

*Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2017*

**Remarks in a Meeting With Governor Ricardo A. Rosselló Nevares of Puerto Rico and Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator W. Brock Long To Discuss Hurricane Maria Relief Efforts and an Exchange With Reporters**

*October 19, 2017*

*The President.* Thank you very much. We have the Governor of Puerto Rico with us. We've gotten to know each other extremely well over the last couple of weeks. And I can tell you, you're a hard-working Governor. It's a tough situation. So much has to be rebuilt, even from before. The difference between Texas and Florida and various places is, we're looking at designs of a new power plant, a big electrical plant, and many different designs and concepts, which, of course, is very unusual, because it was in pretty rough shape prior, and now it's in even rougher shape.

With that being said, I think we've done a really great job, and we've had tremendous cooperation from the Governor. And we are getting there, and people are really seeing the effort that's been put into Puerto Rico. It's been a very, very difficult situation for many people, I will say that, and especially the island nature. If you look at getting food there, we did. The distribution was very difficult because the roads were blocked, and even the people of Puerto Rico couldn't get to their food, in many cases because of the distribution centers, and the roads were in really horrific shape because of the storm and sometimes because of before the storm.

But with that being said, step by step, it's taken care of. And I say we have a wonderful, and the people of Puerto Rico have a wonderful, representative with respect to themselves in this Governor. This Governor has worked as hard as anybody I've seen, and it's getting done.

So I want to just thank you for all your help.

*Gov. Rosselló.* Thank you, Mr. President. Thank you so much.

*The President.* Thank you very much.

*Gov. Rosselló.* Thank you. Well, thank you, Mr. President. Thank you for setting this opportunity. It's a catastrophic situation in Puerto Rico, as you know. It is only time where two category 4, category 5 hurricanes have passed back to back in a jurisdiction in the United States. But certainly, working in a united front, we are going to beat this, and we know we're going to build better than before.

And today it's an example, Mr. President. I don't think in the history of Puerto Rico we've had the opportunity we have today to sit with members of your Cabinet, decisionmakers, and not only talk about what we've done, but also the path forward, to establish a commitment to treat the citizens of Puerto Rico, the U.S. citizens—proud U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico—equally.

So while we have—there has been a lot done and I want to thank you personally, Mr. President—you answered our call for the pre-land emergency declaration; you declared Puerto Rico a disaster area very quickly, at a verbal request that we made, because we didn't have electricity at that moment; you gave us the waiver for A, B—A and B for FEMA; and staunch communication with all of your members now. We recognize that a lot of business has been done, but a lot has—still has to be done.

So we're hopeful that with these meetings that we're doing to have, we're going to talk about the immediate needs for Puerto Rico, what we need to do to get out of the life-sustaining phase, what we need to do to stabilize Puerto Rico, and of course, what we need to do to build Puerto Rico stronger and better than before.

I am confident that, with your commitment and with your support, Mr. President, with your team's support, we will be able to come out of this in the long haul, together with Puerto Rico, give the U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico the adequate resources, treat us the same as citizens in Texas, in Florida, and elsewhere. We will come out of this stronger, and we will make it innovating, Mr. President.

I know you are a proponent of public-private partnerships, and I think there is an opportunity here to leverage growth in the energy sector and to be innovative, not only rebuild what we had in the past, but also, with the aid of the Federal Government and with the private sector, rebuild a much modern, much stronger platform, and not only have Puerto Rico have energy, but actually be a model of sustainable energy and growth towards the future.

Those are our aspirations. I think we can talk about that in the education sector, in the health care sector. And those are all of our aspirations. We are confident that within this group we will start addressing those poignant, short-term needs, but also talking about the long road ahead working together, working together with your administration.

And again, I want to thank you on behalf of the people of Puerto Rico for your leadership, for your team's leadership, and for having a commitment to stay with the people of Puerto Rico, with the U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico, here for the long haul, to not just put things back together again, but to rebuild them as it should be.

*The President.* Good. Well, thank you, Governor.

*Gov. Rosselló.* Thank you.

*The President.* One of the things we have done is delivered to the island massive numbers of generators for electricity, because with the power plants down and in such bad shape, we really had to find some way to get, especially for the hospitals and certain other areas. And we have—I don't know if it's record numbers, but it's got to be pretty close—record numbers of generators so that we have electric in the most important locations and, step by step, bringing it back. But you can't really bring electric back until you rebuild the power plant, and that's obviously a different level of subject.

