



Editorial

BY MIGUEL FERRER
PUBLISHER

Looking Beyond Fiona

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Once again, Puerto Rico made headline news around the world – the result of another catastrophe. This time, it was about the impact of Fiona, and what may turn out to be historic rainfall. Certainly, we need to look beyond the present situ-

ation; it is part of the extreme weather patterns generated by global climate change. It is not a departure from the many recent disasters that have struck California, the heartland, and countries such as Pakistan, which is facing the effects of what appears a biblical deluge made worse by a government that has been unable to respond to the cataclysm. Now it's Florida's turn.

Back in Puerto Rico this time around, we need

Another significant difference is that today, the government has liquidity and millions of dollars in an emergency fund, part of the fiscal restructuring done by the Financial Oversight and Management Board. In 2017, we had neither. Already, we know that power restoration will be a question of days, not a matter of months. To be fair, María pummeled transmission and distribution lines, and caused widespread cata-

strophic losses, whereas Fiona's devastation has been more regional.

that have yet to materialize in real projects to shore up our infrastructure. These projects are critical to sustain our economy and quality of life. Just days before Fiona hit, we received a visit from FEMA's administrator. It is clear that there is a real understanding that reconstruction is moving very slowly. This was acknowledged a few days later in a congressional hearing.

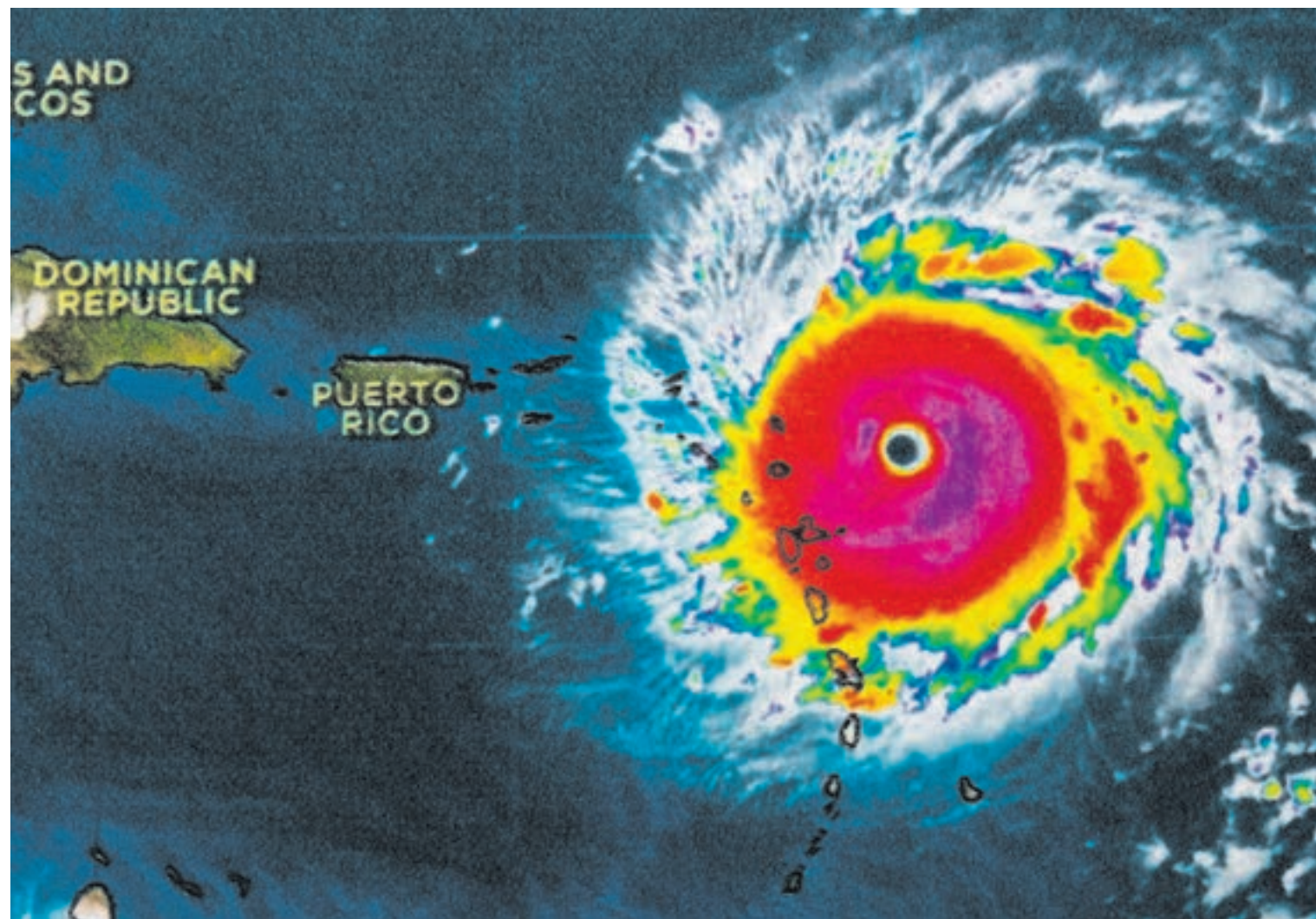
For me, the takeaway is that the process is tied up in a bureaucratic morass that does not consider our reality, nor the growing threat of climate change. Clearly, it is not working. FEMA and our government need to streamline the process and use Puerto Rico as a case study to improve the federal government's response to other disasters; otherwise, the federal government will end up paying more and more as one disaster after another hits us before most of the funds are disbursed for reconstruction. That is precisely our case five years after María.

The serious work of rebuilding the power grid has yet to begin. The reason for that is due to the many steps required before reconstruction starts. We also need to ensure the widespread use of renewable energy is a priority in the process of rebuilding our system.

As of now, \$80 billion has been allocated by Congress for Puerto Rico's rebuilding. Of that, federal agencies have obligated \$67.7 billion to Puerto Rico's reconstruction. However, that does not mean those funds have been channeled to Puerto Rico. That process may take years. As of now, only 31 percent of the funds, or about \$24.4 billion, has been disbursed to a recipient. Once the money is disbursed, the work of planning a project, obtaining the permits and building begins. That does not take place overnight. It needs to accelerate dramatically before our people give up and leave for greener pastures.

More distressing would be that widespread disaffection spreads among our people with the potential of pronounced social and political ramifications. Bad Bunny's recent video on Puerto Rico's situation captures the essence of that feeling. We need to listen, come to grips with the arguments presented and, more importantly, consider the issues that are highlighted to determine whether they are attainable or appropriate for our economy. Above all, we need to join forces and find solutions that can sustain an economy that offers ample opportunities to all.

Now is the time to utilize Fiona's aftermath to make a case for a more effective recovery and reconstruction process across the island. We urgently need to get back to the task of creating and sustaining a viable and vibrant economy. Let's do it.



ation to leverage this attention in favor of our people and our future.

Almost to the exact date of the fifth anniversary of when Hurricane María made landfall on September 20, 2017, we are again facing the task of providing relief, recovery and reconstruction from another hurricane. This should not surprise

to focus on the strengths we have developed. In contrast with 2017, we do not need basic supplies, FEMA has four warehouses stacked full. We also have supplies of medication, and President Biden announced that the federal government will pay 100 percent of the costs of Puerto Rico's recovery from Hurricane Fiona for the next 30 days.

strophic losses, whereas Fiona's devastation has been more regional.

Yet, we are losing our patience. We are tired of living without power and water. There is a sense of being ignored, and of our best interests being dismissed. Part of our frustration is tied to the promise of billions in funds for reconstruction