



CONGRESSWOMAN JENNIFFER GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN

PUERTO RICO - AT LARGE

Member Testimony
Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veteran Affairs and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
Tuesday, 10 March 2020

Chairwoman Wasserman Schultz, Ranking Member Carter, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Subcommittee on the priorities for Military Construction and Veterans' needs in Puerto Rico.

The people of Puerto Rico have contributed to the nation's defense since 1899, with some of the highest enlistment rates in the nation so these are areas of great importance for my constituents.

DEFERRED FUNDS :

Last year's deferral of military construction allotments to be used for Border Security represented, for Puerto Rico, **a redirection of over \$402.5 million, the largest dollar amount of any one state or territory.** A jurisdiction with 1% of the U.S. population provided 11% of the funds. I support Border Security in all borders including our Caribbean Border, but we must make sure those already budgeted projects are not forgotten.

The projects affected in my district include (details attached):

- Housing, maintenance shops, training facilities, power infrastructure, dining facilities and headquarters at **Camp Santiago Training Center** (\$218 million)
 - This center is not only used by Puerto Rico Guard and Reserve units, critical in ongoing disaster relief in hurricanes and earthquakes; but also, is used by the federal government for training by other Active and Reserve units, federal law enforcement agencies, and allied nation units.

- Replacement of the **Ramey Department of Defense School in Punta Borinquen**, to support the families of military and Homeland Security members stationed in the Island (\$61million).
- **Arroyo Readiness Center** (\$30 million), the **Vehicle Maintenance Center in Gurabo** (\$28 million), and the **Aircraft Maintenance Center in San Juan**, (\$64 million) recommended for maintaining force readiness.

These improvements had been long delayed, and had been approved and budgeted, but construction had not yet started in FY 19 due to normal procedural requirements. The question arises: deferral until when? The concern being that further delay will increase costs and risk degrading the training resources.

The Caribbean is one of our nation's borders, that with Venezuela and Latin America, where U.S. presence needs to remain strong in the face of drug trafficking, transnational crime and illegal entries. **Maintaining readiness in the Caribbean is itself a major investment in border security.**

I request we ensure the deferred funding for already-approved Military Construction projects in Puerto Rico is made available, committing in Report Language to the full allotted funding of these projects and their completion as close as possible to the originally planned schedule.

BUDGETED CONSTRUCTION:

I of course request we ensure the continuity of those projects already budgeted and obligated under the Appropriations from FY19 and FY20 that the current Budget Request lists as follows:

- **\$26 million for family housing replacement at US Army Garrison Fort Buchanan**
- **48.5 million for communications and contingency response facilities at Muñiz Puerto Rico Air National Guard Base.**

Likewise, I urge the approval in this **FY2021 appropriation of the Budget Request for \$37 Million for the Puerto Rico National Guard Fort Allen Readiness Center**; another installation that was pending improvements for a long time and the hub for operations in relief of the recent earthquakes.

Across all the USA, I am also encouraging that the appropriations include language recommending that the DoD prioritize the building of lasting and resilient military installations that can face natural risks.

VETERANS AFFAIRS:

In the area of Veterans' Services, I have joined colleagues in urging the Congress to:

- **Provide a meaningful investment of \$860 million for the VA's Medical and Prosthetic Research Program for the coming fiscal year.**
- **Support funding of at least \$313 million in FY 2021 for veteran suicide prevention and outreach programs.**

The people of Puerto Rico have held the American flag up high in both wartime and peacetime, and the honor they showed paying the price of its defense merits that their nation support them and show commitment to military capabilities in Puerto Rico and Veterans' Services. Your leadership is needed to make this happen.

Thank You.