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**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-5400**

August 12, 2015

The Honorable Ashton B. Carter  
Secretary of Defense  
The Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301-1155

Dear Secretary Carter:

I write to call the Department of Defense's attention to the drought situation in my district of Puerto Rico, home to 3.5 million American citizens, and to request that the Department make available all appropriate assistance to address the water supply shortage in the U.S. territory. I urge you to convene a task force composed of the appropriate services and commands of the Department to identify all legal authorities and capabilities that could potentially be used to replenish reservoirs managed by the local water authority, the Puerto Rico Aqueduct and Sewer Authority (PRASA), or to transport and supply drinking water directly to communities and public facilities across the island that are most affected by the drought and the water rationing that has been implemented by PRASA.

According to the official U.S. Drought Monitor, 85 percent of Puerto Rico's total land area is currently experiencing drought conditions, and 20 percent is experiencing "extreme" to "exceptionally extreme" drought. The most affected communities are located on the eastern side of the island, including the greater San Juan metropolitan area, where a substantial part of Puerto Rico's population resides. To date, the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture has issued two separate natural disaster declarations for Puerto Rico, declaring 20 of the territory's 78 municipalities as disaster areas because of the drought.

The drought has had many adverse consequences. For example, local farmers and ranchers are losing income because of dried-out crops and dying livestock. Households and businesses in the greater San Juan metropolitan area must live without running water for three days for every day their taps are turned on. The drought is also impacting at least 476 public schools that serve over 100,000 students in 17 different municipalities. The 2015-2016 school year began this Monday and, due to water rationing, the Puerto Rico Department of Education announced that affected schools will operate only Monday through Thursday and with a shortened school day schedule. School breakfasts served to students under the federal National School Breakfast Program are at risk of being canceled at these schools and school lunches offered to students under the federal National School Lunch Program will be reduced and otherwise modified at these same schools on days when the schools have no water service.

I understand that the Department of Defense has certain capabilities and authorities to relieve stress on communities stricken by drought and, specifically, to transport and supply drinking water to communities in times of natural disaster, including drought. The research and development activities sponsored by the Department in recent years for mobile shipboard desalination capabilities within the U.S. Navy and Military Sealift Command fleets are of particular interest. So, too, is possibly replicating the bottled water supply mission that the *USS Kearsarge* fulfilled in Haiti when communities in that nation were recovering from hurricanes. I also understand the *USNS Comfort*, under the command of the Navy's 4<sup>th</sup> Fleet, is equipped for humanitarian and civil defense missions arising in the Caribbean region.

Moreover, Congress has authorized the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to provide and transport—through small-diameter emergency water lines, tank trucks, or other means—emergency supplies of drinking water, and to construct water wells, at 100 percent federal cost for communities affected by drought, provided a written request for such assistance is made by the Governor of the affected state or territory. I hope a request for such assistance will be forthcoming, and I am urging the Governor and PRASA to conform to all submission requirements for this assistance without delay.

In the interim, I urge you and any Department-wide task force you may convene to actively explore each of these legal authorities and capabilities, as well as any others that may be relevant, in concert with local government officials in Puerto Rico. I want to be sure that all appropriate federal assistance to restore the water supply in Puerto Rico—particularly for hospitals, schools, and other public facilities—and to replenish the PRASA reservoirs will be provided. My hope is that, with such federal support, we can identify and implement a solution until the drought ends.

Thank you for your attention to this request. My office stands ready to assist the Department of Defense and other federal agencies.

Sincerely,



Pedro R. Pierluisi  
Member of Congress

cc: General Martin E. Dempsey, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff  
General Frank J. Grass, Chief, National Guard Bureau  
Lieutenant General Thomas P. Bostick, Chief of Engineers, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
The Honorable Alejandro García-Padilla, Governor of Puerto Rico  
Colonel Marta Carcana, Adjutant General, Puerto Rico National Guard  
Mr. Alberto M. Lázaro-Castro, Executive Director, Puerto Rico Aqueduct and Sewer Authority