

JENNIFFER GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN
PUERTO RICO, AT LARGE

WASHINGTON OFFICE:
1609 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
(202) 225-6215 FAX: (202) 225-2154

SAN JUAN OFFICE:
157 AVENIDA DE LA CONSTITUCIÓN
ANTIGUO EDIFICIO DE MEDICINA TROPICAL
SEGUNDO PISO
SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO 00901
(787) 723-6333 FAX: (787) 729-7738



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-5400

COMMITTEES:
TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE
SUBCOMMITTEES
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PUBLIC BUILDINGS AND
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
WATER RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT
NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEES
WATER, OCEANS AND WILDLIFE
OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS

December 3, 2020

The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson
Chairwoman
House Committee on Science,
Space and Technology

The Honorable Frank Lucas
Ranking Member
House Committee on Science,
Space and Technology

Dear Chairwoman Johnson and Ranking Member Lucas:

I write to respectfully request your committee holds a public hearing regarding the uncontrolled collapse that destroyed the 305-meter radio telescope at the Arecibo Observatory (AO) in Arecibo, Puerto Rico.

The 305-meter telescope was built in 1963 and was recognized as the main feature of the AO. It was the largest radio telescope until 2016, when China built the 500-meter Aperture Spherical Telescope, or FAST, and was known for fostering advancements in education and research in astronomy, space, atmospheric and planetary sciences.

On August 10, 2020, one of the main auxiliary cables that supported the platform above the reflector dish slipped from its socket in Tower 4 and fell into the dish, creating a sizable gash. On November 6, 2020, close to when temporary repairs were scheduled to begin, one of the main cables at the same support tower unexpectedly broke and landed on the dish. These events unveiled signs of degradation in the structure, with additional cable breakages noticed in recent days.

These incidents presented the possibility of collapse. On November 19, the National Science Foundation published a press release indicating their decision to begin plans for a controlled decommission of the telescope, which attracted national and international media attention.

During the morning of December 1, 2020, the platform collapsed, and the telescope is now destroyed. Considering the significance of this structure and the role it played on matters of national security, science, technology, engineering and STEM education, I respectfully request a public hearing that will assist with acquiring a better understanding of the events leading to the collapse, efforts to clean the site and next steps for the facility. I appreciate your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Jenniffer González-Colón".

Jenniffer González-Colón
Member of Congress