With that, I will say that I have given my blessing to Congress, and Congress is working with you and your representatives on coming up with a plan—

*Gov. Rosselló.* That's right.

*The President.* —and a payment plan, and how it's all going to be funded, because you are talking about some substantial numbers, and I guess you knew that. But I know you were talking about rebuilding your electric plant long before the hurricane; you've been wanting to do that for a long time.

*Gov. Rosselló.* That's right.

*The President.* So maybe this is a reason that we can do it. And we'll help you, and we'll all do it together. But I will say this: The people of Puerto Rico are amazing, just incredible people. The spirit they have, the strength they have. What they've gone through, many were isolated in areas where there were no roads, there were no bridges; the bridges were wiped

out. It really was incredible to watch this spirit that they have, and they did it with grace. They did it with a smile, in many cases. It was really something beautiful to watch.

So just please extend all of our warmest regards. And we're with you.

*Gov. Rosselló.* Thank you so much. Thank you.

*The President.* Thank you very much.

### *Hurricane Maria Recovery Efforts in Puerto Rico*

*Q.* Mr. President, last week in a tweet, sir, you suggested that there was a limit to the Federal emergency involvement in response to the Puerto Rico hurricanes. How long are you willing to commit Federal resources to not just the recovery, but the rebuilding of Puerto Rico? And what do you and Governor Rosselló know about reports of widespread corruption among local officials in distribution of emergency supplies? Apparently, the FBI is looking into it.

*The President.* Well, I'm working very closely with the government on that, because there has been corruption on the island, and we can't have that. You know, we're sending a lot of supplies; we're sending tremendous amounts of food and water and everything. And I know your folks are working on that very hard.

*Gov. Rosselló.* That's right.

*The President.* But we just can't have it.

When it comes to Texas, as an example, and Florida, you know how smooth that's been. It's operating like a well-oiled machine. They are really going well, and the people are working very hard. And in Puerto Rico, they're working hard too, but we have gotten some of those reports from—on a local basis. And I think the Governor will be able to do something about that. I hope you're going to be able to something about that.

*Gov. Rosselló.* Yes. Of course, sir. If you want, I can brief you a little bit on what we're doing. We've gotten some reports that food was getting, either from FEMA or from the private sector or not-for-profits, to the different municipalities and they weren't being distributed appropriately. So we did three things: Number one, we got the National Guard to go over to all the municipalities and help with the logistics in case it was just a matter of not knowing how to execute. Number two, we had auditors from our treasury department go so that we can have accountability on what food goes in and what food goes out to the people of Puerto Rico. Number three, very importantly, we had our department of justice go and is investigating whether there has mismanagement of foods, because it is unacceptable. And as I stated the first day—

*The President.* By the way, not by the Federal. This is local we're talking about. Just so we all understand. I think—Brock is here, and Tom is here—I think they've done an incredible job. But we're now talking on a local basis, and I think, John [John Roberts, Fox News], that was your question also.

*Q.* It was—[*inaudible*].

*Gov. Rosselló.* Yes. And we are following up on that. And as I stated the first day, if there is a public official that is purposefully mishandling the food that should go to the people of Puerto Rico, there is going to be some hell to pay.

Q. And then, Mr. President, the length of time you're willing to commit Federal resources to the recovery?

*The President.* Well, I can say that for anywhere. I can say that for any place we go. You know, at some point FEMA has to leave, first responders have to leave, and the people have to take over. Puerto Rico is a more difficult circumstance, as you can understand, John. But at a certain point, we have to leave the various locations that we're in.

We were in Louisiana, and they have done a fantastic job. They were sort of grazed, but Lake Charles and the various areas were hit pretty hard. But it was a grazing hit. We worked there, and they've taken over and been fantastic. In Texas and Florida, it's been incredible to watch. It's really been incredible to watch how quickly things are coming together.

But at a certain time, FEMA and first responders, and by the way, the military—we have close to 18,000 people on Puerto Rico right now—

*Administrator Long.* Over 18,000, yes, sir.

*The President.* —in Puerto Rico. We moved a hospital ship; I believe it's the largest in the world. It's there now. You know, you don't want to use it as much—if you can have the local hospitals, that's better in many ways.

