

States to find ways to make sure all of our students achieve. We have put them on that, we expect them to live up to that, and that is the promise of this bill.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New York.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—
S. 1774

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I am going to ask for a unanimous consent request but speak for a couple of minutes, engaging in some discussion with my dear friend, the senior Senator from the State of Utah.

First, I thank him for coming to the floor today on this issue. I am heartened that he has expressed interest in working with us to get something done to help our fellow citizens in Puerto Rico. I also thank my friends, the Senators from Connecticut, New Jersey, Oregon, Washington, Illinois, and my colleague from New York who is here for their steadfast support for helping Puerto Rico in this time of crisis.

I rise deeply troubled by the dire economic, financial, and health care situation in Puerto Rico. The island is facing a financial crisis, a health care system on life support, and the situation grows more dire each month.

Puerto Rico is \$73 billion in debt already and large bond payments will continue to become due next month and in the months to come. Sadly, as Puerto Rico's economy and health care system has floundered, residents have started to flee their homeland. As the economic situation worsens, the population shift from the island to the mainland will continue until the only ones left are those who don't have the resources to move. At that point we are going to have a humanitarian crisis on our hands, if there isn't one already.

There are 3.5 million people, Puerto Ricans, living on the island today and another 5.2 million living in the United States, including over 1 million in my State of New York. We have a basic American responsibility to aid all American citizens in times of crisis, no matter where they live. Beyond that basic imperative, if we fail to offer Puerto Rico assistance now, the problem will not be contained to the island.

We need to be concerned with these issues, not only because Puerto Ricans are part of the American family and deserve the quality of life we all expect but also because our failure to act now could result in a Puerto Rican financial crisis that becomes a drag on our entire economy. I want to underscore this point. Congress must intervene before the crisis deepens and widens. We have the tools to fix this problem. They are sitting in the toolbox. The problem is Puerto Rico isn't allowed to use them.

Similar to chapter 9 protections offered under the Bankruptcy Code, every State in the United States can

access chapter 9 protections for municipal and public corporate debt, but Puerto Rico, because it is a territory, cannot. Providing Puerto Rico the ability to restructure its debt is absolutely necessary if Puerto Rico is going to get out from this financial crisis.

Senator BLUMENTHAL and I have introduced legislation along with many of my other colleagues who will join us today that will put Puerto Rico on an equal footing when it comes to chapter 9. At the very least we should pass it right away. There are other proposals as well. We could widen bankruptcy protections. There are health and economic issues as well and we have to look at those.

I stress to my colleagues on the other side of the aisle that giving Puerto Rico the restructuring authority in our bill isn't a bailout and will not require any additional spending. It will not cost the taxpayers one plug nickel, but it will do a whole lot of good to our friends in Puerto Rico.

On the health care front, I have introduced a bill with many of my same colleagues to address several aspects of the health care crisis, issues such as Medicaid funding and fairness, appropriate reimbursement rates, and equitable physician payments. Disparities in how the Medicare and Medicaid Programs treat Puerto Rico and our other territories are significant and need to be addressed.

In conclusion, I am going to be the first to admit that neither of these bills is a silver bullet to solve all of Puerto Rico's problems, nor are they the only potential solutions. We are more than willing to work with the chairman of the Finance Committee, a good friend who I know cares about the Puerto Rican issue, to find other solutions and craft bipartisan legislation so long as it provides help to Puerto Rico, but the clock is ticking. We are running out of time. Congress must act now to address these issues that are stifling Puerto Rico's economy and way of life. We must give them the tools they need to solve these problems.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Judiciary Committee be discharged from further consideration of S. 1774 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration, the bill be read a third time and passed, and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Utah.

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, I want to say first that I appreciate what my colleague is trying to do with regard to Puerto Rico. I think it is fair to say that we all share his concerns, and I don't know of anyone in this Chamber who is indifferent to the issues facing our fellow American citizens in Puerto Rico. I agree with the senior Senator from New York that Congress should act to

address these problems and we need to act very quickly. However, a number of Senators, myself included, have some concerns about the specific policy in the bill he has brought up today on the floor. Setting aside those concerns, there are a number of questions about whether this approach would effectively address Puerto Rico's problems.

I want to work with my colleagues and especially my colleague from New York to find a path forward on this issue. Once again, there is bipartisan agreement that something needs to be done. I have been working closely with the ranking member of the Senate Finance Committee on this issue. He has been a great help. I have also been in some pretty involved discussions with the chairs of the Judiciary and Energy and Natural Resources Committees, which also have jurisdiction in this matter, as we have been working to draft a legislative proposal to address a number of these concerns. In fact, we are planning to introduce our bill later today.

