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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-5400

March 13, 2018

LTG Todd Semionite
Commanding General and Chief of Engineers
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
441 G St. NW
Washington DC 20314-1000

COL Jason A. Kirk
District Commander
Jacksonville District, USACE
PO Box 4970
Jacksonville FL 32232-019

RE: POWER RESTORATION MISSION IN PUERTO RICO

Dear Lieutenant General Semionite and Coronel Kirk,

Restoring electrical power to Puerto Rico has been our collective priority since the day Hurricane María exited the Island. Without power, our economy could not move; without power, water could not be distributed; without power, our fellow citizens were left in the dark.

Puerto Rico's critical need for power restoration in the aftermath of disasters has been a test for all of us who have been involved. USACE has been an invaluable resource in this moment of great need and it is vital to see to the full completion of the maintain good lines of communication between the team addressing the relief and rebuilding missions in Puerto Rico.

As of today, we are officially at the 90% generation capacity mark. However, the observation on the field makes it evident that electrical generation does not correlate with electrical service to homes across Puerto Rico. Only six out of 78 municipalities have reported 100% power restoration, knowing full well that the fragility of the system can erase these gains in the blink of an eye. There are still municipalities in the central mountainous region with less than 60% restoration of service, with power restored mainly in the towns and commercial areas, leaving vast rural areas left in the dark. The movement of crews from areas with a high restoration rate to address the lagging areas only causes distress in the former communities, who feel that they are being abandoned without the job being completed. With well over a hundred thousand customers still lacking service, that is distressing.

USACE's contracts with Flour Corporation and Power Secure are set to expire on March 19th and April 7th, respectively. Personnel from these companies have been working for the past five months in the municipalities that compose the mountain

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region—such as Cayey, Lares, Ciales, Morovis, and Utuado, to name a few examples—and, due to the difficulty of the terrain and the immensity of the devastation, they have not concluded their task; they should not leave until they do so.

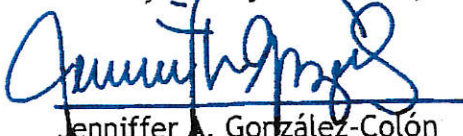
Raising camp and leaving PREPA to finish the job is not an option. PREPA's contracting process to substitute USACE's personnel will take time, delaying relief for people who have already spent more than six months without power. Moreover, last week's winter storm Riley further highlights the uncertainty that would be caused if Flour and Power Secure were to leave, when personnel working under PREPA's mutual aid agreement were recalled to attend to natural disasters in their own jurisdictions. After 6 months of no power or unreliable service, the average citizen on the street in those communities cannot tolerate even the perception that at this point we will begin to wind down the urgent relief mission and that the process of finishing the job will slow down.

I must urge USACE in the strongest terms to maintain the intensity of effort; to extend contracts as required, to maintain the presence of crews at a higher level than projected to address the areas where the job is not finished; to inform and advise the local authorities and the public of what are the timelines and keep the communications lines open; to assist in supplying PREPA with materials and technical assistance if and as necessary. The goal must be to have near 100% restoration—not generation— of power within a month and for the people in Puerto Rico to have visible evidence of this being pursued with a sense of urgency.

I wish to impress on the Corps leadership the importance of taking this need of the American citizens living in Puerto Rico into consideration in the making of decisions about the power restoration mission, and I am ready to bring before my colleagues in Congress any need for additional appropriations or for statutory language that will move this forward.

Again, I must thank all the men and women both military and civilian in USACE who have helped so much in the effort of Puerto Rico's recovery. Our mission is not complete. We must act quickly so that this project may retain its priority position. I look forward to an effective communication with the USACE team to make sure that Puerto Rico's needs are addressed.

Thank you for your service,



Jenniffer A. González-Colón
Member of Congress