

Concerned About Climate Change

By Michelle Irizarry (published in Spanish by “La Gaceta” newspaper on Friday November 10, 2017)

In one month, I survived hurricane Irma, watched Maria destroy my birth home of Puerto Rico, and traveled to Washington D.C. with [Green For All](#), to join dozens of moms from across the country to talk to Congress about what we are experiencing.

We met with congressional leaders about what we are seeing in our communities. All of us worried about our kids and keeping them safe. We’ve seen first-hand the environment’s impact on their health, and worry about what their future holds.

At a time when we need more environmental protections, more polluter accountability, and aggressive climate solutions, the Trump Administration’s proposal to cut the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s budget by 31 percent was a big concern for us. If these cuts pass, it will mean less funding for water infrastructure repairs and upgrades, less accountability of polluters, virtually no enforcement of clean air and clean water laws, and less support for communities to clean up and redevelop toxic waste sites.

We must protect funding for the EPA and demand that our Congressional leaders pass a clean budget that puts families before polluter profits. I’m not alone. The 50 or so moms who gathered in D.C. were there on behalf of over 300,000 moms, women and those who support us who signed an [open letter](#) calling on Congress to fully fund the EPA.

I’m raising two brilliant daughters and it’s a bit emotional for me when I think about the future. My oldest daughter has plans to be a teacher and to have a family. But I don’t know how much of her plans will be limited by climate change and environmental pollution. As a water resources engineer, observing the impact of recent storms has been alarming. Although one cannot attribute the impact of a single storm to climate change, some of the trends we have seen during this hurricane season are consistent with future predictions under climate change -- [namely more intense and wetter storms](#).

When it comes to sea level rise, there are many unknowns that need to be researched and understood. Experts predict that large portions of South Florida will be flooded periodically by 2060-2100 and we are already seeing some of these impacts from the Keys to Palm Beach.

Mass migrations of Americans searching for a place to go, similar to what we are seeing after Hurricane Maria’s devastation in Puerto Rico, could cause socioeconomic and political disruption. Local governments are taking the lead on sea level rise adaptation such as raising seawalls and roads, and installing pumps to get rid of floodwaters. Without research to guide our work, we will never know what we can do to protect communities most vulnerable to our rising waters and furious storms.

There is so much more we can do if we had more resources at the state and federal level. If we put a price on carbon, and used that money to invest in curbing pollution, building green infrastructure and making Florida climate resilient, as other states have begun to do, we might actually have a fighting chance. There's no bold solutions like that being put forth like that here in Florida.

What I saw in Washington was moms who fiercely love their kids, refusing to be paralyzed by fear. If only our state and federal leaders could be as bold as these women to offer real solutions instead of partisan excuses. We need a fully funded EPA, we need to hold polluters accountable for the true cost of their pollution, and we need to aggressively invest in solutions.

Like it or not, we are on this planet together. It's time we act like it.