I am sure I will have more to say on that piece of particular legislation in the coming days. For now I will say I would be happy to engage the senior Senator from New York on this matter as well and would hope that he would be willing to do the same with me. Going forward, I hope we can work together to make sure we have all the information we need about the situation in Puerto Rico in order to craft informed policies and effective solutions and do so in short order, in the interest of helping the people of Puerto Rico.

As of right now, I think we need additional deliberation on this matter rather than simply deeming any piece of legislation to be the correct approach. For these reasons I must object to the good Senator's request at this time, but once again I will commit to working with him and others to address these important issues.

I do object.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from New York.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, just briefly. I thank my colleague from Utah for his remarks. I want to work with him, as I know Senator WYDEN, Senator GILLIBRAND, Senator MENENDEZ, and so many others on the floor want to get this done. We have to work together quickly and I appreciate him acknowledging that.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New York.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Mr. President, I want to express my strong disappointment that we are unable to do this legislation now. There is a grave sense of urgency for the people living in Puerto Rico, so I share the goals of my colleagues to get this done sooner than later. This has to be moved forward. No American parent or child should have to face economic stress simply because of where they live. Congress has the responsibility to actually help these families. The economic situation in Puerto

Rico is a serious problem that we can only begin to solve with meaningful legislation.

This bill is the fiscally responsible way to help the people of Puerto Rico. It is the fiscally responsible way to alleviate the dire economic situation in Puerto Rico. Let's be very clear. This is not a bailout. It is a means for our fellow Americans in Puerto Rico to get themselves out of serious economic distress. Congress must come together to pass this bill. The situation in Puerto Rico is desperate and these families need our help. There is no other way to see it. We have to help them.

I urge my colleagues to reconsider this objection. Congress must help the people of Puerto Rico.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I will be very brief.

I ask unanimous consent that Senator MENENDEZ speak after me.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I very much appreciate Chairman HATCH's willingness to work with all of us—Senator SCHUMER, Senator GILLIBRAND, Senator MENENDEZ, and myself—the many Senators who care deeply about this issue.

My view is that the situation in Puerto Rico will get far, far worse, particularly with inaction. That is why it is so important for this body to come together, Democrats and Republicans, and move quickly.

As Chairman HATCH has noted, we have been working on this in the Finance Committee. We are appreciative of Chairman HATCH's willingness to listen to colleagues on both sides of the aisle, and I think it is fair to say we have made some tangible progress.

Recently, the talks have bogged down, in particular because of efforts to change national programs that have nothing to do with Puerto Rico. I wish to emphasize what has been the challenge in recent days. We are trying to deal with the very real and significant questions facing Puerto Rico. Some have said in order to do that, you would have to make substantial changes in national programs.

One of the reasons I wanted to speak briefly on the floor this morning is I believe that any legislation to assist Puerto Rico needs to be focused on the territory and not get into unrelated provisions. In addition, any legislation to assist Puerto Rico ought to include some type of debt restructuring authority. Unfortunately, I think things have moved past the point where any sort of austerity in Puerto Rico can allow them to climb out of debt without causing a humanitarian crisis. That is why some type of debt restructuring is so important.

Wrapping up, I also wish to point out that debt restructuring and debt restructuring authority does not add a penny to the Federal deficit. In my dis-

cussions with Chairman HATCH—and we are very appreciative of our relationship and discussions we have had—that has been very important to him. So I do want to point out that debt restructuring authority does not add one penny to the Federal deficit.

This issue is too important to get lost in yet another partisan fight. I am going to work closely with our many colleagues, the two Senators from New York, Senator MENENDEZ, who knows an enormous amount about this issue, and the chairman because, as I touched on in my statement, things will get much, much worse and sooner than people think, in my view, if Congress fails to act.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I have a lot of respect for Chairman HATCH. I am privileged to sit with him and the ranking member on the Senate Finance Committee. He does try to work in ways that are bipartisan, so I appreciate his willingness to acknowledge that this is a problem. But I am disappointed that this rather modest measure to help Puerto Rico address its challenges in an orderly and legal way seems to be in a vortex in which we can't get it out.

There are four things I think we need to be clear about. Every single municipality in the United States already has access to chapter 9. Puerto Rico had access to it until 1984, when a provision was stuck into a larger bill with no explanation or debate. Restoring chapter 9 to the island doesn't cost the U.S. Treasury a single penny, nor will it raise the deficit. Perhaps most importantly, all other measures both the mainland and the island can take are virtually meaningless without this restructuring authority.

