Episode #3. Catastrophe worsens in Puerto Rico following Hurricane Maria

Hurricane Maria struck Puerto Rico last Wednesday, leaving the entire island without power and sending some 15,000 people to emergency shelters. At least 16 people were killed in the storm, the strongest to strike Puerto Rico since 1932.

Maria was the third hurricane to hit the Caribbean islands within the past three weeks, following Hurricanes Irma and Jose. After striking Guadeloupe, the Virgin Islands, and Dominica, where 27 people died, Maria engulfed the entire island of Puerto Rico, bringing torrential rains and 155-mile-per-hour winds. On Tuesday, the mayor of San Juan, the capital city, said the island is “in a humanitarian crisis.” Nearly half of its 3.5 million residents were still without clean water, and hospitals were without diesel necessary for running life-saving equipment. Additionally, around 80 percent of the island’s crop value was destroyed.

President Donald Trump will visit the island territory next Tuesday, saying it’s the earliest he could get there without disrupting relief efforts. Meanwhile, water, food, and supplies have been arriving steadily since San Juan’s port reopened on Saturday.

Chris: Emily, it makes me sick to hear Trump saying that he’s done such a great job, an A-plus job, in helping Puerto Rico. The truth is: He’s doing a terrible job! It wasn’t until Monday that he even acknowledged what was going on!

Emily: I agree -- there’s no excuse for not talking about the crisis sooner. At the same time, wouldn’t you say that the actual response is more important?

Chris: The actual response? From what I see, it’s been much weaker than after Hurricane Harvey hit Texas and Louisiana last month...

Emily: Has it really been? As of yesterday morning, I read, FEMA had given out 4 million meals and 6 million liters of water, with 7 million more meals and more water on the way.

Chris: OK... but given the situation, it’s not enough! If the administration really wanted to get help to Puerto Rico faster, why couldn’t it waive the Jones Act -- and let the people access food and medicine less expensively? Also...

Emily: Also what?

Chris: Also, think about the message Trump sent when he finally started tweeting about Puerto Rico. Did he talk about the people suffering, or that it could take many months before things are back to normal? No! He talked about their debt, and their poor infrastructure! These are U.S. citizens!

Emily: Chris... don’t you think you’re being just a little too critical? It seems to me that there’s a strong commitment to providing aid -- no one can expect things to change overnight. I know you oppose Trump on most things but...

Chris: Emily, it doesn’t matter at all whether or not I support Trump. Either way, as a citizen I have the right to express my opinion and in this case to criticize our president’s response. To me, his lack of leadership is astounding.