

September 26, 2022

Honorable Raul M. Grijalva  
Chair, Natural Resources Committee  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington D.C.

**SUBJECT: Puerto Rico's Post Disaster Reconstruction and Power Grid Development Slated for Friday, September 30, 2022, 9:30am EST/Longworth House Office Building #1324**

Honorable Chair Grijalva,

Puerto Rico was impacted by yet another natural disaster—*Hurricane Fiona*, a few days ago. As we have learned, “Nature always wins”. And with climate change already in our doorsteps, its actions will become more unpredictable and arriving with greater force and impact.

Many years ago, in 2005 you, Mr. Chairman, visited Puerto Rico and, within your busy schedule, met with a group of local decision makers in Rio Mar. Richard L. Carrion, CEO and President, Banco Popular de Puerto Rico (Popular Inc.) met with you. As BPPR's communications and public relations division senior vice president and manager at the time, I accompanied Mr. Carrion to said meeting and listened in to the discussion. Many years have gone by...17 years to be precise. I was then impressed by your leadership and hands-on business resolve with your constituents in mind first and foremost. And that's why I address you today because I know you will listen.

As a diverse member of the U.S. population, a woman, a professional communicator and educator, U.S. citizen and as a Puerto Rican in the diaspora, I ask you for a few minutes of your time. I want to speak on behalf of all Puerto Ricans in the island as I see it today.

Presently, the island of Puerto Rico officially became a bounty of war (Spanish American War 1898). Later Puerto Rico was *declared/defined as an un-incorporated U.S. Territory by the U.S. Congress*. Later in 1917 Puerto Ricans received the U.S.-citizenship, yet with limited rights than citizens in the states. It was followed by a new status to be known as a Commonwealth with fairly limited powers to navigate its course in a world economy.

Puerto Rico has evolved in the last two decades and it has become what I call “**a natural disaster-based economy.**”

In other words, one natural disaster is followed by yet another...and another...and another. Let's illustrate:

- ✓ 2022 – September – *Hurricane Fiona, Cat. 1*
- ✓ 2020 – January – *Earthquakes and tremors mostly in the southern part of the island*
- ✓ 2018 - September – *Hurricane Maria, Cat. 4 or 5*
- ✓ 2018 – Aug./Sept. – *Hurricane Irma, Cat. n/a*

After *Fiona, Irma and Maria*, Federal aid was assigned in the close to TRILLION\$ by the U.S. government to rebuild and improve Puerto Rico's infrastructure resulting in improved citizens' living conditions, and basic needs such as:

- Housing-clean and secure, with accessibility to clean and running water, electricity, gas
- Housing- buildings with working electricity for functional elevators
- Food distribution and accessibility
- Transportation with functional roads to cross mountains and waterways (rivers, lakes, and tributaries)
- Education: School buildings, students, teachers, staff, food, health
- Health hazard conditions containment: Garbage, Debris, Contaminants
  - Immediate removal and cleaning of hurricane debris all over the island's municipalities; if not collected and picked up, plagues could certainly follow. Moisture builds up fungi and serves as nests for insects
  - Available garbage deposits (LANDFILLS already full)
- Health conditions: Hospitals and Health Centers – Children, Seniors, Disabled
  - Services (Home and Hospital, Tele-service) / Medicines supplies – distribution, pharmacies / Facilities to obtain service

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**But, what's TODAY's reality?**

- To Plan and To Rebuild what? Is there a priority list? Has the planning and completion stages been established? And, if so, have these been communicated to the citizens impacted by the disasters?
- And, is there a timetable with phases to complete the scope of work?
- How? Who is in charge? Who is accountable?
  - The Judge managing the debt? The Fiscal Control Board? Definitely not the Governor.
- Who secures the rebuilding permits process? Who is reliable?
- Who works on projections and needs?
- Who is responsible for the allocation of funds?
- Who is fiscally responsible for the management of said funds?
- Is there a contact person who can answer questions? How is it communicated?
- Have the FEMA 2017 Irma and Maria's funds been used in their totality? How have these funds been used?
- Should there be funds from that disaster, why provide more?

So many questions come to mind, however, there are no answers-- just a growing sense of frustration among all citizens. The governor said "PR was prepared for Fiona"--how? The truth is that neither the governor nor the government were ready. And thus, the island was not. Nature won. Empathy was not present in those who were elected to serve the people.

LUMA and the AEE: that's another issue that moves from bad to worst. No empathy on their part for a community in need. Who's accountable here?

All Puerto Ricans are tired sick of the disastrous situation all these natural disasters bring with physical and infrastructure damage to stay forever with no solution in sight. A bad situation turns into a worse one, and so on until the next disaster.

**What do I ask for Puerto Ricans in the Island?**

The Truth - Respect – Action – Accountability – Hope based on facts; workable initiatives with scheduled timetables based on real and factual information. Puerto Rico's seniors, veterans, parents and youth need stability in the present in order to build a future. The children and youth need schools to receive an education if Puerto Rico is to have a future.

**What do I ask from you, chairman Grijalva?**

Understanding - Action – Demand accountability. Demand real answers from those who will present testimony on Friday, September 30, 2022 at the House of Representatives Natural resources Committee hearing to discuss Puerto Rico's Post Disaster Reconstruction. The damage after Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017 remain UNFIXED and in an even worse state today than when it happened. A disaster-based economy is not sustainable nor viable.

Ask the Junta de Control Fiscal where are the millions received after Irma and Maria? How were they used? Accountability! They were appointed as part of PROMESA however they should be your eyes I Congress for all citizens in Puerto Rico.

In closing, I sincerely appreciate your time and attention to this matter. It pains me to see my home and my Island in such a weak and perilous situation with tired arms to demand action. Let's use our voices – your voice -- the committee's leadership and voices – to unite and demand solutions. Failure is not an option and Puerto Rico's future depends on you.

Respectfully,

Olga Mayoral Wilson, APR, Fellow PRSA

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