



Hon. Thomas Rivera Schatz  
PRESIDENT

June 11, 2009

The Honorable Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As President of the Senate of Puerto Rico, I write to you to respectfully ask your intervention and attention to the health issues affecting thousands of disenfranchised U.S. citizens in the island municipality of Vieques, Puerto Rico. As you may know, our fellow Americans in Vieques have been exposed to toxins as a result of more than six decades of bombings. Rates of serious illnesses among Viequenses, including cancer, hypertension and diabetes, far exceed those on the main island of Puerto Rico.

In spite of this, nothing is being done by Federal authorities to address the major health problems suffered by our fellow Americans in Vieques. They have borne a very heavy burden in defense of our national security. Even though the bombings stopped in May 2003, they continue to suffer from the toxic chemicals and heavy metal hazards that are the legacy of decades of bombing and military practices in Vieques.

This is not right and I applaud you for publically pleading that, as President, you would promote appropriate remedies to the health conditions caused by military activities conducted by the U.S. Navy on Vieques. Given the urgent nature of this matter, I respectfully understand that the time to promote and provide those remedies is now.

Since thousands of Viequenses still have pending health claims against the Navy in which they seek compensation for illness arising from the alleged toxic contamination of the island, the Department of Justice should address this issue in a matter according to your campaign commitment to promote appropriate remedies to health conditions caused by military activities conducted by the U.S. navy on Vieques.

Sadly, I just learned that the U.S. Department of Justice submitted a motion using the discretionary function exception of the Federal Tort Claims Act (FTCA) asking the court to dismiss the case for lack of subject matter jurisdiction. If successful this will deny more than 7,000 Americans their day in court.

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A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "T. Rivera Schatz".

As a devoted student of American history, I can say that the people of Vieques and the people of Puerto Rico have endured great sacrifices in defense of our nation. In fact, since World War I more than 100,000 Puerto Ricans have proudly served in the U.S. Armed Forces. So, how could it be that the most democratic country in the history of the world is going to deny our fellow Americans in Vieques their day in court? Isn't it enough that after more than one hundred years under the U.S. flag we still lack a vote in the U.S. Congress? Will this happen anywhere else in the United States? How could it be that other jurisdictions and even non-U.S. citizens have received compensation in similar cases, but no effort has taken place to compensate the people of Vieques?

Given that reality, I respectfully call upon you, Mr. President, to fulfill your pledge to or fellow Americans in Vieques, who deserve compensation in order to adequately address their health issues. I am available to meet with you or your staff in order to further discuss this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Thomas Rivera Schatz', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Thomas Rivera Schatz  
President of the Senate of Puerto Rico