



Antonio Morales, 93-year-old World War II veteran, rests in a single-story concrete home with no running water, in Corozal, Puerto Rico. Morales is one of thousands still waiting for water and power as the six-month anniversary of Hurricane Maria approaches.

Six months after Maria, Puerto Rico pleads for help

By DANICA COTO
Associated Press

COROZAL, Puerto Rico — Hurricane Maria shredded the electric poles in this plantain farming town high in the mountains of central Puerto Rico, leaving tens of thousands of people without power or running water. Desperate, residents of the town's Barrio Mana neighborhood asked federal officials for a generator to pump water from the well that supplies the neighborhood's 130 families.

That was nearly six months ago. Today, like everyone in Barrio Mana, World War II veteran Antonio Morales, 93, sleeps in a single-story concrete home with no running water, its floor covered with dozens of gallon jugs and plastic buckets of water that his nurse uses to bathe him.

"Barrio Mana is not even on the government's radar," said Morales' 61-year-old daughter-in-law, Maria Perez, her eyes filled with tears. "Practically no one has shown up here."

Super-charged with energy from unusually warm seas, Hurricane Maria caused roughly \$100 billion in damage to Puerto Rico when it roared across the island Sept. 20, according to the government of the U.S. territory. In November, Puerto Rico asked Congress for \$94 billion to fund needs ranging from power restoration to home repairs.

U.S. lawmakers have appropriated \$23 billion in direct aid, a response that some Puerto Rican officials called woefully inadequate. Separately, the Federal Emergency Management Agency has spent some \$6 billion for Puerto Rico from its standing emergency funds since the hurricane.



José Morales checks a water tank installed on the roof of his residence in the Barrio Mana neighborhood, in Corozal, Puerto Rico. After Hurricane Maria shredded the electric poles in this plantain farming town, Barrio Mana residents asked federal officials but never received a generator to pump water from the well that supplies more than 100 families.

As the six-month anniversary of the Category 4 storm approaches, only a fraction of the \$23 billion in congressionally approved funds has actually been spent in Puerto Rico. In February, a \$4.7 billion loan approved last year for Texas, Florida, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico was reduced by the U.S. Treasury Department to \$2 billion for Puerto Rico, none of which has been disbursed. And programs funded with FEMA money, like generators for rural wells, have yet to reach thousands of Puerto Ricans like those in Barrio Mana, American citizens living in Third World conditions six months after a natural disaster.

Puerto Rican officials say the Trump administration is neglecting the territory because it doesn't have a vote in Congress or presidential elections. The Trump administration

has blamed Puerto Rico for creating delays in the disbursement process, but has not been more specific.

Meanwhile, tens of thousands of Puerto Ricans are still waiting for permanent shelter, water or power as the next Atlantic hurricane season approaches.

"If we were a state, the response certainly would have been a lot quicker," said Omar Marrero, director of Puerto Rico's Central Recovery and Reconstruction Office. He said that of the \$23 billion, Puerto Rico has so far received only \$1.27 billion for its federal assistance nutrition program and \$430 million to help repair public infrastructure.

Last week, 58 U.S. legislators sent a letter to U.S. Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin demanding the agency expedite the loan process and offer the full amount.

Trump's possible China tariffs bring loud protests

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump is considering sweeping tariffs on imports from China, with an announcement possible as early as next week. And that has industry groups and some lawmakers scrambling to prevent the next front in a potential trade war that could reverberate across the U.S. economy.

Early indications from the White House have officials braced for tariffs across a wide variety of consumer goods, from apparel to electronics, and even on imported parts for products made in the U.S. The size and scope remain under debate, but the U.S. Chamber of Commerce is warning that annual tariffs of as much as \$60 billion on Chinese goods would be "devastating."

Trump's focus on China could be even more consequential, both at home and abroad, than the recently announced penalty tariffs on steel and aluminum. And amid the staff turmoil at the White House, it's being read as a sign of rising influence for the administration's populist economic aides, led by Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross and adviser Peter Navarro.

Even Larry Kudlow — an avowed free trader tapped to replace Gary Cohn as director of the White House National Economic Council — has said that China deserves a "tough response" from the United States and its friends. He told CNBC this week, "The United States could lead a coalition of large trading partners and allies against China."

But with these tariffs, the Trump administration appears so far to be content to go it alone.

