



Hon. Pedro R. Pierluisi
Statement for the Record

**Joint Oversight Hearing of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
and the House Committee on Natural Resources**

**“As Difficult As Possible: The National Park Service’s
Implementation of the Government Shutdown”**

October 16, 2013

This hearing allows us to put things into their proper perspective, and to underscore the real impact of the shutdown, not only in the 50 states and in the District of Columbia, but in Puerto Rico and the four other U.S. territories as well. The majority of the 10,000 federal workers in Puerto Rico have been furloughed. As a result, many federal operations, including homeland security in the Caribbean, the provision of service to our veterans, and critical assistance to our most vulnerable constituents have been—or will soon be—compromised.

The impact to our national parks is important, to be sure, but it is only one of many casualties of this politically-manufactured crisis. The employees of the National Park Service, including nearly 90 of whom reside in Puerto Rico, are well represented by Mr. Jarvis—who is simply doing his job as Director of the National Park Service and, in my view, doing it well.

I believe the vast majority of the American people understand how and why we have arrived at this unfortunate juncture, namely because some members of this body have sought to use the appropriations process and the debt ceiling extension to make changes in policy that they cannot effectuate through the normal legislative process. This effort cannot—and will not—work.

National parks are not the only public lands impacted by the shutdown. In Puerto Rico, we are especially proud of our historic landmarks and our natural wonders. Puerto Rico is home to crown jewels in the National Park System, the National Forest System, and the National Wildlife

Refuge System that attract visitors from every congressional district and from all over the world. The public has been unable to visit these sites since October 1st.

Specifically, the National Park Service has been our partner in preserving the nearly 500-year-old city of Old San Juan, including the Spanish-era forts of San Cristóbal and San Felipe del Morro. These forts are part of the San Juan National Historic Site managed by the National Park Service.

According to the National Parks Conservation Association, the San Juan National Historic Site receives more visitors in a typical October than three-quarters of all other National Park units in the United States. These visitors inject an estimated \$100,000 per day into the Puerto Rico economy. Because of the shutdown, this economic activity has grinded to a halt.

Likewise, El Yunque, the only tropical rainforest in the National Forest System, offering an abundance of recreational, educational and research opportunities to more than 1.4 million visitors each year, is also closed to the public. There is no public access to El Portal Visitor Center, the Yokahu Observation Tower, the picnic shelters, and the 25 miles of trails leading to the iconic waterfalls within the Forest because of the lapse in appropriations.

Furthermore, the territory's four National Wildlife Refuges—Cabo Rojo, Laguna Cartagena, Culebra and Vieques—are all closed to the public as well. These refuges, particularly the beaches contained within the Vieques refuge, are important drivers for the tourism-based economies of the surrounding areas.

Naturally, the shutdown has caused a substantial economic hardship to the local Puerto Rican small businesses that provide interpretative guides and are concessionaires in the National Park, the National Forest and the National Wildlife Refuges.

Mr. Jarvis: I know that you and your colleagues at the Department of the Interior are doing all that you can to manage operations in a situation that is not of your own making. I hope that reason will prevail—and prevail soon. I thank you for the service that you, the men and women

you lead, and indeed all federal employees provide to this nation, including Puerto Rico. I hope all federal employees can return to their respective missions on behalf of the public. And I hope the National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service receive the resources they need to protect our public lands for future generations.