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Trump's Homeland Security Secretary Visits Puerto Rico, Pledges Support for Recovery and Security

Kristi Noem's visit focused on federal disaster relief, power grid reconstruction, and border security. Governor Jenniffer González pressed for FEMA to release \$18 billion in stalled funds, while Noem vowed to explore ways to streamline federal aid.

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Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem, center, participates in an immigration enforcement operation in New York City on Jan. 28, 2025. By. U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem visited Puerto Rico last Thursday, marking her first official trip to the U.S. territory. During her visit, she pledged to assist the U.S. territory in its

ongoing recovery from devastating hurricanes and longstanding power grid failures.

Speaking briefly to reporters, Noem acknowledged the bureaucratic obstacles slowing down reconstruction efforts and vowed to explore ways to reduce federal permitting requirements under the Federal Emergency Management Agency to ensure that residents receive the assistance they were promised.

FEMA has played a significant role in funding Puerto Rico's reconstruction since Hurricane Maria struck as a Category 4 storm in September 2017, causing widespread destruction. However, Puerto Rico Governor Jenniffer González has been critical of the agency, stating that FEMA has yet to release \$18 billion allocated for the territory's power grid reconstruction. President Trump has vowed to either dismantle FEMA and send federal funding directly to states, or greatly reform the agency to more swiftly respond to natural disasters across the country.

Noem confirmed that she and González, a Trump supporter, discussed Puerto Rico's energy crisis at length, focusing on how the federal government can aid in modernizing the island's energy infrastructure. She did not provide specific details on potential solutions and declined to take questions from the press.

Under the previous administration of former U.S. President Joe Biden, the U.S. Department of Energy invested millions of dollars in solar projects across Puerto Rico, adding more than 1,200 megawatts of renewable energy capacity to the island's power grid.

So far, \$6 billion in federal funding has been committed to rebuilding Puerto Rico's power infrastructure, with FEMA approving 200 out of 440 submitted projects. At least 125 of these projects are currently under construction, but the delayed release of additional funds has raised concerns among officials.

In addition to energy discussions, Noem and González also addressed border security and crime enforcement. The governor emphasized Puerto Rico's role in combating criminal organizations that operate along its shores.

"We want to dismantle all those criminal organizations hitting our shores," González stated, adding that Noem's visit highlights Puerto Rico's significance in the fight against organized crime and drug trafficking.

Noem's trip coincided with a ceremony honoring Michel O. Maceda, a U.S. Customs and Border Protection agent killed in November 2022 during a shootout at sea with suspected drug traffickers. Three other agents were injured in the incident.

The visit also comes amid recent federal immigration enforcement actions, as agents in Puerto Rico have begun making arrests of undocumented immigrants in recent weeks.

Noem underscored Puerto Rico's importance to the United States, stating that González is committed to building partnerships with the federal government for the benefit of both Puerto Rico and the country as a whole.

"The mission of the Department of Homeland Security is to protect the American homeland, but to do it with integrity and honor as well," Noem stated.