

THE HISTORIC 2017 HURRICANE SEASON: IMPACTS ON THE U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

HEARING BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE INTERIOR, ENERGY, AND ENVIRONMENT OF THE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS SECOND SESSION

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Monday, March 12, 2018

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE INTERIOR, ENERGY AND
ENVIRONMENT
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM,
Washington, D.C.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 9:40 a.m., at the Legislature of the Virgin Islands Capitol Building, Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, Hon. Blake Farenthold [chairman of the subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Farenthold and Plaskett.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Good morning. The Subcommittee on the Interior and Environment will come to order. Without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare a recess at any time.

Before we get started, I did want to take a moment to speak directly to our audience. I want to thank the witnesses and also those members of the community who have chosen to be here.

I do want to point out this is a formal hearing of the subcommittee and not a townhall meeting. We are here to hear from the witnesses. Though we value what members of the public have to say, this is a formal hearing. If there is time afterwards, Ms. Plaskett and I will come to the back and visit and listen to anybody's concerns. Also we need to get back to Washington because we have votes tomorrow in the House.

So we would appreciate it if the members of the audience would basically just listen. If you've got something to say, obviously you can write to us or we'll try to talk to you after.

With that, I'll offer my opening statement before we get started.

Today the subcommittee would examine the effects of the historic 2017 Hurricane Season on the U.S. Virgin Islands. However, before we get started, I do want to thank the ranking member of this subcommittee, Ms. Plaskett, for being such a wonderful host in showing us her beautiful home islands.

It's been almost 30 years since I've been here. There have been substantial changes, not just based on time but obviously based on the devastation of the hurricanes. These islands are extremely beautiful but the effects of the hurricanes are clear. It's painful to see the destruction in this area.

I'm especially sympathetic to what the residents of the USVI are enduring because my home city of Corpus Christy, Texas was slammed by Hurricane Harvey as well this year. We faced wind

gust up to 132 miles an hour in nearby Port Aransas, an island community I grew up in having had a house there.

I'll tell you the devastation that we saw from Harvey it reached as far as the Houston area based on rain. It was just amazing. According to the National Weather Service, Houston saw an all-time record daily rainfall accumulations on August 26th and 27th.

The struggle of residents in Texas and the Virgin Islands have faced in the aftermath of the storms have been intense. Economic losses based on Harvey are as high as a 100 billion. We are still awaiting numbers from here as we continue to do recovery.

I bring up Texas to note that I do have experience with these devastating hurricanes and made my trip here particularly interesting. It's personally important for me to understand the challenges that you all are facing.

Earlier this week I was in Port Aransas talking to the Mayor about their recovery efforts. We see some of the same challenges here with housing and debris removal. There is an extra burden here based on logistics. It takes longer. It's more expensive to get stuff out of here and the same is true to get stuff here and get the debris out of here. So it's interesting to see.

We are looking always to find ways to improve and reform the Federal response to this. The Stafford Act, which is the law governing Federal disaster assistance in the U.S., is intended to be flexible and leave a great deal of decision making to the localities in the State, territory, or the local governments.

In our Federal system of government this is important because it preserves the sovereignty of the territories, States, and local governments and respects their expertise. However, these locations and localities that often need Federal assistance are faced with overwhelming disasters as happened here and back home in Texas.

This Federal assistance is provided by an alphabet soup of agencies ranging from FEMA, DOD to HHS, SBA. I think it's important that the Congress play a role in this as well and particularly this committee. We need to make sure these interactions, especially those between local governments and Federal agencies are working as well as possible.

Now by the very definition of the word, a disaster, is disruptive. It causes chaos and upends the order of life that we're used to, and as such, there is always going to be difficulties coordinating the relief and recovery efforts, and geography just adds to some of those challenges. There are always ways we can improve this and that's certainly the case here in the U.S. Virgin Islands. I hope today we can have a productive discussion about advancing these improvements.

I want to thank the representatives of the Federal agencies who have taken time out of their busy schedules to appear today. I want to thank the participants of our panel representing the local perspective because your voice is vital to understanding what we need to do to fix the disaster relief problem.

I want to point out that even though it's just Ms. Plaskett and me here, we had originally scheduled this meeting in December but the House schedule changed. The day we were planning on being here, it got changed and as a result some of the other members that were planning to attend were not able to reschedule to come

at this date. But Ms. Plaskett and I felt like it was important that we get this hearing done as soon as possible.

This transcript will be made available to the entire subcommittee and committee as a whole. I'm looking forward to hearing what you have to say.

And now I'll recognize Ms. Plaskett for her observations.

Ms. PLASKETT. I first want to thank Chairman Farenthold for calling this hearing to examine the impact of the Federal Government's response to Hurricanes Irma and Maria in the U.S. Virgin Islands. And I also would like to thank the chairman of the committee, Trey Gowdy, who has made sure that this hearing was able to take place.

I especially would like to thank the senate president, Myron Jackson, as well as all the members of the legislature for hosting us and having this hearing here in the Virgin Islands legislative building.

I think people need to be aware that this is probably the only time that the U.S. House of Representatives have had a formal hearing here in the United States Virgin Islands. While there have been townhalls, there have been meetings, this is in fact a record that will go into the Congressional Record and will demonstrate the people of the Virgin Islands' vigilance and resilience and their concerns as U.S. citizens for the effect and the impact of the Federal response on these islands.

Every sector of the U.S. Virgin Islands was devastated by two Category 5 hurricanes which made landfall last September. Eighty-five percent of the homes were destroyed or damaged. Nine of the territory's K through 12 public schools remained shuttered due to damages sustained by the hurricanes.

The University of the Virgin Islands suffered damage to its campuses on both St. Thomas and St. Croix. Both the Roy Lester Schneider Regional Medical Center in St. Thomas and the Governor Juan Francisco Luis Hospital on St. Croix sustained damage and could not perform critical care services, forcing the evacuation of critical care and chronic patients to Puerto Rico and eventually to the U.S. mainland.

Our airports and seaports remained closed for days. Roadways and thoroughfares already in disrepair sustained further damage. And critical communications, including radio broadcast antennas and cell towers were crippled. Emergency 911 communications were inoperable.

Hurricanes Irma and Maria caused dozens of injuries and some deaths. The damage from these storms and the psychological and long-term economic impact is as unparalleled as the occurrence of two Category 5 hurricanes making landfall in a specific area in a two-week period could do.

While the Federal Government's response is welcomed and appreciated, there are critical improvements that must be made in advance of the next Atlantic hurricane season, which begins June 1, and the ones to follow if we want to mitigate the loss of life, injury and damage to property. To be clear, the people of the Virgin Islands of the United States are grateful for the efforts of the Federal Government in assisting our recovery. We want to make that—I'd like to make that point at the beginning.

Through our combined recovery efforts, disaster recovery centers received over 63,000 visits from hurricane survivors. Distribution centers provided approximately 100,000 meals and some 72,000 liters of drinking water. As of January both FEMA and SBA have approved more than \$400 million in grants and low interest disaster housing loans, and \$68.7 million in aid to various individual and household programs. Congress has passed three disaster supplemental appropriations; still the recovery is far from over.

The catastrophic destruction caused by Hurricanes Irma and Maria continue to demand massive amounts of aid to address the overwhelming needs of the victims who now face the daunting task of rebuilding their lives. We will hear about the things that went well, but we must also hear about the things that did not go as well and ways that we can improve ourselves.

That is the sign of a true democracy and a mature country that is able to hear where our shortfalls were so that we can do better the next time. We must continually try to improve ourselves. That's how we remain the greatest country in the world.

So many of the issues that we have found are the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services field offices in St. Croix remain closed. There are currently no offices to process permanent residency and naturalization applications for persons without the means to travel to St. Thomas. And if they could travel to St. Thomas, these persons would need to wait an exorbitant amount of time for personnel to process the backlog of applications. The hard working permanent residents and legal immigrants who continue to contribute to our economy cannot suffer any longer.

Additionally, the United States Postal Service has released hundreds of workers hired to eliminate mail backlogs despite the continuing delays. Packages have been delayed for months at a time.

I have specific cases that I have given to the Assistant Postmaster General regarding that. Mail has simply gone poof, disappeared in distribution centers in Puerto Rico. That cannot be. The United States Postal Service is a primary means of commerce in the territory and that needs to be restored.

The Army Corps of Engineers and the Federal Emergency Management Agency and working with the Government of the Virgin Islands has not completely provided adequate plans for plant and other hurricane debris removal. Mounds of hurricane debris, including appliances and scrap metal are disposed of near public schools and pose real health and safety risks. Virgin Islanders are still struggling to achieve normalcy.

We are now 80 days away from the 2018 Hurricane Season, 16 months away from the 2019 Hurricane Season and 28 months away from the following. The only thing we are ready for is freedom from the longstanding problems caused by the last hurricane.

Without an adequate Federal investment in infrastructure and other critical funding to harden systems like our energy grid to make them more resilient to withstand future storms, we will be in the same or worse predicament than we were following the last major storm, particularly with so many homes still exposed today.

In the aftermath of the storms, I and Ranking Member Elijah Cummings wrote to Chairman Trey Gowdy in October to request a hearing on the Federal recovery efforts in the Virgin Islands. We

received several briefings from FEMA, the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Defense.

Today is our first public hearing on the hurricane response and I'm pleased that we are able to receive testimony from representatives of the Virgin Islands community and Federal officials directly involved in the relief and recovery efforts.

To better prepare ourselves for future hurricanes, I've worked with Congress to introduce H.R. 4782, the Puerto Rico and Virgin Islands Equitable Rebuild. This is the Marshall Plan we are requesting for the Virgin Islands.

Additionally, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands allows the islands to use disaster funds to lay the groundwork for a more resilient and clean energy grid. I believe that is what Congress has been requesting.

Both Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, as well as Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer, wrote an opinion piece together after coming to the Virgin Islands who recognized that the Stafford Act must be amended to allow for resiliency and the hardening of our systems so that we can withstand the next hurricane season.

Throughout this hearing you will find that the Virgin Islands is resilient. Because of this resilience, she has come a far way since the previous hurricane season. However, normalcy remains out of the reach for far too many Virgin Islands residents, and to stop at the progress made is to impose on American citizens a substandard quality of life.

Thank you again, Chairman, for having this hearing. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses and asking pertinent questions.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Thank you very much.

I'm now pleased to introduce our first panel of witnesses: Senator Myron D. Jackson, the senate president of the United States Virgin Islands, and senator—and I hope I get this pronounced right—Tregenza A. Roach, the senator from the Virgin Islands Legislature as well.

Pursuant to committee rules, all witnesses will be sworn in before they testify. Will you please stand and raise your right hand?

Do you solemnly swear or affirm that the testimony you are about to give will be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help you God?

Let the record reflect both witnesses answered in the affirmative. You all may be seated.

We do have two panels today. In order to allow time for discussion, we'd appreciate it if you would limit your testimony to 5 minutes. Your entire written statement will be made a part of the record.

As you see there is a clock on the middle desk here. You may not be able to read the time but it does have a green, yellow and red light. That's like the traffic signal. Green means go, yellow means hurry up and red means stop.

So we will start, I guess, with Senate President Jackson. You are recognized for 5 minutes.

PANEL I**WITNESS STATEMENTS****STATEMENT OF MYRON D. JACKSON**

Mr. JACKSON. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, Good morning Honorable Blake Farenthold, Chairman, and Honorable Stacey Plaskett, Delegate to the Virgin Islands and Ranking Member.

Mr. Chairman, at this time I would ask your indulgence and ask if the vice president of the institution to join me as we have been partners through the process of our recovery?

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Without objection so ordered.

Mr. JACKSON. Thank you. That would be Senator Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly.

It is a pleasure to host the Subcommittee on Interior, Energy and Environment of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform today in the Earle B. Ottley Legislative Chambers on St. Thomas. On behalf of the 32nd Legislature of the Virgin Islands, we are grateful for the opportunity to testify before you today at this field hearing to assess the impacts of the 2017 Hurricane Season on the Virgin Islands of the United States.

The double blow of the two Category 5 storms, Hurricanes Irma and Maria to our territory had a crippling effect on our territory from which we are still in turmoil in areas such as healthcare, schools, emergency services, housing, our electrical system, agriculture, and environment and our cultural heritage and tourism industries.

Without the assistance of the U.S. Government, Federal funds infused into our economy, and the hundreds of men and women sent to assist the Virgin Islands, we could not be where we are on the journey to recovery.

Thank you to the Federal Emergency Management Agency and all of the linemen, engineers and national emergency workers who have expended countless hours to work with our local officials, first responders, local and national military forces, volunteer groups and others in our restoration from the devastating natural disaster we experienced last September.

As it relates to our Federal disaster assistance, community disaster loan, the Virgin Islands is grateful for the financial assistance approved by Congress in October of 2017 in the form of \$500 million in a low interest community disaster loan from FEMA which will cover revenue loss and support the territory's hospitals, central government operations, and the Water and Power Authority over the course of the next three fiscal years.

We are also grateful that Congress approved \$89 billion to areas impacted by natural disasters to include the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. It is calculated that the Virgin Islands may ultimately receive in excess of \$7.5 billion requested for our recovery.

We ask you also to be our voice as advocates in forgiveness of these loans so that the territory can fully recover and continue to advance economically as efforts were being made prior to the arrival of these storms.

The most glaring casualty of course for us is the medical evacuees. The 2017 hurricane season has been very impactful to our health system. The territory as a whole was adversely impacted as we airlifted patients out of the territory. Over 500 patients were transported out of the Virgin Islands and close to 140 remain on the mainland.

As of last month, according to the Commissioner of Health, 43 evacuees have died. Under the current response plan, FEMA, the Department of Health, Human Services, the Department of Defense all have responsibilities for medical evacuees. Hurricanes Irma and Maria exposed the chaotic management of our most vulnerable citizens.

This is a time that we need to consolidate the responsibility for our medical evacuees under one agency. That agency must keep a chain of command of each patient, including the names of the accompanying family member and an additional emergency contact.

We cannot allow evacuees to be further stressed by this uncertainty. We must and can do better for our citizens as they are forced to leave their homes to seek medical services during disasters.

Another area of concern is housing. Our primary concern for the territory in the wake of the hurricanes was a response to our displaced residents.

A prime example of this is the Department of Housing and Urban Development on February 2, 2018 announced it would afford the territory \$243 million to help the Virgin Islands recover from the effects of the storm. The devastating picture of the Tutu Hi-Rise and Lagoon Street communities could paint no clearer image of the destruction to hundreds of homes that were ripped open.

No immediate emergency housing was provided for residents living in the devastated areas such as the Tutu Hi-Rise and residential communities within the territory. In the immediate aftermath of the storms, temporary housing is needed on the ground.

Other areas of concern is our schools. The overriding concerns in the area of education is the split sessions of many of our schools in the territory. In retrospect we could have done better in collaboration with FEMA.

I recognize that my time has ended. I'm available to answer any questions the committee deems necessary. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

[Prepared statement of Mr. Jackson follows:]

**Written Testimony of Senate President Myron D. Jackson of the
Legislature of the Virgin Islands
Before the Subcommittee on Interior, Energy, and Environment of
the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
Capitol Building, Earle B. Ottley Legislative Hall,
St. Thomas, Virgin Islands of the United States**

Monday, March 12, 2018

Good morning Honorable Blake Farenthold, Chairman, and Honorable Stacey Plaskett, Delegate to the Virgin Islands and Ranking Member.

It is a pleasure to host The Subcommittee on Interior, Energy, and Environment of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform today in the Earle B. Ottley Legislative Chambers on St. Thomas. On behalf of the 32nd Legislature of the Virgin Islands, we are grateful for the opportunity to testify before you today at this field hearing to assess the impacts of the 2017 Hurricane Season on the Virgin Islands of the United States.

The double blow of the two Category 5 storms, Hurricanes Irma and Maria - to our territory had a crippling effect on our Territory, from which we are still in turmoil in areas such as healthcare, schools, emergency services, housing, our electrical system, agriculture, and environment and our cultural heritage and tourism industries.

Without the assistance of the U.S. government – federal funds infused into our economy, and the hundreds of men and women sent to assist the Virgin Islands, we could not be where we are on the journey to recovery. Thank you to the Federal Emergency Management Agency and all of the linemen, engineers, and national emergency workers who have expended countless hours to work with our local officials, first responders, local and national military forces, volunteer groups and others in our restoration from the devastating natural disasters we experienced last September.

Federal Disaster Assistance - Community Disaster Loan:

The Virgin Islands is grateful for the financial assistance approved by Congress in October 2017 in the form of a \$500 million low-interest Community Disaster Loan from FEMA which will cover revenue loss and support the territory's hospitals, central government operations, and Water and Power Authority over the course of the next three fiscal years. However, there are concerns with the terms of the loan agreement. We have been forced to pledge our gross receipts and rum cover over monies as a senior lien necessary to access these funds. This requirement is levied against the backdrop of a territory in financial distress, reeling from the pull out in 2012 of our major employer HOVENSA, and unbalanced reimbursements for Medicare and Medicaid. Coupled with the unfunded Earned Income Credit and our inability to access the market, we ask that you revisit the process for the Virgin Islands to access the Community Disaster Loan funding. We also requesting your advocacy in forgiveness of these loans so that the Territory can fully recover and continue to advance economically as efforts were being made prior to the arrival of the storms. We are also extremely pleased and grateful that Congress approved \$89 billion to areas impacted by natural disasters to include the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. It is calculated the Virgin Islands may ultimately receive an excess of \$7.5 billion requested for our recovery.

Medical Evacuees:

The most glaring casualty of the historic 2017 hurricane season has been our medical evacuees, who since the destruction of all our hospitals, are in a fight for their lives for treatment and care and the support of their loved ones after they left the Territory before and after the storms. In the disarray that unfolded, over 500 patients were transported out of the Virgin Islands, with close to 140 remaining on the mainland. As of last month, according to Commissioner of Health Michelle Davis, at least 43 evacuees have died. Under the current response plan, FEMA, the Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Defense, all have responsibilities for medical evacuees. Hurricanes Irma and Maria exposed the chaotic management of our most vulnerable citizens. There

is a need for consolidating responsibility for medical evacuees under one agency. That agency must keep a chain of custody on each patient, including the names of the accompanying family member and an additional emergency contact. We cannot allow evacuees to be further stressed by this uncertainty. We must and can do better for our citizens as they are forced to leave their homes to seek medical services during disasters.

I and other Senators personally visited with dialysis patients transferred to Atlanta, and heard their tales of isolation, lack of communication and neglect felt by many. Similar stories are coming out of Puerto Rico, Florida, and Fort Jackson, South Carolina. These strategies will be critical in strengthening the emergency plan in times of natural disaster, and the possibility of stemming the high number of casualties suffered in the wake of these two devastating hurricanes. They will assist in filling gaps when it comes to issues such as culturally-sensitive food, appropriate clothing, and transport of patients, and family members, especially of those evacuees with strong desire to return to their homes.

Housing:

Another primary concern for the territory in the wake of the hurricanes was the response to our displaced residents. A prime example is that the Department of Housing and Urban Development on February 2, 2018 announced it was offering \$243 million to help the Virgin Islands recover from the effects of Hurricanes Irma and Maria. The devastating pictures of the Tutu Hi-Rise and Lagoon Street communities could paint no clearer image of the destruction to hundreds of homes that were ripped apart. No immediate emergency housing was provided for residents living in areas devastated by the storms, such as Tutu High-Rise and residential communities within the territory. In the immediate aftermath of storms, temporary housing is needed on the ground.

Criminal Justice/Emergency Operations

In regard to our corrections facilities, the Alvin A. Swan Annex sustained major damages decreasing the amount of inmates that can be housed. 76 inmates were moved from St. Thomas to St. Croix to Golden Grove because electrical power at the Criminal Justice Center was non-existent. St. Croix lost its administrative office.

Another major issue regarding our emergency preparedness is the lack of adequate warning systems and communications from VITEMA. Most recently a Tsunami alert created panic in the territory. The towers were damaged and our ocean warning devices require our attention, funding for replacement.

Schools:

The overriding concern in the area of education is the split sessions of many of our schools in the territory. In retrospect, based on the amount of damages sustained to our school plants and facilities, modular systems should have already been in the territory to assist with this deficiency. During the response period, the Department of Education in collaboration with the Army Corps of Engineers developed plans for temporary modular classrooms. This plan changed when we entered the FEMA recovery mode which made this task unsurmountable to be achieved by the Department. This school year is lost. Modular systems will now be in place for the 2018-2019 school year through an initial FEMA budget approval of \$42 million. Additional concerns include mold remediation, teacher shortages, limited instruction periods, and returning our student population to the territory. Participation in the School Lunch Program has dropped dramatically after the hurricanes which will impact our fiscal year funding for 2018-2019. A loss of \$1.5 to \$2 million is expected compared to fiscal year 2016-2017.

D-SNAP:

From November 13 to Nov. 18, 2017, residents of St. Thomas, St. John, Water Island and St. Croix could apply for the Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Program under the US Department of Agriculture's Food & Nutrition Service – to receive short-term food assistance benefits for families suffering in the wake of the storms. This simplified application to the normal SNAP guidelines allowed our people to buy food for two months for their families from grocery stores and food vendors in the program that had access to electricity and the ability to accept cards. The first day, after enduring lines that for many lasted three or more hours, 2,228 persons registered for the program. Of the territory's population of roughly 100,000 persons; the program funding of \$23 million approved for the Virgin Islands was said to cover 38,000 qualifying residents. In comparison to other states and territories, the allotment for the Virgin Islands was dramatically smaller for a household of 1 person, with a disaster gross income limit of \$1,567, or \$247 monthly. In households of 1 person Guam, it is \$1,953 and \$283 monthly. In Hawaii, it is \$2,100 or \$358 monthly. And in the 48 contiguous states it is \$1,700, and \$192 monthly. I respectfully submit that the amount allotted to this territory's residents needs to be substantially increased to be on par with other jurisdictions across the nation.

Energy:

The Virgin Islands consumers pay one of the highest rates in the nation. Electricity rates as of February 1, 2017 are 32.34 cents per kilowatt hour for the first 250 kilowatt hours and 34.96 cents for all other kilowatt hours for residents. The commercial rate was 38.85 cents per kilowatt hour. According to reports from Virgin Islands public utility officials, the most extensive damage sustained by our Water and Power Authority was to the transmission and distribution system and the overall electrical grid. The two power plants, in Estate Richmond on St. Croix and at Krum Bay on St. Thomas, sustained some damages that delayed restoration on St Thomas, however the transmission and distribution system suffered losses from Hurricane Irma on the magnitude of 80% on St. Thomas and 90% on St. John, with the two outlying islands, Hassel

Island and Water Island, each suffering about 90% damage to their electrical infrastructure. Hurricane Maria rendered about 80% damage to St. Croix's system.

Approximately 1,000 off-island public utility and private linemen provided and local electrical companies contributed to the effort to rebuild the transmission and distribution system. A monumental logistic effort was made to transport them along with vehicles, equipment, supplies and material inventory to the territory via cargo shipping. These materials and supplies competed for space with private businesses and individuals that were also shipping supplies to the islands.

WAPA plans to replace traditional wooden poles with composite poles on various key transmission feeders on all islands, which will be able to withstand sustained wind speeds of up to 200 miles per hour. About 4,300 composite poles are identified for major primary electrical circuits for the St. Thomas-St. John district, and approximately 5,900 composite poles on St. Croix.

WAPA has also been awarded hazardous mitigation funds to underground more of its main transmission and distribution circuits. Some of these funds have also been approved to install two small emergency generators on St. John, as the island is currently without backup generation.

WAPA is also exploring the benefits of electric micro grids that in the event of a major electrical service interruption can function as a small generating facility to produce electricity on its own power. WAPA is currently working to develop the initial micro grid in conjunction with the Virgin Islands Port Authority at St. Croix's Henry E. Rohlsen Airport.

