

I really appreciate the opportunity that he has given for both of us to kind of clear the air about the perceptions that could have been drawn by reading such an article.

#### PUERTO RICO

Mr. REID. Mr. President, 18,000 Puerto Ricans served in the Armed Forces in World War I; 65,000 in the Second World War; 61,000 during the Korean war; 48,000 in the Vietnam war. Since 1917, more than 200,000 American citizens from Puerto Rico have served in the U.S. Armed Forces, serving in every conflict since World War I.

A previous leader of the Senate asked me to represent the Senate in a ceremony in Puerto Rico a number of years ago as they were dedicating the monument to fallen soldiers of Puerto Rico in conflicts involving the United States and other countries. I have never forgotten that. I have a warm spot in my heart for Puerto Rico, a wonderful part of our country and a territory of the United States with a beautiful rain forest. I have been there. I have fond memories. I have been there a few times, but I really like Puerto Rico.

Today, as they have helped us in these battles, Puerto Ricans who live in Puerto Rico need our help. Right now, the people of Puerto Rico are drowning in over \$72 billion in debt. It is a sparsely populated territory with, I think, about 3.5 million people. They have more debt per capita than any U.S. State, of course. The territory is facing a severe economic and fiscal crisis, and it is becoming a humanitarian crisis.

Leader PELOSI and I fought to include meaningful provisions in an omnibus spending package to assist Puerto Rico, including empowering Puerto Rico to readjust a significant portion of its debt.

Unfortunately, Republicans refused to work with us to address Puerto Rico's massive debt in a meaningful way. Instead of seizing the last chance Congress has this year to do the right thing for Puerto Ricans, they turned their backs on 3.5 million citizens of the United States who are Puerto Ricans and live in Puerto Rico.

To be clear, helping Puerto Rico doesn't mean bailing the island out of its massive debt. They don't need that. They don't need a massive check from the taxpayers. This is about giving Puerto Rico and their leaders the same tools that every State has—the same tools that are currently available in every State. Puerto Rico is part of the United States, and the people of Puerto Rico are looking to Members of Congress to step in as partners. That is our job.

The territory is facing a massive \$900 million payment in bond payments on January 1 to its bond holders. Puerto Rico's Governor said yesterday that the island will default in January or May. We can't wait.

Next year—likely the first half of 2016, the same period in which Puerto

Rico is expected to default on its debt—Congress will present a Congressional Gold Medal in honor of the 65th Infantry Regiment, which suffered such massive casualties over time. This infantry regiment was a U.S. Army unit consisting mostly of Puerto Rican soldiers that distinguished itself for its remarkable service during the Korean war. It is shameful to think that Congress can at once recognize the extraordinary contributions of Puerto Ricans, who have made the ultimate sacrifice for their country, and then do nothing to protect Puerto Ricans when they turn to us for help in a time of crisis.

Inaction is not an option. Puerto Rico needs to do its part, and so must Congress. As Puerto Rico's Resident Commissioner has said: "This is not just a Puerto Rican problem; this is an American problem, requiring an American solution."

We can do something to help, and we must do something to help. We can work together to pass legislation that allows Puerto Rico to restructure a significant part of its debt without costing U.S. taxpayers a penny.

These bonds are not bonds of the U.S. Government. People have made investments. Like every other investment, sometimes they go bad. Theirs went bad as a result of the crash we had here 9 years ago or so on Wall Street.

The Obama administration and congressional Democrats want to do something to help. We have asked Republicans to join us in this effort, but so far they have only stood in the way. All we want is to simply say that a territory of the United States—and we will limit it, of course, to Puerto Rico—has the ability, like every other State, to file for bankruptcy protection.

Just last week, the senior Senator from New York asked for unanimous consent to adopt the Puerto Rico Chapter 9 Uniformity Act—a bill that would extend chapter 9 of the bankruptcy code to Puerto Rico and allow it to restructure its municipal debt in the same way other States can.

But instead of giving Puerto Rico the same rights as Kentucky, Nevada, Illinois or Utah, the chairman of the Finance Committee, from Utah, blocked this critical legislation.