But we have tremendous assets in Puerto Rico. No, at some point, no matter where it is, whether it's Texas or whether it's Florida, it ends. But I can say in the case of Texas and the case of Florida and the case of Louisiana—some areas also got grazed—they have been incredible in the response and incredible in how fast it's coming back. And in many cases, areas that were devastated are already back.

In this instance, it's a more difficult situation. But I think the Governor understands that FEMA, the military, first responders cannot be there forever. And no matter where you go, they cannot be there forever.

*Gov. Rosselló.* If I may just briefly add to that, that is the importance of the short-term and long-term packages that will be in Congress, right? We're going to need some resources.

Of course, FEMA is there for the initial response. There is some rebuilding to go through. So that's why we're thankful to the President for supporting these petitions to Congress so that we can get the resources, liquidity to kickstart the economy and, of course, the long-term rebuilding process.

And this is very important. You know, the President has been clear on stating that no U.S. citizen will be left behind. We will be working. And this is the way we work towards making a better America and a better Puerto Rico.

Q. But what about—

*The President.* You have—excuse me. You have areas in Puerto Rico where we literally had to and still have to—but it's getting less and less—deliver food and supplies by helicopter because the roads have been wiped out and the bridges have been wiped out. There's no way to get there except by helicopter. And those are difficult situations, and we're working with the Governor and the folks on getting it taken care of. But we are literally delivering supplies dropped by helicopter.

And with that being said, I have to also say our military and our first responders, and Brock Long and FEMA and Tom, the job they've done has been incredible. But we are

delivering very essential supplies by helicopter because there's no way to get to the area of the island. And the folks have done an incredible job.

Brock, would you like to say something?

*Administrator Long.* So every day, we continue. Right now the focus is on restoring essential services. We've stabilized a lot of the emergency power needs of hospitals, and we're starting to focus and work with the Governor today on rebuilding power grids going forward, as well as water treatment, waste water, roadway systems. So we're going to continue to support the Governor.

We're looking at trying to specifically restore the essential power—or the essential functions to six major municipalities within Puerto Rico that service about 80 percent of the population, starting there, and then working our way out.

So the traditional recovery is going to require a solution far greater than what FEMA typically puts down. But that's why we're here today working with Governor Rosselló and the President and all of the Cabinet members to figure out what the best way forward is for the longer term solutions.

*The President.* There's never been a situation where power and energy have been so devastated—never—you know, where you don't have a power plant. Because power plants—you don't fix them up, and we're not just putting a pole up in the street, like in Texas where you'd put up the poles, and in Florida, actually had a lot of underground wire, which is great. It would be wonderful if you could have underground wire. It makes it a lot better in these storms. But there's never been a situation where the energy and the power has been totally destroyed.

And part of the problem is that it was pretty well destroyed before the storm, and we're working together to get that back up, but also to make it long term—

*Gov. Rosselló.* That's right.

*The President.* —which I think you have to. They were working on long-terming it prior to the storm, so now they really are working on it.

*Gov. Rosselló.* And that's part of the mitigation strategy. I mean, again, I can't stress enough how important it is that we keep this on the long haul—for the long haul; that we work together so that we can make sure that we don't just put things back, again, as they were, but that we make them better than before.

And I think that is the critical—it is better for all the U.S. citizens that this happens. I think in Puerto Rico, again, looking at the long term, recognizing that we're still at the emergency phase, this could allow Puerto Rico to be a showcase in terms of energy production and otherwise by way of mitigating and innovating.

### *Hurricane Maria Recovery Efforts in Puerto Rico*

*Q.* Mr. President, between one and ten, how would you grade the White House response so far, sir?

*The President.* I'd say it was a 10. I'd say it was probably the most difficult when you talk about relief, when you talk about search, when you talk about all of the different levels, and even when you talk about lives saved. You look at the number—I mean, this was—I think it was worse than Katrina. It was in many ways worse than anything people have ever seen.

They got hit by a category 4—grazed—but grazed about a big portion of the island, but it was grazed. The rest of it hit Florida, as you know. But that was bad. But then, they got hit dead-center—if you look at those maps—by a category 5. Nobody has ever heard of a 5 hitting land. Usually by that time it's dissipated. It hit right through—and kept to a 5—it hit right through the middle of the island, right through the middle of Puerto Rico. There's never been anything like that.

