

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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Opening Statement Ranking Member Stacey Plaskett

Hearing on “Examining the Regulation of Shark Finning in the United States” Subcommittee on the Interior, Energy and Environment

November 2, 2017

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing.

We can all agree that sharks play an invaluable role in our ecosystem. I believe we can also agree that it is concerning that the shark population continues to decline. We as Americans and citizens of this world can do more to stop this decline.

However, what we do not agree on is the need for a hearing on shark finning today, instead of on the ongoing humanitarian crisis in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Mr. Chairman, most of my constituents remain in the dark because utility service has not been reestablished since Hurricanes Irma and Maria. According to reporting by the *Miami Herald*, two months after Hurricane Irma and one month after Hurricane Maria “less than a third of St. Thomas residents, 16 percent of St. Croix customers, and . . . hardly anyone on St. John” has power.

Unlike Florida and Texas, normal life has not resumed in the U.S. Virgin Islands. There are children who still do not have a school to go to. According to the *Miami Herald*,

“[m]any schools are still too damaged to reopen. Others were destroyed or are still in use as shelters. Limited curfews are still in effect.”

And I am very concerned about the livelihood of many Virgin Island residents, who depend on tourism for their income.

On September 29, 2017, Ranking Member Cummings and I requested that Chairman Gowdy hold an emergency hearing on the humanitarian crises caused by the hurricanes in the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. Chairman Gowdy declined this request and held Member-only briefings with FEMA, the Department of Defense, the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Health and Human Services. Although the daily experiences of my constituents would have been highly relevant, two of these briefings were scheduled at times when I was travelling back to my district. That is truly unfortunate.

It is long past time for the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform to conduct oversight hearings on President Trump's slow and ineffective response to the devastation caused by the hurricanes in the U.S. territories of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

With all due respect to Chairman Farenthold, the witnesses and the many people who, like me, care deeply about the survival of sharks in our ecosystem, it is offensive that we are holding a hearing on this subject at a time where the U.S. Virgin Islands does not have one fully functioning hospital.

Mr. Chairman, there is not a better time to reach across the aisle than this – American citizens in the U.S. Virgin Islands are suffering and questioning if their government has forgotten them. Let's answer these questions and resolve their fears with a resounding, "No, we are here for you. We are looking out for you." And then let's prove it by conducting an emergency hearing on the slow and ineffective federal response to the hurricanes in the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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