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October 13, 2017

Mr. John Roth
Inspector General
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
245 Murray Lane, Southwest
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Mr. Roth:

Earlier this week, President Donald Trump tweeted a video that purported to show federal relief efforts in Puerto Rico, efforts he has claimed the public and the media are willfully ignoring. That video appears to have been favorably edited to demonstrate a robust federal response, and as publications like the *Washington Post* have revealed, includes misleading footage. This portrayal of the recovery is completely at odds with what I am hearing from countless Connecticut residents with close friends and family throughout Puerto Rico, suffering amid the damage wrought by the hurricane. The administration's efforts should be squarely and solely focused on helping the 3.4 million Americans on the island, all of whom are struggling for access to basic necessities

In my recent visit to Puerto Rico, I was deeply impressed by the dedicated and courageous rescue and relief work of the men and women on the ground working for FEMA, the military, and other agencies and relief organizations. I am deeply concerned, however, about the administration's overall inadequate approach to this catastrophe. I write urging you to launch an immediate investigation into the administration's response to Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico. The American people need to know whether the Trump administration is truly focused on helping the millions of Americans now suffering in Puerto Rico – addressing allegations of self-promotion and subterfuge.

Last week, the Federal Emergency Management Agency – the agency leading the federal response to the devastation caused by Hurricane Maria – removed critical data from its website that showed the status of residents' access to electricity and water – perhaps two of the key metrics revealing progress on the island. After a swift and well-justified public outcry, FEMA returned the data to its website. By limiting access to this information, the agency seemingly was attempting to remove embarrassing and unflattering statistics that reveal shamefully slow improvements in Puerto Rico. The public deserves an explanation. FEMA is within the Department of Homeland Security. Accordingly your office is best positioned to investigate federal recovery efforts and ensure accountability. I urge you to closely evaluate the following:

- Whether the administration is selectively disclosing or manipulating data to provide incomplete or misleading information. Likewise, this inquiry should consider whether the agency is shielding data from its website that could be unfavorable to the administration.
- Whether the agency adequately prepared for the hurricane's arrival and properly coordinated the movement of resources and supplies as forecasts predicted a powerful, nearly unprecedented storm that could devastate the island, which was already suffering from the impact of Hurricane Irma weeks earlier.
- Whether efforts by the president earlier this year to freeze the hiring of federal officials and reduce the budget of agencies like FEMA undercut available resources or morale and limited the effectiveness of FEMA's response.
- Whether FEMA is adequately asserting leadership in ensuring that federal officials and stakeholders throughout the island engage with proper, responsible private sector partners who have a history of results – especially in restoring vital resources and services like electricity and power.
- Whether FEMA has provided the island with a sufficient number of staff and personnel to meet the enormity of the challenge facing island residents.
- Whether FEMA has dedicated sufficient resources to meet the immediate and short-term health needs of island residents, ensuring proper amounts of medicine, medical devices, and functional facilities. This inquiry should also consider whether FEMA is responsibly addressing the health risks of hospitals lacking power for weeks on end and the dangers that come from contaminated water, such as leptospirosis. This inquiry should also focus on whether FEMA officials have accurately counted the number of victims of the storm. The death toll now stands at 45, but some reports and experts contend the toll could be ten times that amount.
- Whether FEMA has properly requested and used the unique expertise and assets of our military as well as all other federal agencies to address the needs of residents, ensuring the continuation of law and order and the availability of sufficient housing, health, transportation, telecommunications, and energy.
- Whether FEMA has properly supervised the distribution of food, water, and other critical necessities throughout the island. Earlier this week, Puerto Rico's governor voiced deep frustration with missing goods and supplies. This inquiry should focus on FEMA's role in ensuring successful distribution of goods and supplies, including whether FEMA has adequately recognized and addressed limitations facing municipal governments in distributing supplies.

I strongly encourage you to expand your investigation and review any and all other elements of FEMA's response as necessary.

I appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Richard Blumenthal". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Richard" being the most prominent.

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senate