

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

July 25, 2019

The Honorable James Inhofe
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Adam Smith
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mac Thornberry
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Inhofe, Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Reed, and Ranking Member Thornberry:

We write regarding the conference committee for the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 (NDAA). As passed by the House of Representatives, this legislation contains a provision that will provide crucial resources for safe cleanup of hazardous military waste on the Puerto Rican island of Vieques. As conference negotiations begin, we urge you to ensure that this funding for safe Vieques cleanup is included in the final conference report in order to address health and environmental problems caused by decades of U.S. military exercises on the island.

Vieques is home to thousands of United States citizens, and it was devastated by Hurricanes Irma and Maria. For decades, the island was used for U.S. Navy bombing exercises and live-fire training,¹ which left thousands of acres contaminated with heavy metals and toxic chemicals.² We share the concern of residents that the hazardous waste and remaining munitions pose a risk of further contamination of the island and continues to threaten public health.

The military has now been engaged in cleanup efforts on the island for years³—a crucial and overdue process. But those efforts have included open-air burning and detonation of hazardous wastes.⁴ According to the Congressional Research Service, these practices entail

¹ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, “Atlantic Fleet Weapons Training Area, Vieques, PR,” <https://cumulis.epa.gov/supercpad/SiteProfiles/index.cfm?fuseaction=second.Cleanup&id=0204694>.

² The Atlantic, “Puerto Rico’s Invisible Health Crisis,” Valeria Pelet, September 3, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/09/vieques-invisible-health-crisis/498428/>.

³ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, “Atlantic Fleet Weapons Training Area, Vieques, PR,” <https://cumulis.epa.gov/supercpad/SiteProfiles/index.cfm?fuseaction=second.Cleanup&id=0204694>.

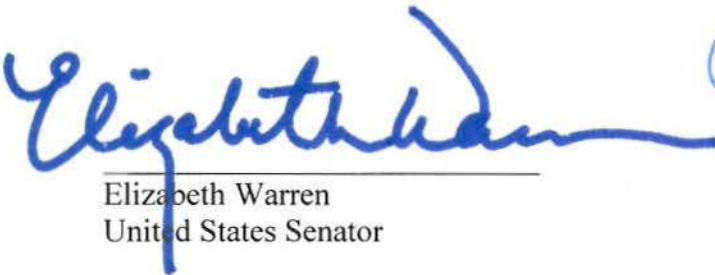
⁴ New York Times, “New Battle on Vieques, Over Navy’s Cleanup of Munitions,” Mireya Navarro, August 6, 2009, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/07/science/earth/07vieques.html>; NBC News, “AOC proposal calls for

“potential environmental and safety hazards,” and “[e]nvironmental concerns” have previously influenced how and where the Department of Defense carries them out.⁵ Residents and activists repeatedly condemned the open-air burning and detonation, and have expressed fears about the toxicity, human health effects, and environmental impacts of these practices.⁶ In April, 42 organizations sent a letter to the Environmental Protection Agency and Members of Congress, emphasizing that technologies now exist that offer a safer alternative to open-air burning and detonation.⁷

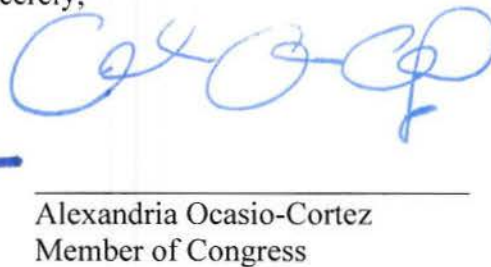
The provision included in the NDAA will help effectuate the use of those safer alternatives. It allocates \$10 million “for the purchase, deployment, and operation of a closed detonation chambers ... that will bring the practice of open air burning and open air detonation to the lowest practicable level.”⁸

After decades of bombing exercises by our military resulted in severe harm to Vieques, we owe it to our fellow U.S. citizens on the island to clean up after ourselves in a safe, responsible way. As you finalize the NDAA, we therefore urge you to include the House provision that provides funding for safe Vieques cleanup. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



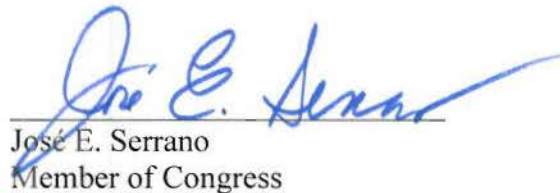
Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



José E. Serrano
Member of Congress

environmentally safer military cleanup efforts in Vieques, Puerto Rico,” Nicole Acevedo, July 12, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/aoc-proposal-calls-environmentally-safer-military-cleanup-efforts-vieques-puerto-n1029351>.

⁵ Congressional Research Service, “Vieques and Culebra: An Analysis of Cleanup Status and Costs,” David Bearden, July 7, 2005, p. 10 n. 26, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL32533.pdf>.

⁶ Letter from LatinoJustice PRLDEF to Kevin Cloe, Remedial Project Manager, NAVFAC Atlantic, May 30, 2019, <https://www.scribd.com/document/416458427/Public-comment-concerning-the-Navy-s-Proposed-Remedial-Plan-for-UXO12-and-UXO14-in-former-Vieques-Naval-Training-Range>.

⁷ Letter from Citizens for Safe Water Around Badger, Vidas Viequenses Valen, et al. to Administrator Pete Lopez, U.S. EPA Region 2, et al., April 22, 2019, <https://cswab.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Vieques-Call-to-Action-42-Groups-to-EPA-Reg-2-US-Congress-April-2019.pdf>.

⁸ Amendment 334 to the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020, https://amendments.rules.house.gov/amendments/OCASNY_032_xml78191033183318.pdf. Confirmation of adoption (see #043): <https://armedservices.house.gov/cache/files/c/5/c5be6330-209d-4370-a3a5-e7a20ab75bed/BD6BB927B1EADB5758E21E9B87FE7B14.fy20-ndaa-floor-amendment-tracker.pdf>.



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Tulsi Gabbard
Member of Congress



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



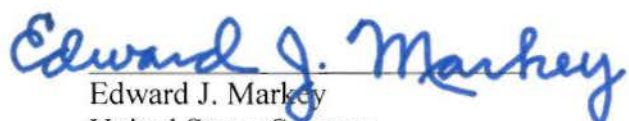
Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress



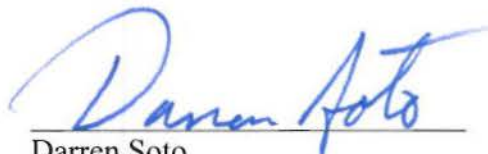
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United States Senator



Ro Khanna
Member of Congress



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



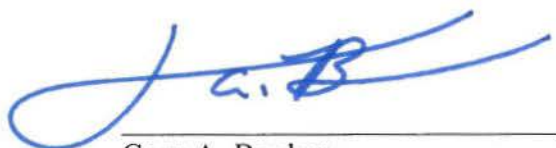
Darren Soto
Member of Congress



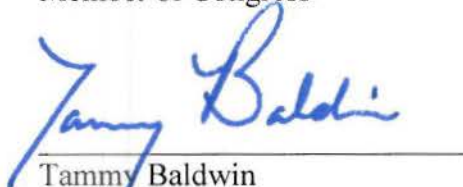
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Deb Haaland
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Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator