

September 28, 2017

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of over 400 Hispanic state legislators across the 50 states, Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands (USVI), we want to provide several recommendations to improve the Administration's response to the humanitarian crisis in the aftermath of Hurricane María.

The National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators (NHCSL) respectfully urges you to adopt the following initiatives, which we believe can significantly improve the situation on the ground.

First, the Department of Defense (DOD) should deploy even greater technological and logistics capabilities to provide generators for hospitals and other essential infrastructure, set up temporary telecommunications connections to remote municipalities in Puerto Rico and communities in the Virgin Islands that are unreachable, and position targeted security assets due to the potential for mass looting that local officials are concerned about.

Media reports state that approximately 10,000 shipping containers – that are filled with food, water, and medicine – are sitting idly in the San Juan port since Saturday but have not yet been distributed. There are tons of aid supplies that the diaspora communities have collected throughout the states that need to be shipped. We understand that logistics on the ground are complicated. One of the reasons for this is the lack of truck drivers given that many of them live in municipalities that are cut off and have not been able to drive to work. This is yet another opportunity for you, as Commander-in-Chief, to deploy boots on the ground to help deliver humanitarian aid immediately.

According to the US Department of Energy's Report #47 on Hurricanes María, Irma, and Harvey, the majority of the 55,000 customers across the Virgin Islands remain without power due to impacts of María and Irma. Our fellow Americans in the USVI need immediate assistance to address this critical infrastructure collapse.



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National Hispanic Caucus
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We commend you for issuing a 180-day waiver for state matching fund requirements for emergency relief grants for Puerto Rico and the USVI. Given that the recovery is estimated to take months, if not years, we request that you expand that waiver for at least one year and ensure that it is an Executive Branch wide waiver so that programs spanning multiple federal agencies can reach the most vulnerable. In the case of Puerto Rico, the situation is exacerbated by its dire budgetary strains and the crippling financial crisis that makes it close to impossible for the Commonwealth to pay with its own money in order to receive emergency assistance funding.

We also commend you for reversing the Department of Homeland Security's decision not to issue a waiver of the Jones Act for Puerto Rico, and providing a 10-day waiver. However, we want to emphasize that the same considerations that factored into your decision to issue a 180-waiver for state matching funds for federal emergency programs are just as valid for granting the Jones Act waiver for the same period of time. This is an extraordinary situation that requires overcapacity resources and the US Merchant Marine does not have the logistical capacity to fully transport the resources required to rebuild Puerto Rico in an acceptable amount of time, without the support of foreign flag vessels. We also hope you will agree that humanitarian needs in a time of crisis take precedence over private business interests, and that you will revisit this decision and extend the Jones Act waiver for at least one year.

Finally, we must ensure that the critical funding for the recovery effort is met and that rebuilding can start as rapidly as possible. That is why we respectfully request that you work with Congressional leaders on an emergency supplemental appropriations bill for Puerto Rico and the USVI. We understand that Congress will be working on further funding for the Hurricane victims in Texas and Florida, and we fully support those efforts.

However, the situation of Puerto Rico and the USVI is more catastrophic because they were destroyed in their entirety. There are no working regions left within the state, or neighboring states connected by land, that can provide immediate relief and technical support to the neighboring regions. As you, Mr. President, recognized recently, in the case of Puerto Rico and the USVI, they are completely devastated and surrounded by water.

That is why, in the appropriations bill to cover all three hurricanes, we request that the supplemental spending measure for Hurricane María fully fund the immediate recovery efforts in Puerto Rico and the USVI, invest in critical infrastructure such as the electric grid and roads, as well as provide equitable healthcare funding to make sure that the population can get the assistance they deserve after such a calamity. This funding package should also include economic tools for Puerto Rico to get back on its feet as quickly as possible, given the 10-year recession that has plagued the Island and has decimated much of the infrastructure that Hurricane María destroyed. NHCSL believes that any recovery package must first, and foremost, act like a Marshall Plan for Puerto Rico, because Maria's damage is only comparable to that of a war zone. Economic development is the only path to true recovery.

The 3.5 million US citizens living in the islands are going through the worst natural disaster in modern history. In Puerto Rico, more than 90% of the population is without electricity, more than half without drinking water, and 92.5% of cellular sites are down. Entire towns are destroyed and

there are countless others that are cut off from the rest of the Island given the debris and telecommunications complications.

Power generators that run on diesel are running out of fuel and even hospitals are going through black outs. In fact, earlier this week, three patients died in a San Juan health facility because the diesel ran out and there was no power.


Food, water, and medicines are running out in some areas, and, under these circumstances, there is a fine line between looting and sheer survival. These American lives are literally at risk and are counting on your leadership to survive.


We commend you for deciding to visit Puerto Rico and the USVI next week because your leadership on the ground will surely make things happen more quickly and effectively.

Thank you so much for your consideration of this urgent request. We stand ready to work with you and assist your administration in any way possible to ensure that Puerto Ricans and Virgin Islanders – all American citizens – receive the lifesaving assistance they need in a timely matter.

We look forward to your prompt response.

Most respectfully,


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