



# COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Hearing Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)** ***Road to Recovery: Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands after*** ***Hurricanes Irma and Maria***

**July 11, 2019**

I share Chairman Payne's dismay about FEMA's decision not to send a witness to today's hearing. Their refusal undermines the work of this Committee, which is exercising its oversight responsibilities to ensure Federal recovery assistance is being allocated appropriately and taxpayer dollars are being spent wisely.

It is disrespectful to our witnesses from Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands who traveled to be here today to inform Congress about the recovery challenges they still face at home. And it is unfortunate they are not here to listen to testimony from our Government Accountability Office witness, which has done yeoman's work reviewing FEMA's response to the 2017 hurricane season in order to improve the agency's work on this and future disasters.

I am particularly disappointed in FEMA's refusal to send a representative after Acting Administrator Peter Gaynor testified at a previous hearing that he would see to it that his agency provided a witness for this hearing. Now we have an empty chair where someone from FEMA should be. Nonetheless, I appreciate Chairman Payne and Ranking Member King holding today's hearing on Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands' recovery from the 2017 hurricane season.

This hearing continues the Committee's longstanding oversight work on the Federal response to major disasters, and it comes at a critical juncture in recovery for Puerto Rico and the USVI.

Thanks to the witnesses present today for taking time to lend us your perspectives. I hope you will share your stories and offer insights into what Congress can do to help ensure a speedy and efficient recovery from Hurricanes Irma and Maria. I look forward to a good discussion today on that topic and to future oversight of FEMA's recovery efforts.

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Media contact: Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978