I appreciate the chairman's remarks about being open to negotiate, but we have been negotiating this issue for several months now. We have heard from stakeholders representing every interest on the island. We have had three congressional hearings. And while there may be some differences on the exact prescription, virtually everyone agrees that some restructuring authority must be part of the cure.

Again, this is something we can do right now. This is something that doesn't cost anything or need an offset, and it is something tangible that will give—and I want to focus on this—the 3.5 million American citizens who live in Puerto Rico a fighting chance.

This is not about some foreign country. The citizens of Puerto Rico are citizens of the United States. If all 3.5 million came to the mainland, they would have the rights and privileges as any other U.S. citizen. They would be fully eligible for any benefit that any citizen of the United States has.

Sometimes we look at the people of Puerto Rico—and I have had Members in the past when I served in the House of Representatives who have asked me:

Do I need a passport to go to Puerto Rico? Pretty amazing. This is not some foreign country, this is the United States of America. They are U.S. citizens. They deserve to be treated as U.S. citizens.

The people of Puerto Rico have fought in virtually every war the United States has ultimately had. If you go to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial with me, you will see a disproportionate number of names from the island of Puerto Rico who served in that war or the 65th Infantry Regiment Division in the Korean War, which was an all-Puerto Rican division and the most highly decorated in the history of U.S. military actions, and on and on. It is shameful that we treat 3.5 million U.S. citizens this way.

This crisis didn't develop overnight, nor will it be fixed in a day, but the present Governor, Governor Padilla, and the Government of Puerto Rico have done everything they can to right the ship of insolvency. Governor Alejandro Padilla didn't create this crisis, which has gone on through various administrations in Puerto Rico, but he has made the tough choices. He has closed schools and hospitals. He has laid off police and firefighters. He has raised taxes on businesses and individuals. They have gone beyond what a sovereign nation such as Greece, for example, would ever have imagined doing, but they have run out of options. All the cuts and tax hikes will not make a dent in this crisis without the breathing room that restructuring authority provides.

This problem isn't going to go away, but I do say that as Congress fiddles, Puerto Rico burns. It would be outrageous if the Congress goes home for a holiday and leaves a brewing catastrophe for the 3.5 million citizens of Puerto Rico who have fought for and died for this country.

So I hope these negotiations, which, as the distinguished ranking member has said, should be focused on the issue of Puerto Rico and the 3.5 million U.S. citizens who live there, who wear the uniform of the United States, who have fought for it proudly and who have died for it, ultimately are not linked to something that has nothing to do with those 3.5 million U.S. citizens.

Puerto Rico isn't asking us to pull them out of this hole; they are just asking us to give them the tools with which they can help themselves. For over a century, we have had an inextricable bond with the island of Puerto Rico and its people, and we should not turn our backs on their great commitment to our country.

I am going to come to the floor again and again, and I am going to remind my fellow Americans of Puerto Rican descent in Pennsylvania, in Ohio, in Florida, in New York, in New Jersey, and elsewhere around this country about their need to raise their voices on behalf of their fellow citizens. This is pretty outrageous to me.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I am proud to follow my colleague from New Jersey, my other esteemed colleagues, and the ranking member on the Finance Committee—Senator WYDEN—and Senator SCHUMER simply to make a few very starkly apparent points about the situation in Puerto Rico. It affects not only the 3.5 million citizens in Puerto Rico—and they are American citizens of the United States—but also the financial markets, the bondholders, and citizens who depend on the viability of our financial system across the country and potentially around the globe.

There is a reason for bankruptcy laws. They try to make the best of a bad situation. Bankruptcy is never pleasant or welcome. The reason for the bankruptcy laws is to create an orderly, structured process for avoiding the chaotic and costly race to the courtroom and then endless litigation. It simply consumes scarce resources. That is what will happen if bankruptcy protection is not provided in some way to the municipal entities, governmental function, and others in Puerto Rico.

By a quirk of history, Puerto Rico is not covered by chapter 9. That quirk of history could be extraordinarily costly, not only in dollars and cents but in the humanitarian catastrophe that threatens the people of Puerto Rico in depriving them of essential services, energy, medical care, and all kinds of very necessary governmental functions that may be impossible if there is no orderly resolution to its financial situation.

We can debate how Puerto Rico arrived at this place. We should learn from history so we don't repeat it, but right now this crisis demands action, and that action has to come now.

Many of us remember when New York City faced similar financial straits and the headlines in some of the tabloids. One said "Ford to City: Drop Dead." It was a reference to President Ford and his lack of action when New York City was in dire fiscal trouble.

