COMMONWEALTH OF PUERTO RICO
PUERTO RICO FEDERAL AFFAIRS ADMINISTRATION

May 21, 2014

The Honorable James M. Inhofe
Ranking Member
Senate Armed Services Committee
205 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-3603

Dear Senator Inhofe,

On behalf of the Governor of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Alejandro J. García Padilla, I write you in strong support for an Amendment to allow the Department of Defense to remove unexploded ordnance and munitions scrap from select publicly-accessible areas on the island of Culebra, Puerto Rico. This Amendment will shortly be debated during consideration of the 2015 National Defense Authorization Act at the Senate Armed Services Committee. I urge you to support the Amendment.

The island of Culebra, off the eastern coast of Puerto Rico, was used as a military weapons training range. While portions of the island fall within the jurisdiction of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineer for cleanup under the Defense Environmental Restoration Program (DERP), a frustrating interpretation of previously enacted law has resulted in federal agencies deeming the most contaminated areas of the island outside of the jurisdiction of federal authority. As a result hundreds of acres of publicly accessible land around the island remain contaminated, obscured from rightful public use and enjoyment.

This Amendment would clarify the position of previous law, specifying that it is indeed within the scope of federal authority to administer the decontamination of unexploded ordnance from beaches, campgrounds, and the Carlos Rosario Trail. This Amendment has a limited scope and empowers the Secretary of the Army to carefully determine the boundaries of the clean-up, yet making sure it includes popular sites like Flamenco Beach, which are now routinely closed because of the threat of the explosion of unexploded ordnances. Indeed these threats are not theoretical, as a young girl playing at one of the beaches was injured in 2013 while inadvertently handling a live ordnance found there.

The future stability and safety of the island of Culebra is critical and we urge you to revise federal law to clarify that these sites, arguably the most contaminated areas around the island, are indeed worthy of consideration for clean-up by the Department of Defense. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Juan E. Hernández
Director

Cc: The Resident Commissioner of Puerto Rico

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