



One Hundred Fifteenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20515

October 12, 2017

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

We write to express our deep concern regarding statements you made this morning regarding the Federal government's commitment to the helping the people of Puerto Rico recover from the devastating impacts of Hurricane Maria.

Since Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico on September 20, 2017, you have made a series of bizarre statements, typically via Twitter, about the nature of the federal government's obligations to relief efforts, the status of relief efforts, and the people of Puerto Rico. Although at times profoundly offensive,¹ we overlooked many of your tweets and the infamous paper towel toss² hoping that you would take on the disaster relief mission with a greater sense of gravity than the cavalier manner in which you approach public relations.

Yet, for reasons none of us can understand, today you called into question the federal government's commitment to supporting the long-term recovery for Puerto Rico, tweeting: "We cannot keep [the Federal Emergency Management Agency], the Military, [and] the First Responders, who have been amazing (under the most difficult circumstances) in Puerto Rico forever." Mr. President, three weeks is hardly forever, but we agree that it probably feels like it for 84 percent of Puerto Ricans without electricity and the 37 percent of Puerto Ricans without water.³

Responding to and recovery from disasters takes time, it takes commitment, and it takes transparency. Earlier this month, media outlets reported that the Federal Emergency Management Agency was not providing consistent information about the status of recovery

¹ On September 30, 2017, you tweeted that the people of Puerto Rico "want everything to be done for them when it should be a community effort."

² Janell Ross, "In Puerto Rico, Trump's Paper-Towel Toss Reveals Where His Empathy Lies," *Washington Post* (Oct. 6, 2017), https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2017/10/06/in-puerto-rico-trumps-paper-towel-toss-reveals-where-his-empathy-lies/?utm_term=.424f59d87e2b.

³ Christina Caron, "84 Percent of Puerto Rico Still Doesn't Have Power," *New York Times* (Oct. 10, 2017), <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/10/us/puerto-rico-recovery.html>.

efforts in Puerto Rico on its website.⁴ Today, there are disturbing stories that official figures regarding the number of Hurricane Maria-related deaths may be inaccurate.⁵ We urge you to ensure your agencies are forthright and candid with the American public about the state of recovery in Puerto Rico, particularly because that information is necessary to understand the nature of federal resources that will be required to help Puerto Rico recover.

When we wrote to you on September 27, we asked you to bring all federal resources to bear and establish a Rebuilding Task Force that will help the areas affected by this season's hurricanes build back stronger. To date, that has not happened. Instead, you have called into question the federal government's commitment to Puerto Rico recovery, in general. Once again, we ask you shift your focus from Twitter to the people of Puerto Rico, and confirm your commitment to the immediate response and long-term recovery efforts. In particular, we ask that you redouble response efforts and that your next supplemental appropriations request include funding for programs that will help Puerto Rico repair its power grid, repair water infrastructure, and help homeowners and small business with recovery and rebuilding. We also ask, again, that you establish a Rebuilding Task Force.

Mr. President, we urge you not to let this become your Hurricane Katrina. Tweets cannot change the facts on the ground.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to working with you in the months and years to come as we work to help Puerto Rico recover from this horrific disaster.

Sincerely,



BENNIE G. THOMPSON
Ranking Member



DONALD M. PAYNE, JR.
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness,
Response and Communications

⁴ Jenna Johnson, "FEMA Removes – Then Restores – Statistics About Drinking Water Access and Electricity in Puerto Rico From Website," *Washington Post* (Oct. 6, 2017), https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2017/10/05/fema-removes-statistics-about-drinking-water-access-and-electricity-in-puerto-rico-from-website/?utm_term=.7ca31a276040.

⁵ Eliza Barclay and Aleexia Fernandez Campbell, "Everything That's Been Reported About Deaths In Puerto Rico Is At Odds With the Official Count," *Vox.com* (Oct. 12, 2017), <https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2017/10/11/16424356/puerto-rico-official-hurricane-maria-death-toll>.