I give ourselves a 10. I think that, locally, there—I really think, locally, they have in this gentleman great leadership. I have to tell you, he is a—it's a tough job. But we have provided so much, so fast. We were actually there before the storm hit. We were there before the first one, before the category 4 hit.

Brock and the military and a lot of people were there before the storm. We had the Coast Guard waiting for the storm just outside the storm and following the storm in. Many lives saved. The Coast Guard in Texas saved 16,000 lives. The Coast Guard is incredible, incredible, the job they've done.

But all of the Armed Forces, what they've done has been—Army, Navy, the Marines, the Air Force—all of the goods dropped in. Helicopters that weren't even meant for this purpose, all of a sudden, they're delivering food and services. I would give a 10.

I would say, locally—and I understand locally. A person loses his or her or their house, and then they can't go to work. If you lose your house, it's hard to go and be a policeman for the day. You're trying to have your family live, frankly. This is what happened to so many people. You read that they had no truck drivers in Puerto Rico. Well, they have a lot of truck drivers in Puerto Rico, but many of them lost their houses, so they had to be with their families. So we would have the military driving trucks. They're not supposed to be driving trucks. It's not their—it's not even their aptitude. Some of them didn't really know how to drive trucks, but they learned very quickly. They're smart.

But we had the military, in many cases, driving trucks, because it's not the people's fault; they lost their house. They were devastated. And I think we did a fantastic job. And we are being given credit.

You know, it was very nice that the gentleman who worked for Bill Clinton, when he was President, gave us an A-plus, and that included Puerto Rico. Gave us an A-plus. And I thought that was really very nice. And I think—I really believe he's correct. We have done a really great job.

Texas, again, really—very far along. Florida very far along. And Puerto Rico is a different kind of a situation because it needs so much infrastructure. But over a period of time, that will happen.

### *Puerto Rican Statehood*

Q. Do you think Puerto Rico should become a State? Would that make this easier?

*The President.* Well, we're not talking about that now. Well, you'll get me into trouble with that question, right? We'll hold that one for—how about we hold that one, Mike, for a later time, right?

[*At this point, a reporter spoke in Spanish, and no transcript was provided.*]

*Gov. Rosselló.* In Spanish or—okay, okay.

[*The reporter spoke in Spanish, and no translation was provided.*]

*The President.* And then, you can interpret. [*Laughter*]

*Gov. Rosselló.* That's right. Will do.

[*Gov. Rosselló spoke in Spanish, and no transcript was provided. He then spoke in English as follows.*]

So I'll say it—I'll say a brief version in English.

*The President.* I like it better in Spanish. [*Laughter*] That was beautiful.

*Governor Rosselló.* Well, I like it too. [*Laughter*]

So my job as a Governor is to state what the facts are, number one, and to establish robust expectations for the people of Puerto Rico and for the U.S. citizens in Puerto Rico.

The facts are that every petition that we have made to the President of the United States until this moment, it has been answered. It has been answered. The reality is that we still need to do a lot more for the people of Puerto Rico, and that's why we're meeting here. This is not over, not over by a longshot.

And again, it is the President's commitment to work with the U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico; to treat us equally on this event; to make sure that those 250,000 that have lost their homes get equal treatment; that we can start restoring the more than 42 roads that have been destroyed in Puerto Rico; that we can lift up our energy grid, and that is something that needs to start happening now.

And I petitioned the Corps of Engineers, I petitioned FEMA and our power authority, to work together so that we can be aggressive and we can get results for the people of Puerto Rico in restoring energy as soon as possible while keeping an eye on having the opportunity to have a better system for Puerto Rico.

This is—you know, Mr. President, the United States has been characterized for taking extraordinary measures in extraordinary times. These are extraordinary times in Puerto Rico; therefore, these are extraordinary times in the United States.

### *Federal Budget/Tax Reform/National Economy*

*Q.* [*Inaudible*—predictions for the budget vote this afternoon, sir?

*The President.* I think we'll be successful tonight. It will be possibly sometime in the morning, maybe sooner. I think we have the votes for the budget, which will be phase one of our massive tax cuts and reform. But I think we'll be successful tonight with respect to the budget. I think you probably know. You can count the votes, maybe better than most people. But I think we have the votes, and, frankly, I think we have the votes for the tax cuts which will follow fairly shortly thereafter. So we'll see what happens.