I understand there are important issues that must be discussed, such as the nature and scope of this authority, but to deny Puerto Rico any restructuring authority, as the Republicans have done, is negligent.

I hope that recent comments by Republican leaders, including Speaker RYAN, will translate into meaningful action.

Senate Democrats are ready to work across the aisle on a real solution for Puerto Rico, with the understanding that any viable plan moving forward will be a Federal process that allows Puerto Rico to adjust its debt.

To deny Puerto Rico any restructuring authority is not just bad for

Puerto Rico, it is bad for the creditors as well.

So I say to my Republican colleagues: Let's work together to extend a helping hand to our fellow citizens in Puerto Rico. It should be in this bill that we are going to vote on tomorrow. Giving the people of Puerto Rico the tools necessary to resolve this fiscal crisis is the right thing to do. It is the moral thing to do.

Mr. President, would you announce the business of the day.

#### RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

#### MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 6 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The assistant Democratic leader.

#### SYRIAN REFUGEES

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, it is amazing some of the people we get to meet in our lives as Senators. There is a medical doctor in Chicago who I didn't know several years ago, but he and his wife have become dear friends in a short period of time. His name is Dr. Zaher Sahloul. He asked for an appointment in my office in Chicago a few years back, and I agreed to it. He came in to tell me a story and to show me some pictures. He is originally from Syria, and he is head of the Syrian-American Medical Society in the Chicagoland area. Because of the tragedy of the civil war in his home country of Syria, he has felt a special obligation to help.

What he has done on many occasions now was to get as close to the action as he could in Syria to provide medical assistance to the victims. Many times he risked his life to do it. And other doctors—some Syrian-American and some not—have joined him in that effort. He would bring me back photographs of what casualties of war look like in Syria. They were heart-breaking—pictures of children who had been maimed and seriously injured by the barrel bombs of President Assad in Syria and stories about parents killed in the bombings that continue day after weary day.

Dr. Sahloul would ask me: What can you do, Senator? Can't you help us? Can't you stop this?

Of course, that civil war in Syria, which has gone on for 4 years, is almost intractable, almost impossible to define. There are so many forces fighting one another that at any given moment, your ally today may be your enemy tomorrow.

I tried, since meeting Dr. Sahloul, to do some things: to come out for a safe

zone, a humanitarian zone in Syria, where medical treatment and food and a safe shelter could be found for families who are facing these attacks. We have had some limited—and I underline “limited”—success in providing these safe zones, but it is a fact that the tragedy of Syria continues even to this minute. If anything, today it is worse because of the bombing by the Russians, which I am told has gone into areas that previously had been protected because of the citizen and civilian populations.

The result is obvious. Millions—literally millions of people in Syria over the last 4 years—have fled. They are running for their lives, and they are running from war, and they are running from terrorism.

Dr. Sahloul recently wrote an article about his trip to the United States. He arrived in 1989. He tells the story of coming to Chicago and feeling very much alone. He graduated from medical school in Damascus. He had a chance to practice medicine in Chicago, but he wasn't sure that he could ever really fit in.

He tells the story of his first Thanksgiving in Chicago in 1989, when a fellow doctor invited him to join her and her family for Thanksgiving dinner. It was a gracious gesture—a gesture of hospitality. Dr. Sahloul has not forgotten it to this day. This article, which I will ask to have printed in the RECORD at the conclusion of my comments, goes into some detail.

Dr. Sahloul really wrote this article not to just tell his story but to tell two other stories—the story of immigration, which is literally the story of America, and the story of Syrian refugees.

His most recent trip to the region was to the island of Lesbos, which is part of Greece. I went there a few weeks ago with several of my Senate colleagues. Thousands—hundreds of thousands of refugees—are flowing into Lesbos from Turkey. They have left Syria and Afghanistan, and they are working their way into Greece on their way, they hope, to refuge and shelter in Europe.

It is impossible to describe, if we have not seen it ourselves, what is going on here. But imagine for a moment that you were so frightened of the prospect of your child or your wife dying in war that you said: Tomorrow, pick up whatever you can carry. We are leaving. We cannot stay here.