Food Security & Agriculture

The nutritional health after the storms were grossly inadequate by the MRE's and snack boxes provided by FEMA during this crisis. Our agricultural industry nearly grinded to a halt, with administrative offices in St. Croix, two large greenhouses, irrigation systems and access roads badly compromised by storm waters. The loss of 85 percent of solar equipment at the Bordeaux Farmers Market was matched with the complete flooding of the Abattoir on St. Thomas, while water storage tanks of about 90,000 gallons of water were among the damage at the

Community Garden in St. Croix. Farmers markets in both districts are slowly coming back online, although our major agricultural fairs have had to be canceled or postponed. One of the biggest concerns is that of Virgin Islands farmers who are challenged with qualifying for disaster assistance in the wake of losses experienced during the hurricanes. In St. John, wells in Coral Bay With resurrection of power and water lines as well as internet services, the infrastructure is slowly being repaired, one challenge at a time services are being re-established and projects scheduled pre-hurricane are revisited.

Customs & The Denton Act

The Virgin Islands was allowed by the United States Congress to impose custom duties on goods coming into the territory as a means of generating revenues. Several years ago the Federal government began to retain millions of duties to cover their operations. This was done without local government involvement. \$15,000,000 on average is retained by Customs and Border Patrol. In the aftermath of the hurricanes, it became evident that the dollars collected in the territory are not deployed to enhance technology or processes. One example, is the ACE software that is available to other jurisdictions. The ACE software allows Customs to track emergency supplies leaving other ports. This allows this to prioritize containers containing emergency supplies. Instead many ships and containers were not processed delaying our recovery efforts in the territory.

The Denton Program allows private U.S. citizens and organizations to use space on U.S. military and cargo planes to transport humanitarian goods to countries in need. The Virgin Islands is not included and emergency supplies are not allowed on military planes during disaster responses.

Environment/Debris

The debris that has accumulated in our islands continues to be a challenge since the hurricanes. As of March 2, 870,726 cubic yards of storm debris has been collected by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and territorial agencies. Disposing of this debris is what we are now faced with. The

Legislature of the Virgin Islands took a position through Act No. 8018, banning the burning of all fallen trees and other vegetative debris generated as a result of a natural disaster was a major health hazard to our residents. Other options for disposing of storm debris need to be included in the disaster assistance.

The protocols for cultural resources are grossly inadequate after advocating for months within FEMA. Finally, after six months, cultural resources professionals are on the ground and working with institutions and government entities.

Thank you to the Members of the 32nd Legislature for your contributions to this report, and to the Chair and Delegate to Congress for the opportunity to give an overview of some of the ongoing concerns regarding strengthening the working partnership between federal and local officials to improve disaster response. Your commitment to seeing the Virgin Islands through this period of rebuilding is appreciated.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Thank you. We do have your testimony. I read it beforehand and I appreciate it.

Senator Roach, you are now recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF TREGENZA A. ROACH

Mr. ROACH. Good morning, Chairman Farenthold. Good morning, Delegate Plaskett, to your staff, to the people of the Virgin Islands.

My name is Tregenza A. Roach, a member of the 32nd of the United States Virgin Islands. This is my third term.

Despite my office, however, I would like to speak to you as a private person, a resident who experienced both Hurricanes Irma and Maria firsthand, as a person who had to navigate the recovery process for my aging mother whose home sustained substantial damage, and as a person who helped others navigate, which has been an arduous recovery process.

Secondly, I would like to share my thoughts as a policymaker, especially in light of the fact that a new hurricane season starts in June, and in light of the information provided by many of those who study the changes in the world's climate and warned that most storms like these are in our future, more fierce and damaging than those we have experienced before.

My mother is an 82-year old widow who has her faculties. She tills the soil and harvest everything from pumpkin to guavaberry. That is to say that despite some of the maladies that accompany aging, she is a fit and active woman. But for the first time in a hurricane season I had to get her off the island for her own sanity and for mine, and was then left to take charge of dealing with FEMA, the Army Corps of Engineers, the Small Business Administration, insurance companies, banks.

Immediately after Hurricane Irma, I was on a hunt for a tarpaulin to cover the leaking roof. None was available up to the coming of Hurricane Maria on September 19, 2018. I was able to secure covering for the leaking roof only because a colleague, Senator Alicia "Chucky" Hansen, was able to purchase a tarpaulin commercially and bring it over on a mercy flight from St. Croix before they were hit with Hurricane Maria. I paid three men to go on the roof and put the tarp in place, but Maria came and pretty much disposed of it.

Weeks after, the Army Corps of Engineers came on the scene and covered the roof with blue. The tarpaulin has leaked since then despite follow up visits from the Corps and a local contractor who they identified to the project. I simply gave up. Virgin Islanders are not begging people. So I, like others, simply gave up and deployed pots and pans at strategic places on the floor to capture the flow.

As for FEMA, they subsequently sent an inspector who I thought was very thorough in verifying the damage. They inquired about insurance. I told them there was a policy but no content and limited structural. But their denial letter followed and a check of \$500.00.

I visited their center, sat with everyone else, provided proof of the limits on insurance and then received my second denial letter. I can appeal when I finally settle with the insurance company, which has not yet taken place. The letters have been terse with no consideration for the recipient.

The SBA process was initiated in October. Their denial was also swift in coming.

This is an aging population, both nationally and locally, and so I find it instructive to look at the impact of the processes on the elderly. Of the many calls that I received from the elderly, I want to tell you of another which illustrates the insensitivity of the process to wounded persons seeking only the assistance of their government.

Another 82-year old came to my office, a woman with her two denial letters. FEMA denied her assistance because she could not prove that she owned the property in which she lived and SBA because she could not prove that the property in which she lived was her primary residence. This is the case of a woman who had moved into the house owned by her father. She had continued to live in the house after taking care of him for 17 years up to his death.

I contacted FEMA and posed the question of whether the woman could simply get a power of attorney from the four siblings confirming that they were all part owners of the property as per the will, that she lived on the property to take care of her father, and that she continued to live there with their consent and was authorized to proceed with the recovery process on their behalf.

The FEMA officials to whom I spoke to said "yes," but no one at any of the centers had shared this possibility with this aging, tired woman. She was on her own.

As a policymaker, I think we must address the following: A more effective and timely process by the Army Corps of Engineers with roof coverings after a storm.

A permanent FEMA process—presence, sorry, in the territory or enter the fact that this is to become our new reality and that a permanent presence would mean a more efficient experience, particularly for our sister island of St. John who can be cutoff totally of power and communications with the loss of a cable from St. Thomas.

A Federal approach to recovery which considers the whole person who suffer mental and health issues following a storm, and a process which is more timely.

I thank you for listening to my testimony. I'll await any questions that you may have.

[Prepared statement of Mr. Mr. Roach follows:]

Good Morning. My name is Tregenza A. Roach, a member of the 32nd Legislature of the United States Virgin Islands. This is my third term. Despite my office, however, I would first like to speak to you as a private person, a resident who experienced both Hurricanes Irma and Maria first hand, as a person who had to navigate the recovery process for my aging Mother whose home sustained substantial damage, and as a person who helped others navigate which has been an arduous recovery maze. Secondly, I would like to share my thoughts as a policymaker, especially in light of the fact that a new hurricane season starts in June, and in light of the information provided by many of those who study the changes in the world's climate and warn that more storms like these are in our future, more fierce and damaging than those we have experienced before.

My Mother is an 82-year-old widow who has her faculties, tills the soil, and harvests everything from pumpkins to guavaberry. This is to say, that despite some of the maladies that accompany aging, she is a fit and active woman. But for the first time in a hurricane season, I had to get her off the island—for her own sanity, and for mine, and was then left to take charge of dealing with FEMA, Army Corps of Engineers, Small Business Administration, insurance company, banks.

Immediately after Hurricane Irma, I was on a hunt for a tarpaulin to cover the leaking roof. None was available up to the coming of Hurricane Maria on September 19, 2018. I was able to secure covering for the leaking roof, only because a colleague, Senator Alicia "Chucky" Hansen was able to purchase a tarpaulin commercially and bring it over on a mercy flight from St. Croix before they were hit with Hurricane Maria. I paid three men to go on the roof and put the tarp in place, but Maria came and pretty much disposed of it. Weeks later, the Army Corps of Engineer came on the scene and covered the roof with blue. The tarpaulin has leaked since then, despite follow up visits from the Corps and a local contractor who they identified to the project. I simply gave up. Virgin Islanders are not begging people, so I,, like others, simply gave up and deployed pots and pans at strategic places on the floor to capture the flow.

As for FEMA, they subsequently sent an inspector who I thought was very thorough in verifying the damage. They inquired about insurance, I told them that there was a policy, but no content, and limited structural, but their denial letter followed and a check for \$500.00. I visited their center sat with everyone else, provided proof of the limits on insurance, and then received my second denial letter. I can appeal when I finally settle with the insurance company, which has not as yet taken place. The letters have been terse, with no consideration for the recipient.

The SBA process was initiated in October. This denial was also swift in coming. I think in one day.

This is an aging population, both nationally and locally, and so I find it instructive to look at the impact of the processes on the elderly. Of the many calls from the elderly, I want to tell you of another which illustrates the insensitivity of the process to wounded persons seeking only the assistance of their government. Another 82-year old, came to my office with her two denial

letters. FEMA denied her assistance because she could not prove that she owned the property in which she lived, and SBA because she could not prove that the property in which she lived was her primary residence. This is the case of a woman who had moved into a house owned by her Father. She had continued to live in the house after taking care of him for 17 years up to his death. Because the estate had not been probated, both the tax bill, and the utility bills still came in his name. She presented a will which she had to FEMA and SBA, which bequeathed the property to her and to four other heirs.

I contacted FEMA and posed the question of whether the woman could simply get a power of attorney from her four siblings, confirming that they were all part owners as per the will, that she had lived in the property to take care of her Father, and continued to live there after his death and with their consent, and that she was authorized to proceed with the process of restoration on their behalf and with their consent. The FEMA officials to whom I spoke, said, 'yes'. But no one at any of these agencies shared this with her. She was on her own.

I have subsequently applied to the emergency repair program which is being carried out under the auspices of the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority. This application was completed on February 14, 2018. A team of inspectors came to the property within days of the application. I was contacted on Saturday and informed that a contractor has been assigned to the project and will need to schedule a walk through. I will see how far I get with this one, but I can honestly say that I don't know how some persons have managed with this and am certain that my Mother would have thrown her hands in the air and have chosen to take matters into their own hands.

As a policy maker, I think we must address the following:

A more effective and timely process by the Army Corps of Engineers with roof covering after a storm.

A permanent FEMA presence in the Territory.

A federal approach to recovery which considers the whole person.

A process which is more timely.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. All right, thank you very much. I'll recognize myself for 5 minutes of questioning.

So, Senator Roach, I want to first point out that I understand the issues with FEMA having dealt with this with a constituent issue as well. I've spoken to FEMA numerous times and volunteered to rewrite their letters for them because typically a denial letter from FEMA is not a denial letter. It's there is something wrong with your file. It needs to not say denial right there up in the top in big lettering. It needs to—it definitely does need to be more compassionate.

With that being said, let's talk a little bit about housing. You've got a unique situation in the Virgin Islands with respect to housing. In the district I represent we have hundreds of people living in temporary housing in hotels. But a vast majority of the hotels in the Virgin Islands are unoccupied, and filling those hotel rooms with local residents takes away from the ability of other local residents to make money off of tourist.

If you were the President or if you were the head of FEMA, what would you do to address the short-term housing needs? It's my understanding we still have people in the Virgin Islands living in tents.

Mr. ROACH. Well, I think I would offer a two-pronged approach. I remember in the aftermath of Hurricane Marilyn that there were temporary structures that were erected. I can recall at least two places on the Island of St. Thomas, one on the east and one just adjacent to the Charlotte Amalie High School which provided temporary housing.

I think the other consideration would be how to make damaged homes more liveable. The second part of my testimony, which I didn't read, which you have for the record was a new program, at least new to the extent that I was made aware of it on approximately the 10th of February. That is a program that is being conducted under the auspices of the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority and it is intended to make living spaces more habitable.

So I applied for that program on the 14th of February. I know because it was Valentine's Day. They subsequently sent out an inspector, who I believe—actually a team of inspectors who were very thorough.

I mean, they asked questions about whether there was hot water to the property. They asked questions whether there was any damage to the gas lines bringing gas into the kitchen. They asked if there was a working refrigerator. They asked about smoke detectors. They asked about whether the cistern had been cleaned, et cetera.

But then the follow-up visit I just found out on Saturday that just past, the 10th of March, that they are now coming again to the property with an inspector.

Now, although it seems to me that is a very thorough program, we are looking again. I initiated my FEMA application on the 14th of September. I was one of those few people who had internet access and I did the application online, the 14th of September. This is the 12th of March and except for the leaking tarp, except for the \$500.00 from FEMA, I think that sums up about the assistance.

And I think making the space more liveable would be incredibly good for the mental health of the person, one; and, two, particularly—and I always want to emphasize the elderly—particularly in the instances of the elderly, if they could stay in their home with just some accommodations to make it more liveable, I think they would be in a better condition to complete the recovery process.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Thank you.

Senator Jackson referred a little bit about insurance as well and how long it's taking for the insurance company to pay. In Texas the vast majority of hurricane assistance—insurances is handled by TWIA, which is the State-operated insurance programming. Believe me we've had plenty of complaints about that. I'm glad I'm not in the Texas legislature. I only have to deal with FEMA, not TWIA.

In the Virgin Islands can you talk a little bit about the experience of collecting insurance, and if there is anything you think either the State or the territory or the Federal Government ought to do to improve that?

Mr. JACKSON. I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The issues relating to insurance in the territory has been one of contention. Many of the homeowners have expressed their displeasure in the manner to which their insurance companies have taken them through the process of their adjustors and likewise the time that it took for the adjuster to arrive at their homes.

In addition to that, the issue of under insurance continues to be a big issue here in the territory. Of course education is key. And through Banking and Insurance and several of the forums prior to the storm encouraging our residents to be much more educated in the process to which they purchase insurance and likewise what under insurance would mean in the event of a devastating hurricane or disaster. For the most part most residents here have wind-storm insurance coverage, very little have flood insurance.

So as a result of the challenges that many have had with our insurance companies, we have had an engagement with Banking and Insurance in reference to how we can improve the process here in the territory and likewise protect the interest of the consumer as they are purchasing insurance through these companies, and likewise the fine line that many may not read in reference to the coverage and likewise make informed decisions.

Likewise the banking community also has a responsibility to make sure that their customers are also fully aware of the process to which the banks and the customer have a relationship with coverage for their homes in the territory.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. And I see my time is up. Hopefully, we'll have time to do one more round of questions because I do have some questions. I do have one quick question, though. It's kind of a yes or no.

The flood insurance here is the same as in the continental United States, right? It's underwritten by FEMA?

Mr. JACKSON. Yes.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. All right, Ms. Plaskett, you are up for 5 minutes.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you.

I did, Mr. Chairman, I want you to know, however, that it's my understanding for most homeowners here what the insurance that

they need would be in fact windstorm insurance, which for many homeowners can run over a thousand dollars a month.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Trust me, I live in a hurricane zone.

Ms. PLASKETT. Right, so that's the concern.

Thank you so much for being here. And, Senator Jackson, so much of your testimony that you were not able to give but it's written testimony, it's very informative. I'm sure that the Committee will have a chance to read through much of it. So the questions that I'm going to ask are directly related to your statement so that you can get that information on the record as well.

I wanted to ask you, Senator Jackson, about debris removal. If you could or, Senator O'Reilly, talk about the difference between the debris removal on St. Thomas, which was run by the Army Corps—managed by the Army Corps and St. Croix, which was managed by the Department of Public Works which I understand. Could you tell us about how that process has occurred here in the Virgin Islands?

Mr. JACKSON. I'll let Senator O'Reilly speak to St. Croix.

I'll speak to St. Thomas in that for many of us it's been very frustrating with the process of debris removal from our neighborhoods, highways and the like. I would say that the early process to how we get to clean up our communities has been one of contention.

I say contention in that many of the areas of our communities still have debris. We visited St. John yesterday on the east end and I was aghast of the amount of debris that is still on the roadsides in addition to the utility wiring and some of the remnants of our electrical poles and the like that are littered on the side of our roads.

The Army Corps of Engineers in collaboration with the Department of Public Works and of course the company series has been engaged in this district. And of course through the process of public announcements, which I feel in many ways have not been very successful because if you don't listen to a particular radio program, you may not know the schedule coming into your neighborhood and the like.

So there needs to be more on the ground communications with residents in terms of when do you put out your green waste, when do you put out your electronic waste and other items? In some cases residents have had to really struggle, especially our elderly in getting that waste to the curbside in many of our neighborhoods, which has been very challenging for many of our residents, especially our elderly.

Ms. PLASKETT. Can I ask when did you first see Federal agencies on the ground doing waste removal, debris removal? Can you recall?

Mr. JACKSON. Well, right after the storm the Department of Public Works was mobilized. In addition to that, we had the military on the ground and other emergency entities like what we have here in terms of the response.

Ms. PLASKETT. Do you know when that was? Because as I recall for quite a number of weeks it was Public Works, yes, the local Public Works and residents who were doing much of the debris removal.

Mr. JACKSON. Much of the debris removal began with the residents of the territory. Public Works started to deal with the main thoroughfares. But within our residential communities they were challenged with the lack of assistance in getting out of their respective neighborhoods and into the main thoroughfares of our roadway system.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you.

Senator O'Reilly, you have spent an enormous amount of time in the hospitals in dealing with the issues there. Is there anything that you would like to share with the committee about the evacuation, the hospital process or anything you'd like to add at this point?

Ms. RIVERA-O'REILLY. I would. And good morning, Chairman Farenthold and Ms. Plaskett.

With the few seconds left, I'd like to share—

Ms. PLASKETT. You can take more than a second.

Ms. RIVERA-O'REILLY. Thank you.

I'd like to share the—since the president already mentioned the concerns regarding the medical evacuees, I'd like to share specifically regarding the structures of the hospitals.

It is my opinion, as the chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on Hospitals and Human Services, that the assessment by FEMA of the structures is too slow, that the change in personnel by FEMA has delayed the final assessment of the structures. Now the assessment has to establish that the repairs would cost 50 or more percent in order for a new structure to be built.

As of today, we still do not know whether we will have new hospitals. In the interim, individuals are flown out of the territory on a daily basis to receive medical care. I think it is unacceptable that a Federal agency that is trained to respond to disasters such as FEMA has taken this long to make a final determination regarding the status and the condition and the future of our healthcare structures, infrastructures and our healthcare services.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Now we'll move to the second round of questions because I've probably got enough to keep us here all day. But let's visit for a second and I'll ask each of our panel members if you would tell us what—with respect to the Federal response, if you would give us what you think the best thing done is and the worse or a suggestion for improvement, where we need to focus primarily on improvement.

I'm one of these people who believes if you are going to criticize something you also need to say something good or have a suggestion for fixing it. So I'll give each of our folks a chance to do that.

Senator ROACH. Senators are an ambiguous term here.

Mr. ROACH. Well, I would echo the Delegate in recognizing that the assistance provided by the Federal Government is valuable and useful, and that the people who came to assist with the process are people who left their homes and their families to come here and spend time with us in a very difficult moment. So I think we definitely would have to be appreciative of that.

I think one of the programs that I got the least complaints about was the food, the SNAP Emergency Disaster Funding. But as a thought on how we could improve going forward, I really believe

that the people involved in the process have to be more sensitive to what we are experiencing here, and to be mindful of the fact that we are living in a place that is going to be exposed to more of these storms.

We're living in a place that has, if not the highest, it's certainly one of the highest cost of living under the United States flag, and that construction cost and food cost are not what they imagine them to be. And if they approach it with that kind of information and with that sensitivity, I think the process can be improved for everyone.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Senator Jackson, do you want to take the same question?

Mr. JACKSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

As Senator Roach stated in reference to the aid that the FEMA disaster has provided to the territory and their response to the territory, we are grateful. I think the areas that I would like to see improved is that how do you deal with territories during a natural disaster?

Of course we're separated by water by thousands of miles. The protocols that were put in place, for example, for the storage of emergency goods in Puerto Rico, we can all say that that's a failure, that likewise the Virgin Islands was impacted by these two hurricanes, and that Puerto Rico also was severely impacted, and that the ability to provision the U.S. Virgin Islands became even more so challenging.

In areas, for example, a hurricane zone like the Virgin Islands or the Caribbean, but specifically to the Virgin Islands, the loss of roofing material is going to be the greatest impact that you would have from storms and infrastructure. The issues relating to not having available tarps in the territory to sufficiently cover our people during these storms is an area that we should improve in terms of how do we take care of the population?

One of the areas also was food security. Many of the meals ready to eat coming on the ground it's understandable as you address the immediate recovery or response to the community. But then at the same time who makes those decisions in terms of what meals, whether they are culturally sensitive?

So the Red Cross stepped up to the plate as well as individuals like Tim Duncan that provided wholesome meals to our community versus meals ready to eat and snacks in boxes. So the nutritional health of our communities is really very important. I think those were the areas that FEMA could do better in.

And likewise the response on the ground in getting the professionals in to the territory. For example, we've been advocating for the impact of cultural resources and only most recently professionals have come in to the territory to assist entities in this regard of our cultural institutions, our libraries, our museums, our cultural heritage sites and the like.

Those are just some examples that I provided to you, Mr. Chairman, that we could do improvement in.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. And, Senator Rivera-O'Reilly, do you want to take a stab at that one as well.

Ms. RIVERA-O'REILLY. I'd like to. Thank you so very much.

I think that shelter, water and food are essential in the immediate response. We felt very comforted by the presence of the military and we are so thankful. As soon as military trucks were on the ground in collaboration with our National Guard, it gave our citizens a sense that they were being taken care of. There were truckloads moving across the islands filled with water and MREs. I am so grateful, I am so grateful for that.

There are a number of areas that I believe can be improved. I urge you to consider the increase in the reimbursement rates under CMS for Medicare and Medicaid. It will help our hospitals significantly to remain operational.

I also urge you to look at the manner in which the Army Corps of Engineers rolls out their Blue Roof Program. It is designed for stateside housing, for stateside roofs, not Caribbean construction. And so when they came out and installed the blue roofs, what they did was caused greater damage to the roofs. So where there was one leak after the blue roof was installed, the residents expected there would be no leaks, there were multiple leaks.

I also would like to recommend that when FEMA comes to the ground that it comes with its own pods, that it brings its own shelters because they have saturated the remaining hotel rooms in the territory. What that did was that it inhibited and impeded adjusters from coming to the territory because there was no housing. So all of your Federal personnel completely saturated the remaining hotel rooms, also limiting hotel rooms for the tourists.

I will also ask that you consider including the Virgin Islands in the Denton Act. It turns out that we are not.

So military airplanes cannot be utilized to move humanitarian aid to our Virgin Islands after disasters. We need to be able to use military planes so that individuals in the mainland who want to send supplies are able to do so.

Those would be my requests. Of course if you allow me more time, I'd say that FEMA should as well as SBA consider including non-English proficient individuals in the teams that they send to the territory.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Thank you.

I thought FEMA did that. We've got a lot of Spanish speakers down in our area. I'll certainly look into that as well.

Ms. RIVERA-O'REILLY. They didn't here.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. All right, Ms. Plaskett, we'll let you go and then we'll finish this round of questioning and go to our Federal agencies.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you, sure.

I have three pieces—three written testimonies that I'd like to include in the record. One is from Virginia Clairmont, Queen Street, Frederiksted. The other is presented by Mrs. Ruby Simmonds Esannason here on St. Thomas. And then the third is by Senator Jenelle Sarauw, a Senator in the 32nd Legislature.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Without objection so ordered.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you. And before I ask questions, there was just a couple of pieces in this testimony that I wanted to get on the record before I ask these questions.

One, of course, is the very moving testimony and statement that was given by Mrs. Simmonds Esannason talking about the evacuees which has been discussed by the witnesses here this morning, by the senators. She says in the State of the Territory Address presented on January 22, 2018, Governor Kenneth E. Mapp noted that 682 persons were evacuated for medical reasons and some 248 still remain on the mainland at that time. Since then I have asked what happened to the other 434 persons? How many of them came home in the cargo section of the plane?

I can tell you specifically about the ones I know of, including my son-in-law, the aunts of two of my stepdaughters, a very dear friend, and the relatives of other persons with whom I've spoken or whose stories have been reported in the news.

There are so many people that we lost during these hurricanes. But she gives specifically the names of Sergeant Aaron Hodge, Sr., Ashley Frett, Sr., Cynthia Thomas, Arroya Correa Rivera and El Marina Palmer, all of whom died after the hurricanes in the States as medical evacuees.

I think that's important for us to remember that the effects of hurricanes here in the Virgin Islands continued well after the actual hurricanes took place.

One of the things that she points out that I'd like to then present a question to the witnesses is that she talks about going to VITEMA, which is the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency seeking information about where individuals were after leaving the hospital.

Were they in Puerto Rico? Were they in St. Croix? Where were they located? For quite a period of time many individuals could not be found.

She says she was able to find out from Sergeant Hodge that when he was in Puerto Rico the situation that he faced there was really not a very good one. When he was in Puerto Rico, I'm quoting, "He told me that drinking water was being rationed. He was being given water in a container the size of a fruit cup. That's about three ounces. This is what was given to a full grown adult. He was eventually evacuated to Atlanta, Georgia where, unfortunately, he passed away."

I would like to ask the senators these questions. And Senator Sarauw also talks about the situation on St. John probably being more dire than the situation on the other islands. She talks about the distribution sites which Senator O'Reilly also gave us some indication about how important they were.

My question to you all really relates to the relationship and the amount of communication and the coordination between the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the local one.

Knowing that we're dealing with two Category 5 hurricanes and that our own resources are very restrained, FEMA has been at this for innumerable years, do you feel that there was sufficient support coming from FEMA to pick up the gaps initially knowing where they were? How did that work? Was that done correctly? Are there ways that it could be improved, the coordination between FEMA and the local agencies that are in place? How can we work on that better?

Senator Jackson.

Mr. JACKSON. It's a very good question and we've spent a tremendous amount of time in the EOC and VITEMA and had the opportunity to actually witness and to be engaged with the process of response. I have to say on both sides we need to work on the response from a natural disaster in the territory. I think given the fact that we are islands, we are outside of the continental United States and that likewise FEMA's history in the territory, of course Hurricane Hugo and Hurricane Marilyn, gave the territory some experience as it relates to FEMA and what is necessary for emergency response.

Who would have imagined that the Virgin Islands in its centennial year would be struck with two Category 5 hurricanes 12 days apart? Who prepares for that? And how does an emergency entity like VITEMA with limited resources really rise to the occasion of responding to the disaster? They, themselves, were not fully prepared and likewise FEMA representatives coming into the territory with the lack of communications, driving around this territory most time were lost, not having the local scout or representative with them as they were going into these various neighborhoods was very challenging.

I do think that we really need to revisit how FEMA and the territory protocols are put in place for a response in light of these two hurricanes. And likewise most recently the tsunami notification to the territory that created a panic to our residents, we need to be prepared, fully prepared. Likewise how our relationship with the Federal Government hitting the ground is to be done because it was very chaotic.

Ms. PLASKETT. Did anyone else want to add something to that?

Ms. RIVERA-O'REILLY. I'd like to, Congresswoman Plaskett.

I believe that we should consider training a cadre of local residents who are now currently working with FEMA, train them so that they, too, are able to be deployed to other areas in the United States that are hit. So that when, not if, but when this territory is again the victim of a disaster, that those FEMA trained local residents are deployed here because they are more familiar with the territory.

I also felt that FEMA took a back seat and allowed VITEMA to take the lead. I am not sure—and I know that that is the protocol. I know that we are in charge. But I'm not sure that we can be in charge of solving our own disasters when our own homes are affected.

Ms. PLASKETT. When you are in the middle of it yourself.

Ms. RIVERA-O'REILLY. Yes, if you are in the middle of the disaster it is difficult to really see, and so FEMA would take a step back and allow the local government to make the decision. I would prefer to see a real partnership, a side by side relationship where best practices are recommended to the local government so that VITEMA is empowered because it had to respond to disasters on all four islands.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you.

I know that I had heated and very colorful discussions with Brock Long because FEMA of course as we know in the Federal Government only gives what is requested. But if you don't know what to request and you are dealing with the magnitude of dis-

aster, it's difficult to make those kind of assessments on the ground.

There needs to be—we end up hiring companies to assist us in making the request. There should be a natural liaison in working with FEMA. It's kind of like they are almost hiding the money or hiding the ball and you have to figure out which hand it's in to ask the right thing. So, thank you.

I know that's also frustrating for the FEMA workers who are here on the ground who want to do the right thing, who have empathy and want to be a part of the recovery. But they have to wait for the okays that they are getting in Washington.

And if you would, Senator Roach.

Mr. ROACH. Thank you, Delegate Plaskett.

I think we have to consider the need for adjustment of policies and processes both locally and federally. In our case we have a statute that gives the Governor complete authority to deal with the Federal structures in a state of emergency. He's the point person for FEMA. He gets to determine whether a state of emergency should be extended and the length of time that it can be renewed. I think we ought to look at that structure.

I think if the reality of the persons living offshore of the United States, and in particular the residents of the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, that it is time to also consider new structures.

I believe that FEMA should have a permanent presence in the territory, that they should literally be here year-round. I believe that that would assist in having better relationships with them and the local agencies. It would lead to a more timely response in the case of natural disasters, and that we are living in extraordinary times that call for extraordinary solutions that we might not have considered before.

Thank you.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you.

I know we are finishing this, but I would like to also place into the record another testimony, written testimony, a statement for the record that was given to me by Meaghan Enright. She is a resident of St. John and has been working with Love City Strong and Love for Love City Foundation on the recovery efforts in St. John.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Without objection so ordered.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. I'd like to thank our panel for being here and answering our questions and providing both the written and verbal testimony. We could go on but we do have a panel of Federal folks that we would like to talk to as well. So thank you all for being here. It's been great visiting your island.

In order to allow us time to set up for the next panel, we're going to take a 5-minute recess.

[Recess.]

Mr. FARENTHOLD. The subcommittee will come to order. I love the big gavel. It's like twice the size of the one we use in Washington.

We've got a new panel of witnesses. I'd like to take the opportunity to introduce them.

First we have Mr. William "Bill" Vogel. He's the Federal Coordinating Officer at the Federal Emergency Management Agency a/k/a FEMA.

We have Mr. Murad “Mojo” Raheem, the ASPR Regional Emergency Coordinator for Region II at the Department of Health and Human Services. Welcome.

We have Colonel Scott Heintzelman, Defense Coordinating Officer for FEMA Region II at the Department of Defense.

We have Colonel Robert J. Clark, Commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Field Recovery Officer or Office.

Mr. Randy Lavasseur, Caribbean Group Superintendent for the National Park Service.

And we have Mr. Henry “Hank” Dynka. He’s the manager of In-Plant Support for the Northeast Area of Operations for the United States Postal Service.

Welcome, gentlemen. And pursuant to committee rules, we ask that you stand and be sworn in.

Do you solemnly swear or affirm that the testimony you are about to give is the truth, the whole and nothing but the truth so help you God?

Thank you. You all may be seated.

Let the record reflect all the witnesses answered in the affirmative.

I believe all of you were in the audience for our first panel. The same basic rules apply. We’ve got your entire written testimony and we ask that you give a synopsis within 5 minutes, hit the high points. As I said, the yellow light means we’re just about done. Red light means wrap it up.

So we’ll start first with Mr. Vogel. You’re recognized for 5 minutes, sir.

PANEL II

WITNESS STATEMENTS

STATEMENT OF WILLIAM VOGEL

Mr. VOGEL. Good morning, Chairman Farenthold, Ranking Member Plaskett. My name is William Vogel, the Federal Coordinating Officer. I’m here to testify about the critical role that FEMA has played in the U.S. Virgin Islands over the past 6 months.

U.S. Virgin Islanders were making progress after the devastation of Hurricane Irma in September when just two weeks later the second Category 5 storm struck the territory. And in the months since Hurricane Maria, a large scale coordinated effort has been underway to help the island communities and survivors get back on their feet.

FEMA and our Federal partners are working with the U.S. Virgin Islands Government to drive the recovery forward to meet the needs of hurricane survivors and to repair and rebuild communities stronger and safer and to lessen the impact when storms strike in the future.

FEMA coordinates the Federal response to a disaster and in the U.S. Virgin Islands we initially assigned 55 other Federal agencies to assist in response and recovery. These agencies responded immediately and deployed personnel to the territory along with the Department of the—I’m sorry, the Department of Homeland Security served capacity for us and FEMA.

Within two weeks of Maria, 2,500 Federal employees had been deployed to the U.S. Virgin Islands in addition to 6,000 Coast Guard and Department of Defense staff served both the USVI and Puerto Rico. All totaled we issued 331 mission assignments totaling \$698 million.

In the 6 months of recovery, milestones have been achieved. Roads have been cleared of storm related debris, most of the airline flights have resumed, seaports are active, and stores and restaurants have opened. I'm pleased to note that the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority reports that power has been restored to all customers able to receive electrical hookups in the territory, more than 55,000 customers.

For FEMA's individual assistance and public assistance programs and low interest disaster loans from the U.S. Small Business Administration and claim payments by the National Flood Insurance Program, more than \$810 million has been provided to households, businesses and territorial agencies as a result of Irma and Maria. As of the 9th of March, more than \$74 million has been provided directly to individuals and households for rental assistance, housing repairs and other needs.

Housing is a priority for us because many homes were damaged and there are few rental resources available. There is no standard solution for survivors. Each person's situation is very unique. We are very much aware of the people living with friends and relatives creating very difficult living conditions. I can tell you that I have spoken personally to people who are desperate for housing on the islands.

We have several programs that are helping. We provide grants for home repair. We provide rental assistance. We are funding territorial programs for the Emergency Home Repair V.I. to provide money for people to make basic emergency repairs so that they can stay in their home while they work on a long-term solution. The funding comes from FEMA's Sheltering and Temporary Essential Power Program.

We have the Multi-Family Lease and Repair Program to pay for repairs to rental units if the landlord will let us place disaster survivors in those units.

We have a direct lease program in which we lease rental units and place survivors in them. We also have a permanent housing construction direct repairs so that we can hire contractors to make essential repairs in lieu of providing other financial assistance.

We've operated a total of 10 disaster recovery centers across all three islands to help answer questions related to these assistance programs and survivors' specific housing needs. These centers receive more than 65,000 visits.

We've completed all housing inspections and we are reaching out to individual survivors who have special housing needs.

The housing side of recovery is never a simple process. But for a territory that expands several islands where housing resources are scarce, the challenges are multiplied. We're looking for every possible way to support survivors who need housing. This is my number one priority.

Installing temporary facilities for critical infrastructure is also a top priority. FEMA's public assistance program staff is working

closely with the Virgin Islands Department of Health and Education to construct interim facilities for medical and hospitals and schools that were damaged. FEMA is also working with our Federal and local partners on making permanent repairs to those critical facilities and other public infrastructure.

To date we have reimbursed the territory \$262 and a half million for emergency work, mostly for debris removal and other power restoration. At the outset it was important to get electrical power restored and remove debris from roadways.

I can report that, working with the Army Corps of Engineers and the territorial agencies, we've removed 887,000 cubic yards of debris left by the storms, a 102 percent is the total estimated debris beginning at the operation. FEMA has authorized a 100 percent cost share for debris removal.

Nearly 800 power company workers were deployed to the islands to restore power. Students were able to return to school within weeks after the hurricanes because of the generators installed by the Army Corps of Engineers. In all, the Army Corps installed 180 generators in critical facilities such as schools, hospitals, emergency services, government agencies and other places enabling communities to continue functioning after the storms.

It's been a big operation, particularly with the logistics, challenges involved in providing assistance to the island communities. We are deeply aware of the stress that these hurricanes have placed on the population and the territorial government. We will continue to support the territory's priorities and we will be on the job until the territory tells us when we have completed our work.

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today and I look forward to answering your questions. Thank you.

[Prepared statement of Mr. Vogel follows:]

STATEMENT
OF
WILLIAM VOGEL
FEDERAL COORDINATING OFFICER
FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY
BEFORE
THE
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ST. THOMAS LEGISLATURE BUILDING
ST. THOMAS, U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

“The Historic 2017 Hurricane Season: Impacts on the U.S. Virgin Islands”

Submitted
By
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20472

March 12, 2018

Introduction

Good morning, Chairman Farenthold, Ranking Member Plaskett, and members of the Subcommittee. I am William Vogel, the Federal Coordinating Officer for the disaster response in the U.S. Virgin Islands following Hurricanes Irma and Maria. On behalf of U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Nielsen and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Administrator Long, thank you for the opportunity to discuss DHS and FEMA's efforts to assist with response and recovery in the U.S. Virgin Islands following recent devastating events.

2017 Hurricane Season

This year's historic hurricane season has been a true test of the Nation's ability to respond to and recover from multiple concurrent disasters. The United States has had three major hurricanes make landfall this season: Harvey, Irma, and Maria. The impacts of these events are substantial. Roughly 25.8 million people were affected by these three storms – eight percent of the entire U.S. population. FEMA, our partner agencies in the federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial governments, in addition to vital volunteer relief organizations and the private sector, work in concert, with unity of effort, to serve the needs of disaster survivors.

FEMA alone cannot deliver disaster assistance to this vast number of survivors. Unity of effort is required for disaster response and recovery on any scale, but especially during this historic season. All levels of government, non-profit organizations, private sector businesses, and survivors must work together, each drawing upon their unique skills and capabilities, to meet the needs of disaster survivors.

Hurricanes Irma and Maria: Impacts and Initial Response Efforts in the U.S. Virgin Islands

On September 6, the eye of Hurricane Irma made official landfall in the British Virgin Islands (just to the north of the U.S. Virgin Islands) as a catastrophic Category 5. Extreme winds and heavy rainfall ravaged parts of the U.S. Virgin Islands, particularly St. Thomas and St. John.

President Trump approved an emergency declaration on September 5, with a major disaster declaration (DR-4335) following on September 7. This disaster declaration made federal funding available to affected individuals on the islands of St. John and St. Thomas through FEMA's Individual Assistance Program. Federal funding was also initially made available to territorial and eligible local governments and certain non-profit organizations for emergency work and repair or replacement of facilities; funding was available for all areas of the U.S. Virgin Islands (FEMA's Public Assistance Program, emergency work, categories A-B). The disaster declaration has since been amended to expand the assistance by including Public Assistance, permanent work, categories C-G and Hazard Mitigation Grant Program for all areas of the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The Federal Government deployed assets to the Caribbean in anticipation of the storm, including incident management assistance teams, urban search and rescue teams, and medical assistance

teams. Prior to Irma's impact, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) evacuated dialysis patients and their caregivers to Puerto Rico so they could continue receiving life-saving treatment. As a former Defense Coordinating Officer in FEMA Regions I, II and IV, I understood the value of having the Department of Defense on the ground with us pre-impact. The Region II Defense Coordinating Element deployed with the FEMA Regional Incident Management Assistance Team (IMAT) to St. Croix on September 4. These deployments allowed FEMA to coordinate quickly with territorial officials and perform rapid problem analysis to prioritize immediate federal support needs following the storm.

FEMA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) co-located with the U.S. Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA) in downtown St. Croix from the onset. Since the facility is close to the Government House, the proximity allowed continuous collaboration on priorities and objectives with territorial leadership and our VITEMA partners.

The collaboration took a public form as well, as I joined Governor Mapp at daily news conferences at Government House to keep the public informed of response activities and outline the path forward.

Within days of Irma's impact:

- FEMA sent more than 575,000 meals and 380,000 liters of water to the USVI for the response effort. These life-saving commodities, along with cots, baby formula, temporary roofing materials, and other necessities, went to the U.S. Virgin Islands National Guard for distribution at local Points of Distribution in St. John and St. Thomas. These items also went to shelters operated by our recovery partners.
- The USS Wasp was stationed off the coast of the U.S. Virgin Islands to conduct medical evacuations of critical care patients from St. Thomas to St. Croix and to perform damage assessments in support of the territorial government.
- HHS and U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) had medical teams supporting overwhelmed hospitals and partnering with urban search and rescue teams to locate and evacuate dialysis patients.
- The U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) conducted port reconstitution efforts and damage assessment overflights.
- The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) responders were on the ground in St. Thomas and St. Croix for electricity restoration tracking and technical assistance. DOE was also working with the USACE to coordinate emergency power generation in St. Thomas and St. John.
- Generators arrived for installation on St. Thomas and St. John critical facilities, including shelters, hospitals, emergency service buildings, and water treatment plants. The USACE deployed a Power Planning and Response Team to assist with assessments and generator installations at these critical facilities.
- FEMA Mobile Emergency Response Support (MERS) personnel were on the ground to support communication needs for the U.S. Virgin Islands.
- A FEMA Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Incident Support Team-Advance element and Virginia Task Force One (VA-TF1), a National Incident Management System Type 1 task force, were on the ground conducting operations in the U.S. Virgin Islands. FEMA had deployed additional USAR support, including Canine Search and logistics teams.

- U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) had coordinated with the USCG to deploy a 67-person Disaster Assistance Recovery Team for response and recovery work on St. Thomas.

Two weeks into response efforts from Hurricane Irma, the core of Hurricane Maria passed just south of the U.S. Virgin Islands on its way to Puerto Rico. Maria's outer eyewall devastated St. Croix with powerful winds and heavy rainfall, damaging the communications and power grid, destroying homes, and downing trees. President Trump approved a major disaster declaration for Hurricane Maria (DR-4340) on September 20, making FEMA's Individual Assistance, Public Assistance, and Hazard Mitigation Grant Programs available for the whole territory.

While St. Croix had been largely spared from the ravages of Irma, Maria's impact meant all three of the territory's main islands were devastated.

The joint federal and territorial response team launched a massive and united effort to meet survivors' immediate emergency and medical needs, restore communications, power, and water services, and address the disruptions to the islands' supply chain caused by sea and airport closures and the large quantities of debris blocking roadways.

After Hurricane Maria impacted the U.S. Virgin Islands, federal assets continued life-saving and life-sustaining operations, including:

- FEMA urban search and rescue operations began with initial damage assessments and intelligence reports. The USCG conducted search and rescue operations in St. Croix and surrounding waters.
- FEMA loaded vessels with more than 1.3 million meals, 2 million liters of water, 30 generators, and 6,000 cots that were already enroute to St. Thomas to offload once ports were open.
- The U.S. Army National Guard conducted security operations, route clearance, traffic control, and food and water distribution.
- The U.S. Marine Corps' 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit inserted an Air Control Element at the airport in St. Thomas in order to help open the airfield. The Federal Aviation Administration deployed a Mobile Air Traffic Control Tower (ATCT) to St. Thomas after Hurricane Irma. The Mobile ATCT was removed to a secure off island location prior to impact of Hurricane Maria and redeployed after the hurricane had passed.
- U.S. Northern Command conducted initial incident awareness and assessment missions using U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps air assets.
- DOE deployed emergency responders to coordinate with the Western Area Power Administration (WAPA), the American Public Power Association, DOD, and FEMA to support grid damage assessment and power restoration efforts.
- A Joint Debris Task Force of territorial and federal agencies, including FEMA, USACE and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), was established to prioritize road clearing efforts and address the enormous quantity of debris that threatened public health and safety.

FEMA and our federal partners continue to push forward vigorously on the back-to-back recovery missions across the U.S. Virgin Islands. Our open, collaborative relationships with

Delegate Plaskett, Governor Mapp, and territorial government agencies provide a strong foundation as we work together on every front to meet survivors' needs and restore essential services.

Within two weeks of Maria's impact, we had more than 2,500 federal staff on the ground in the U.S. Virgin Islands – not including the more than 6,000 USCG and Title 10 DOD personnel, who were supporting both Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The interagency effort to meet one of the governor's top objectives resulted in the opening of schools in St. Thomas and St. John just weeks after the hurricanes. In addition, many more schools have opened on all three islands, allowing students to move forward with the 2017-2018 school year. Supporting Governor Mapp's priority of getting schools reopened, USACE installed generators at schools and worked with the territorial Department of Education to assess options to provide classroom space for students at damaged schools. EPA personnel helped the U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources and Department of Health to assess potential environmental dangers and water quality at the schools while local workers from the community, as well as personnel from the Danish Emergency Management Agency, assisted with the cleanup and repair efforts.

Hundreds of healthcare professionals from HHS and DOD supported and augmented local medical staff who were working steady 12-hour shifts in the weeks after the hurricanes. The military's 575th and 602nd Area Support Medical Companies (ASMC) established mobile medical units outside of St. Croix's Gov. Juan Luis Hospital and Medical Center as well as St. Thomas's Schneider Medical Center to offer backup support for patients needing medical care.

HHS continued to provide support for hospital recovery, public health, and behavioral health services. This includes providing aeromedical evacuation through the National Disaster Medical System, managing the care of medically-evacuated patients in Atlanta, working with the USVI Department of Health on vector-borne disease control, and advising on behavioral health programs for residents and first responders.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had health communications experts on the island working with the U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Health to share public health messaging with the community, including information on mold cleanup, food and medication safety, and coping after a disaster.

FEMA coordinated with the American Bar Association and local legal aid organizations to provide free legal services to impacted residents, providing support restoring legal documents that were damaged or lost in the storm and with legal issues related to accessing disaster benefits.

On October 21, FEMA launched our local hire program in the U.S. Virgin Islands, providing assistance with applications and conducting interview sessions with candidates across the territory. As of March 1, 92 local hires are on the job at our Joint Field Office in St. Croix and our Area Field Offices on St. Thomas and St. John. These workers bring critical knowledge and skills to our workforce while supporting the ongoing recovery efforts in their communities. Hiring locally allows disaster survivors to get back to work and support the territory's recovery.

The USCG supported the U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR) to coordinate pollution mitigation and the recovery of 479 vessels that sank or were displaced as a result of the hurricanes. That mission is now complete.

Meanwhile, our FEMA Hazard Mitigation team has been compiling damage assessment information and meeting with territorial agencies to identify opportunities for mitigation and resiliency efforts on the islands. This team believes there are tremendous opportunities to strengthen infrastructure as well as public and private buildings to ensure future protection from storms.

The Road to Recovery

FEMA and our federal partners will continue to support the U.S. Virgin Islands throughout the recovery process. FEMA is currently focused on augmenting territorial capabilities by providing medical services; supporting restoration activities in critical sectors such as communications, power, transportation, and water; and supporting debris removal efforts.

As of March 1, more than \$70 million in FEMA's Individual Assistance has been disbursed directly to survivors to help them get back on their feet. FEMA has also approved permanent housing construction for eligible homeowners who have a FEMA verified loss of at least \$17,000 as a result of the hurricanes. To date, 134 households meet the criteria for the Permanent Housing Construction-Repair program. FEMA representatives are reaching out to these eligible survivors to discuss their housing options. FEMA is also in the process of securing contractors to begin conducting repairs throughout the territory.

FEMA has also authorized funding for the Sheltering and Temporary Essential Power (STEP) program for the U.S. Virgin Islands. This program, which will be managed by the territorial government, allows residents to safely return to or remain in their homes as a form of shelter so they can focus on rebuilding and returning to normalcy. STEP is an emergency protective measure to perform basic, emergency work to keep survivors safe in their homes.

