

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 29, 2017

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We are writing to urge you to immediately utilize all necessary authorities granted to you under the Defense Production Act (DPA) to provide relief to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands from the devastation brought by Hurricanes Irma and Maria. As you are aware, the DPA allows the President to prioritize materials and services to promote emergency repairs, supply lines, and restoration of vital utilities and facilities destroyed or damaged by a natural disaster. Both Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands were already reeling from the damage caused by Hurricane Irma when they suffered a direct and devastating hit from Hurricane Maria. The sheer scope and magnitude of this natural disaster creates serious national security implications and as such, demands the use of extraordinary measures. Without immediate and decisive action, the 3.5 million American citizens living in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands will continue to be subjected to needless pain and suffering. While the full scope of the devastation is not yet known, one thing is for certain – with quick and robust action granted through the authorities in the DPA, the potential devastation on Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands may be mitigated.

The federal government has the transportation and logistics infrastructure to help alleviate the immediate and overwhelming crisis currently facing Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Existing as islands hundreds of miles away from the U.S. mainland, significant airlift and sealift resources are particularly in high demand. Through the Voluntary Intermodal Sealift Agreement (VISA) program operated by the Maritime Administration's authorities under the DPA, the federal government could quickly provide much needed supplies to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. In addition, the Department of Transportation operates the Civil Reserve Air Fleet (CRAF) program, which could be used to augment the airlift capacity of relief supplies onto the islands and the evacuation of civilians with emergency medical conditions off of the island. Finally, the DPA allows the President to exercise the "Priorities and Allocations" authority, enabling the government to access any of the critical supplies and resources it needs from the private sector to save lives during this extraordinary time of crisis. The federal government maintains these relationships and agreements for the express purpose of alleviating crises and restoring critical infrastructure. Based on the details emerging from Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, the unfolding situation certainly qualifies as a national security issue.

Recent media reports indicate that the entire island of Puerto Rico is without power. As fuel and water supplies dwindle precariously low, damaged infrastructure from roads and bridges to ports and electrical lines exacerbate the already formidable challenges, and threaten to leave the island without power for months to come. This is a prediction that would never be acceptable on the

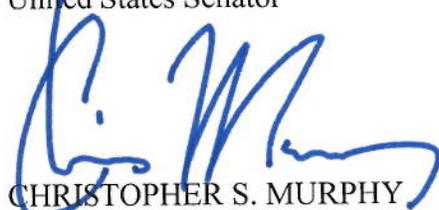
mainland and it should not be acceptable for the American citizens living on Puerto Rico. The possibility of months without power could well be fatal for those with medical conditions that require power, those with medications that must be refrigerated, or the elderly and infirmed who are exposed to tropical temperatures. Restoring power to all of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands should be a priority of the federal government, and all available resources should be employed to fix the power infrastructure and bring fuel to these islands.

The situation on Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands is dire and demands a dramatic and immediate response to alleviate untold suffering. The 3.5 million people living on Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands are citizens of the United States and deserve to be treated as such. They serve in our military and answered the call every time their country needed them – and now, it is our obligation to be there for them. Failure to be there in their time of need is both unacceptable and un-American.

Sincerely,


ROBERT MENENDEZ
United States Senator


BILL NELSON
United States Senator


CHRISTOPHER S. MURPHY
United States Senator


RON WYDEN
United States Senator


CORY A. BOOKER
United States Senator


KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND
United States Senator


ELIZABETH WARREN
United States Senator


TIM KAINE
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BERNARD SANDERS
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ROBERT P. CASEY JR.
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KAMALA D. HARRIS
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