

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2017

Remarks in an Exchange With Reporters Following a Tour of Areas Damaged by Hurricane Maria in Guaynabo, Puerto Rico

October 3, 2017

Hurricane Maria Recovery Efforts

Q. What have you made of what you've seen so far on the ground today, Mr. President?

The President. Well, what I see is an incredible job done by FEMA, done by the Coast Guard, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, the Marines. I think that the job of the first responders has been something like I've never seen before.

What FEMA has done, what the people that got here even before the hurricane have done—and the Governor is with us and your mayor is with us also, and Governor—what's happened in terms of recovery and in terms of saving lives—16 lives, that's a lot. But if you compare that to the thousands of people that died in other hurricanes and that, frankly, were not nearly as severe—I just have such respect for FEMA and for all of the people that got here early and what they've been able to do.

Governor, you may want to say something.

Governor Ricardo A. Rosselló Nevares of Puerto Rico. Yes, well, we're grateful for the President. We're grateful for the effort that the Federal Government has embarked. This is a team effort. We have all the way from mayors to FEMA, the DOD; General Buchanan is here with us as well.

Mr. President, we couldn't have done this if we didn't have those—that support. But of course, we recognize—and the President recognizes—that we still need to do a lot more, but we know that we're going to do it together. And this is a commitment—by the President and the First Lady being here, it shows a commitment to being here for the long haul, helping us get the emergency help, helping us get stability, and then rebuilding Puerto Rico stronger than before.

The President. Congresswoman, would you like to say something?

Representative Jenniffer González-Colón. Well, first of all, thank you. Because one of the things that you may [have]* heard in the mainland is what's not happening actually here. People from FEMA and the Federal Government were in the island before the Hurricane Irma: before, during, and after. Same thing with Maria. So we've been hit by a hurricane category 5 in less than 10 days, one after the other one.

So if not by the Navy, the Army, the—even from the Coast Guard—they are rescuing more than 800 people and still ongoing in rescue missions—we're not going to be able to restore the island, and the efforts from the government, dealing to together with the Federal Government, Mr. President, it's the first time in history that Puerto Rico got direct communication with the Federal agencies, with the Governor, to deal with the situation. We never before. And we are in the path of the hurricane, so we are used to having hurricanes, but never like this one.

And this is a major one; this is devastation. But thanks for all the help and all the resources. The highways funds you send to the island, the people from the HHS—all 36 agencies are on the island because of you.

The President. Thank you very much.

* White House correction.

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Q. Ninety-five percent of people here are still out of power; they're struggling for food and water. What message do you have for those people?

The President. The power grid, honestly, was devastated before the hurricanes even hit. And then, the hurricanes hit, and they wiped them out. We're getting—a lot of generators have been already brought to the island. Most of the hospitals are open or at least partially open. But most of them now are open.

And again, the job that's been done here is really nothing short of a miracle. It's been incredible. And I appreciate virtually—and this is the mayor from this very important area. And, Mr. Mayor, I appreciate your efforts too, and I appreciate what you had to say.

Mayor Angel Pérez Otero of Guaynabo, Puerto Rico. Thank you on behalf of my people of Guaynabo, on behalf of the 3.5 [million]* U.S. citizens over here. Because this is a team. Your people are doing the right stuff for us. We, the mayors, we've got to do the—this is a team. And that's what I—that's my experience over here in Guaynabo in the helping of thousands and thousands of people. So thank you. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:15 p.m. outside Calvary Chapel. In his remarks, Gov. Roselló referred to Lt. Gen. Jeffrey S. Buchanan, USA, commander, U.S. Army North (5th Army).

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* White House correction.