Because the communications challenges and power outages made it difficult for survivors to register for assistance or contact FEMA online or by phone, FEMA placed disaster survivor assistance teams on the ground throughout the territory to canvass hard-hit communities, assist survivors in registering for FEMA assistance, and provide resource referrals for their various needs. Disaster Survivor Assistance teams met with nearly 34,667 survivors directly and conducted more than 11,022 registrations.

FEMA's Disability Integration team has been in the U.S. Virgin Islands since Hurricane Irma to help coordinate the broad effort to assist all survivors. Team members are working closely with FEMA Individual Assistance specialists, HHS, the Virgin Islands Department of Health Services, the American Red Cross, the territory's aging and social services programs, and other partners to get goods and services to the islands' most vulnerable survivors. We partnered with the Atlanta-based relief organization Friends of Disabled Adults and Children to deliver hundreds of donated assistive medical devices to hurricane survivors in need.

FEMA and the Small Business Administration (SBA) established 10 Disaster Recovery Centers across the islands to directly support survivors, help them register for federal assistance, and answer questions about the assistance available to them. There have been more than 65,000 visits to these recovery centers since the first one opened in St. Croix on October 8.

As of March 1, SBA had approved \$457 million in loans to 6,777 homeowners, renters, businesses of all sizes, and private nonprofits (\$253.7 million for Irma and \$203.3 million for Maria). SBA also set up two Business Recovery Centers in the islands.

As of March 1 more than \$261 million has been obligated through FEMA's Public Assistance program, most of that for emergency protective measures, emergency power restoration and debris removal. More than 3,600 blue roofs have been installed. More than 867,000 cubic yards of debris has been collected. USACE installed a total of 180 generators at critical facilities; 13 remain in use. As of March 1, 514 federal employees were deployed to the U.S. Virgin Islands.

More than \$165 million of the \$261 million in Public Assistance grants from FEMA has been obligated to boost the emergency power restoration effort. As a result of amendments to the major disaster declarations for the U.S. Virgin Islands, FEMA is funding 100 percent of the costs of such emergency work for 180 days from the declaration dates.

The funds helped the U.S. Virgin Islands' WAPA – the Water and Power Authority – cover the cost of bringing about 700 linemen from the mainland, as well as shipping in more than 10,000 poles (including many that can withstand 200 mph winds), about 5,000 transformers, 5.6 million feet of wire, and over 600 bucket, utility and trailer trucks, and derricks to dig holes in the islands' rocky terrain. Had we not brought in those resources, the governor estimated the power would not have returned until April at the earliest. FEMA also provided \$160 million in loans to the USVI Government and WAPA through the Community Disaster Loan program for operations costs.

FEMA, in coordination with Department of Health and Human Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration, has provided \$2.5 million in funding to the U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Health to provide individual and group crisis counseling services to impacted individuals and families across the island.

Patients in need of medical care not currently available on the islands have been transported to the mainland. The Virgin Islands Department of Health (DOH) coordinated with FEMA and HHS in this effort. When a patient has Medicare, Medicaid, or private insurance, the USVI government works with the local hospital to arrange for transportation to appropriate medical facilities. For patients who do not have Medicare, Medicaid, or private insurance, HHS coordinates with the USVI government, the local hospital and HHS partners in the National Disaster Medical System to move the patient to the continental U.S. FEMA reimburses the hospital or territory for this patient transport through the FEMA Public Assistance Program. Throughout the process, non-profit partners on the mainland and in the Virgin Islands continue to support medical evacuees and their families with case management and other human services.

A joint task force is conducting a detailed assessment of medical facilities, including Juan Luis Hospital, Schneider Hospital and the Myrah Keating Smith Community Health Center. This is an important step in determining the cost to repair or replace these facilities. In the meantime, FEMA, USACE, and HHS are working to provide temporary medical facilities so people do not have to travel to the mainland for treatment of critical care conditions.

In St. Croix, a three-suite operating room is scheduled to be installed in parking lots at Juan Luis Hospital in late May. The hospital has requested proposals to construct a temporary dialysis treatment facility at Juan Luis Hospital. A temporary medical facility is planned for the Virgin Islands Department of Health clinic at the Charles Harwood Medical Complex site and in St. Thomas, a temporary medical facility is planned for Schneider Hospital. In St. John, the Army Corps estimates completion of a temporary patient care clinic at Myrah Keating Smith Community Health Center by late May.

Thirteen schools were closed after the storms and students have been attending other schools on double shifts. The Virgin Islands Department of Education has identified 47 storm-damaged properties, including schools, headquarters, adult education centers, procurement warehouses, youth rehabilitation centers, and school lunch warehouses. FEMA is working with VITEMA and the Department of Education to assess requirements for temporary facilities for schools that have been damaged.

FEMA has assisted, community, and faith-based organizations in organizing Long Term Recovery Groups on each island. Members of these groups work to empower survivors in taking an active role in restoring their own communities. The government has named a Territorial Voluntary Agency Liaison to work with local and statewide volunteer groups in donations management, home repair, home rebuilding, and addressing other disaster-caused needs that are unmet by traditional government relief programs.

Conclusion

Within two weeks in September, the U.S. Virgin Islands were hit by two catastrophic hurricanes. The road to recovery will be a long one, but we will continue to work with territorial and local partners, as well as Congress, throughout the recovery process. We will be here as long as we are needed.

For those of us who have been on the ground in the U.S. Virgin Islands since before the storms, it is a wonderful thing to be a part of this recovery and see the territory build back stronger. It is our goal to help the rebuilding effort implement mitigation and resiliency measures so that in future storms the impact will be lessened and millions of dollars saved. Progress continues to be made, but much of this recovery process still lies ahead.

I am grateful for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss this important mission, and I am happy to respond to any questions the subcommittee may have at this time. Thank you.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Thank you very much.
Mr. Raheem, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF MURAD RAHEEM

Mr. RAHEEM. Good morning, Chairman Farenthold and Ranking Member Plaskett.

Thanks for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response, ASPR, to discuss our Nation's medical and public health response and recovery efforts to the hurricanes that impacted Puerto Rico and the United States. I am Murad Raheem, the Regional Administrator of Region II within ASPR.

The scale and scope of this year's hurricane season was unprecedented. Never before has a response system been tested to support the impact of three major storm systems within such a short period. While the National Disaster Medical System, NDMS, was supporting the response following landfall of Hurricane Harvey in Texas, the system had to mobilize in Florida, Puerto Rico and the USVI to support Hurricane Irma.

Then, within days, Hurricane Maria made landfall in Puerto Rico and the USVI impacting many of the same communities. Despite the challenges, ASPR provided professional and trained personnel and resources to mitigate the impact of the storms ultimately saving lives.

When ASPR was originally established by Congress a decade ago, the objective was to create "unity of command" by consolidating all Federal public health and medical preparedness and response functions under ASPR. ASPR leads the Federal public health and medical, preparedness, response and recovery to disasters and public health emergencies in accordance with the National Response Framework and Emergency Support Function No. 8, public health and medical support.

ASPR also coordinates with other components of HHS with respect to HHS' role in ESF No. 6, which is health and social services and HHS' lead role as the coordinating agency with respect to the Health and Social Services Recovery Support Function. ASPR is in effect the national security mission manager for HHS.

Specific to my role within ASPR as the REC in Regional II, I worked to build and maintain relationships with State, local, territorial and tribal officials and healthcare representatives daily. These established relationships proved critical during the immediate preparedness for and response to Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

Given my daily coordination and communication with officials before the hurricanes hit, I was familiar with local resources and, as such, was able to ensure the Federal response to local needs.

Since late October, I've also served as the Federal Health Coordinating Official. In this role I'm the primary point of contact supporting information between HHS and local officials.

Specific to the response provided following Hurricanes Irma and Maria, ASPR's strategy has been three-fold, save lives, stabilize the healthcare system and restore services. To save lives and stabilize the healthcare system, approximately 2,500 NDMS personnel were

deployed to the impacted areas and were supported by approximately 21.5 tons of equipment.

While deployed, personnel provided care to over 2,500 patients in the USVI specifically. Care included providing access to trained medical assessments, treating minor injuries, dispensing medicine and water, wound care and assessing injuries.

When care exceeded capabilities, NDMS supported the evacuation of patients. We evacuated approximately 211,000 patients from the USVI before, between and after Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

Our partners, the DOD and the Department of Veterans Affairs were key components of these moves. Once the hurricanes passed, teams provided onsite medical care through Federal Medical Stations with 50 to 250 beds provided through the strategic national stockpile.

HHS also activated the Emergency Prescription Assistance Program known as EPAP for both the USVI and Puerto Rico to ensure victims who were unable to pay for prescriptions received the required medication. Ensuring that people are still able to access these supplies that they rely on everyday helps patients cope with disaster more effectively and prevent stress on the healthcare system.

Now that much of the response effort is concluding, ASPR is continuing to support the USVI through its recovery operations. Currently, HHS personnel are deployed long-term under the authorities of the National Disaster Recovery Framework and are in continual coordination with local officials to maintain situational awareness, link local officials to resources, and assist with challenges or issues as they arise.

Our primary mission is to support a locally led recovery by building capacity with the USVI government and other key stakeholders that carryout the critical health and social services to the island residents.

In conclusion, the devastation caused by Hurricanes Irma and Maria overwhelmed local, State and territorial healthcare capabilities. ASPR provided the resources to meet existing medical requirements, transport patients to ensure proper care when needed, utilize authorities like EPAP to ensure the population received critical prescriptions, and will continue to coordinate on issues impacting long-term recovery.

There is much work left to be done, but we have ensured the public health and medical requirements within the impacted communities are able to support the population.

I thank you again for this opportunity to address these issues. I'm happy to answer any questions.

[Prepared statement of Mr. Mr. Raheem follows:]

	Written Testimony House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on Interior, Energy, and Environment
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The Historic 2017 Hurricane Season: Impacts on the U.S. Virgin Islands

Statement of

Murad Raheem

Regional Emergency Coordinator, Region II

Office of the Assistant Secretary For Preparedness and Response (ASPR)

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)



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Chairman Farenthold and Ranking Member Plaskett, thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR) to discuss our nation's medical and public health response and recovery efforts to the hurricanes that impacted Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI). I am Murad "Mojo" Raheem, the Regional Emergency Coordinator for HHS Region II within ASPR. In the response and recovery to the hurricanes, I served as the Federal Health Coordinating Official on the ground.

HHS and our interagency partners have pushed forward in unprecedented ways to save lives and support the communities and people impacted by Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria. Since September 2, 2017, HHS deployed approximately 4,500 personnel to support response efforts and currently have 63 personnel deployed in Puerto Rico and the USVI specifically to support recovery efforts. HHS will continue working as efficiently as possible until our mission is complete.

The scale and scope of last year's hurricane season was unprecedented. Never before has our response system been tested to support the impact of three major storm systems (Harvey, Irma, Maria) within such a short period. While the National Disaster Medical System (NDMS) was supporting response following landfall of Hurricane Harvey in Texas, NDMS had to mobilize in Florida, Puerto Rico, and the USVI to support Hurricane Irma response. Then, within days, Hurricane Maria made landfall in Puerto Rico and the USVI impacting many of the same communities. This response scenario tested NDMS and Federal capabilities like never before. Despite the challenges, ASPR provided professional and trained personnel and resources to

mitigate the impact of the storms on the communities, ultimately saving lives and ensuring there were health and medical resources available to those in need.

The Role of ASPR

When ASPR was originally established by Congress a decade ago, the objective was to create “unity of command” by consolidating the Federal public health and medical preparedness and response functions under the ASPR (subject to the authority of the Secretary). This approach was modeled on the Goldwater-Nichols Act that created the Department of Defense (DoD) combatant commands; the impetus was the disorganized and fragmented response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and concerns about an H5N1 influenza pandemic.

ASPR’s mission is to save lives and protect Americans from 21st century health security threats. ASPR is, in effect, the national health security mission manager for HHS. As such, on behalf of the Secretary of HHS, ASPR leads the Federal public health and medical, preparedness, response and recovery to disasters and public health emergencies, in accordance with the National Response Framework (NRF) the National Disaster Recovery Framework (NDRF) by leading the Emergency Support Function (ESF) #. 8, Public Health and Medical Services and Health and Social Services Recovery Support Function, respectively. It is ASPR’s responsibility to coordinate the nation’s medical and public health preparedness, planning, and response capabilities to help Americans during such events, whatever their cause. ASPR also coordinates with other components of HHS with respect to HHS’s role in ESF #6 , Mass Care, Emergency Assistance, Temporary Housing, and Human Services, and HHS’s lead role as the coordinating agency with respect to the Health and Social Services Recovery Support Function. ASPR

coordinates across HHS, the Federal interagency, and supports state, local, territorial and tribal health partners in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from, public health emergencies and other emergencies and disasters that have health or human services impacts.

ASPR, in partnership with other HHS agencies, works to enhance medical surge capacity by organizing, training, equipping, and deploying HHS public health and medical personnel, and providing logistical support for HHS responses to public health emergencies. ASPR also coordinates overall Federal response, and supports readiness at the state and local level by coordinating Federal grants and cooperative agreements, and carrying out drills and operational exercises. ASPR also oversees advanced research, development, and procurement of medical countermeasures (e.g., vaccines, medicines, diagnostics, and other necessary medical supplies) against chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear agents, and pandemic or epidemic diseases, and coordinates the stockpiling of such countermeasures.

Specific to my role within ASPR, I serve as the Regional Emergency Coordinator – or REC – for HHS Region II. As the REC in Region II, I work to build and maintain relationships with Federal, State, local, Territorial, and Tribal officials and health care representatives daily. These established relationships proved critical during the immediate preparations for, and response to, Hurricanes Irma and Maria – as well as throughout the response and ongoing recovery. Because of my longstanding and established relationships, local officials were able to coordinate and communicate with me directly to request resources and assistance. Given my daily coordination and communication with local officials before the hurricanes hit, I was familiar with their resources and, as such, was able to ensure the Federal resources provided met local needs.

Since late October, I have also served as the Federal Health Coordinating Official (FHCO) for the Federal response to the hurricanes. In this role, I am the primary point of contact supporting information flow between HHS and local officials. In addition, as FHCO, I remain responsible for the medically evacuated residents, discussed further on in my testimony, transported from the USVI and Puerto Rico.

Federal Assets and Capabilities Supporting Response

When communities are overwhelmed by a public health or medical emergency, they can request Federal assistance to augment existing medical capabilities. ASPR can deploy NDMS personnel and response teams, if requested, to provide professional medical support. For each incident, NDMS deploys trained medical teams to provide medical services and/or augment health and medical facilities in impacted communities. NDMS is supported by a workforce of intermittent Federal employees, who volunteer to be activated to respond to emergencies and disasters, such as physicians, nurses, paramedics, and other support staff, such as logisticians and information technology specialists. With respect to Hurricanes Irma and Maria, ASPR leaned forward and pre-deployed NDMS teams to Puerto Rico before hurricane landfall so that HHS could provide immediate medical support for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

ASPR maintains logistical capabilities and supplies that accompany deployed NDMS personnel, including resources to shelter and feed deployed personnel as well as supporting medical equipment and supplies to treat the medical needs of the impacted community. ASPR ensures that the right equipment is where it is needed to provide an effective medical response. To

ensure resources are available when and where needed, ASPR maintains regional staff and warehouses that are strategically positioned to ensure resources are available at a moment's notice. One such warehouse is located in Puerto Rico.

Specific to the response provided following Hurricanes Irma and Maria, ASPR's strategy has been three-fold: save lives, stabilize the health care system, and restore services. To save lives and stabilize the health care system, approximately 2,500 NDMS health care providers and other NDMS personnel were deployed to the impacted areas and were supported by approximately 21.5 tons of equipment. While deployed, personnel provided care to over 31,000 patients, more than 2,500 of those patients were specifically in USVI. Care included providing access to trained medical assessments, treating minor injuries, dispensing aspirin and water, wound care, and assessing injuries. When care exceeded capabilities, NDMS supported the evacuation of patients.

An important lesson learned from events such as Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy and during the 2010 Haiti earthquake was the impact that disasters have on persons who rely on durable medical equipment (DME), especially energy dependent DME. To rectify this problem, ASPR and CMS created the emPower tool. EmPower provides information to local public health officials about the number of Medicare beneficiaries in each impacted area who rely on 14 types of life-maintaining and assistive equipment, ranging from oxygen concentrators to electric wheelchairs, as well as data on the number (and, if requested, the identity and location) of Medicare beneficiaries who rely on dialysis, oxygen, and home health services. Citizens who use durable medical equipment tend to be at-risk populations with access and functional needs, including the chronically ill and aging populations – those who are the most vulnerable in their communities

and most likely to need life-saving assistance in prolonged power outages. EmPower enables State and local public health officials to locate and contact such vulnerable, electricity-dependent residents, to help ensure their safety in an emergency or disaster by evacuation or otherwise. EmPower also provides real-time severe weather tracking information from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to help communities track and plan for emergencies. In Florida and St. Thomas (USVI), for the first time in its history, NDMS personnel joined Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) teams to locate dialysis patients whom authorities were unable to reach during the initial evacuation, using EmPower data.

NDMS evacuated 122 dialysis patients from USVI and 60 non-medical attendants for them, before, between, and after Hurricanes Irma and Maria. Our NDMS partners, Department of Defense (DoD), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) evacuated these patients from USVI and received them in the United States for dialysis. . Additionally, ASPR collaborated with the VA and DoD to increase the number of patients who could be seen and treated in PR and USVI. Once the hurricanes passed, NDMS teams provided on-site medical care through Federal Medical Stations with 50 to 250 beds provided through the Strategic National Stockpile.

HHS also activated the Emergency Prescription Assistance Program (EPAP) for both the USVI and Puerto Rico to ensure victims who were uninsured received required medication. EPAP provides an efficient mechanism for enrolled pharmacies to process claims for prescription medication, specific medical supplies, vaccines and some forms of durable medical equipment (DME) for eligible individuals in a federally identified disaster area. When people's medical

supplies get lost or damaged in a disaster, a health condition that was previously manageable may become more serious, causing these people to seek care in an emergency room or go without needed care. Ensuring that people are still able to access these supplies that they rely on every day helps patients cope with a disaster more effectively, maintains their physical or mental health, and prevents or reduces stress on the healthcare system. The current EPAP activation for the USVI expires March 14, 2018. Should the USVI determine that an extension is needed, they can request an extension to the current EPAP activation.

ASPR's Transition to Long-Term Recovery

Now that much of the response effort has concluded, HHS is continuing its support to the USVI through its recovery operations, again coordinated through ASPR. Currently, HHS personnel are deployed long-term under the National Disaster Recovery Framework, and are in continual coordination with local officials to maintain situational awareness, link local officials to resources, and assist with challenges or issues as they arise. Our primary mission is to support a locally led recovery by building capacity with the Puerto Rican and USVI governments and other key stakeholders that carry out the critical health and social services to the islands' residents.

For example, ASPR Recovery staff coordinated an initial Workforce Capacity, Development, and Sustainment Working Group, which brought together local and USVI government, education, healthcare and public health stakeholders involved in training and hiring the healthcare and human services workforces. The workgroup will focus on discussing licensure challenges and effective workforce development partnerships and training programs, and

identifying successful recruitment strategies along with specific job descriptions for the immediate needs of the USVI health and human services systems.

Conclusion

The devastation caused by Hurricanes Irma and Maria overwhelmed local, State, and territorial health care capabilities. Through ASPR, HHS provided the resources to meet existing medical requirements, NDMS partners transported patients to ensure proper care when needed, HHS utilized programs like EPAP to ensure the islands' populations received critical prescriptions, and will continue to coordinate on issues impacting long-term recovery. There is much work left to do, but we have worked to ensure the public health and medical requirements in the USVI and PR are prepared to support the population. HHS will continue to engage with local officials, and will not leave until the recovery work is done. I thank you, again, for this opportunity to address these issues, and am happy to answer any questions.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Thank you very much.
Colonel Heintzelman, you are up for 5 minutes, sir.

STATEMENT OF SCOTT HEINTZELMAN

Colonel HEINTZELMAN. Good morning, Chairman Farenthold and Ranking Member Plaskett. I'm honored to be here and pleased to testify alongside my fellow mission partners for the 2017 Hurricane Season.

As USNORTHCOM's Defense Coordinating Officer for FEMA Region II, I'm proud to represent the active duty soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines, activated reservist and Department of Defense civilians who tirelessly supported the Federal responses to both Hurricanes Irma and Maria in the U.S. Virgin Islands. The enormous damage caused by these storms requires significant inter-agency response led by FEMA and supported by a range of Federal, State and local partners. USNORTHCOM is proud to be a part of that critical mission.

As you all are well aware, the 2017 Hurricane Season was the most active in years with three major storms impacting millions of Americans. In the immediate aftermath of those hurricanes, active duty personnel were there to provide military capabilities to the FEMA led Federal response. Key contributions included strategic airlift, sea and airport surveys, search and rescue, route clearance, commodity distribution, rotary wing lift, high water vehicle support and medical capabilities. The active duty men and women under USNORTHCOM's direction made significant contributions to the response and recovery efforts in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

I'm grateful for the support this committee has provided in support of the Federal response. I thank you again for giving me the opportunity to appear today and I welcome your questions. Thank you.

[Prepared statement of Colonel Heintzelman follows:]

Statement by
Colonel Scott W. Heintzelman, United States Army
Defense Coordinating Officer
United States Northern Command

Before the 115th Congress
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
Subcommittee on Interior, Energy, and Environment
United States House of Representatives

March 12, 2018
U.S. Virgin Islands
Field Hearing

Chairman Farenthold, Ranking Member Plaskett, distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address you today on United States Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) support of the national response to Hurricanes Irma and Maria in the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI).

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is responsible for coordinating the Federal Government's response and recovery to major disasters and emergencies under the auspices of the National Response Framework. USNORTHCOM is the combatant command that provides FEMA with active duty military Defense Support of Civil Authorities (DSCA) in the USNORTHCOM area of responsibility (AOR). This AOR for DSCA includes the continental United States, Alaska, Puerto Rico, and the USVI, when directed by the President or when the Secretary of Defense has approved a request for assistance pursuant to the Stafford Act or the Economy Act.

A fundamental tenet of the national response system is that USNORTHCOM's active duty response is always in support of domestic civil authorities, in this case, FEMA. It is also important to note that the Federal military chain of command always runs from the President to the Secretary of Defense to the USNORTHCOM Commander, General Lori Robinson.

Prior to landfall, the Secretary of Defense directed USNORTHCOM to give full support to the national response to Hurricanes Irma and Maria, and USNORTHCOM specifically postured capabilities in advance of each hurricane. USNORTHCOM then provided significant support to the national response following Hurricanes Irma and Maria to save and sustain lives in the USVI. The men and women of USNORTHCOM – active duty military and Reserve Component, civilians, and contractors – were ready and acted with a great sense of urgency when they were directed through mission assignments generated by FEMA.

USNORTHCOM maintains a high level of preparedness by continually investing in preparedness, including through training, integrated planning with our Federal, State, and local partners, as well as joint exercises with our Federal, State, and local partners.

USNORTHCOM continually seeks to improve in our ability to provide timely support, and to work closely with its domestic agency partners. For example, during a disaster response, FEMA issues mission assignments to request support capabilities and resources. USNORTHCOM has worked closely with FEMA to develop all-hazard, pre-scripted mission assignments prior to disasters. This helps to expedite the process of requesting and delivering assistance. These pre-scripted mission assignments include: heavy and medium rotary-wing lift; strategic and tactical transportation; communications support; emergency route clearance; damage assessment; mobilization centers and operational staging areas; airspace control; deployable temporary medical facilities; and rotary-wing medical evacuation.