On Friday, the National Retail Federation, which recently hosted industry groups to organize opposition to another round of tariffs, convened a conference call to update its members. "They're all concerned about this," said David French, vice president for government relations. "Tariffs are a tax on consumers and they're best used sparingly as tools."

Trade experts and economists say the tariffs could lead to rising prices for U.S. consumers and businesses without accomplishing one of the president's stated goals: reducing last year's trade imbalance of \$566 billion.

China, the largest source of the trade imbalance, would likely respond to



AP Photo/Evan Vucci, File

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is warning President Trump against slapping big tariffs on Chinese imports.

any tariffs by retaliating with higher import taxes on U.S. goods, among other possible restrictions.

"They signaled that they will aim at things that affect the United States politically as well as economically," said Claude Barfield, a scholar at the conservative American Enterprise Institute and former consultant with the U.S. trade representative.

"The farmer in Kansas or Iowa could feel it," he said. "U.S. high tech companies could feel it because the supply chains for iPhones go through China."

Lawmakers on Capitol Hill, who have largely been shut out of administration deliberations, fear tariffs would stunt economic benefits in the U.S. that could be stemming from the GOP tax cuts.

Republican leaders, including House Speaker Paul Ryan of Wisconsin and Rep. Kevin Brady of Texas, chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, have urged the administration to target any proposed tariffs as narrowly as possible, away from U.S. allies and focused on countries engaged in over-production and product dumping.

Republicans in Congress largely opposed Trump's steel and aluminum tariffs and are working with the administration on a process for allowing waivers or carve outs for certain countries or types of metals, beyond the exemption the White House is allowing for Canada and Mexico.

"We want to narrow this," Brady, who has been in talks with Ross all week, said Friday on Fox. "Tariffs are taxes — lower is better, zero is the best."

The new tariffs on China would be tied to an investigation into the country's failure to stop intellectual property theft, a probe that was launched in August as part of the rarely used Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974.

As rumors of an exodus swirl, White House pushes back

By JONATHAN LEMIRE, CATHERINE LUCEY and JILL COLVIN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — With whispers of a staffing purge permeating the West Wing, the White House pushed back Friday and insisted that reports of tumult and imminent departures are overblown.

Chief of staff John Kelly, himself the subject of rumors that his days are numbered, assured a group of staffers their jobs were safe, at least for now.

"The chief of staff actually spoke to a number of staff this morning reassuring them that there were no immediate personnel changes at this time and that people shouldn't be concerned," said press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders.

But days after President Donald Trump's secretary of state was ousted, many close to the president think more upheaval is coming soon.

Trump has been moving toward replacing national security adviser H.R. McMaster but has not

settled on exact timing or a successor, according to four people with knowledge of White House deliberations. Kelly has also worn on the president, confidants of the president said. And Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin, under fire for ethics violations, appears to be grasping to keep his job.

With speculation about McMaster's future particularly intense, Sanders gave multiple reassurances about the national security adviser — first in a tweet Thursday and then from the briefing room podium the next day. She said Trump had indicated that no changes were coming. "I spoke directly to the president last night," Sanders said. "He asked me to pass that message along to Gen. McMaster. I know the two of them have been in meetings today."

McMaster, for his part, said Sanders had "set it straight" but struck a slightly different tone.

"Everybody has got to leave the White House at some point," he told a reporter from ABC News outside the West Wing. "I'm

doing my job."

But the air of stability the White House tried to project felt more like a pause than a permanent shift.

Trump is privately weighing still more changes, expressing frustration with some aides and sifting through possible replacements. Reports of tumult in the administration were at such a feverish pitch — even on Trump's beloved Fox News — that the president on Thursday reflected on the latest staff departures during an Oval Office conversation with Kelly and Vice President Mike Pence.

With a laugh, Trump said: "Who's next?"

It's a question that has the whole White House on edge.

Kelly has told confidants that he believes he can weather the current storm. But he has grown increasingly frustrated with the constant turmoil in the West Wing, believing at times that Trump intentionally fuels the chaos to keep his staff on its toes and his name in headlines, according to a person familiar with the chief of staff's thinking.


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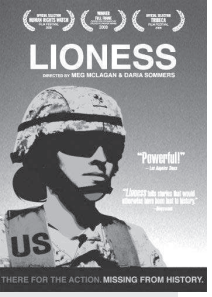
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