



Pittsburgh, San Juan look to forge a new path in energy innovation

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By Katishi Maake / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Less than two months from the upcoming hurricane season, San Juan Mayor Carmen Yulin Cruz says Puerto Rico is still reeling from last year's Hurricane Maria and is not prepared for more blows to its debilitated electric grid.

Ms. Cruz sat down and spoke with Mayor Bill Peduto as part of an hour-long discussion for Carnegie Mellon University's Energy Week. The two discussed how San Juan and Pittsburgh can use smart energy technology to tackle their respective power generation issues. Though the two cities offer contrasts — one devastated, the other stable — they both can benefit from microgrids, which would allow independence from traditional power grids, the mayors said.

Puerto Rico faces a much steeper challenge as the economy has not recovered and an estimated 150,000 to 200,000 people and 70 percent of schools do not have power months after last year's hurricane, according to Ms. Yulin Cruz.

She also said there are 500,000 homes on the island in need of major renovations, and they have raised enough money to take care only a quarter of that population.

"There are towns like San Juan that have power but the power grid is very unstable," Ms. Yulin Cruz said. "You may lose your power a couple of times a week."

Ms. Yulin Cruz said the island's biggest obstacle is the inconsistent or non-existent distribution of FEMA reimbursements used to pay for recovery services. She said San Juan currently has about \$21 million of reimbursement money but has been waiting for weeks to receive a \$3.5 million reimbursement to pay contractors who helped in the hurricane's aftermath.

The island also still has not received any of the \$4.9 billion of short-term loans approved in a U.S. aid package passed last October. Ms. Yulin Cruz added that the island's recovery efforts have been

stifled by the Financial Oversight Management Board, which controls the budget.

“We need the fiscal control board to stop squeezing the life out of the people of Puerto Rico,” she said. “It should be the governor and 78 mayors that are in charge of reconstruction.”

Mr. Peduto said he wants to foster a sister-city relationship with San Juan as the city looks to rebuild its energy infrastructure. He said both cities stand to benefit from looking at new energy systems that produce power locally as opposed to being transported from a power plant.

“When we look at energy, we look at it very much in siloed ways,” Mr. Peduto said. “You have areas where you’re going to have more concentrated and dense development.”

Both mayors referenced microgrid technology as an innovative means of localizing energy storage and production. Microgrids can disconnect from the traditional grid and operate autonomously, according to the Department of Energy.

This is particularly helpful in times of crisis, and Ms. Yulin Cruz said she hopes Pittsburgh and its academic institutions can help bring microgrid technology and information to Puerto Rico so the island can take advantage of solar and wind energy consumption methods.

“One of the things Pittsburgh has been great at doing is building those partnerships,” she said. “There is no fear in this city to look at new things [and] build upon what didn’t work and make sure others learn from what has worked.”

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