USNORTHCOM also has a standing DSCA Execute Order (EXORD), approved by the Secretary of Defense, that delegates authorities and assigned capabilities and resources to the Commander of USNORTHCOM to provide critical life-saving and life-sustaining capabilities. This includes such capabilities such as Defense Coordinating Officers and Defense Coordinating Elements; DoD installations to be used as FEMA mobilization centers; medium- and heavy-lift helicopters; search aircraft for disaster area reconnaissance; deployable communications support packages; joint task forces to command and control Federal military responders; Combatant Commander Assessment Elements; aeromedical patient evacuation and transportation; deployable hospitals and Forward Surgical Teams; naval vessels with medical and surgical services, and critical care patient capability.

The Commander of USNORTHCOM, using her delegated authorities under the DSCA EXORD, postured active duty military capabilities and equipment in advance of the hurricanes, including units capable of performing such response missions as aerial damage assessment, strategic lift (e.g., C-17 aircraft), medical evacuation, logistics support, and air and sea port opening. USNORTHCOM also deployed U.S. Navy ships, which were forced to avoid the consecutive hurricanes while remaining in vicinity of the affected areas in order to get on station and begin responding immediately.

FEMA issued USNORTHCOM mission assignments in the USVI for the national response to Hurricanes Irma and Maria requesting: search and rescue operations; port and airfield assessment; aerial port operations; emergency route clearance; air and ground transportation; aeromedical evacuation; National Disaster Medical System (NDMS) patient movement, reception, and medical care; medical support; strategic airlift to transport personnel, relief supplies, and equipment; imagery; life-sustaining commodity (e.g., food and water) distribution; power restoration and distribution; temporary shelters; water purification; logistics support; maritime freight support; Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)-capable radars; and installation support bases and responder support camps for FEMA responders. All mission assignments are now complete.

In conclusion, USNORTHCOM is a fully committed partner in the national response system and was proud to provide life-saving and life-sustaining support to our fellow citizens in need. Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to your questions.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Thank you.
Colonel Clark.

STATEMENT OF ROBERT J. CLARK

Colonel CLARK. Good morning, Chair Farenthold and Ranking Member Plaskett.

I am honored to testify before you today to discuss the authorities and responsibilities of the United States Army Corps of Engineers during disaster response and recovery operations and the impacts to the U.S. Virgin Islands during the 2017 Hurricane Season.

I am Colonel Robert Clark. I'm Commander for the Corps Field Recovery Office in the U.S. Virgin Islands. My permanent position is I'm the Commander of the Corps' Wilmington, North Carolina District.

The Corps conducts its emergency response activities under two basic authorities, the Stafford Act and under Public Law 84-99. Under the Stafford Act we are the Federal agency in support of FEMA under the national response framework. In this capacity the Corps is the lead Federal agency for Emergency Support Function 3, Public Works and engineering, and works under FEMA's direction.

ESF-3 provides temporary emergency power, temporary roofing, debris management, emergency infrastructure assessment, critical public facility restoration, temporary housing, demolition and structural stability and support to FEMA command and control.

Under Public Law 84-99, we prepare for disasters through planning, coordination and training with local, State, Federal partners, and by assisting State and local entities in implementing advanced measures to prevent/reduce storm event damages.

When a disaster occurs, Corps teams and other resources are mobilized from across the country to assist the local Corps districts response to an event. As part of this mission, the Corps has more than 50 specially-trained response teams supported by emergency contracts to perform the wide range of Public Works and engineering support missions I just described. Additionally, the Corps uses pre-awarded contracts that can be quickly activated for missions such as temporary roofing, commodity distribution and generator installations.

With regard to the hurricane activities, 2017 was an unusually active season. The Corps has been involved in a FEMA led Federal response and recovery operations for multiple events to include Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria.

FEMA has identified close to \$3 billion in mission assignments for the Corps to assist in Hurricanes Irma and Maria response and recovery. In the USVI there have been 25 mission assignments totaling 256 million.

For temporary emergency power, the Corps and its contractors completed 316 pre-installation inspections for temporary generators and installed 180 generators in the U.S. Virgin Islands. The Corps has de-installed 165 generators out of the 180 installed with the remaining 15 installed generators that were turned over to FEMA logistics, which are being maintained by a long-term contract. The Corps' temporary power mission was completed on February 11, 2018.

For temporary roofing, in order for the Corps and its contractors to install temporary covering, the blue roofing, the government and its contractors require a valid right of entry. In the U.S. Virgin Islands the Corps and its contractors have completed 3,658 blue roof installations. The blue roof mission was completed on December 15, 2017.

For debris management, the Corps and the territory combined has removed over 822,000 cubic yards of the estimated 870,000 cubic yards of debris in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The Corps remains fully committed and capable of executing its Civil Works activities across the Nation despite our heavy involvement in these ongoing response and recovery operations. We also remain ready and poised to assist in future events as they may occur.

This concludes my testimony. I look forward to answering any questions you might have. Thank you.

[Prepared statement of Colonel Clark follows:]

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

COMPLETE STATEMENT OF

**COLONEL ROBERT CLARK
COMMANDER, FIELD RECOVERY OFFICE
U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS**

BEFORE

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

ON

**THE HISTORIC 2017 HURRICANE SEASON:
IMPACTS ON THE U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS**

MARCH 12, 2018

Chairman Farenthold, Ranking Member Plaskett and distinguished members of the Subcommittee:

I am honored to testify before you today to discuss the authorities and responsibilities of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) during disaster response and recovery operations and the impacts to the U.S. Virgin Islands during the 2017 Hurricane Season. I am Colonel Robert Clark, Commander for the Corps Field Recovery Office in the U.S. Virgin Islands. My permanent position is Commander of the Corps Wilmington, North Carolina District.

The Corps conducts its emergency response activities under two basic authorities: the Stafford Disaster and Emergency Assistance Act (Stafford Act); and Public Law 84-99, 33 U.S.C. 701n as amended (PL 84-99). Under the Stafford Act, we and other Federal agencies support the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) under the National Response Framework (NRF). In this capacity, the Corps is the lead Federal agency for Emergency Support Function 3 (Public Works and Engineering), but works under FEMA's direction. ESF-3 provides Temporary Emergency Power, Temporary Roofing, Debris Management, Emergency Infrastructure Assessment, Critical Public Facility Restoration, Temporary Housing, Demolition/Structural Stabilization, and support to FEMA Command and Control Nodes/ESF3. Under PL 84-99, we prepare for disasters through planning, coordination, and training with local, state, Federal partners; and by assisting state and local entities in implementing advance measures to prevent/reduce storm event damages. After the emergency event, PL 84-99 authorizes the Corps to repair damage to authorized Corps projects, and work with states/municipalities to rehabilitate and restore eligible non-Federal flood infrastructure to pre-storm conditions.

When disasters occur, Corps teams and other resources are mobilized from across the country to assist the local Corps districts and offices respond to the event. As part of this mission, the Corps has more than 50 specially-trained response teams, supported by emergency contracts, to perform the wide range of public works and engineering-related support missions I just described. Additionally, the Corps uses pre-awarded contracts that can be quickly activated for missions such as debris removal, temporary roofing, commodities distribution, and generator installation.

2017 Hurricane Season – With regard to hurricane activity, 2017 was an unusually active season. The Corps has been involved in the FEMA-led Federal response and recovery operations in support of multiple events, including Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria.

Hurricanes Irma and Maria – Category 5 Hurricane Irma made landfall over the U.S. Virgin Islands on September 6, 2017, while also impacting Puerto Rico with Category 2 winds, 12 foot storm surge and up to 20 inches of rain. Hurricane Irma made landfall in southern Florida/Florida Keys on September 9, 2017. Soon thereafter, Category 5 Hurricane Maria made landfall over Puerto Rico on September 20, 2017, after once again severely impacting the U.S. Virgin Islands, causing major damage to critical

infrastructure and homes. FEMA has identified close to \$3 billion in Mission Assignments for the Corps to assist in Hurricanes Irma and Maria response and recovery (29 Mission Assignments totaling \$2.8 billion in Puerto Rico and 25 Mission Assignments totaling \$254 million in the U.S. Virgin Islands). In the U.S. Virgin Islands, there have been 12 Mission Assignments totaling \$38.5 million for Hurricane Irma and 13 Mission Assignments totaling \$213 million for Hurricane Maria. Currently, the Corps has 41 personnel deployed in the U.S. Virgin Islands supporting the recovery missions.

Temporary Emergency Power: The Corps and its contractors completed 316 pre-installation inspections (for temporary generators) and installed 180 generators in the U.S. Virgin Islands. The Corps has de-installed 165 generators out of the 180 installed generators and the remaining 15 installed generators were turned over to FEMA logistics, which are being maintained by a long-term FEMA contract. The Corps temporary power mission was complete on February 11, 2018.

Temporary Roofing: In order for the Corps and its contractors to install temporary covering (blue roof), the government and its contractors require validated rights of entry. In the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Corps and its contractors completed 3,658 blue roof installations. The blue roof mission was completed on December 15, 2017.

Debris Management: As of March 05, 2018, the Corps has removed approximately 822,000 cubic yards of the estimated 870,000 cubic yards of debris in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The Corps remains fully committed and capable of executing its other Civil Works activities across the Nation despite our heavy involvement in these ongoing response and recovery operations. We also remain ready and poised to assist in future events as they may occur. This concludes my testimony and I look forward to answering any questions you might have. Thank you.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Thank you.
Mr. Lavasseur.

STATEMENT OF RANDY LAVASSEUR

Mr. LAVASSEUR. Chairman Farenthold and Ranking Member Plaskett, thank you for your invitation to present the Department of Interior's views regarding the impacts on the U.S. Virgin Islands from the historic 2017 Hurricane Season. I'm accompanied by Daryl Heckles who's in the audience, the Acting Superintendent of the Virgin Islands National Park. I'll summarize my remarks and ask that my full statement be included in the hearing record.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. It will be.

Mr. LAVASSEUR. Thank you.

The National Park Service sites in the U.S. Virgin Islands include Christiansted National Historic Site, Buck Island Reef National Monument and the Salt River Bay National Historic Park and Ecological Preserve on St. Croix; and the Virgin Islands National Park and the Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument on St. John.

These national parks play an integral part of the tourism economy. Nearly 600,000 people visited the national parks in the Virgin Islands in 2016, supporting nearly a 1,000 jobs and about \$100 million in economic output. Hurricanes Irma and Maria significantly impacted the areas we manage.

On St. John the storms displaced a dozen staff members and destroyed or significantly damaged 25 facilities. The storms substantially eroded shorelines, deposited significant amounts of sediment and debris on the Virgin Islands National Park's iconic coral reefs. These storms caused 90 vessels to wash aground or sink and destroyed strands of Pillar coral, a threatened species. In addition, they substantially damaged the park's largest concession operations mainly at Cinnamon Bay as well as Caneel Bay Resort, the largest single employer on the island.

Immediately following Hurricanes Irma and Maria, the National Park Service activated an Incident Command Structure at all the national park sites within the Caribbean. The Incident Management Team mobilized hotshot fire crews of units and sawyers to remove debris from roads, parking lots and walkways; completed initial building repairs and restored operations where possible to help reinstate park visitation.

To assist during the immediate aftermath, among other things, the National Park Service made the visitor center at the Virgin Islands National Park available to St. John residents as a temporary shelter; provided fuel to operate generators at local health clinics; provided staging areas used by the U.S. Navy and BBC Electric; provided radio dispatch support to augment remaining emergency radio services; and helped ensure emergency services were available on the island.

In turn, the National Park Service received a tremendous support from other Federal agencies as well as the territorial government, nonprofit organizations, the business community and of course our citizens.

On St. Croix, Christiansted National Historic Site resumed normal operations in November. The water and hiking trails at Buck

Island Reef National Monument are made open to visitors but the pier remains closed. The Salt River Bay visitor contact station remains closed at this time.

St. John, Virgin Islands National Park reopened in early December but is still in a major recovery phase. Initial repairs restored basic visitor services and reopened the park's visitor center, trails, beaches and their adjacent waterways.

However, much of the park's infrastructure such as roads, water systems, signs, concession facilities and fee structures were destroyed or badly damaged. Over 500 archaeological sites and historic structures still needs stabilization and 35 derelict vessels remain in sensitive habitats.

The ongoing closure of Caneel Bay Resort has left an indelible imprint on our visitor services and the community at large. The same holds true for park concession operations throughout St. John. The National Park Service recognizes the importance of these businesses to the economy of the Virgin Islands and is dedicated to working with them to resume operations as soon as possible.

The Department appreciates the cooperation and collaboration with Delegate Plaskett and Governor Mapp. We look forward to continuing these efforts throughout the recovery phase.

Recovery of the Virgin Islands National Parks will be significantly spurred by funds from the hurricane supplemental appropriation recently approved by Congress. The total amount of recovery funding that has been allocated to the National Park Service for parks on the mainland and in the Caribbean is \$207 million.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions that you or Congressman Plaskett have.

[Prepared statement of Mr. Lavasseur follows:]

**STATEMENT OF RANDY LAVASSEUR, CARIBBEAN GROUP
SUPERINTENDENT, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE
INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE OVERSIGHT & GOVERNMENT REFORM
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENERGY, & ENVIRONMENT, REGARDING THE
HISTORIC 2017 HURRICANE SEASON: IMPACTS ON THE U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS.**

March 12, 2018

Chairman Farenthold, Ranking Member Plaskett, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for your invitation to present the Department of the Interior's views regarding the impacts on the U.S. Virgin Islands from the historic 2017 hurricane season. This testimony focuses on national park lands in the Virgin Islands.

The National Park Service (NPS) maintains a substantial presence in the U.S. Virgin Islands. NPS sites include Christiansted National Historic Site, Buck Island Reef National Monument, and Salt River Bay National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve on St. Croix; and Virgin Islands National Park and Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument on St. John. Together with our other Caribbean park, San Juan National Historic Site in Puerto Rico, these parks protect and preserve approximately 29,000 acres, including nearly 2,000 species and approximately 200 archeological sites and historic structures.

The NPS is keenly aware that tourism plays an enormous role in the economy of the U.S. Virgin Islands, and that the national parks of the U.S. Virgin Islands are an integral part of this tourism economy. Nearly 600,000 people visited the national parks of the U.S. Virgin Islands in 2016, supporting nearly 1,000 jobs and about \$100 million dollars in economic output within their gateway communities.

Hurricanes Irma and Maria dealt a devastating blow to the Caribbean in 2017. The people, land and resources, including areas managed by the NPS, were significantly impacted. On September 6, 2017, Hurricane Irma, a Category 5 storm with winds reaching 185 miles per hour, caused extensive damage to Virgin Islands National Park, which comprises 73% of St. John. Within two weeks, Hurricane Maria, a Category 4 storm, with winds topping out at 155 miles per hour, moved across the U.S. Virgin Islands, leaving St. John and St. Thomas without power.

On St. John, the storms displaced a dozen NPS staff members and destroyed or significantly damaged 25 NPS facilities, including the island's oldest building, erected in the 1600s. The storms substantially eroded shorelines and deposited significant amounts of sediment and debris on Virgin Islands National Park's iconic coral reefs. The storms caused 90 vessels to wash aground or sink within the park and destroyed stands of Pillar coral, a threatened species. In addition, they substantially damaged the park's largest concession operation with operations mainly at Cinnamon Bay, as well as Caneel Bay Resort, the largest single employer on the island.

Immediately following Hurricanes Irma and Maria, the National Park Service activated an Incident Command Structure at all NPS sites within the Caribbean. The Incident Management Team (IMT) was delegated with the authority to protect human life and operate safely, initiate

employee assistance programs, and manage and support damage assessment teams. The IMT mobilized hotshot firefighting units and sawyer crews to remove debris from roads, parking lots, and walkways; completed initial building repairs; and restored operations where possible to help reinstate park visitation in the Territories.

In the immediate aftermath of the storms, to assist in the recovery efforts, the NPS:

- made the visitor center at Virgin Islands National Park available to St. John residents as a temporary shelter;
- helped facilitate the evacuation of St. John residents by allowing the U.S. Coast Guard and others to use the NPS dock to transport residents away to safety;
- provided fuel to operate generators at local health clinics, allowing basic medical attention to be administered;
- provided staging areas used by the U.S. Navy for staging recovery supplies and equipment, and BBC Electric to restore St. John's power grid;
- provided radio and dispatch support to augment remaining emergency radio services and helped ensure emergency services were available on the island;
- established a regularly scheduled meeting that remains in effect today on park grounds for Territorial, Federal, non-profit entities, and the public to share information about the status of hurricane recovery efforts and needs of the island; and,
- provided its Red Hook location and associated dock to the Virgin Islands Territory to support the U.S. Coast Guard and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers projects to remove nearly 500 displaced vessels in Territorial waters outside of park boundaries.

In turn, the NPS received tremendous support from other Federal agencies, the Territorial government, non-profit organizations and the business community, and the citizens of the U.S. Virgin Islands, including:

- assistance from Federal, Territorial, nonprofit and volunteer disaster relief entities connecting NPS employees with aide opportunities;
- support from over 450 Federal and contract employees who added \$3.1 million to the local economy, and the local vendors who provided the products, lodging and related services to aid these federal and contract employees in conducting their response and recovery missions;
- electrical service from BBC Electric to repair and install electrical components necessary to restore electricity to St. John park facilities;
- fuel for park vehicles provided by Global Disaster Immediate Response Team to support assessment and repair activities and to fuel small generators for all employees who needed them; and,
- support from Caneel Bay Resort with utility issues at visitor use areas, aiding our ability to reestablish utilities more broadly within Virgin Islands National Park.

The success of these efforts have relied upon, and been representative of, effective collaboration and a shared commitment among the various stakeholders to meeting the needs of the communities and future visitors to the islands.

On St. Croix, Christiansted National Historic Site resumed normal operations in November. The water and hiking trails at Buck Island Reef National Monument are open to visitation, while the

pier sustained significant damage and remains closed. The Salt River Bay visitor contact station sustained substantial damage and also remains closed.

On St. John, Virgin Islands National Park the park reopened in late February, but is still in the major recovery phase. Initial repairs restored basic visitor services and reopened the park's visitor center, trails, beaches and their adjacent waters. However, much of the park's infrastructure supporting visitor use — such as roads, water systems, signs, concession facilities and fee structures — were destroyed or badly damaged. Over 500 archaeological sites and historic structures need stabilization and 35 derelict vessels remain in sensitive habitats.

The ongoing closure of Caneel Bay Resort, the largest single employer on St. John, has left an indelible imprint on visitor services and the community at large. We are committed to working with all our partners to reopen Caneel Bay Resort. The same holds true for park concession operations on St. John, which are also still reeling from the negative impacts of the 2017 storms. The NPS recognizes the importance of these businesses to the economy of the U.S. Virgin Islands and is dedicated to working with them to resume operations as soon as possible. As such, NPS is committed at the highest levels to have senior regional and headquarters staff visit the islands as needed to ensure rapid progress is made with rebuilding. Since the hurricane, both Deputy Secretary Bernhardt and the Assistant Secretary for Insular Areas, Doug Domenech have traveled to the Virgin Islands to assess the damage. The Department has appreciated the cooperation and collaboration with Delegate Plaskett and Governor Mapp and we look forward to continuing these efforts throughout the recovery process.

Recovery of the Virgin Islands parks will be significantly spurred by funds from the emergency hurricane supplemental appropriation recently approved by Congress. The total amount of recovery funding that has been allocated to the NPS is \$207 million. That amount will be distributed among all of the National Park System units on the mainland and in the Caribbean that were impacted by the 2017 storms.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Thank you very much.

And it's Mr. Dynka. Is that how you pronounce your name?

Mr. DYNKA. Dynka.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Dynka, okay. Mr. Dynka, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF HENRY DYNKA

Mr. DYNKA. Good morning, Chairman Farenthold, Ranking Member Plaskett. My name is Henry Dynka and I'm the manager of In-Plant Support for the Northeast area.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Could you pull that microphone a little bit closer to your mouth?

Mr. DYNKA. All right.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Thank you.

Mr. DYNKA. In this role I oversee the ongoing review and evaluation of service and quality performance at processing and distribution centers. I was personally deployed to the Caribbean for approximately seven weeks after the storm. I appreciate the opportunity to provide the subcommittee information on the preparation, response and recovery efforts the Postal Service employed in the Virgin Islands as a result of Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

In the event of a hurricane, the Postal Service's primary focus is the safety and well-being of our employees, customers and the integrity of the Nation's mail system. We have an extensive hurricane preparedness guide to provide the necessary direction, coordination and support to ensure we are prepared to respond to and recover from a hurricane.

When we knew that the Virgin Islands were in the direct paths of Hurricanes Irma and Maria, employees were asked to confirm their contact information. All postal vehicles, facilities and unprocessed and undelivered mail was secured to the fullest extent possible. We notified potentially impacted post offices to be prepared for closure. Emergency equipment was assessed for operability and electronic equipment was powered down, disconnected and moved to higher ground.

Devastation in the Virgin Islands from back to back Category 5 hurricanes was unlike any experience in recent history. We partnered with some several Federal agencies such as FEMA, FBI, Customs, HHS, DOD and DEA in our response and recovery efforts. We confirmed the safety of our employees as quickly as we could and provided them aid such as water and meals ready to eat, which had been staged before the storms hit.

Many postal facilities sustained significant damage. Despite our best efforts, we lost mail due to weather damage and looting that occurred before we were able to secure those facilities. Communication was sporadic and we relied heavily on social media, traditional news outlets, news outlets that communicate post office hours and served as updates.

Post offices were left without power and internet services for extended periods of time, which hampered our efforts to restore retail operations and track delivery of mail and packages. St. Thomas Airport was closed for 10 days following Hurricane Maria and later reopened with limited daily flights and operating hours which remain in effect today.

Also, the barge that carries mail from St. Thomas to St. John was down for approximately two weeks. Road closures and debris made it difficult for our employees on the Virgin Islands to get to work and deliver mail.

Every postal facility in the Virgin Islands was damaged, obstructed or impacted. The Frederiksted Post Office on St. Croix in particular was severely damaged. These challenges impacted mail delivery.

Executives at the highest level of the organization were engaged with the recovery efforts and the leadership team was deployed to the Virgin Islands over a 3-month period. We worked diligently to restore retail and delivery services where safe despite stringent curfews.

We reprogrammed equipment to pre-sort mail to help expedite delivery when it arrived in the Virgin Islands. We contracted with a commercial air carrier to transport oversized packages directly into St. Thomas. We used an expedited process to hire temporary employees to help with the backlogged mail and we installed satellite dishes to improve mail tracking and retail services.

Currently all post offices in the Virgin Islands are operational with the exception of Frederiksted. Repairs at Frederiksted and Veterans Station are on schedule for completion this summer.

Also last week we sent review teams to every office in the Virgin Islands to assess staffing needs. We are grateful for the transportation and communication assistance provided by our Federal partners. We are proud of our employees who worked tirelessly to restore mail service in the Virgin Islands, many doing so while working to rebuild their homes and lives.

While we recognize the challenges remain, we are committed to ensuring we fulfill our mandate to provide secure, efficient and affordable mail service to all Virgin Islands customers.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to testify. I welcome any questions that you and the subcommittee members may have.

[Prepared statement of Mr. Dynka follows:]



**Statement of Henry Dynka
Manager, In-Plant Support, Northeast Area
United States Postal Service
Before the United States House of Representatives
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
Subcommittee on the Interior, Energy, and Environment
March 12, 2018**

Good morning, Chairman Farenthold, Ranking Member Plaskett, and Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Henry Dynka and I am the Manager of In-Plant Support for the Postal Service's Northeast Area office. In this role, I oversee the ongoing review and evaluation of service and quality performance at processing and distribution centers across the Northeast Area. I also provide technical support to Post Offices within our service area, which includes the Caribbean District.

As a member of our Northeast Area's Emergency Management Team at the leadership level, I was personally deployed to the Caribbean for approximately seven weeks after the storms.