And if you look at these refugees as they travel—mothers and fathers carrying babies, with toddlers and small children walking alongside of them—you realize how desperate they must be to leave everything behind and to head out on this journey of danger. One of the most dangerous parts of it is that trip across the Aegean Sea between Turkey and Greece. They have to pay smugglers 1,000 euros, which is over \$1,000 for each adult, and 500 euros for each child. They put them in these plastic boats. Some of them are given

lifejackets. The infants, too small for a lifejacket, are literally given plastic water wings that we give to our infant children to play in the wading pools near our homes. That is all they have. They cram them into these boats. They strap on a Chinese motor. They put just enough gasoline in that engine that they think will make it across—but not more—and try to find someone in the boat who will steer it. They point to their destination, and they leave. Sometimes these boats have 50 or 60 people in them when they are only supposed to have 20 to travel safely.

They are warned that as they come up to the shore in Lesbos, Greece, or other islands, they should immediately run into the rocks and scuttle the boat so that it sinks. Otherwise, they are told they will be turned around and pushed back to Turkey, and they may not have enough gas to make it. And that is what happens.

Dr. Sahloul tells the story of what happens when these boats are scuttled as they arrive in Greece. He tells of the drowning of little children who don't make it off the boat onto dry land but literally drown right there. We saw one of those photos just a few months ago of a tiny 3-year-old boy who drowned just as he was about to make it into Greece.

Dr. Sahloul tells that story so that some of us—all of us—will understand the desperation of these refugees.

It is now very popular among politicians to blame the Syrian refugees for terrorism in America. We have not accepted that many refugees in our country. The numbers are about 2,000. At this point, not a single person among those refugees has been arrested and charged with terrorism. Yet one would think that these Syrian refugees are the greatest threat there is to America.

I will include the article I referred to in the RECORD so that those who follow this debate and follow the proceedings on the floor can read firsthand and for themselves Dr. Sahloul's story and the story of these Syrian refugees. I ask unanimous consent that the article be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From Lobelog, Dec. 14, 2015]

TODAY'S SYRIAN REFUGEES ARE YESTERDAY'S  
IRISH

(By Zaher Sahloul)

Immigrants have built the United States—and that includes Syrians.

Four months after I arrived to Chicago in 1989, my colleague at the hospital, Dr. Nancy Nora, invited me to her family's Thanksgiving dinner. I was homesick in a new country after graduating from medical school in Damascus. Nancy Nora was an Irish American from a large Catholic family. Her father was a respected local physician.

Nancy told me that it was a tradition in her family to invite a newcomer to the city. After all, Thanksgiving, I learned, celebrated Native Americans welcoming European refugees who fled their homelands due to reli-

gious and political persecution. I came to Chicago from the ancient Syrian city of Homs to pursue advanced medical training. Syrians look to the U.S. as the best place to pursue this training. In fact, almost half of one percent of American doctors are of Syrian origin. There are also famous Syrian actors, playwrights, rappers, chess players, entrepreneurs, scientists, businessmen, and even Republican governors. Every Syrian American is proud that Steve Jobs is the son of a Syrian immigrant. Syrian immigrant Ernest Hamwi invented the ice cream cone during the St. Louis World Fair in 1904.

“Everyone who enjoys ice cream and an iPhone should feel indebted to Syrian immigrants,” I remind my children. All three have been born in Chicago. The eldest, Adham, ran his first marathon this year—to raise awareness about domestic violence—and aspires to a career in politics. Mahdi is involved in his university's Students Organizing for Syria (SOS) chapter as well as the Black Lives Matter campaign. Marwa, a high school freshman, is a budding pianist and ran for her school's cross-country team. They all volunteer in local charity events and for Syria. My wife, Suzanne, the daughter of a Syrian civil engineer and Canadian mother with Irish-Scottish roots, founded the Syrian Community Network (SCN) to help support newly resettled Syrian refugee families in the Chicago area.

#### DARKNESS IN SYRIA

To many Syrians, America symbolizes the values that we lack at home: freedom, rule of law, and the respect for human rights. In Syria, my generation knew only one president, Hafez al-Assad, who ruled for 30 years with “iron and fire,” as they say in Arabic. He detained and tortured thousands of people who dared to speak out against his rule. He committed massacres, the worst of which in the city of Hama the same year I graduated from high school.