But I will tell you, our country needs tax cuts. I mean, these are examples, when you look at what we just went through with Texas and Florida and Louisiana and Puerto Rico and Virgin Islands. You look at, you know—we need growth. We need people who are going to be pouring into our country. And we have that now. You know, we're starting to have that. We're starting to have that even on the prospect of tax cuts. We have companies—you saw last week—car company—massive improvements and expansions and, in some cases, brandnew plants. They're coming in.

Foxconn is building a—as you know, they make the Apple iPhones and more. They're going to build a fantastic plant. I think it's going to be in the State of Wisconsin. And hopefully, it's going to be there. We've been showing that land. It's a beautiful piece of land. I hope they like it. But that will be one of the biggest in the country. I think Apple is going to be building some very, very big plants. People are starting to say, hey, this is where we want to be. And you see the stock market. We hit an alltime high yesterday, and I think we've hit it about 49 times, Mike. [Laughter]

So we're really doing well, but we can do something very, very spectacular if we're given the tax cuts. We're one of the highest taxed nations in the world. You look at our taxes compared to other competitive nations or competitor nations—because I think nothing is competitive with this—but I'm a little biased, but that's the way it is. But you look at how high we pay and how much we pay. And our companies, they leave because the taxes are so high.

If we get this done, it will be historic. It will be bigger than any plan ever approved or—ever. It will be the biggest tax cuts in the history of our country. And I can tell you, we have tremendous support for this. So the budget is going probably fairly late tonight. They'll be working late tonight. Could be one of those morning calls that you'll be watching your television at 3 o'clock in the morning, and it could be sooner than that.

But I think we have the votes. And right after the budget, we start with a vote on—as you know—on the tax cuts. And I think we're in very good shape.

#### *Hurricane Maria Recovery Efforts in Puerto Rico/Puerto Rican Public Debt*

Q. Mr. President, who's going to pay for the infrastructure recovery in Puerto Rico?

*The President.* In Puerto Rico, we're going to working systems, we're going to be dealing with Congress, we're going to be coming before—meaning, far before—any existing debt that's on the island, because as you know, the island has massive debt. Just their—as we talk about the electrical facilities, I think they have \$9 billion in debt. Well, any debt that's put in will be coming before that debt. We want to make sure we put in debt and that debt is absolutely protected.

In addition to that, we're providing tremendous relief and services right now, and we'll continue to provide that for a period of time. And then, a new group will come in, and the new group will be more building-oriented when things are perfect.

So—but we do have to come before the existing debt. They have, I guess, by some counts, \$120 billion, if you add everything—probably about \$120 billion. Certainly, any money that's put in by people, whether it's public or private, they're going to want to come in first position. And that's very important, and I think the Governor understands that. I would imagine pretty much everyone understands that in Puerto Rico.

Q. So no bailout for bondholders?

*The President.* No, we're helping right now. We're helping a lot. This is costing a lot of money, having FEMA, having the military, having the first responders. And we're doing that because we have an obligation to Puerto Rico, to humanity. We have an obligation to ourselves. We want to continue to do a great job on that, and we're doing it.

No, but at some point you're going have to—there's going to have to be reconstruction. And again, the biggest thing is the power plants. But there's going to have to be—and it's pretty bad when you have to say power plants are almost coming before bridges. But you have power

plants that are needed, you have bridges that are needed, and you have roadways that are needed. That's something you don't see when you go into areas hit by hurricanes or disaster of almost any kind.

### *Hurricane Maria Recovery Efforts in Puerto Rico*

Q. Mr. President, how much longer before the electricity is fully restored to the island?

*The President.* Excuse me?

Q. How much longer before electricity is fully restored?

*The President.* Well, it's—you know, it's a very, very good question, actually. As you know, we have most—much of the electric is done by generators that have been brought to the island, in massive numbers, as I said before. The plant itself is going to take a while. We have to build a brandnew plant. Or we have to do, essentially, a renovation that's so large it's going to be like a brandnew plant—one or the other. We're looking at both right now.

But there's never been a case where power plants were gone. So this isn't just like—you know, as I said, I don't want to just fix poles—you can't just fix the poles. There's never been a case where power plants were gone. So it's going to be a period of time before the electric is restored. Okay, how about one more?

Q. Governor, between one and ten, how do you grade the White House response?

*Gov. Rosselló.* As I've said, the President has answered all of our petitions, and this is still ongoing. So we expect that that will continue. We're being very diligent, giving all of the data. And what we want to do—and I sort of want to circle this—this is a storm-centric approach to what happens.