The unprecedented circumstance of two Category five hurricanes making landfall so close after one another presented challenges that the Postal Service had not experienced during past hurricane recovery efforts. I appreciate the opportunity to provide the Subcommittee information on the preparation, response and recovery efforts the Postal Service employed in the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) as a result of Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

The Postal Service utilizes comprehensive integrated emergency management plans at every level of the organization, which include team concept of operations, evacuation plans, and continuity of operations plan (COOP), to ensure the continuation of essential postal functions and critical services in the event of a natural or man-made disaster. In addition, we have an extensive Hurricane Preparedness Guide used to assist postal managers at the District, Area, and Headquarters levels in providing the necessary direction, coordination and support to ensure facilities are prepared for, and able to respond to and recover from a hurricane.

The Postal Service's primary focus is the safety and well-being of our employees and customers, and the integrity of the nation's mail system. Each decision we made and actions taken before, during, and after the hurricanes that devastated so much of the Caribbean was based on these priorities.

Preparations for Hurricanes Irma and Maria

The Postal Service prepared for the hurricanes well before anticipated landfalls. When it was known that the Caribbean District, which encompasses Puerto Rico and USVI, was in the direct path of Hurricane Irma, and later Hurricane Maria, we began reviewing our District and Area COOP. We also began holding regular telephone conferences to assess the Caribbean District's level of preparedness.

Using the Hurricane Preparedness Guide as a "playbook", Headquarters, Northeast Area, and Caribbean District staff developed a localized plan to prepare for the impending storms. As we monitored the approaching weather systems, we notified potentially affected offices, employees, labor union and management association representatives, the Postal Inspection Service and the Postal Service Office of the Inspector General (OIG) of our plan to secure equipment and facilities, and to safely evacuate and utilize designated COOP locations when the storms hit.

Specifically, potentially impacted mail processing facilities and Post Offices were notified to be prepared for closure. Emergency equipment, such as generators, were assessed for operability; and electronic equipment was powered down, disconnected and moved to higher ground, as was all unprocessed and undelivered mail. Postal vehicles and facilities were secured to the extent possible before the onset of the storms. Alternate employee work sites were identified at available facilities outside of the expected impact zone to ensure some semblance of mail service was restored as soon as possible following the hurricanes.

As part of our COOP, employees were asked to confirm their contact information, including emergency contacts, so we were able to account for their status as soon as possible following the hurricanes. We deployed Meals-Ready-to-Eat (MREs) and water to the USVI prior to Hurricane Irma making landfall. National Employee Emergency Hotline messaging was also shared with employees via various communication platforms. Additional generators, water, MREs, hand sanitizer, and disinfectant wipes were staged at locations on the mainland and shipped to the Caribbean District after the storms made landfall. Caribbean District staff followed the same course of actions in preparation for Hurricane Maria.

Immediate Impacts of Hurricanes Irma and Maria on Postal Service Operations

Hurricane Irma primarily impacted the islands of St. Thomas and St. John. As soon as the hurricane passed, the Postal Service sent additional personnel to the affected areas to quickly provide support to employees who remained on St. Thomas through the duration of the storm. Immediately following the storm, the Postal Inspection Service began assessing the integrity of postal facilities on the island. The Veterans Station, which services approximately 6,000 Post Office Box customers, sustained structural damage. Before the Postal Service could secure this location, we experienced loss of mail due to looting and weather-related damage. To assist in securing postal facilities, additional Postal Inspectors and OIG personnel were deployed to St. Thomas.

Immediately following Hurricane Irma, the federal government assumed control of the airport in St. Thomas and limited transportation to emergency supplies and services only. Since mail (including packages) was not deemed an emergency supply or service, this created a backlog of items destined to St. Thomas and St. John. Transportation that was available was used to send additional supplies, such as bottled water and MREs to St. Thomas for our employees. Once the restrictions on the airport were relaxed, we were able to resume limited mail flights to St. Thomas. However, the regular barge used to transport mail from St. Thomas to St. John remained out of service for approximately two weeks.

On September 16, a week and a half after Hurricane Irma hit, mail was available for pickup at the Charlotte Amalie, East End, and Havensight Post Offices on St. Thomas. We also established partial delivery service throughout the island, wherever it was safe for our employees to travel. It is important to note that while we were establishing limited mail service, we were concurrently preparing for Hurricane Maria, which was expected to make landfall in a few days. By September 19, we were able to transport mail to St. John via boat and made pick up service available to local residents. As a curfew between the hours of 6 p.m. to 10 a.m. had been imposed after Hurricane Irma hit, we remained in close contact with local government officials and established Post Office operating hours of 12 p.m. to 4 p.m. to ensure customer and employee compliance. We utilized all traditional news outlets to communicate Post Office hours. Post Office operations ceased later in the day on September 19 as Hurricane Maria began to make landfall.

While St. Croix sustained minimal damage from Hurricane Irma and we quickly resumed regular mail delivery, the island was so severely impacted by Hurricane Maria that it took approximately one week to gather intelligence and determine necessary recovery actions to facilities. The Frederiksted Post Office, in particular, was severely damaged and experienced a loss of mail due to looting and weather damage. To overcome resulting communications difficulties on St. Croix, we established twice daily touchpoint calls with the Postmaster on the island to obtain personnel status updates.

The Postal Service partnered with the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) to use its helicopters to transport supplies and critical backlogged mail containing checks and medicine destined to St. Croix. We were only able to begin moving other mail to St. Croix on October 2. It continued to be difficult to transport mail into St. Thomas because flights were limited to daytime hours.

The circumstances of Hurricanes Irma and Maria hitting back-to-back meant we were unable to recover from the first storm before bracing for the second storm to hit. Following the storms, we moved quickly to first locate employees and then to assess the extent of damage to facilities. This included determining which major utilities and resources, such as water, power and fuel, needed to be repaired or replenished. We also assessed the impact to our delivery and mail processing operations.

Executives at the highest level of the organization were engaged with recovery efforts and kept abreast of the situation so that critical decisions could be made and supported quickly. The Postal Service's Chief Operating Officer participated in daily telecoms with Northeast Area and Caribbean District personnel to discuss recovery actions and to ensure resources were provided expeditiously.

Over a three-month period the Northeast Area sent a leadership team, including senior level executives, to support recovery efforts. Teams deployed included personnel from Operations, Human Resources, Transportation and Information Technology. Employee Assistance Program (EAP) personnel were also deployed to the areas impacted by the storms.

Recovery Actions Following Hurricanes Irma and Maria

Postal Service recovery activities following the hurricanes focused on people, property, product, and communications.

People

Communication was extremely difficult in the immediate aftermath of both hurricanes. Cellular service was spotty or nonexistent, and due to power outages, many employees were unable to communicate their status. Despite these communication challenges, Caribbean District and Northeast Area personnel held coordinated conference calls three times a day, focusing first on locating employees to ensure all were safe. All USVI employees were accounted for within seven days following Hurricane Irma, and within eight days after Hurricane Maria.

Once the safety of our employees was confirmed, we provided them aid. Nearly 2,000,000 bottles of water and 700,000 MREs were distributed to employees in Puerto Rico and USVI. In addition, a total of 2,800 care packages—consisting of first-aid kits, flashlights, batteries, bug repellent and hand sanitizer—were distributed.

Property

Postal Service facilities and equipment, including generators for back-up power, sustained significant damage. By October 4, all 12 USVI facilities were fully or partially operational, or had established full or partial service at alternate sites. Both the Frederiksted Post Office and the Veterans Station continue to undergo repairs, which are expected to be completed sometime this summer.

Product

Because we were initially unable to transport mail to USVI, due to limited transportation options, it created a backlog. Further, destinating mail volume increased significantly as friends and family on the mainland sent aid to loved ones on the islands via mail.

In order to compensate for the lack of flights going in to St. Thomas, beginning on September 7, mail destined for St. Thomas and St. John was processed to a more finite sort level (5-digit ZIP Code level) on the mainland. When it arrived in the Caribbean, it could then by-pass the processing operations in Puerto Rico and quickly be sent directly to St. Thomas.

On September 15, we dedicated significant resources to reprogramming mail processing equipment in Puerto Rico, to process mail in delivery order, which expedited delivery once this mail reached St. Thomas. This operational adjustment was necessary due to limited employee availability on St. Thomas, caused in part by the ongoing curfew.

Transportation routes were also adjusted so mail could be promptly sent to temporary alternate sites upon arrival on USVI. The Postal Service also operated mobile units and deployed tents to allow customers to receive retail services and retrieve mail while permanent facilities were being assessed for structural damage and undergoing cleaning and repairs.

Additionally, we recruited 25 temporary employees on USVI to assist the 156 permanent employees with sorting mail and resuming timely mail delivery.

Communication

The Postal Service experienced multiple communications challenges, including an inability to transmit scan data on the availability or status of package deliveries. A lack of internet access was the primary contributing factor affecting mail and package tracking since the scan data could not be uploaded and recorded. Further, power outages meant that mobile delivery devices used to scan mail and packages could not be charged. The Postal Service has since invested in satellite dishes to improve communication coverage. They are currently being placed in strategic locations with limited cellular coverage.

To notify customers regarding the status of mail service, we leveraged social media, including a growing group of Facebook sites, including "USVI Hurricanes Maria and Irma Alert" and "Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency." The Postal Service made regular, reliable official posts to more than 14 local social media venues to share facts and reduce or correct misinformation. We also provided messaging and interviews to national and local news outlets.

To communicate with local employees, we provided nightly emergency hotline information (scripted and verbally delivered by local managers). We also provided information via internal electronic and hardcopy postal communications channels.

On September 22, we began a series of regular email/text updates sent to elected officials providing them status updates on Post Office closures, processing operations, and indicating how employees could contact the Postal Service to report their status.

Coordination with Other Federal Agencies

The Postal Service partnered with several agencies including DEA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the Department of Defense (DoD), to both ensure the safety of our employees and to reestablish mail delivery.

For example, Postal Service OIG staff sought the assistance of CBP contacts to locate employees on St. John when Hurricane Irma hit. The first postal personnel responding to St. Croix in the aftermath of Maria were able to do so because of transportation provided by DEA.

For the first time, we also partnered with DoD for an initial shipment of mail to the Caribbean District. This helped reduce the amount of backlogged mail.

Additionally, we partnered with agencies on several important mailings. We assisted FEMA with expedited mailing of hardcopy Individual Assistance grant applications to the mainland for processing, and we worked with the Center for Disease Control and USVI Department of Health to distribute public health informational flyers.

Challenges and Lessons Learned from Hurricanes Irma and Maria

The devastation in the USVI from Hurricanes Irma and Maria was unlike any experienced in recent history. The back-to-back Category five hurricanes caused extensive damage to the power and communication infrastructures in USVI, leaving the Postal Service without power and internet service for an extended period of time. This hampered our efforts to restore retail operations and track the delivery of mail and packages. We continue to face some challenges with intermittent interruptions to internet service and power.

The transportation infrastructure was also severely affected. The St. Thomas airport was closed for ten days following Hurricane Maria and then reopened with limited daily flights and operating hours, which remain in effect today. As a result, the latest flights leaving for St. Thomas do not always align with our mail processing operations, which means mail arriving in St. Thomas is not always delivered that same day.

Further, the barge used to transport mail from St. Thomas to St. John was out of service for two weeks, resulting in additional mail delivery delays.

Other infrastructure was significantly harmed, and road closures and debris made it difficult for our employees to travel on the islands. Every postal facility in the USVI was damaged, obstructed, or impacted by loss of power and water. The Frederiksted Post Office on St. Croix was severely damaged. Our efforts to repair and rebuild affected facilities have been extensive and are ongoing. We have worked quickly to restore retail and delivery services in devastated areas, despite stringent curfews on the three islands.

We are currently assessing the overall impact of the storms from a national perspective to determine any opportunities for improvement. The lessons learned from the unique circumstances and challenges we encountered in the USVI include:

- Like many businesses and federal agencies, the Postal Service relies heavily upon technology and internet service for its operations. The lack of internet service impacted our ability to restore services. As such, the Postal Service is strategically installing satellite dishes around the USVI to improve our internet capability now and in the future.
- Consistent with our universal service obligation, the Postal Service accepted all packages bound for the USVI even though the St. Thomas airport was initially closed and later reopened with limited flights and hours. As a result, a significant backlog of mail and packages accumulated on the mainland. More robust communication to our customers can help to better manage delivery expectations and improve the customer experience. We also learned that by reprogramming our processing equipment to presort mail in delivery order, we could eliminate the need for sorting at the local Post Offices and thereby expedite delivery to our customers. In order to handle the backlog of mail, we developed an expedited hiring process allowing the Postal Service to adjust staffing levels much quicker than normal. This process will allow us to be more flexible in the future, should the need arise.
- The limited transportation environment in the Caribbean immediately following the hurricanes reinforced the need to constantly assess transportation options. In the case of the USVI, we contracted with a commercial air carrier and also partnered with DoD for the one-time transportation of mail.
- Finally, we recognized that daily assessment of mail processing operations and the ability to dynamically manage mail as needed was key to handling the significant volumes.

Current State of Postal Service Operations

At this time, all Post Offices in USVI are operational with the exception of the Frederiksted Post Office. Post Office Box mail, package, and retail services are provided at a temporary location while the damaged facility is rebuilt. Delivery services for Frederiksted customers are being provided out of the Kingshill Post Office. The Veterans Station facility is currently providing service out of a mobile unit on-site, with an additional unit being deployed next week to improve customer service. Repairs at the Frederiksted Post Office and Veterans Station are expected to be completed sometime this summer.

Last week, review teams were deployed to every office in USVI to assess staffing needs. The staffing analysis should be completed within approximately 30 days. Staffing adjustments, if any, will be implemented as soon as reasonably possible based on availability of qualified personnel.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Postal Service is grateful for the coordination, partnership and assistance provided by the federal agencies in attendance, as well as those not represented at today's hearing. We are also proud of all postal employees who have worked tirelessly to restore mail service in the Caribbean District following

Hurricanes Irma and Maria. Many of these incredibly resilient and dedicated employees committed to restoring postal services while having to rebuild their own homes following the devastation.

While we recognize that challenges remain, which continue to affect expected service levels, the Postal Service is committed to ensuring we fulfill our mandate to provide secure, efficient, and affordable mail service to all our USVI customers.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to submit this testimony. I welcome any questions that you and the Subcommittee Members may have.

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Mr. FARENTHOLD. All right, thank you very much. I think we'll start with FEMA.

So, Mr. Vogel, I'll recognize myself for 5 minutes. I want to talk a little bit about debris removal.

We are 80 days away from a new hurricane season here. You've still got mounds of debris in various places, some of which are in pretty urban areas. My experience with hurricanes is you get all the loose stuff from outside and put it inside so it doesn't become a projectile. Is there some concern about a timeline for getting some of these debris piles removed before they become possible missiles in another hurricane?

Mr. VOGEL. Yes, Mr. Chairman, we've been working real hard with the Army Corps of Engineers and the territory in order to be able to come up with a final resting place for the debris that's been collected. Just recently the Army Corps of Engineers has asked for contracts in order to be able to have debris removed from the islands. We are awaiting information on that.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. So do you know where it's going to go yet.

Mr. VOGEL. That's in the process of being discussed and the contractors have that option.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. All right, let's talk a little bit—a lot of the local witnesses talked about the interaction with FEMA. At the hotel I was staying at the other night there was a FEMA employee. I talked to him for about 10 or 15 minutes.

It seems like part of the issue is FEMA hires when it needs to hire. Obviously you've got the need to staff up when there are big events. But somebody might get hired and then when they are finished, they are laid off and 6 months or a year later there is a need again. You may get some of the same people back or you may not. There is a loss of institutional knowledge there.

Have you all thought about some way of preserving that institutional knowledge or getting the training to new folks that are fast enough and fashioned where they can be of more service to the people faster?

Mr. VOGEL. Mr. Chairman, in any operation we want to be able to provide the best service that we can for those that we support. We are always looking at ways to be able to train those people as efficiently as we can and deploy them to the areas where they need to work.

Of course as work is completed, those employees may go to other operations, some may elect to leave. But we continue to work with everyone in order to have some type of stability in our force. I'm happy to say that we have hired 92 local hires here for this operation that will be able to remain working with FEMA as the recovery transpires.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. I think Ms. Plaskett and I are going to talk to some of the FEMA folks in Washington about a program to train locals and come up with something similar to the reserves that the Police Department has or the National Guard. That really sounds like a good idea that would be a minimum investment that would pay big dividends.

One of the other concerns was the fact that there is no local storage of blue roofs or water or food. Can you talk about why we don't have those more strategically placed?

Mr. VOGEL. Mr. Chairman, I know that the plan for the Caribbean was to provide those necessary commodities from the warehouse that was established in San Juan. I don't know if there is a facility in the Virgin Islands that would be able to properly store those necessary commodities in a climate controlled area. But we'll certainly take a look and work with the territory and see—

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Why would you need air conditioned bottles of water and plastic tarps.

Mr. VOGEL. Well, the tarps will eventually deteriorate in a hot, humid warehouse environment, and water certainly has an expiration date on it. We certainly wouldn't want to give any expired water to any survivors to use.

So there is inventory control procedures that would have to be followed. We'll work real hard with the territory in order to be able to see if we can help identify a system to make that happen.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. You're not saying water expires. There is probably contamination from the containers or something. I mean water has been around since the beginning of time.

Mr. VOGEL. Yes, that's correct, Mr. Chairman. But I will say that the supply system, the logistic system, although taxed, did work very well in order to be able to get those essential commodities here on the islands for those survivors.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. And also let's talk for one second—I'll come back to it in my second round of questioning. I'll go ahead and let Ms. Plaskett go. That's my 5 minutes.

Do you want to go ten and ten? That might be a little bit more efficient.

Ms. PLASKETT. Okay.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. So we're going to go 10 and 10. So give me 5 more, please.

So from a hurricane prone area, myself just recovering from Harvey and particularly some of our coastal resort communities like Port Aransas and Rockport in Texas, we've seen problems with FEMA using up all the hotel rooms, whether it's for relief personnel—and that's not all FEMA. That's government-wide as well as the linemen and all the other folks that come in. But in Texas we've still got several hundred people in hotels. In an economy based on tourism, that's a problem.

There was a witness previously that suggested that FEMA had the ability to bring in some sort of modular housing. I've visited our military and State Department facilities in places like Afghanistan where a standard container unit is basically converted into a residence. It seems like something like that might be easy to transport and relieve some of the pressure on the local economy for housing relief from government personnel. Is that something you all have tossed around?

Mr. VOGEL. Mr. Chairman, we are very concerned about the amount of space that we take when we come to any area that's been devastated by storms. This past storm we had assistance in housing our staff and also linemen and other volunteer agencies on ships that were docked in Frederiksted and in Christiansted—I'm sorry, Frederiksted and at Charlotte Amalie. We had those ships with us until February when there was sufficient housing that had been identified within the islands to be able to help support the

economy and move our staff and the rest of the survivors into existing facilities that had been repaired.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Let's talk a little bit more about housing challenges for permanent residents. It seems like there is a delay obviously of getting the housing back on line. We've talked some about insurance. I think that's particularly true of owners of apartment complexes and other multi-family dwellings that rent things out.

Do you see any way we can improve that so we've got places to put people other than hotels?

Mr. VOGEL. Yes, Mr. Chairman, we have the Multi-Family Leasing Repair Program. It's ongoing here in the islands where we will pay a landowner to be able to—we will help repair the apartments that they have. And then as long as they are willing to accept one of our survivors, one of the survivors that we identify that needs housing, we will repair that and then we will pay that property owner for 18 months while we're working on a permanent housing solution for that survivor.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. All right, thank you very much.

Mr. Raheem, you said you are talking to the local officials on a daily basis in coordinating?

Mr. RAHEEM. Yes, sir.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Is that by phone, via email? How do you talk to those guys.

Mr. RAHEEM. It depends on where I am at the moment. The times that I'm here, predominantly on St. Croix because that's where the joint field office is, Commissioner Davis, Deputy Commissioner Reuben, folks from Housing, Human Services, VITEMA, et cetera, we are in face to face meetings. When I'm back in New York and doing other things, it's obviously by phone, email, video-conference, whatever is required, sir.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Well, this committee has requested from your agency copies of emails related to this disaster relief and we've only got a handful. It seems like if you all have the level of coordination that you are talking about, there ought to be more emails. I'd like to request that you get with your IT folks and the appropriate folks and see about getting our document production request met.

Mr. RAHEEM. Certainly, sir.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. We also heard from our local panel beforehand that there was an issue tracking victims who are medivacked out to Puerto Rico or wherever. What are you all doing to improve the tracking of people so family members know where their relatives are, who's safe, who's not and that sort of thing.

Mr. RAHEEM. Mr. Chairman, so currently all the folks are in Atlanta, Georgia. We've consolidated all the folks that have been evacuated from the various locations to Atlanta, Georgia, and all those records are made available on a daily basis. In fact, the Virgin Islands very kindly provided three nurses. There is currently two remaining from St. Croix that are actually acting as case managers to all those folks.

So Virgin Islanders are directly speaking to other Virgin Islanders, discussing the needs and requirements. All those lists are available to the Virgin Islands Department of Health and are made available on an actual daily basis.

Anytime we return anyone, someone has met the needs of care and they return—actually three are being done this morning—those records are being done here. Obviously that's after the fact.

For this current season if that need arises again, using established IT systems in conjunction and coordination with the VIDOH is a critical planning factor. Something called JPATS, Joint Patient Assessment & Tracking System is something we are working with the VA to bring here for this hurricane season.

Clearly in the last one those evacuations occurred on a very urgent basis. Sometimes in those emergencies and as you are well aware from Texas and other places, those things don't always get all the details collected at the moment. The detail was collected relatively quickly after the fact. But certainly there is always opportunities to improve.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Great. I've still got some more for the right-hand side of the panel as I look at you guys. But we'll let Ms. Plaskett do ten minutes, and, hopefully, we'll have time to do a second round.

Ms. PLASKETT. Sounds great. Thank you.

I have some very specific questions that I wanted to ask very quickly. I'm hoping you can just quickly give me the answers so that we can cover a lot of material.

Mr. Vogel, one of the questions that has arisen and there seems to be some confusion about in terms of the Department of Education in the modular units that are going to be used. Recognizing that our children are back in school, we need to put on the record that the children are only in the school, in the public schools for four hours a day because they are sharing space with other schools because we don't have all the facilities in place.

When will the modular units that's been discussed be on island for the next coming school year?

Mr. VOGEL. Delegate Plaskett, I can't tell you the exact date. I can tell you that we have been working very, very hard with the Department of Education and with the territory in order to be able to identify the number and type of—

Ms. PLASKETT. So it has not been done?

Mr. VOGEL. Yes, that has been done.

Ms. PLASKETT. Do you have the type?

Mr. VOGEL. That has been done.

Ms. PLASKETT. Is there a person who has created them and do we have a date of shipment?

Mr. VOGEL. The contract is ready to be let. I don't know the date of shipment. We will get back to you.

Ms. PLASKETT. When you say the contract has been ready to be let, does that mean it has been signed and it's in place?

Mr. VOGEL. Ma'am, I would have to check with the Department of Education.

Ms. PLASKETT. So it's the Department of Education that's been responsible for that?

Mr. VOGEL. Yes. And we have been working with the Department of Education to assist them and identify what it was that they need.

Ms. PLASKETT. So your position is more advisory in terms of what should be needed and what specs you all would be willing to support?

Mr. VOGEL. We'll support whatever specs they ask for. And what we do is work with them in order to be able to develop the project worksheet that would reimburse the territory for that process.

Ms. PLASKETT. Okay, got it.

And now in terms of the hospitals as well, we have heard about evacuation of individuals. We know that dialysis units as well as people are really pretty much just being triaged at this point. If there is long-term care that's needed, they have to be removed.

We've heard the Governor talk about creating units on the ground as an assessment is done. Are those units on their way as well?

Mr. VOGEL. Yes, they are. And the units were delayed somewhat last week as a result of the storms but the units are on their way.