I still remember the atmosphere of fear in Syria. We dared not speak. We were told that the “walls have ears.” My family even prevented me from going to the mosque to pray. Many of my high school friends and relatives disappeared into the dark cells of the infamous Palmyra prison, the site of another infamous massacre by Assad's ruthless security men.

When Hafez died in 2000, his son Bashar, a classmate of mine from medical school, was appointed to the presidency by a token parliament. People expected change. After all, Syria had a well-educated middle class, a diverse economy, and a reasonably vibrant nonprofit sector. It also had a tradition of democracy, which had its ups and downs between 1920 and 1970. Bashar, inexperienced but equally ruthless, disappointed us all. When hundreds of thousands of young Syrians demonstrated peacefully in 2011, thinking naively that the Arab Spring had turned at last to Syria, Assad and his cronies responded with what they knew best: brutality and oppression. More than 250,000 people have been killed. Tens of thousands have disappeared into the prisons. Half of the population has been displaced. And barrel bombs, cluster bombs, and all kinds of weaponry have leveled entire cities and neighborhoods.

Besides meager humanitarian assistance and empty rhetoric, the international community has stood by mostly idle, watching darkness descend on Syria. It has become one of the worst humanitarian crises in our lifetime. In the ensuing chaos, extremist groups like the Islamic State (ISIS or IS) and Hezbollah filled the vacuum. But the snowballing refugee crisis only captured the world's attention when it reached the shores of Europe. With the drowning of the Syrian toddler Aylan Kurdi, who tried to flee with

his family to Greece from Turkey across the Aegean Sea, suddenly Syrian lives mattered.

#### WITH THE REFUGEES

I just returned from my last medical mission with my organization, the Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS), to the Greek island of Lesbos. Tens of thousands of Syrian refugees are making the desperate boat trip from Turkey to Lesbos and other Greek islands. The unfortunate ones are drowning, while the lucky ones must carry on through another 1,200 miles of borders, humiliation, and misery to reach whoever opens the door to them. Germany and Sweden have been the most hospitable, while others are building walls and barbed wire fences along their borders. The Syrian refugees I met were fleeing the recent Russian bombings and Assad's barrel bombs, while some are fleeing the brutality of the Islamic State. I saw several women, some with toddlers Aylan's age, who lost their husbands to the war. One woman was crying as she described a public execution by IS that she was forced to witness with her five-year-old son. He has had nightmares since then.

I heard from a Syrian volunteer doctor about a boat with a capacity of 30 people that was stuffed with more than 80 refugees. Each refugee had to pay the smugglers 1,000 to 2,000 euros. It was a cold night when the boat crashed onto the rocky shores and split in half. Children got stuck underneath the boat. Many simply drowned. The Syrian doctor, himself a victim of Assad's torture and now a refugee in France, described to me how he performed CPR on two small children. One was dead, and one died later. The U.S. presidential candidates and governors who slammed the door in the faces of helpless Syrian refugees should hear these stories. These refugees deserve our sympathy and hospitality.

Since 1975, Americans have welcomed over 3 million refugees from all over the world. Refugees have built new lives, homes, and communities in towns and cities in all 50 states. Since the war began, however, only 2,034 Syrian refugees have been resettled in the entire United States. This is a shameful number, considering that there are 4.2 million Syrian refugees. The House of Representatives has passed a bill that would impose additional security measures on refugees from Syria, making it nearly impossible to accept more refugees from Iraq and Syria. A similar bill is awaiting a Senate vote.

Nancy Nora's father, surrounded by his large extended family at the dinner table on that Thanksgiving many years ago, explained to me how Irish Americans were demonized when they first arrived to the United States as refugees. They were maligned by politicians and by the public, and were perceived as a threat. During dark times in our history, the United States has treated newly arriving Jews, Italians, Japanese, and Latinos as a threat.

As I was leaving the Nora household after that memorable evening, her family wished me good luck with my studies and my new life in America. Suddenly, the cold Chicago night felt very warm. I felt at home.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I have several colleagues on the floor who wish to enter into a colloquy, and I yield the floor for that purpose, and then I will wait until they are finished to reclaim my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

#### UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST— H.R. 4188

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate

proceed to the immediate consideration of H.R. 4188, the Coast Guard reauthorization, which was received from the House; I further ask that the Thune substitute amendment be agreed to; that the bill, as amended, be read a third time and passed; and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Delaware.

