

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 6, 2019

COMMITTEES:  
APPROPRIATIONS  
FOREIGN RELATIONS  
SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE  
SMALL BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP  
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

The Honorable Mark T. Esper  
Secretary  
Department of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Esper:

This letter is to request the Department of Defense (DoD) to provide the necessary resources to assist the Commonwealth of the Bahamas in recovery efforts following the unprecedented devastation in much of their territory by Hurricane Dorian, a Category 5 storm that lashed the region for nearly two days.

Today, I traveled to the Bahamas with Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, Senator Rick Scott, and members of the U.S. Coast Guard. From what we saw, Great Abaco, the city of Marsh Harbor, and the surrounding cays have been decimated and are in dire need of the type of logistical and other assistance that only the U.S. military can provide. Most airports are not operational, with runways and roads having been washed away. Ports are also not navigable, leading to a severe fuel issue that is required in any natural disaster recovery. Food, medicine and potable water will continue to be required for survivors and those aiding in the relief efforts.

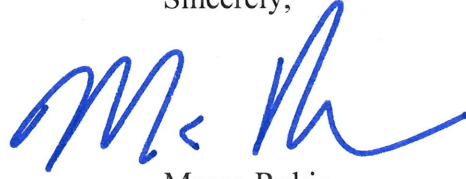
I would like to express my appreciation for your approval of DoD's support to U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM) to airlift United States Agency for International Development (USAID) personnel and supplies in addition to deploying an airfield assessment team, an airfield clearing team, and an air traffic control team to open the Bahamas up as soon as possible for aid and relief flights. As you know, the USAID and the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance are the lead federal agencies for foreign disaster response, however, it is vital to the survival of those in urgent need that the DoD communicate to Congress any and all delays caused by those agencies in requesting the Pentagon's support.

The DoD is the sole arm of the U.S. government that is able to provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief in the size and scope required by this catastrophic hurricane. Therefore, I urge you to provide the full capacity of the DoD to help those devastated by the storm by bringing military assets to bear in a time of emergency. Additionally, as Bahamians from impacted areas relocate to other parts of the county, the ill and infirmed will require additional assistance and could overwhelm hospitals. The Department should consider redirecting the USNS Comfort, or a similarly-equipped ship, to provide lifesaving hospital services at this critical time.

The U.S. and Bahamas share many cultural, familial and economic links, and the Bahamian Government has been a strong regional partner with the U.S. Now is the time for the U.S. to assist them in their hour of need. Thank you for your continued service to our great nation and for your

strong leadership during this difficult time for the Caribbean. I stand ready to assist you in these efforts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Rubio', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Marco Rubio  
U.S. Senator