Ms. PLASKETT. And then in terms of the assessment, in the previous panel there was a discussion about the assessment. Colonel Clark, I don't know if that's in your department with the Army Corps of Engineers, has an assessment been made of the hospitals to determine whether it's 50 percent or more destruction or when is that going to happen?

Colonel CLARK. Ma'am, that assessment is ongoing.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Could you turn on your microphone, please, sir.

Colonel CLARK. Yes, sir.

The assessments are ongoing. I believe the actual assessments are complete. Right now they are working with the Federal agencies and all the partners in completing that report. I think the draft report will be done in about two weeks with the final report done by the 18th of April, ma'am.

Ms. PLASKETT. And then that report goes to our Governor and then goes to the Federal partners in FEMA as well to make a determination of what reimbursement will take place?

Colonel CLARK. Ma'am, we'll get that report to FEMA, yes.

Ms. PLASKETT. So you'll send the report to FEMA and then FEMA sends the report to the Governor. Is that how that works?

Mr. VOGEL. Yes, ma'am, that's correct.

Ms. PLASKETT. Okay, thank you.

Now turning the question to the actual hurricanes and the recovery and the process, one of the things ongoing on the ground is I'd like to focus a little attention on St. John, in particular on the Coral Bay area which was probably the most isolated area in the Virgin Islands after both of those hurricanes struck.

I was struck by testimony from some of the witnesses who talked about the psychological feeling of having waiting days and seeing the Navy and others circling waiting for them to come on the ground after Irma, them being there and then them leaving again to move themselves out of the way of the storm while Maria came and then waiting again.

Could you explain that process—I think that would be you, Colonel Heintzelman—how that works? And what is the protocol in the Virgin Islands for getting people on the ground, the military on the ground to support?

Colonel HEINTZELMAN. Sure. Delegate Plaskett, thank you for your question.

So I think I'll start with the national response framework. We respond to the mission assignment of the lead agency, in this instance FEMA asked us to do, and we do those in collaboration also with the territory. So whatever they ask us do, that's where we put our capabilities.

Ms. PLASKETT. And did you receive a request before the storms to be prepared to come?

Colonel HEINTZELMAN. Yes, ma'am. In fact I think me and Mr. Vogel first spoke on Friday or Saturday, the 1st or 2nd of September, we did our first mission assignment. It really allowed us to deploy the fleet, the maritime platforms. It take about 4 or 5 days to sail here, and that allowed us to have them offshore.

So when Irma hit the very next morning, the 7th of September, myself, Mr. Vogel, the Governor, the Adjutant General were over here on St. Thomas within hours after the storm passing.

Ms. PLASKETT. And how long did it take for all of the troops to actually be able to come on the ground?

Colonel HEINTZELMAN. You've had a lot of talk about where you house responders in hotels. What we did is we berthed all our marines and sailors on the ships. They came in every day. They performed their mission assignments. They went back to the ship at night where they slept and ate. Some stayed overnight. They would stay in the National Guard Armory or points of distribution. But what we didn't want to do was to be a burden to anybody else. So they came and went every single day.

The morning after the storm, on the 7th of September, we had forces ashore. We immediately started doing medical evacuation. We did search and rescue. We immediately started opening the roads.

Ms. PLASKETT. So in the case of Northern Florida I know that the Army deployed troops to be in shelters before the storms took place. Had there been a discussion about having people in place in shelters before? If it was done, how many? If not, why was it not done?

Colonel HEINTZELMAN. We have about 26 people of soldiers, airmen and marines that come down before the storm. We locate with the FEMA Incident Management Assistance Team at the VITEMA office and I coordinate the response. Other than that, it's just me. Out of the ships, which were just offshore, we had I think 3300 sailors and marines ready to go.

Ms. PLASKETT. And do you think that that was the proper mechanism for doing it rather than having individuals here berthed and staying in shelters on the ground? Was the ship the proper means with which to give the recovery and why?

Colonel HEINTZELMAN. Ma'am, I think it's ideal because you can keep them out of the way. They can stay out of the storms and they don't become victims. And then immediately following the storm with their helicopters—I think we had 30 some helicopters, landing craft, we are able to quickly move them to ashore. They are able to do their mission but at the same time they don't get in anybody's way. They don't take up the hotel rooms.

There is not much room for say responder based camps here in the islands. So they can go back and forth to the ship. I think it's kind of an ideal way to do it.

Ms. PLASKETT. And then one last question before I move on to someone else. In terms of communication, we know the communication systems were down, towers were down. Did you receive a request for I think they are called COWS or satellites or things? And how was that then deployed so that communication can occur?

Colonel HEINTZELMAN. Communication was definitely a challenge after the storms. We lost most of the cell phone towers.

So I provided a lot of the communications. I supported both FEMA and VITEMA. Everything we had is satellite based. We did that for several days until they were able to bring in more robust systems.

One of the challenges, though, with satellite based communications is you have to put up a dish antenna. If you remember after Maria the winds the next day, I think it was the 21st were still like 70-knot winds, you really can't put a dish antenna up in that.

So we were without communications for about 24 hours. We knew that would be the case. We went into that with what we call a no-communications plan.

[Power Interruption in Hearing Room.]

Colonel HEINTZELMAN. Would you like me to continue?

Ms. PLASKETT. I think we should wait for just a minute.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. We are certainly not in the dark on this issue.

So until we get our lights back on or if we determine we're not going to be able to, we'll take a recess subject to the recall of the Chair.

[Recess.]

Mr. FARENTHOLD. The subcommittee will come back to order. It seems we've got enough power for our reporter to record what we're saying and keep the official record. We've got the windows open. We've got some daylight and we feel like we're working on a generator now.

Are you still good without the microphones to record us, ma'am?

The REPORTER. Yes.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. All right, we'll just go on and speak up the best we can.

Ms. PLASKETT. Sure. I guess my question would be a follow-up.

Colonel Heintzelman, when you talked about an immediate time after the hurricane, after Irma you and the Governor or others were able to get onto St. Thomas very quickly, when were you able to get to St. John?

Colonel HEINTZELMAN. The same day, ma'am, within an hour.

Ms. PLASKETT. And when were you able to bring your deployed personnel to actually be there and assist with the recovery on St. John?

Colonel HEINTZELMAN. I know, ma'am, on St. Thomas it was the same day. So it would have been that Thursday, the 7th of September. I believe there was another day, until Friday the 8th until we got over to St. John.

Ms. PLASKETT. Because in the testimony I have from Miss Enwright, who is with St. John with Love City Strong and others, she discusses in her testimony that it took at least three days be-

fore they were able to see the Navy and others come after Irma. Would that be correct?

Colonel HEINTZELMAN. Ma'am, I know we had some people on Cruz Bay that Friday, the 8th of September.

Ms. PLASKETT. Okay, on Cruz Bay. And it took a little longer to get to Coral Bay, correct?

Colonel HEINTZELMAN. We did, ma'am, we did do some search and rescue over there. We took some urban search and rescue teams. We did some patient evacuations. I'm not sure the exact date, though, that people actually went over to Coral Bay and spent any time.

Ms. PLASKETT. Okay. Colonel Clark, in talking about the Army Corps, Senator Roach talked about—and I think what he was describing that he had applied for was the STEP, the Rapid Repair Program. Could you tell me if the Rapid Repair Program has that been deployed as yet in the Virgin Islands?

Colonel CLARK. Ma'am, what I can tell you is we deployed working through FEMA the Blue Roof Program and the Blue Tarp Program. We did not commission or assign for a repaid repair.

Ms. PLASKETT. Mr. Vogel, would that be through you, FEMA, that the Rapid Repair Program is now being initiated rather than—and that's supposed to be rather than having creating temporary housing, you repaired the homes that are in place already, correct?

Mr. VOGEL. Delegate Plaskett, that is correct. That program is administered and controlled by the territory. We reimburse the territory for those expenses that are associated with the homes that they repair and what FEMA calls the Sheltering and Temporary Essential Power Program

Ms. PLASKETT. STEP, correct?

Mr. VOGEL. That is correct, that's STEP.

Ms. PLASKETT. But now it's administered by the Virgin Islands Government. But of course the Virgin Islands Government is not going to initiate this until they are assured that the Federal Government has approved the reimbursement for it, right?

Mr. VOGEL. Ma'am, the territory—

Ms. PLASKETT. Why would you expend the money for the program if you didn't think that the Federal Government was going to reimburse you for it, which is how the STEP program works? When did the Federal Government agree to reimburse the Virgin Islands Government for it?

Mr. VOGEL. Delegate Plaskett, the territory elected to do this program through a contractor. We had been working with the territory in order to be able to develop a project worksheet and authorize them and obligate monies to them so that they were able to initiate that contract.

Ms. PLASKETT. Right. But the Virgin Islands Government, Governor Mapp, did not go into the contract negotiations until he knew that Brock Long had agreed to begin the reimbursement at a reasonable amount for each one of those homes; is that correct? And when was that negotiated with the Director of FEMA?

Mr. VOGEL. Ma'am, I'm sorry, I don't have a date when that was negotiated. I was not aware that that negotiation took place. I do know that we had worked with the territory.

We have also worked with the territory's subject matter expert, which is Witt O'Brien's. We have come up with a reasonable number in order to be able to have that project worksheet obligated.

Ms. PLASKETT. And what is that reasonable number?

Mr. VOGEL. The reasonable number that was initially sent forward to OLA was some \$634 million.

Ms. PLASKETT. And per home, what would that break down to?

Mr. VOGEL. The STEP authorization per home is \$25,000.

Ms. PLASKETT. And, Colonel Clark, what is the application of how much it cost per home for the Blue Roof Program?

Colonel CLARK. Ma'am, I don't know the exact number but it was up to \$25,000.00 repair for the Blue Roof Program.

Ms. PLASKETT. So if you are putting temporary housing and you are putting a temporary blue roof on a home at 25,000, then you are saying to permanently fix the roof at 25,000 does that seem like a reasonable amount for a roof? Because I know that part of the negotiation that the Governor had was that he wanted to increase the amount per roof because he did not believe that 25,000 was going to fix people's roof.

Mr. VOGEL. Delegate Plaskett, we initially had received from FEMA headquarters a ceiling of \$20,000.00 per home. We went back and asked for that to be adjusted and they adjusted it to \$25,000.00.

Ms. PLASKETT. So you are now saying that there was some negotiation back and forth that went on?

Mr. VOGEL. That was not in accordance with the negotiation of the contract, ma'am. That was in negotiation with FEMA headquarters that had established a \$20,000.00 ceiling for the amount of money that we were authorized to spend in the Sheltering and Temporary Essential Power Program per home.

Yes, we asked that to be increased. We asked for that to be increased. The Governor asked me to ask for that to be increased. We sent that forward and they favorably approved \$25,000 as the maximum per home.

Ms. PLASKETT. I know my time has run out.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. We've got time to do one more round of 5 minutes each. The committee staff and I need to get to the airport. We're trying to save the taxpayers some money and not spend another night in the Virgin Islands.

Ms. PLASKETT. Although you'd like to.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. That's exactly right.

Mr. Lavasseur, at the Park Service you talked a little bit about the damage sustained by your concessionaires. Obviously the largest is Caneel Bay. I was able to drive through and walk-through a little bit of that. It's pretty close to a total loss.

How much longer do they have on their concession contract?

Mr. LAVASSEUR. They are currently not under a concession contract. They are under a retained use estate. That's the legal mechanism on how they are sitting on the island right now.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. How much longer do they have under their agreement.

Mr. LAVASSEUR. Seven more years, sir.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. So as a businessperson and I'm looking at replacing a resort that obviously is hundreds of millions of dollars'

worth of improvements, there is no way I'm going to be able to recoup that investment with only a guarantee that there is seven years left on my contract.

Are you all negotiating with them? Is there a legal procedure in place for them to either extend it or forfeit it for somebody else to come in?

To me it seems like it's going to take a minimum of a 50-year agreement. I think the original agreement with the Rockefellers was, what, 60 years?

Mr. LAVASSEUR. I believe it was, yes.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. So are you all working on anything? I mean that's got to be critical to the hundreds of people who work there.

Mr. LAVASSEUR. So the current negotiations are happening at the highest levels of the Department of Interior and the National Park Service. Because they understand the significance and the importance of this, and the business issues of it, they have taken that from the park to ensure that it was their top priority. It's being handled from the Washington office.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. All right, thank you. And I assume you've got the other issue with the other hotel there. It's very similar. I did not get to look at that.

Mr. LAVASSEUR. Yes, Cinnamon Bay right now operates out of Cinnamon Bay and Trunk Bay. We are working with the concessionaire who has not received his insurance yet. So the concessionaire there is still working through insurance to try and get the facility up and running.

Now we at the National Park Service have taken upon ourselves to cleanup Trunk Bay knowing that that's an important function of the cruise ships to make sure that Trunk Bay is operational. It's currently operational right now and can be occupied by the concessionaire.

As you mentioned earlier with the business solution, the concessionaire has struggles with putting employees there with the amount of visitor base that we are currently having. It's one of those things, the chicken before the egg. If you don't put business there, visitors won't come. If visitors don't come, the business doesn't survive.

So there is that happening throughout all the territories and the commonwealth.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. All right, Colonel Clark, some of the local folks said that there was an issue with how you all installed the blue roofs here. As opposed to in the U.S., most of us have composition shingles and wood decking on the roof. That's not the primary form of construction here.

Can you talk about some of the challenges you are faced with the blue roof and anything you all have learned and would do different next time?

Colonel CLARK. Yes, sir.

First of all, I think the blue roof is a very important program that allows temporary roofing or shelter in place. We were able to put on 3,658 roofs across the territory. As you mentioned, it's really geared for shingle roofs like you would see in Florida and other places and not so much the metal roofing we have here.

So one of the things we're trying to strive to be better is next week we have what they call the remedial action plan workshop in which the enterprise, the Corps of Engineers enterprise will look at procedures, techniques that would be more useful for the Virgin Islands.

So I would say another thing is the roof systems that are here with the damage it was more than 50 percent, more than what you would have seen in Florida. Most of the baseboards were torn off. So we had to put down the baseboards, put on the blue roofs. So we'll look at other techniques that might be able to do it faster.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Finally—and I'll open this up because I don't know particularly who to ask this to and I saw this in Texas. One of the really important things you needed towards your return to normalcy aside from the debris removal and getting the grocery stores open is getting your communications restored. We saw some news stories about new technologies like either a drone or balloon based cell towers or even potentially using some form of specially equipped aircraft that would form an orbit around an area to provide cell service until the towers are in place.

Has anybody worked with that or have any thoughts on what, if any, the government involvement should be with that or should that be something left with the private sector? I guess Mr. Vogel—

Mr. VOGEL. Mr. Chairman, I can tell you—

Mr. FARENTHOLD. You are in the hot seat today.

Mr. VOGEL. I can tell you a system that worked very well here and it was the first time that FEMA had used that. We used part of the 82nd Airborne's Civil Authority Information Systems team. They had a great capability to go out and, number one, repair some of the radio stations.

Number two, they can do print media.

Number three, they have loudspeakers on their vehicles.

And, number four, it's a great bunch of soldiers who go out and meet people face to face in the remote areas. They have special vehicles that they can use, altering vehicles and it worked very well.

I am not aware of some of the other communications infrastructure that people are looking at. But I agree with you that anything that we might be able to do to improve the resiliency of communications and come up with other programs to be able to help that immediate need right after a devastating event like both of these hurricanes was is absolutely essential.

I know that just this past week the Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission was here. I know that they are looking real hard at what is it that they can do in order to be able to support it.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Again as a fellow survivor of a rather severe hurricane last year, my heart goes out to the folks in this area, and my thanks go to our Federal responders.

I'll now recognize Ms. Plaskett for 5 minutes and again with apologies that we don't have time to spend a full day on this. We just simply can't.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you. Thanks so much.

Colonel Clark, when you talked about the installation of the blue roofs, you said there were 3,658 that were put up. How many applications were submitted for the Blue Roof Program?

Colonel CLARK. Ma'am, we received about 6,000 ROEs. By the time we looked to take out the duplicates, triplicates, it was closer to about 5,000. Of that 5,000 there is about 500 that just did not meet the requirements, that the damage was so much that they didn't meet the requirements. The rest were people who either found other means to repair the roof, either insurance or repaired it themselves or canceled the program.

Ms. PLASKETT. And, Mr. Vogel, do you know approximately how many roofs or how many homes were damaged in the Virgin Islands? Do we have an estimate of that?

Mr. VOGEL. We have an estimate of some 12,500 homes.

Ms. PLASKETT. So we know that a lot of people then probably just did not apply. Is that what we think happened in terms of people not applying for the Blue Roof Program if there were 12,000?

Mr. VOGEL. Delegate Plaskett, many of those homes may not have had sufficient damage to apply for a blue roof. Many of those homes may have only received minor damage.

Ms. PLASKETT. So I guess the reason I'm asking this question is I'm concerned about those homes that still appear to be extremely damaged. And I know, Colonel, that you can only do for those that have applied.

The staff yesterday were on the Island of St. John and took some pictures of some of the homes that people are living in. We don't have the monitors up anymore but I know that we've made pictures of this.

What can we do as the Federal Government and the local government working together to ensure that people who are living in homes that look like this don't have to go into the 2018 Hurricane Season like this?

If you could see on one of these, people are actually living in one of the little sheltered areas there. How do we deal with this for the next hurricane season that's right upon us? And if it's not a hurricane, at least the rain that's incessant during those months.

Does anyone have suggestions on what do we do for these cases for people who are living in homes that look like this? How do we as a community or the Federal Government deal with that?

Mr. VOGEL. Well, Delegate Plaskett, we continue to work with the Virgin Islands Housing Authority and the Department of Human Services to identify any available structure to be able to support those survivors who are living in conditions like this and encourage them to be able to reach out and work with us to find a safe, sanitary and secure place to live while their permanent homes are either being replaced or repaired.

We are in the process of doing a Permanent Housing Construction Direct Repair Program, and that program will help those homes that have up to \$75,000.00 worth of damage done to them. And, hopefully, that will take care of the number of the homes that we see are damaged and the survivors are still in there.

I have also requested that permanent housing construction—a new construction program be authorized for the Virgin Islands. I'm awaiting headquarters, FEMA's decision on that.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you. And you all have done—you know I've asked some questions about what the deficiencies are. Please don't think that that means that I don't recognize the tremendous work and the amount of hours that you all put in. I know that cannot be understated as well. So many of you have really stepped up to the plate and gone outside of your mission statement.

So I guess my parting question would be if you could really talk about the lessons that were learned very succinctly. What maybe you did really well and what could be changed or improved or things that we as members of this committee that's our purpose is to find out what Federal legislation is within your purview to add to the support of your agencies in your missions as we move into the next hurricane season and to other places?

Mr. VOGEL. Delegate Plaskett, I'm taking all the time here. I'm sorry.

First of all, I think that the coordination that took place just prior to the storm, and the fact that we had been down here in May on a major military exercise and I was able to bring some of my staff with me, they got a chance to see where the critical infrastructure was, what the islands looked like. They hadn't been here before. That was absolutely essential for them to be able to see that. So once they got here and saw what had happened, they were then able to operate.

I think the relationship that I have with Colonel Heintzelman is absolutely critical in these types of operations. We talk all the time. He's in FEMA Region II as am I. Our discussions prior to the time as that black cloud was coming across the Eastern Atlantic looking at what it was that we ought to be able to say, okay, somebody needs to be able to make a decision here. It's going to cost a lot of money to deploy a joint task force. But if we don't have them with the forecast of the effects that this storm is going to have, we will be unable to provide the commodities immediately after the storm.

Colonel Heintzelman was able to make sure that those—all of those assets and resources were available to us. The joint task force was here. So that part of the process worked really well along with the initial coordination of the 55 Federal agencies that I asked for to come and help in this effort. Never in my 12 short years of working in FEMA have I seen such good cooperation.

We had great communications with the National Response and Coordination Center at FEMA headquarters. We were on with them early in the morning and very late at night. We had visibility on what was going to arrive the next day. As I identified additional requirements from all of the agencies that they identified to me, we would discuss that. They had arrangements made so that we would be able to have that commodity or that service shipped to us.

The thing that I would recommend and we were able to very quickly reorganize, but we need air operation assets on each one of the islands here. Initially the plan was to do that from Puerto Rico. We quickly had to change the way we did that business so that we had visibility on what type of essential equipment was here to be able to service the aircraft when they arrived, what kind of people we needed here in order to be able to make sure that those commodities and those services got out to the territory.

So for that part of the operation I think went really well. I know that there are processes in place in the coming years to make sure that those air operation sections are sufficiently staff for each one of the islands.

Believe me, our heart goes out to all the people that have been affected by this thing. We certainly understand how critical it is in order to be able to get things back in place.

I commend the Virgin Islanders with their resiliency. I've just got to tell you that we will be here as long as it takes in order to be able to get this place put back together again and be more resilient in the future. And I'm committed to do whatever I can in order to be able to help.

Ms. PLASKETT. Colonels, did you have anything additional to add?

Colonel HEINTZELMAN. Ma'am, I would second what Mr. Vogel said. The most important lesson learned for NORTHCOM is pre-positioning those forces before the storm like you mentioned with the amphibious readiness group so that the capabilities are immediately available post-storm.

That's a big decision me and Mr. Vogel talked directly in person with Mr. Long back on the 5th of December. It's about a \$10 million decision but we intend to do that every year. I mean you can't anticipate everything in a big disaster like this. What we did anticipate we've taken note of those capabilities in order to prepare for next season.

Ms. PLASKETT. And, Colonel Clark, because now after the disaster and the initial recovery, so much of this falls on the Army Corps in terms of the rebuilding.

Colonel CLARK. Ma'am, we all know in the response and recovery effort it's never fast enough for those that are in need. That's why the Corps and all the Federal partners, territory partners take doing after action reviews and lessons learned very seriously. The Corps enterprise itself in October and November sent outside personnel down to the Virgin Islands that did interviews with all Federal partners, local partners and other folks to collect those lessons learned.

As I mentioned before, we are always looking for ways to get better. One example is next week in New Orleans where we are getting with some of the Federal partners to discuss in the remedial action plan workshop to review some of those lessons learned; to review and prioritize the issues that relate to the Corps' response to this disaster; consider courses of action for addressing those issues and developing action plans to innovate improvement for correcting operational deficiencies like we encountered for the blue roof; look at ways of how the blue roof mission could be unique to the Virgin Islands and how we can improve.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you.

And thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this.

One of the things I would hope that the Committee would consider in listening to some of the testimony and the changes and the one you have discussed about having a cadre of training, I wholeheartedly agree with you and support that.

But also I think there needs to be a serious look from our level as to whether or not we need to continue having regional offices

that are in Puerto Rico for the Virgin Islands. Because when issues like this come up, there is a fight for limited resources between ourselves and our brothers and sisters in Puerto Rico.

They are also compromised. I think that the Virgin Islands should not be reporting to Puerto Rico but potentially Florida or other places who have the resources and the isolation in times of need like this.

Mr. FARENTHOLD. Thank you very much.

I'd like to thank the witnesses again for appearing before us today.

We'll hold the record open for 2 weeks for any member who is not here to submit written opening statements or a question for the record. If you folks would be willing to answer any of the written questions should they appear, we would greatly appreciate that.

If there is no further business, without objection this subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD

TESTIMONY SUBMITTED TO THE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM'S
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE INTERIOR, ENERGY, AND ENVIRONMENT

PRESENTED BY RUBY SIMMONDS ESANNASON, D.A.

MARCH 12, 2018

Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present a statement regarding the treatment of patients evacuated from the territory's hospitals in the wake of hurricanes Irma and Maria. As this committee reviews the federal government's response after the storms and attention is paid to debris removal, restoration of electricity, and the issuance of SNAP cards, it is vital that you not lose sight of the 682 individuals who were medically evacuated from the Virgin Islands following the hurricanes and the manner in which those evacuations were handled.