The Nation would not let New York City drop dead. It should not let Puerto Rico drop dead financially. It should not send a message to Puerto Rico: Drop dead.

For this Chamber to say "drop dead" to Puerto Rico is absolutely intolerable and unacceptable, just as it would be if we were to say "drop dead" to the people of Alaska, represented so ably by the Presiding Officer, in a similar situation or to the people of Oregon, Connecticut, or any of our States or municipal entities. We know we came to the aid of Detroit, Stockton, and other municipalities when they needed it. That message, "Drop dead, Puerto Rico," is antithetical to the democracy we represent here.

Puerto Rico can and must reform itself, but no amount of long-term reform will address the short-term reality that Puerto Rico cannot pay its

current debts when due. That is the definition of "insolvency"—the inability to pay debts as they come due. The denial of chapter 9 will not create more money that makes Puerto Rico solvent and enables it to pay those debts. The only question is whether this reality results in a chaotic and costly default, with nobody winning except the legions of creditors' attorneys who will spend years and countless billable hours fighting each other litigating through the State or Commonwealth courts, through Federal courts, through courts of appeals, and maybe to the U.S. Supreme Court, over years, maybe over decades. The alternative is an orderly restructure, which serves the public interests as well as the interests of our fellow Americans in Puerto Rico. It is an orderly, deliberate, rational process that only Congress can provide.

The actions in the long term that are necessary in the interest of economic justice, as well as fairness and the welfare of our fellow citizens in Puerto Rico, include addressing issues relating to Medicare, the earned-income tax credit, and other obligations that we have recognized for the citizens of the country who live in the 50 States. The financial gymnastics have enabled Puerto Rico so far to avoid the chaos, and enabled Puerto Rico to avoid going over a cliff that, in effect, is irremediable. But we need to be very blunt and real. Those financial gymnastics cannot be sustained or continued indefinitely. The financial somersaults and headstands must end. The prospect of a humanitarian catastrophe within a U.S. territory is very real and immediate. Congress can act to prevent it. It can choose not to do so. But the responsibility is ours if there is no action.

I urge the Members of this body, our colleagues, to give Puerto Rico—our citizens and fellow Americans there—the respect they deserve and approve the bill that we have offered.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SASSE). Without objection, it is so ordered.

MENTAL HEALTH

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, I wish to talk for a few minutes today about mental health. It is a topic that gets a lot of attention every time somebody does something that we don't think makes sense, when people do harm to others in ways that we don't seem to be able to rationalize in any other way but to say that we are almost 100-percent sure that this is a person who has a significant mental health problem.

Before I go any further with that idea, I wish to say that if you have a

mental health problem, you are much more likely to be the victim of a crime than you are to be the perpetrator of a crime. But when we see things happen in schools—whether it is an elementary school such as Sandy Hook or a community college—and when we see things happen on a military base such as Fort Hood or in the last week at a holiday party, there is no way to explain those things except to say that something has gone dramatically wrong in somebody's life. But it does bring us to a topic that seems to be brought only by the worst of circumstances.

Fifty-two years ago President Kennedy signed the last bill he signed into law, which was the Community Mental Health Act. On the 50th anniversary, the last day of October 2013, Senator STABENOW and I came to the floor to talk about that. When you look at the Community Mental Health Act, there were lots of great goals to be set for the country. Almost none of those goals have been achieved. The goals of closing facilities that people were concerned about, which they thought didn't meet the mental health needs in the best possible way, were often achieved, but replacing those facilities with other places to go to and get care didn't happen. In fact, surprisingly, the worst partner in behavioral health is the government.

We have mandated that some of these issues be taken care of by private insurance in what we would consider mental health equity or mental health parity, but seldom have we mandated that the Federal Government step up and treat behavioral health issues in the same way. While we have done that, we have largely turned to the law enforcement community in the country and emergency rooms and said that is our mental health program. The truth is we never said that. We just allowed that to happen.

The biggest program for dealing with a behavioral health issue is the local police and the emergency room—neither of which is the best place to do this or the right place to do this. Sometimes that is the only option, and it is understandable when it is the only option. But it doesn't have to be the only option so much of the time.

The National Institutes of Health says that one out of four adult Americans has a diagnosable and almost always treatable behavioral health issue. This is not something that we don't have any relationship with. By the way, they don't say that one out of four adult Americans has a diagnosis and is undergoing treatment. They say that one out of four adult Americans has a diagnosable behavioral health issue and it is almost always treatable. In a hearing we had a year or so ago, they went on to say that about one out of nine adult Americans has a behavioral health issue that impacts the way they live every day, many times in a dramatic way.

We need to do something about this. The Congress took a big step to do