There was a massive devastation and catastrophe in Puerto Rico, and our response should be to that. And that's why the first responder effort was there; that's why the stabilization effort is there. That's why we set some very aggressive milestones, to restore energy in Puerto Rico: to have about 30 percent of the energy by the end of the month; by the middle of next month, about 50 percent; and so on. Because we want to make sure that people have that knowledge of where we're going to go, that they can stay in Puerto Rico and they can be part of a rebuilding process.

What keeps—what's going to keep the people there, what's going to keep this going is knowing that we have the backing of the White House and knowing that we're going to have the backing of Congress so that we can have the resources appropriate to attend to the storm and then be smart about it, be innovative, and restore Puerto Rico to a better position than before, leveraging other stakeholders: private stakeholders, non-for-profits, people that want to innovate.

This is our opportunity, again, to showcase that Puerto Rico—U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico—can come out of this catastrophe stronger than ever before.

*The President.* Governor, I just want to maybe ask you a question. Because for the spirit of these people that have worked so hard and so long, like Tom and like Brock and like so many others, did the United States—did our Government—when we came in, did we do a great job? Military, first responders, FEMA—did we do a great job?

*Gov. Rosselló.* You responded immediately, sir. And you did so—Tom and Brock, they have been on the phone with me essentially every day since the disaster. We recognize that

there are some logistical limitations that we have in Puerto Rico. We didn't have the ports open for a couple of days. And we didn't have the airports working at full capacity until about a day or two ago.

So that was always a very limiting step. But if you consider that we've gotten—even with those obstacles—we've gotten about 15,000 DOD personnel in Puerto Rico, about 2,000 FEMA personnel, HHS, and others—the response is there. Do we need to do a lot more? Of course, we do. And I think everybody over here recognizes, there's a lot of work to be done in Puerto Rico. But with your leadership, sir, and with everybody over here, we're committed to achieving that in the long haul.

*The President.* Brock?

*Administrator Long.* In the last 50 days, though, to put this into context for America: From the Virgin Islands to California, we've been working in 20 different States—disasters in 20 different States. In the last 50 days, under the President's administration, we've registered close to 4 million Americans for individual assistance. That's more than Katrina, Rita, Wilma, and Sandy combined. It's been a tremendous effort.

Q. Mr. President, can you say—

*The President.* This was actually bigger than anything we've seen, and yet I think our response was better than anyone has ever seen. And again, we were given an A-plus by the man who did this—did what you were doing—for the Clinton administration. And while I don't know him, I would like to thank him for what he said.

#### *Hurricane Maria Recovery Efforts in Puerto Rico*

Q. Mr. President, you were talking about Government loans to build the power plant right, not Government grants?

*The President.* We're talking about possibly combinations of both. Congress is working right now with the people and representatives of Puerto Rico, and we're talking about potentially combinations of both.

#### *Former President George W. Bush*

Q. Any thoughts on President Bush's speech? Did you see it?

*The President.* I didn't see it. I didn't see it.

#### *Health Care Reform*

Q. On health care, sir, 2 days ago, in the Rose Garden, you talked about the Alexander-Murray plan—health care plan as a good short-term solution, and then you seemed to back off in your evening speech to the Heritage Foundation, and your Press Secretary said yesterday that you opposed it. Where do you stand?

*The President.* No, I like people working on plans at all time. I think ultimately block grants is the way to go where we block out the money to the States. You'll get better health care; you'll get it for less money. It will be more specific. A State is a smaller government, and it can take better care of its people, especially where you have well-run States, where you have Governors that do a great job and, you know, States that do a good job.

If you look at Florida, if you look at Maine—Maine really was very much anxious to do that. Various States—Kentucky—various States really wanted that block grant money. And for

the most part, I think we have the vote for that. There will be a transition period, so anything they're working on will be short term. It will be absolutely short term, because ultimately, it will be—it's going to be repeal and replace.