In his State of the Territory address presented on January 22, 2018, Governor Kenneth E. Mapp noted that of the 682 persons evacuated for medical reasons, some 248 still remained on the mainland at that time. Since then, I have asked, what happened to the other 434 persons? How many of them came back home in the cargo section of the plane? How many came back in urns in someone's carry-on luggage? I can tell you specifically about the ones I know of, including my son-in-law, the aunts of two of my step-daughters, a very dear friend, and the relatives of other persons with whom I have spoken or whose stories have been reported in the news:

Sergeant Aaron K. Hodge, Sr. died in Atlanta, Georgia November 15, 2017
Ashley Frett, Sr. died in Atlanta, Georgia November 15, 2017
Cynthia Thomas died in Atlanta, Georgia October 25, 2017
Aureo Correa Rivera died in Puerto Rico January 13, 2018
Almarina Palmer died in Austell, Georgia January 2, 2018

This is but a small sample of persons who died away from home, away from loved ones after having been taken from the Virgin Islands by FEMA. The stories of lack of communication with family, of patients being lost, of persons being evacuated without their medication, or proper identification, or without a change of clothing are very much the same. Permit me to tell the story which I know best, that of Virgin Islands Police Department Sergeant Aaron K. Hodge, Sr. who was a patient at the Roy Lester Schneider Hospital when hurricane Irma hit. He was evacuated first to St. Croix and then later to Puerto Rico. He was able to make contact, and we knew that he was in Puerto Rico, but exactly where we did not know. Through the contact of friends, my daughter was able to get a telephone number of the hospital in Puerto Rico and the person with whom she spoke told her that the "refugees from the Virgin Islands were going to be placed in shelters." This is not hearsay. I was standing close enough to hear what was said. I

am not sure what the conditions of those shelters were, but the reports coming from other evacuees who were able to call into the radio station painted a picture of horrendous conditions. Nonetheless, my daughter and I went to VITEMA the next day seeking information. The person who was VITEMA's liaison to the hospital could not even get through to the people in Puerto Rico to get any information for us. We were told to contact Mr. Reuben Molloy, of the Department of Health, as he was the one responsible for coordinating the evacuations. We called and left messages, but never received a return call. While Aaron was in Puerto Rico he told me that drinking water was being rationed. He was being given water in a container the size of a small fruit cup. That's about three ounces. This was what was being given to a full, grown adult. Sergeant Hodge was eventually evacuated to Atlanta Georgia, where he died on November 15, 2017.

We are just one family. This is just one story. How many other hundreds of Virgin Islanders have similar stories to tell? When will the hearing be held to allow them to tell of the conditions under which their loved ones died. *The Virgin Islands Daily News* of Tuesday, February 20, 2018 tells the story of Ashley Frett, Sr. as recounted by his daughter. You ask about the Federal Government's response. According to Avril Frett, FEMA lost her father. She said she was horrified by the lack of coordination and communication from those tasked with managing the evacuations. She was the one who had to call around to several hospitals until she found her father. Similarly, Mr. Aureo Correa's family was told that he was sent to St. Croix. When they asked relatives in St. Croix to go and check on him, they discovered that he was not in St. Croix but had been sent to Puerto Rico where he was placed in a tent rather than being placed in a hospital room. In all instances, the local officials said they were not responsible for the patients because FEMA was the entity which removed them from the territory. Therefore, FEMA was responsible.

Fortunately, there are persons who were evacuated, who survived, but their accounts of the treatment they received are equally appalling. Ophelia Torres, a retired nursing Professor at the University of the Virgin Islands, lays out in graphic detail in a two-part interview in the *St. Thomas Source*, the awful treatment she received once she was evacuated to Puerto Rico.

There is no way in this brief statement to adequately capture the magnitude of pain and suffering endured by medical evacuees and their families at that hands of those who were responsible for their care. Each family needs an opportunity to share their experience with this process and get the answers deserved from those responsible.

Among the questions we would like answered are:

1. Exactly what was the Federal Government's role in evacuating patients from the territory?
2. How many patients were taken from each district?
3. Where was each person taken?

4. What was the final disposition of each patient? (i.e. how many died, how many came back home alive, how many are still away, how many are lost and unaccounted for)
5. Is the Federal Government going to provide funds to return the remaining persons from the mainland?
6. Is the Federal Government going to reimburse families for the cost of returning their deceased loved ones?
7. Whose responsibility was it to notify families that their loved ones were being evacuated?

Answers to these questions will not bring back the people we have lost. However, if the full truth about what happened to all the persons evacuated for medical reasons were to be revealed, maybe both the federal and local governments can better prepare to handle similar situations in the future, should the need arise.

Thank you for the opportunity to place this statement on the record.

JANELLE K SARAUW
 SENATOR, 32nd LEGISLATURE
 UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS



CHAIRPERSON:
 Workforce Development, Consumer Affairs, and Culture

COMMITTEES:
 Rule, and the Judiciary
 Education, Youth, and Recreation
 Housing, Public Works, Waste Management, and Planning
 Homeland Security, Justice, and Public Safety

Congressional Field Hearing
 Earle B. Ottley Legislative Hall
 Testimony: Senator Janelle K. Sarauw
 March 12, 2018

Please find this document, my written testimony as it relates to the relief and recovery in the territory, post Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

On September 6, 2017 Hurricane Irma struck the United States Virgin Islands with such severe force, that the hurricane itself no longer registered on the Saffir-Simpson Scale. Entire homes, schools and government buildings were destroyed, the sole hospital in St. Thomas and clinic in St. John was destroyed, our communication infrastructure was severely damaged, and most unfortunately, lives were lost.

Although somewhat comforted by the commitment and provision of the Federal Government's assistance, what we found immediately post storm, left cause for some concern. With two distribution sites initially open, panic among the residents compounded when the food provision did not include provisions for babies, infants or toddlers, seniors, nor special needs/persons with diet restrictions. In fact, the high sodium and high sugar contents for a population without adequate access to medical care facilities, was very concerning. This left no choice but for members of this community, my office included, to begin to take up the charge and run logistics to get proper aid into the territory via private means. One example, is that my office chartered a private boat to retrieve food and medical supplies from a private entity in Puerto Rico, and even ice from our sister island of St. Croix, to distribute to residents on the island of St. Thomas.

The island of St. John was in probably even more of a dire situation. There was no communication between islands because of the limited communication service. But there was also no transportation as the ports remained close for a number of days (St. John's accessibility is by boat/ferry). And so for the first few days post storm, St. John was pretty much on their own for survival.

In addition, as there were continuous rain systems following the storm, the initial distribution of tarpaulin was almost non-existent and when the tarps were distributed, the dimensions were too small. And so residents who were trying to salvage what was left of their homes and its contents were met with grave despair, especially when less than two weeks after Hurricane Irma, Hurricane Maria came to bore down on the U.S. Virgin Islands again, St. Croix receiving the brunt of this storm, and St. Thomas and St. John's infrastructure already compromised.

As this storm also ravished Puerto Rico, who for the most part becomes the storing hub for the Virgin Islands goods, immediate aid into the territory moved at a pace that was less than desirable. Even machinery to clear roads and the like appeared a stalled ordeal.

Congressional Field Hearing
March 12, 2018
Testimony: Senator Sarauw

As a resilient people, the Virgin Islands community bolstered together, helped out their neighbors, began to clear debris and shared what little food was on island [some grocery stores were damaged, and with ports closed, those that remained had limited inventory in short order].

Nonetheless, recovery ensued, and aid began to become more organized. The ports eventually were opened and families were able to receive aid directly from their loved ones living in the mainland. This office along with many others continued to network to receive and distribute aid. Assessments began to take place.

Now, six months after the first hurricane, three months before the start of hurricane season 2018, the Virgin Islands is in a very precarious situation. Still without completed assessments, no modular hospital or schools or otherwise temporary structures have been erected to date. That means that many of our territory's medical evacuees are still in the mainland without family and a high level of uncertainty [41 medical evacuees have expired since being transferred] and schools scheduled to resume after summer break may still have to partake in split session. FEMA assistance as it relates to damaged homes have left many in a state of disarray. To date there still remains too many residents awaiting feedback from adjusters for their insurance claims. Many residents, seniors in particular who received little to no assistance and referred to the SBA loan program are left trying to figure out how, why and when will they begin to assemble a place to live.

We know that the territory has to rebuild a more resilient infrastructure and the devastation, as terrible as it was, has brought about the opportunity to do just that. This means however that the rebuild is not immediate and in the interim the people of the Virgin Islands, U.S. citizens, require some reprieve and require it more expeditiously. A victim of climate change, we anticipate more severe and frequent storms in our region. We do not have the luxury of driving to another state when these natural events occur, nor do we necessarily desire to. But we do want to be able to have a level of comfort and solace, knowing that adequate and timely aid and assistance is available to us from our Federal Partners, and that the urgency of now is understood when dealing with lives-children, seniors.

Although nature has rebounded, and our hills are as lush as they ever were, our waters a pristine turquoise, and the cruise ships have resume calls to our ports, many in the Virgin Islands are still struggling on a daily basis to meet their basic needs. With three months approaching the next hurricane season, the partnership between our local government and that of our Federal government, should provide for our residents a sense of hope and not anxiety.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the people of the United States Virgin Islands – United in Pride and Hope. God Bless America and God Bless the United States Virgin Islands.

Statement for the Record

House Oversight Committee

Re: Hurricanes Irma & Maria, and the ensuing response in the USVI

My name is Meaghan Enright, and I've been invited to submit a statement for the record for the hearings on the historic 2017 hurricane season and its impact on the U.S. Virgin Islands. I'm a 12 year resident of St John, and over the past six months have worked with Love City Strong and the Love for Love City Foundation on the recovery efforts on St John.

From the moment Irma formed off the coast of Africa, as a Cape Verde system, on the 30th of August, everyone was watching her. Something felt different about this storm, and so she was monitored carefully despite being thousands of miles away. As she drew closer, she underwent rapid intensification on the 4th, going from a Category 2 to a Category 5 by 5th of September and the Territory was on high alert for a direct hit by the storm.

Growing up in Virginia and North Carolina, and spending more than a decade in the USVI, I've experienced hurricanes of varying intensities. I was concerned, because this was an unusually strong storm, but felt confident we could ride it out. My apartment on St John is essentially a bunker, the lower level of a concrete home with an unfinished second level - my roof is the concrete floor of the planned upper unit. We're set below the crest of a hill, in a narrow bay, south facing but largely protected, and high enough to be clear of even the most impressive storm surge. And yet, I had no idea what we were in for. Fortunately, Irma passed through the Territory in the daylight hours of the 6th of September. Had she passed at night, the casualty numbers for the Territory would certainly have been different.

One of the anomalies of Irma's track was the tendency of her track to wobble north every few hundred miles. As the storm came through the Territory, the eye passed over Virgin Gorda, Tortola, the East End of St John, and Jost Van Dyke. This put the west side of St John in the outer portion of the western eye wall. We sat in it for hours, and then, as we would've passed into the eye, the storm wobbled north, placing us in the southern eye wall. While the western side of the island was spared the devastating winds on the interior of the eye wall, we sat in Category 5 sustained winds for upwards of 6 hours. While official reports put the maximum sustained winds at 185 miles per hour, all the relevant meteorological equipment in the Territory was destroyed well before the peak of the storm, and the shared opinion of most residents is that sustained winds were well above 200 miles per hour, some say above 250. Compounded by dozens of tornados spawned across the island within the hurricane, the destruction we would eventually come to see was complete. It felt at times as if the concrete structure of my apartment would simply disintegrate, and our shuttered doors bowed and threatened to give way. We were fortunate, and they all held.

The sound of a storm of this magnitude is both indescribable and unforgettable.

When the winds died down to category 1 or tropical storm, it was dark out, so we had to wait until the next morning to see the damage. It was difficult to imagine that much could have been spared. When the sun came up on the 7th we were still under curfew, but we ventured out to check on neighbors and assess the damage. There was not a leaf left on the trees, save a few tenacious palm fronds. Palms are naturally designed to survive these events, their slender trunks have enough give and the fronds will blow about but generally weather the storm, but Irma was different. The trunks of many of the palms were snapped in half, which they can't recover from. Power poles were down or snapped everywhere it seemed - we would come to find out that St John lost over 90% of our power poles in the first storm. WAPA had shut down the grid the night before Irma arrived, so there was no concern of live lines, but it was clear that it would be a very, very long time before power was restored. In Enighed Pond, where the barge dock is located, several vessels had broken their lines, and were up in the mangroves, or sunk, or on the rocky beach. As we walked further out of our neighborhood, which is very near Cruz Bay proper, we began to see more and more people coming out of their homes, or their neighbors homes, wherever they had ridden out the storm. Each new face was a blessing, a relief, because mere hours before I'd been certain that some of my neighbors wouldn't survive. We walked down to town, surveying the damage and trying to get a cell signal to let our families in the States know we were safe. Along Bay Street, in front of Grande Bay, almost all the palms were snapped, and the poles were down all along the road. At least a dozen sailboats were beached in Cruz Bay, nestled up against the beachfront bars, piled on top of each other. A few boats, miraculously, remained afloat, but were as much as 80 feet from their original anchorage. Further towards the center of town, we found more and more people who were safe, a further relief. Friends who had weathered the storm in an office in the Mongoose Junction shopping center had lost windows and part of their roof, but somehow still had an active wireless connection thanks to their fiber optic line, and so I was able to get a message out to the States to notify my family. These friends, Siobhan Mulvey and Tenesha Keyes, had begun a list of people they'd confirmed safe, and were sharing it on social media. That internet connection would soon prove critical to the recovery efforts.

Shortly thereafter, we were gently reminded of the curfew by VIPD officers on patrol downtown, and returned home. Late on the morning of the 7th I saw the first Navy vessel off the south shore of St John, and the Navy Seahawk helicopters, and the sense of relief and hope was palpable. They weren't on shore yet, but help was nearby. We would learn that they had been waiting south of Haiti for the storm to pass, so that they would be well positioned to respond. At that point, we had no idea what to expect as far as federal response - historically St John is, as the smallest, the forgotten island of the Territory when it comes to aid, but we already had a sense that we had taken the most direct hit of the three islands. All that was left to do that Thursday was sit and wait. We knew Friday would bring more answers, because our friends Stephen Libbey and Ryan West had set a plan to meet at the Tap Room in Mongoose Junction to touch base and make sure we were all safe. What was intended as a meeting for friends would turn into a community gathering of hundreds of people.

Friday morning, before the meeting set for 10 am, we ventured out in the other direction from the previous day, down the south shore. Again, poles were down, debris was everywhere. The EC Gas Station had lost the roof to the pumps, and as we went over Jacobs Ladder, we saw that the Westin had a great deal of damage. Roofs off of many of the units and the lobby building close to destroyed. Everywhere on the hillsides you could see the destruction, in many places the lines of damage so clearly delineated that it could only have been wrought by tornados. We couldn't get much further than the Westin that day, so we headed back to town, towards the meeting place. Dozens of people had gathered, and representatives from VIFD, VIPD and the Coast Guard were there. No one was quite sure how the meeting had been organized, but there we were. This would become the first of many 10 am community meetings at Mongoose Junction, but after the first day, a much more organized, structured format was adopted. Presciently, that morning, Mongoose Junction owner and developer said, "the only way St John is gonna work is as a community", a sentiment which would be proven sooner than anyone expected. After the meeting, there was a sense of anxiety, because we didn't know when help would be coming - we'd seen the Navy and Coast Guard helicopters circling overhead but very little had been seen on the ground. There was no sign of FEMA yet on St John, and we were 2 days out from the storm. No one had spoken to St Thomas or St Croix, which meant that it was very likely that no one knew what our condition was. Yet there was also a sense of community cohesion, a feeling that if we didn't know when help was coming, we needed to start for ourselves. Restaurant owners and managers met to discuss who had a generator and could cook, and who could donate food from their walk-in to support the places that could open. Crews were assembled to clear debris from the roads, and lists were started of people who hadn't been heard from yet.

In the midst of this, I went to the other side of Mongoose Junction where businesses still had working internet. Several of them had posted their network passwords, and as I sent messages to my family and friends, I received a message from Nils Erickson, an friend who had lived on St John for many years but who is now based in New England. Nils informed me that he was working with a team in Fajardo, PR to get supplies over to St John, and that the boat would be arriving in Cruz Bay at 4 pm, roughly 2 hours from the time I received the message, and could we put together a list of 40 people to be evacuated back to Fajardo? Suddenly, there was an immediate mission. With Siobhan Mulvey, Tenesha Keyes, Ryan West and Stephen Libbey, we set about spreading the word to anyone who was high priority: pregnant women, mothers with young children, seniors, and anyone with non-emergency medical needs. We went to the National Park Dock to be ready to unload supplies, though where those supplies were going, we weren't yet sure. As more and more people showed up at the dock, we started a manifest for the captains, and a triage system in case we had more than 40 people trying to leave. When the boat was on the dock and we had unloaded the water, food, diapers, pet food, batteries, flashlights, and other supplies that were sent by our neighbors on Puerto Rico, we turned our attention to the evacuees. The first 20 were mothers and their young children. It was a heart wrenching scene as they said goodbye to their husbands and fathers, most of whom were staying to clean up and begin to

rebuild. Once they were boarded, the remaining people on the dock were lined up. In a moment of serendipity, it turned out that we had exactly 40 people waiting on the dock that day.

As Friday afternoon had progressed, we'd learned that we could anticipate 3 more boats from Puerto Rico on Saturday, as well as several from St Croix. The captains wanted to know if we would be back on the dock the next morning, and just like that, we had responsibilities. The next morning we all met early, at Cruz Bay Landing which was graciously serving the first of many breakfasts to the community. I believe they fed about a thousand people that first Saturday. After breakfast we went back down to the dock and with the help of other volunteers, set up a registration system for people who wanted to evacuate. Over the next ten days we worked with John Bergeron, from US Public Health, who was acting as Incident Commander for the National Park, to set up a system within which we could operate on the National Park Dock and within the National Park Visitors Center building. We also worked with captains and the US Coast Guard to get approvals for the boats to use the port, since technically the Ports didn't open until around the 10th of September. We were allowed, with other members of the community, to attend the morning briefings of FEMA, USCG, NPS, USACE, and other agencies and military deployments, which in turn allowed us to disseminate accurate and much needed information to the community through the 10 am meetings at Mongoose Junction, organized daily by Ryan West. We developed a close working relationship with both the Bloomberg Group and Kenny Chesney's Love for Love City Foundation as well, and in the process, largely because FEMA needed something to call us, we became known as Love City Strong. Over the course of the two weeks between Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Maria, and with the support of NPS, USCG, and Love for Love City, among others, we evacuated around 1,200 people to St Croix and Puerto Rico.

During those two weeks, our daily weather update came from the Coast Guard at the 7 am meeting, and Ryan relayed that to the greater St John community at 10 am. A representative in from Coral Bay would then relay the same information out there at their noon meeting. Still largely without communication island-wide, this was our lifeline, the only way to be prepared for approaching weather. There was some concern that Hurricane Jose would approach the islands, but that system stayed away. When Maria intensified, we initially thought that the storm would pass south of St Croix. After it became clear that we were in for another direct hit, we entered what was one of the most disheartening parts of the entire experience. We had, over two weeks, built up a solid response team of FEMA (after a slow start), Navy Reserve, USACE, USCG, and other federal deployments. According to their rules of operation, many teams were required to pull back to safety and redeploy after the event. Despite understanding, the optics of this phase are hard on community morale. Every team, without exception, went to great lengths to assure us that they would be back to continue to help, but we knew based on the track of Maria that we would now be splitting relief resources with Puerto Rico and St Croix as well, as they sat directly in her path.

While Irma was a wind event, Maria was a rain event. The already severely damaged island was drowned in almost 4 feet of rain in 12 hours. Drainage guts that were backed up with debris meant that flash flooding was largely unpredictable, and a massive storm surge combined with 30 foot seas meant that most of the few boats that had survived Irma did not have the same luck in Maria. To be devastated by a second Category 5 storm in 2 weeks is not something anyone should have to bear. Many of the people we had evacuated to St Croix and Puerto Rico ended up riding out the second storm in shelters on unfamiliar islands, and the guilt of having put them there was compounded by the guilt of having accepted supplies after Irma that those two islands now desperately needed themselves. It took four days after Maria for the ports to open, during which time we experienced fuel shortages and narrowly dodged critical water shortages. Gaps in the system that had become apparent post-Irma only became more apparent post-Maria.

The next four months include a lot of details, and many successes and failures. In the interest of brevity, what follows is a list of the gaps and weaknesses as I saw them, as well as a list of what went well and can be a model for future response.

Response Weaknesses

- FEMA deployment to St John was very slow in coming.
- VITEMA was understaffed and underfunded leading up to the storms, hindering their ability to be prepared and to execute their mission.
- FEMA regulations often didn't take into account the intricacies of life on St John, for example, FEMA assessors are not supposed to let applicants into their vehicles or ride in the applicants vehicles. This presented challenges on two levels: first, many residents don't have cars here, and certainly many didn't after the storms, and second, many residents live on their boats, but had trouble initially getting assessors onto their vessels. "The playbook doesn't work here" was a frequent lament
- Law Enforcement : most VIPD officers live on St Thomas. The team here for Irma didn't get relieved for 6 days after the storm, affecting morale and their ability to perform their duties effectively.
- Communications : everyone, including the Coast Guard and FEMA, struggled with this. We saw it firsthand due to our involvement with evacuations. Frequently communications were down even within a unit, let alone between agencies and NGO's
- Logistics : once Puerto Rico went down, shipping was slowed to a crawl. Many supplies would not have made it into the Territory if not flown in by private groups. Additionally, sourcing relief supplies was especially challenging this season because of the successive hits of Harvey, Irma, Maria, and Nate, as well as wildfires in the West.
- Aging and unmaintained infrastructure in the Territory was too susceptible to the storm and took extensive damage that proper infrastructure may have withstood. Roads and hospitals are the prime examples here.

- Damage to homes and displacement of residents is not addressed in a timely manner. There is still a large proportion of St Johnians who are residing somewhere other than their permanent residence, and the resources that are available are on a very long timetable. As we approach our next hurricane season, repairs that are more than temporary are needed, and needed quickly.
- Temporary Housing Solutions have also been slow in coming. St John is already short on housing in the best of times, so our population is particularly at risk with a large percentage of homes storm damaged or unlivable due to mold issues.
- Disaster Case Management is understaffed. Most of the disaster case managers we have on island are St John residents who are victims of the storms themselves, and they are vastly overcommitted on the number of cases they have to handle.

Response Strengths

- Public/Private Partnerships : private philanthropy is the reason that St John's recovery has come along as swiftly as it has. Without the support of The Bloomberg Group and Love for Love City Foundation, as well as smaller private donors, we wouldn't have had the resources we needed. Generators, both commercial and private, food, water, medicine, critical equipment, debris removal... all of this and more were provided by these organizations. Additionally, the willingness of FEMA, NPS, USCG, USACE, and others to work with these private groups and local groups like Love City Strong enabled the partnerships to thrive and the community to get what they needed as efficiently as possible.
- The linemen who responded to restore power. We have BBC on St John and I know the other islands have linemen from other parts of the country, but it is nothing short of miraculous what they have done in six months. We cannot overstate their value to the recovery.

I'm sure I've overlooked somethings, a lot has happened of the past six months and it's challenging to condense it all into a cohesive report. The takeaway for me is two-fold:

First, our response and recovery on St John has been a unique blend of public and private partnerships. This is a model that will work going forward, and which needs to be solidified and supported.

Second, these events are going to be increasingly likely, and as we rebuild we must make sure that every stage of the the response and recovery are more resilient than before. That resiliency includes serious, permanent housing solutions, and a more effective program moving forward to help displaced residents.

Thank you for your time, and for your interest in reviewing the response. The community of St John and Love City Strong look forward to working with all partners to increase the resiliency and preparedness of St John and the greater U.S. Virgin Islands.