



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Gustavo Rivera

## Senator Rivera on the First Year Anniversary of Hurricane Maria Devastating Puerto Rico

GUSTAVO RIVERA September 20, 2018

| ISSUE: **PUERTO RICO, HURRICANE MARIA, PUERTO RICO CRISIS**

"Today, we commemorate the one year anniversary of Hurricane Maria making landfall in Puerto Rico. A year after this storm decimated Puerto Rico and changed the lives of its 3.5 million residents forever, we remember the outright criminal inaction of the federal and central governments and how they are directly connected to the death of nearly three thousand Puerto Ricans, not to mention the failing and stalled recovery efforts.

Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria is far from the "unsung success" Trump and his administration describe. Those thoughtless words only further confirmed the deliberate disregard of his administration for the people of Puerto Rico and the future of the island.

Three hundred and sixty five days later, too many of my sisters and brothers are still struggling with unreliable water or electricity services on the island. Most children, the elderly, the sick, and the most vulnerable among them are suffering from schools, hospitals, and an overall infrastructure in the brink of collapse. Too many homes, nearly 60,000 of them, are still relying on plastic tarps as roofs making them more susceptible to whatever disaster strikes next. The island's present and future have been grossly compromised not only by a natural disaster of unprecedented proportions, but by the uncaring response from a federal government that seemed to forget that Puerto Rico is an American territory and its

wellbeing is the responsibility of the federal government. Such is the federal government's disdain for the lives of people on the island that FEMA has only approved 3 percent of funeral assistance requests, deepening the profound trauma and sorrow that they have already endured.

Despite the darkness, there is still hope. My two visits to the island showed me the admirable resilience of Puertorricans who continue to face steep and highly complex challenges. From deep socio-economic and racial disparities, to evident environmental challenges and, above all, a crippling financial crisis that has left the island with \$73 billion in outstanding debt, Puertorricans have demonstrated that they are making their own path for their island and for their future generations.

While the pain and anger are still raw, and will remain so until we see real recovery efforts, let us take today to solemnly remember those whose lives were lost during the storm and in its aftermath. Let us take this time to recommit ourselves to fighting fiercely so that Puerto Rico is rebuilt by Puerto Ricans and for Puerto Ricans."