

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 15, 2023

The Honorable Katherine Tai
Ambassador
U.S. Trade Representative
600 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20006

The Honorable Gina M. Raimondo
Secretary of Commerce
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Ambassador Tai and Secretary Raimondo:

We write to encourage you to exempt the Dominican Republic from Section 232 steel and aluminum tariffs to facilitate the ongoing recovery efforts in Puerto Rico.

The Dominican Republic is an important ally of the United States, with robust commercial and security ties through CAFTA-DR and the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative. Importantly, the Dominican Republic is a critical exporter of steel and aluminum to Puerto Rico, as Puerto Rico's local economy does not produce steel. Exempting the Dominican Republic from the steel and aluminum tariffs under Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act will support hurricane recovery efforts while also bolstering our relations with an important partner in the Caribbean.

In September 2022, Hurricane Fiona devastated Puerto Rico with more than 20 inches of rain, causing flash flooding and leaving hundreds of thousands without water or electricity.¹ The economic losses and widespread devastation caused by Hurricane Fiona only compounded the existing damage to an already vulnerable island, which was still recovering from the cataclysmic damage wrought by Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017 and the 2020 earthquakes.² As of today, the Federal Emergency Management Agency has allocated close to \$42 billion in federal funds for Puerto Rico, along with additional funds that have been announced for transportation and infrastructure investments.³ Nevertheless, the GAO expects that hurricane recovery efforts in Puerto Rico will be ongoing for years.⁴

Exempting the Dominican Republic from Section 232 steel and aluminum tariffs would directly assist Puerto Rico's recovery efforts by providing the island with the commodities necessary to rebuild its critical infrastructure. The United States has already exempted several countries from Section 232 steel and aluminum tariffs—including Brazil, South Korea, Argentina, Australia, Canada, Mexico, the European Union, Japan, and the United

¹ Jaclyn Diaz, *5 numbers that Show Hurricane Fiona's Devastating Impact on Puerto Rico*, NPR (Sept. 23, 2022), <https://www.npr.org/2022/09/23/1124345084/impact-hurricane-fiona-puerto-rico>.

² *Hurricane Recovery Can Take Years—But For Puerto Rico, 5 Years Show Its Unique Challenges*, GAO (Nov. 14, 2022), <https://www.gao.gov/blog/hurricane-recovery-can-take-years-puerto-rico-5-years-show-its-unique-challenges>.

³ *State Profiles on Disaster Funding*, FEMA (last updated Mar. 8, 2023), <https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/national-preparedness/frameworks/national-disaster-recovery/support-functions/rsflg/state-profiles>.

⁴ GAO, *supra* note 2.

Kingdom.⁵ Additionally, despite the importance of Dominican steel and aluminum to Puerto Rico, steel exports from the Dominican Republic to the island ultimately only account for less than one-tenth of one percentage point of total U.S. steel imports. Thus, the United States could remove this tariff at minimal cost.

It is critical for this administration to take additional action to advance Puerto Rico's recovery efforts from these devastating hurricanes. In this spirit, we request that you exempt the Dominican Republic from Section 232 steel and aluminum tariffs. Please consider this request in accordance with all applicable laws, rules, and regulations. We look forward to your prompt response on this important matter.

Sincerely,



Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress



Jenniffer González-Colón
Member of Congress

⁵ *Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962*, Congressional Research Service (Apr. 1, 2022), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10667>.