So I have great respect, as you know, for both of the Senators that you mentioned, and if they can come up with a short-term solution. What I did say, though, is I don't want the insurance companies making any more money, because—than they have to, because if you look at the stock prices of the insurance companies from the time of the creation of Obamacare with 300- and 400-percent—and even more than that—increases in their stock, they made a fortune off Obamacare. The people that need Obamacare are decimated. Premiums are up 40, 50, 60 percent, in some cases over 100 percent. In the case of Alaska, premiums are up over 200 percent. So anything that they are working on is a very short term—meaning 1 year to 2 years, max. Because I think we have the votes, or we're certainly within one vote. And when you're within one vote, we're able to get a vote.

Senator Cochran, as an example—I have such respect for him, because he is not feeling great, I can tell you that. And he got on a plane in order to vote for the budget. And I have great respect for that man. I think it's incredible. But votes are very fragile; we found that out. We've seen that; I've learned that. I thought we had it the last time, and somebody came out of the blue and voted against it. So now we start the process all over again.

But the block grant—the concept of blocking it out, block grants to the States, that's what people want, and that's what the States want. And that's especially what the well-run States want, because they will have health care that's so good, far better than anybody has ever even thought.

So again, I respect very much the two Senators you're talking about. I love that they're working on it. I want them to be careful with respect to the insurance companies. Insurance companies are extremely good at making money, extremely talented at making money. And I want them to be careful with that.

We will probably like a very short-term solution until we hit the block grants, until that all kicks in. In other words, it doesn't just kick in the following day. There's a transition period. And if they can do something like that, I'm open to it, but I don't want it to be at the expense of the people. I want it—I want to take care of our people; I don't want to take care of our insurance companies. They've been very well taken care of over the last number of years, believe me.

Okay, thank you very much, everybody. Thank you. Thank you very much.

### *Russian Access to U.S. Uranium Reserves*

Q. [*Inaudible*—to buy uranium?

*The President.* Uranium is a big subject. If the mainstream media would cover the uranium scandal and that Russia has 20 percent of our uranium for whatever reason—and a lot of people understand what those reasons may be—I think that's your Russia story. That's your real Russia story. Not a story where they talk about collusion, and there was none. It was a hoax. Your real Russia story is uranium and how they got all of that uranium, a vast percentage of what we have. That is, to me, one of the big stories of the decade, not just now, of the decade.

The problem is that the mainstream media does not want to cover that story, because that affects people that they protect. So they don't like covering that story. But the big story is

uranium and how Russia got 20 percent of our uranium. And it—frankly, it's a disgrace. It's a disgrace. And it's a disgrace that the fake news won't cover it. It's so sad.

Thank you very much, everybody.

Q. Will you approve that Russia—[inaudible]—paid for a dossier? Do you approve?

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:48 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism Thomas P. Bossert; James Lee Witt, former Administrator, Federal Emergency Management Agency; Vice President Michael R. Pence; and Sen. John S. McCain III. A reporter referred to White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Hurricane Maria relief efforts with Gov. Ricardo A. Rosselló Nevares of Puerto Rico and Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator W. Brock Long; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House.

*Locations:* Washington, DC.

*Names:* Alexander, A. Lamar, Jr.; Bossert, Thomas P.; Clinton, William J.; Cochran, W. Thad; Long, W. Brock; McCain, John S., III; Murray, Patricia L.; Pence, Michael R.; Rosselló Nevares, Ricardo A.; Witt, James Lee.

*Subjects:* Arms and munitions : Nuclear weapons and material :: Nonproliferation efforts; Business and industry : Domestic investment, promotion efforts; Business and industry : Global competitiveness; Communications : News media :: Accuracy and fairness; Energy : Infrastructure and grid improvements; Florida : Hurricane Irma, damage and recovery efforts; Health and medical care : Affordability and costs; Health and medical care : Health insurance reforms; Homeland Security, Department of : Coast Guard, U.S.; Homeland Security, Department of : Emergency Management Agency, Federal; Louisiana : Hurricane Harvey, damage and recovery efforts; Natural disasters : Hurricane Maria; Natural disasters : Response and recovery efforts; Puerto Rico : Energy infrastructure, strengthening efforts; Puerto Rico : Governor; Puerto Rico : Hurricane Maria, damage and recovery efforts; Puerto Rico : Political status; Puerto Rico : Public debt, restructuring assistance; Puerto Rico : Energy infrastructure, strengthening efforts; Russia : U.S. elections, interference; Taxation : Tax relief; Texas : Hurricane Harvey, damage and recovery efforts; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: Homeland Security and Counterterrorism; White House Office : Vice President.

*DCPD Number:* DCPD201700768.