obligation to the country . . . to give some sort of time frame for when he expects this investigation to end."

Rep. Lee Zeldin (R-Shirley) in an email Sunday said, "The Mueller investigation should come to an end after a careful review of all relevant information. However, this investigation cannot go on indefinitely."

Finally, White House lawyer Ty Cobb issued a statement Sunday evening saying, "the White House yet again confirms that the President is not considering or discussing the firing" of Mueller.

The president also continued Sunday to rail against both former FBI Director James Comey and recently fired Deputy FBI Director Andrew McCabe on Twitter, pushing back against their statements that they kept detailed memos of their conversations with the president. Trump called them "fake memos."

McCabe was fired Friday by U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions, 48 hours before McCabe was expected to retire from the agency and collect full pension benefits. Sessions said the FBI's Office of Professional Responsibility recommended McCabe's termination, because he had "made an unauthorized disclosure to the news media and lacked candor," but Democrats citing Trump's critical tweets of McCabe have argued the firing was driven by Trump's personal grievances with McCabe.

In a tweet Sunday, Trump criticized Comey, FBI director until the president fired him in May: "Wow, watch Comey lie under oath to Senator G when asked 'have you ever been an anonymous source . . . or known someone else to be an anonymous source . . . ?' He said strongly 'never, no.' He lied as shown clearly on @foxandfriends."

Comey told a Senate panel in June after Trump fired him that he had directed a friend to share the content of a memo he wrote regarding his interactions with Trump, to a news reporter with The New York Times, which published its contents on May 17.

On May 3, before Trump fired him, Comey responded "never" at a Senate hearing when Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) asked whether he had "ever been an anonymous source in news reports about matters relating to the Trump investigation or the Clinton investigation?"

Comey said "no" when asked whether he had authorized "someone else at the FBI to be an anonymous source in news reports about the Trump investigation or the Clinton investigation."

But Comey may not have misled the Senate panel. In June, he told the panel he provided the memo to his friend on the Monday after his firing, May 9, nearly two weeks after being initially questioned by Grassley.



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projects to fix storm outages.

that decision early."

He continued, "Our plan is, when the FEMA workers leave, to continue looking at forecasting the way we do — say we need 500 line personnel, and we only have 300 because FEMA has finished their work and moved on, we'll make that decision two or three days in advance to have those people here. So we'll still have the same number of people available to respond. It's just going to be a matter of, did we get them from our FEMA contractors, or did we get them from upstate New York or out of state?"

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