



# One huge way the federal government is screwing over Puerto Rico as it recovers from Hurricane Fiona

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More than 40% of Puerto Ricans still didn't have electricity as of Monday morning, a week after Hurricane Fiona rocked the US territory and sent the island into disaster mode. More than 15% still didn't have access to running water.

That's right: Our fellow Americans are struggling in disastrous conditions—but an obscure federal law known as the “Jones Act” is hampering our ability to send aid and relief.

## What is the Jones Act?

“The Jones Act is a law that says if you want to transport goods from one part of the US to another, by water, it can only take place on a vessel that is US-flagged, built in the US, at least 75% owned by Americans, and has a 75% American crew,” Cato Institute research fellow Colin Grabow explained to **BASEDPolitics**.

Basically, it's a crony-capitalist regulation that enriches some corporate US interests but impoverishes places like Puerto Rico and makes disaster relief exponentially more difficult.

“Puerto Rico needs relief supplies [but] we greatly restrict the universe of vessels that can transport stuff to Puerto Rico... that means it's going to take longer, be less efficient,” Grabow said.

“To put this in context, there are 93 ships in the entire world that comply with the Jones Act,” the expert added. “So literally 99.8% of all ships do not comply with the Jones Act. We have ports all over the country full of foreign ships but you can't use them. It's less flexibility and it's far more expensive.”

## A Painful Example

Guess what would be really helpful for all the Puerto Ricans without power right now? More diesel fuel to run their generators. However, a ship with 300,000 barrels of diesel fuel sat off the

coast of Puerto Rico Monday morning standing by, waiting to provide fuel to the island—but cannot deliver it, thanks to the Jones Act, until it gets a special waiver from the federal government.

That request was still pending, as of Monday at 11:00 am.

Keep in mind that most of the deaths that have happened in Puerto Rico since Hurricane Fiona occurred not because of the hurricane itself, but because of indirect consequences. NBC News reports that “at least five deaths occurred because people lacked power.”

It should go without saying that archaic laws blocking resources from reaching a disaster-ravaged island probably aren't the best idea.

“Subjecting an island that's highly dependent on shipping to some of the world's most expensive shipping rates is bad policy, [especially] for an island that has a 43% poverty rate and now is trying to rebuild for the second time in 5 years from a hurricane,” Grabow concluded.

### **What Can We Do About It?**

Americans can and should also step up and contribute to charitable relief efforts to aid our fellow citizens facing disastrous conditions in Puerto Rico.

Big picture, Congress could act by repealing the Jones Act. Or, if that can't be done, simply exempting Puerto Rico, as some other US territories are exempt. The Biden administration should swiftly give individual exemptions, but those can only last for up to 10 days, and don't solve the root dysfunction caused by this legislation.

It's simply unconscionable that the status quo serves special interests at the expense of disaster-struck Americans.