

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER BRENDAN CARR**

Re: *The Uniendo a Puerto Rico Fund and the Connect USVI Fund, et al.*, WC Docket No. 18-143; *Connect America Fund*, WC Docket No. 10-90; *ETC Annual Reports and Certifications*, WC Docket No. 14-58.

Roberto Mussenden has worked here at the FCC on public safety issues for more than 20 years. With Hurricanes Irma and Maria having devastated Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, he immediately volunteered to deploy as part of the FCC's initial response.

Having grown up in Puerto Rico, Roberto said that, for him, it was personal. And since that initial trip two years ago, Roberto has spent one week per month on the island as part of the FCC's ongoing recovery efforts. He has spoken about his experience there and the work he did to help turn things around, and I'd like to share just a snapshot of his service.

When he first landed, he found the island "close to apocalyptic"—vegetation ripped out, no lights, no traffic, just silence and devastation. The storms had torn apart the power grid, pulled down 1,000-foot television towers, and destroyed people's homes. When various agencies and organizations arrived—from federal entities like FEMA to the NYPD—they were all using different frequencies to communicate. Roberto immediately set about coordinating frequencies to ensure that those who needed to communicate could reach each other, while avoiding interference to others.

He served as a valuable point of contact for communications providers in Puerto Rico—a consistent and dependable face in a time of crisis. He helped broadcasters and Internet providers get the streamlined approvals and waivers they needed to start rebuilding and upgrading their infrastructure immediately. And he ensured that those who wanted to use new technologies, like Google's Loon, to get people back online obtained the experimental licenses they needed to get up and running quickly.

In short, Roberto represents the very best of public service. And we are lucky to have him and so many other dedicated professionals at the FCC.

In fact, Roberto's efforts are part of a broader and unprecedented FCC response to the hurricanes that devastated Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The FCC stood up an Incident Management Team consisting of technical and policy experts drawn from the Commission's bureaus and offices. FEMA and the FCC coordinated communications-related efforts through Emergency Support Function 2. And the FCC deployed Roll Call and spectrum management experts to monitor and determine the storm's impact on wireless communications.

The FCC also expedited regulatory action in the critical days and hours after the storms. We waived Lifeline rules to ensure that consumers wouldn't be cut off, just when they need the service most. We provided additional E-Rate support to schools and libraries that needed to replace damaged equipment. And we waived rules to speed deployment. In total, we granted around 900 requests for Special Temporary Authority.

FCC leadership also undertook fact-finding missions to the hardest-hit regions. And we stood up a Hurricane Recovery Task Force that took a meticulous and comprehensive approach to the issues—holding public workshops, engaging stakeholders, and providing key findings that we have been able to build on.

These efforts helped accelerate the recovery. Within six months of the storm, one wireline provider in Puerto Rico had restored 75% of its network, nearly completing its recovery three months later. Similarly, in the U.S. Virgin Islands, another provider restored 100% of its network within eight months of Maria's landfall. And the recovery for mobile cell sites was even faster, with one provider restoring 100% of its cell sites on the Virgin Islands within four months.

FCC funding was a key part of many of these efforts. In the wake of the storm, we made available \$77 million in support for the immediate restoration of communications networks. We also established the Uniendo a Puerto Rico and Connect USVI Funds, through which we have already made available an additional \$64 million in support for restoration.

Today, we take the next step in promoting a sustainable and long-term recovery effort. We vote to make nearly \$950 million in additional funding available, with an eye toward funding resilient networks that are better able to withstand future storms. And on this score, I want to thank my colleagues for agreeing to edits that create incentives for carriers to place any new aerial lines on hardened, composite poles, which will help ensure that we have an even more robust network.

The efforts of hardworking FCC staff have not gone unnoticed. In June of 2018, the Governor of Puerto Rico thanked the FCC for “addressing the immediate need of restoring and advancing Puerto Rico communications infrastructure.” In July of 2019, the Governor of the U.S. Virgin Islands, wrote, “I am extremely grateful for the FCC’s prompt action in the days and weeks immediately following the disaster. These efforts helped restore our vital communications networks.”

So I want to add my thanks to the FCC staff here in Washington, in our field offices, and those deployed after the storms for all the work you have done to support this recovery effort. I am proud of your work. And I also want to recognize the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau, as well as the Wireline Competition Bureau and the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau for your efforts on today’s decision. It has my support.