



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi
Remarks as Prepared For Delivery
Congressional Briefing
“Puerto Rico’s Climate Reality: A Snapshot of Accelerated Climate Change”
September 18, 2014

Good morning. I want to welcome you to today’s briefing, which has been organized by the *Latino Climate Action Network*, a group that seeks to empower Hispanics by providing them with information about climate change and its effects on our communities. Today’s briefing focuses on the impact of climate change in my congressional district, the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico.

This morning, you will hear three subject matter experts discuss their work on this important subject. I want to thank Javier Laureano, Ernesto Díaz and Dr. Cecilio Ortiz for traveling from Puerto Rico to our nation’s capital. Their presentations will serve to enhance our understanding of what can be done to better prepare for, and adapt to, global climate change.

This briefing is particularly timely. In July, the White House released a report on the economic costs of delaying action to stem climate change. And next week, the United Nations Climate Summit will be held in New York City. The U.N. Secretary-General has called climate change the “defining issue of our time” and urged the international community to act with a sense of urgency, noting that “the more we delay, the more we will pay in lives and money.”

To frame today's discussion about climate change and Puerto Rico, let me offer a few brief observations.

The latest science indicates that extreme weather events are occurring more frequently, and with greater intensity, as a result of climate change. By all indications, Puerto Rico provides a case in point.

For example, Puerto Rico was impacted by Hurricane Irene in 2011 and Hurricane Sandy in 2012. These storms destroyed homes, businesses, roads and other infrastructure. Federal agencies like FEMA and SBA spent millions of dollars to help the island recover.

Moreover, in the last several months, Puerto Rico has experienced abnormal drought conditions. These conditions have adversely affected all island residents, and in particular our farmers and ranchers, who have had to contend with lower crop yields and livestock losses.

In addition, Puerto Rico has been experiencing periods of extraordinarily intense rains. In May, for example, a heavy rain storm in the northeastern part of the island caused damage to *El Yunque*—a treasure in the U.S. Forest System that functions as a critical carbon reservoir.

Apart from extreme weather, there are other adverse effects from climate change occurring in Puerto Rico. Last month, five new species of coral found in the waters off of Puerto Rico were listed by the federal government under the Endangered Species Act as “threatened.” Science indicates that these species are imperiled, at least in part, by ocean acidification associated with

climate change. The loss of coral reefs means the loss of a natural buffer that shields Puerto Rico's coastal municipalities from storm waves. It also means the loss of habitat for our fisheries.

Simply stated, the impacts of climate change in Puerto Rico are real, quantifiable and significant. It is clear that we must enhance our efforts to reduce carbon emissions that contribute to climate change; to better protect the integrity of our ecosystem, including our watersheds, beaches, plants and wildlife; and to make our public infrastructure more resilient so that it can withstand extreme weather events.

It is for these reasons that I will continue my work in Congress to ensure that Puerto Rico is a part of the President's climate action plan, which is designed to marshal federal resources to reduce our carbon footprint and mitigate the effects of climate change in the United States.

In closing, I want to thank Christina Hernandez and Luis Garden Acosta of *El Puente* and the *Latino Climate Action Network* for organizing this valuable briefing. I also want to thank Senator Gillibrand—a true friend of Puerto Rico—for co-hosting this briefing with me.

Thank you.