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Delaware.

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, if I might, let me briefly explain the basis for my objection. I have had the opportunity to discuss this matter with my colleague from the State of Alaska.

The cruise industry foreign-flags its vessels and thus pays no U.S. income tax, yet it has asked for protections in this bill from remedies sought by seamen for failing to pay wage and overtime, for remedies for maintenance and cure, one of the oldest, internationally recognized remedies for seafarers. These two remedies would keep the U.S. Merchant Marine competitive. U.S.-flagged vessels are required to hire U.S. seamen, and only by ensuring that workers on U.S. vessels and foreign-flagged vessels, which sail in and out of U.S. ports carrying U.S. passengers, have the same remedies can U.S. jobs be protected.

I have had the opportunity to discuss this issue with the Senator from Alaska, and it is my hope that we can work diligently together to address and clear issues of concern to myself and a number of my colleagues. But until we have that opportunity to review the text and to appropriately resolve concerns that arise from the Jones Act and the longstanding workers compensation-type benefit I described called maintenance and cure, my objection will continue.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I want to talk about the broader issue here. I appreciate the willingness of my colleague from Delaware to work on this important issue. The Coast Guard reauthorization bill passed out of the commerce committee unanimously in April.

We talk a lot about national security here on the Senate floor. We talk about our men and women in uniform and how they are protecting us. But I have always liked to mention the men and women in the Coast Guard. Prior to 9/11, you can make a very strong argument that the Coast Guard was probably the only uniformed service whose members were risking their lives for Americans day in and day out every single day. I think a lot of their heroism goes unnoticed. Trust me, in Alaska we see it daily.

The Coast Guard admirably performs a variety of missions on a daily basis

throughout our great Nation with a team of fewer than 90,000 members comprised of Active-Duty, Reserve, civilian, and Volunteer forces and an annual budget of less than \$10 billion, with, let's face it, a fleet of aging vessels and aircraft.

The ranking member of the commerce committee, Senator NELSON from Florida, and I talk a lot about how heroic these men and women are and how they deserve our attention, just like other members of the military.

Last year the Coast Guard executed more than 17,500 search and rescue missions—these are incredibly dangerous, by the way—in rough waters off the coast of Alaska and Florida and Delaware and saved over 3,400 lives. Think about that—3,400 lives in 1 year. In addition, last year the Coast Guard law enforcement crews interdicted over 140 metric tons of narcotics, detained over 300 smugglers, and interdicted more than 3,500 migrants.

What we are talking about here is bipartisan legislation that needs to be passed that will do one very important thing for our country and the Coast Guard: It is going to improve the mission readiness and performance of the Coast Guard. It demonstrates that the Congress of the United States is paying attention to these brave young men and women.

I am disappointed because we have worked hard to move this legislation since April. We have worked hard. We stripped out provisions that the other side had problems with. Section 605 is gone now, to move this forward. So we have been working hard. I thought we were going to pass this legislation this morning.

The provision my colleague from Delaware was talking about is section 606 of the Coast Guard Authorization Act, and it is simply looking to create consistency and reduce forum shopping in lawsuits involving mariners.

While I understand that some special interests—trial lawyers in particular—are not always interested in judicial consistency or efficiency because it is not in the interest of their bottom line, I wish to remind this body that the provision we are talking about passed overwhelmingly in the House of Representatives in a bipartisan manner—not once, not twice, but three times in the past 2 years. Three times. It is not a controversial provision.

Section 606 is about forum shopping for foreign mariners. In fact, section 606 is not even about Americans; it is about forum shopping for foreign mariners in foreign waters on foreign-flagged ships. That is the issue which is holding up the reauthorization of the Coast Guard bill for our brave men and women who serve in the Coast Guard. Why that provision should be holding us up is beyond me.

But I did have a good discussion with my colleague from Delaware. We are more than willing to continue to work with our colleagues to reach consensus.