

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 16, 2018

The Honorable R. D. James
Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works)
108 Army Pentagon
Washington, DC 20310-0108

Lt. Gen. Todd T. Semonite
Chief of Engineers
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20314-1000

Dear Secretary James and General Semonite:

We are writing to express our deep concern that the number of Army Corps of Engineers personnel working on power restoration in Puerto Rico is being drawn down beginning this week, before power is fully restored. We are particularly concerned about the impact this drawdown will have on the island of Vieques.

While we recognize that much progress has been made in restoring power to the majority of customers, the job is not done. According to the Department of Energy (DOE)'s most recent Situation Report for Hurricanes Maria and Irma, published on March 14th, 8.21 percent of electricity customers in Puerto Rico are still without power, many of which are in remote, mountainous areas. Additionally, according to the DOE report, only 71.4 percent of transmission centers are functioning in the Commonwealth. The federal government has a responsibility to the remaining customers who are without power to ensure that their power is restored as quickly as possible. We do not understand how reducing the number of personnel in Puerto Rico helps to accomplish that goal. Accordingly, we seek answers to the questions below.

1. What is the criteria for reassigning Army Corps contractors from areas where power restoration is not yet complete?
2. We understand there are 1,535 Army Corps personnel, including 1,331 contractors currently on the ground in Puerto Rico. Please specify the number working on the island of Vieques. What is the timeline for how much longer they will remain?
3. Was available funding a factor in the decision to draw down the number of Army Corps personnel (both federal and contractor)?
4. Does the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority have sufficient funds to complete power restoration work for all customers in Puerto Rico, including on the island of Vieques, in the absence of Army Corps crews?

5. What impact will this draw down have on the timeline for completing power restoration for all customers? Would keeping these crews in place result in a faster timeline for completing restoration?
6. Last month Congress passed the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018, which contained dedicated funding to rebuild Puerto Rico's energy infrastructure. The bill also waived Stafford Act requirements that limited the use of funds to rebuild to pre-disaster conditions, allowing Puerto Rico to rebuild its energy infrastructure to current industry standards. What role will the Army Corps or its contractors play in the modernization of Puerto Rico's electrical grid, and is there a strategy to incorporate grid modernization and resiliency into the current rebuilding efforts?

Given the urgency of this matter, we respectfully request answers to these questions by the close of business on Wednesday, March 21, 2018. Thank you for your continued attention to needs of our fellow American citizens recovering from Hurricanes Irma and Maria in Puerto Rico.

Sincerely,



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



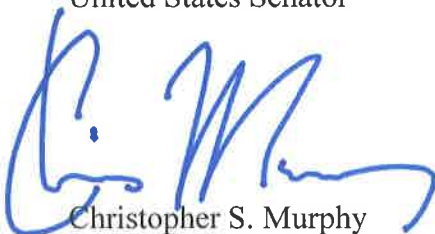
Bill Nelson
United States Senator



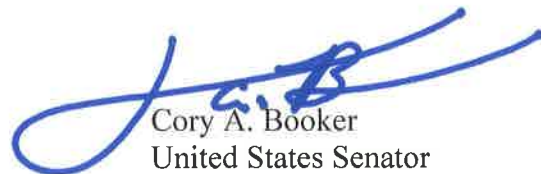
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United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
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Christopher S. Murphy
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Robert Menendez
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