

today still being held unjustly by the Iranian Government.

These are just a few examples among countless many of Iran's unwillingness to respect even the most basic norms of international human rights. Effectively pushing back on these egregious human rights abuses and enforcing the JCPOA demands international collaboration, but increasing our voluntary contribution to the IAEA makes a direct impact without requiring approval or action by any other country.

There are two other additional unilateral steps this Congress can take today.

First, we could increase Federal investment in our National Laboratories, which train the IAEA inspectors I spoke about, develop technologies that nuclear inspectors depend on, and undertake research that improves the lives of people around the world.

Second, and more promptly, the Senate could and should confirm Laura Holgate, a nonproliferation expert who was nominated more than 5 months ago to serve as America's Ambassador to the U.N. agencies of Vienna, which includes the IAEA. After months of delays for purely political reasons, her nomination was finally approved by the Foreign Relations Committee on January 28. The full Senate should not delay any further to ensure that our government is represented at the very organization the world relies upon to prevent Iran from gaining a nuclear weapon.

Later this month, the President will convene heads of state from around the world for a fourth Nuclear Security Summit, a conference dedicated to preventing nuclear terrorism and securing stockpiles of nuclear material from around the world. The IAEA is at the very forefront of this vital mission, and we need to work together to make sure it has the tools it needs to take on these serious tasks.

These goals demand involvement from every actor on the international stage, but by increasing America's voluntary contribution to the IAEA by an additional \$10 million, Congress can send a strong signal that we intend to hold Iran to the terms of the JCPOA, to support the international cause of nonproliferation, and to provide a vital incentive for our international partners to dedicate more of their resources to this important agency.

Iran remains today a revolutionary regime fundamentally opposed to America's values and interests. Iran's ballistic missile tests just last week serve as another reminder that the Iranian Government is neither America's friend nor ally. We must be relentless in our efforts to push back on these missile tests, on Iran's destabilizing support for terrorism, and on its human rights abuses. We must continue to enforce the existing sanctions in American law and be willing to consider imposing new ones when Iran's behavior warrants it.

Let me be clear about one thing in closing. The Persian culture, the cul-

ture of the people of Iran, is one of great richness and complexity. I have had the blessing of knowing many Persian Americans in my life and have known them to be people of great intellect and inventiveness and capability and to be the products of an ancient and respectable culture. We in the United States do not wish the people of Iran ill, but the Iranian regime and those who support it deserve international condemnation for a decades-long pattern of human rights abuses, support for terrorism, and other bad behavior. But we can and should make a distinction between the Iranian regime and the Persian people.

The people of Iran—those who turn out at polls to vote even in elections that are neither free nor fair and who have repeatedly demonstrated in the streets for democracy and engagement, risking life and limb to do so in the decade past—must know that the American people support the struggle of those who hope for real democracy someday in Iran and those who hope for an Iranian regime that someday respects international values and human rights.

So today, just a few days before Monday's Iranian New Year of Nowruz, we wish the people of Iran a happy, healthy, and peaceful new year, while continuing to stand firm against the values and actions of the Iranian regime.

Thank you.

With that, I yield the floor.

Mr. COONS. Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. ERNST). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

PUERTO RICO

Mr. HATCH. Madam President, I am trying to assess the financial and economic challenges facing Puerto Rico, an issue I have been speaking about since last summer. In fact, it was July of last year when I first wrote to Treasury Secretary Lew, expressing my concern about the fiscal situation in Puerto Rico and inquiring about the Obama administration's plans to address this predicament. While I did eventually get a response from the Treasury Secretary, numerous questions that I asked in that initial letter to this day remain unanswered.

Over the ensuing months, I made other inquiries to Health and Human Services Secretary Burwell because, for some time now, we have been told that funding—or to be more specific, a decline in funding—for Federal health care programs was a factor contributing to Puerto Rico's debt crisis. So as the chairman of the Senate committee of jurisdiction over most of

those programs, I wanted to know what HHS thought needed to be done.

Not surprisingly, I am still waiting for a substantive response to those inquiries.

Instead of detailed proposals, I was initially told simply that health funding issues surrounding Puerto Rico are difficult and that the administration expected Congress to address these issues in a fiscally responsive way—and to do it quickly.

Eventually, last month, with the release of the President's budget proposal, we learned that the administration wants to provide \$30 billion—that is with a "b"—in additional Medicaid funds for Puerto Rico. When asked how the administration thought we should pay for this, Secretary Burwell suggested we simply adopt the President's budget. However, given that there are more surviving members of The Beatles than there are Senators willing to vote in favor of an Obama budget, I don't know if anyone can take that suggestion very seriously.

That is the sum total of the input we have gotten from the administration on dealing with Puerto Rico's health funding issues—a proposal for dramatically increased spending with no credible way to pay for it and a demand that we provide that funding as quickly as possible. That is all they are willing to say publicly on this matter, even though administration officials have labeled this a humanitarian crisis.

By the way, buried in all of the details is the fact that this proposal for increased Medicaid funds is meant to shore up an inequity created by the so-called Affordable Care Act. Apparently, the Democrats' partisan health law provided billions in additional Medicaid funding for Puerto Rico, but also included a cliff—or a point in time when that funding would drop off quickly and dramatically—and that cliff is fast approaching.

Let's be clear: The Democrats constructed that cliff, presumably knowing what they were doing at that time. The Democrats in Congress voted for it, and the Democrat in the White House signed it into law. No Republican in Congress supported that cliff.

Yet, now we are told that we must act quickly to eliminate the cliff that they have created and add even more funds without a realistic way to pay for them. And, on top of that, Democrats in Congress have labeled any hesitation on the part of Republicans to fix a problem they created and to fix it in the exact way they prescribe as callous indifference toward the plight of the American citizens living in Puerto Rico.

I have been as clear as I can be on this issue. I have said repeatedly that I want to work with my colleagues to find a solution, but we need to do so in a manner that is fiscally responsible with an eye toward righting the irresponsible course taken by the Government of Puerto Rico.

Toward that end, I, along with a number of my colleagues, have repeatedly requested audited financial statements from the Government of Puerto Rico. One would think that is a reasonable request. These requests date back to last September with the first hearing I held on these issues in the Finance Committee. That was six months ago, yet we still don't have that information from fiscal year 2014, let alone 2015.

In addition, last month I wrote a 9-page letter to the Governor of Puerto Rico, asking a number of questions about Puerto Rico's finances, and I asked that they be answered by the first of this month. I have received no answers to these questions.

In the face of a humanitarian crisis, it seems to be too much to ask of the Government of Puerto Rico that they provide some verifiable financial information so that Congress can make an informed decision about how to handle this very difficult situation. And, apparently, some of my friends on the other side of the aisle are ready and willing to spend tens of billions of dollars in taxpayer funds without all the relevant information and to publicly attack anyone who questions that strategy.

So far, my friends on the Democratic side, including Members of Congress and the administration, have been generally unwilling to provide even the most basic information about how much their various proposals for Puerto Rico would cost the Federal Government or whether they intend to offset those undisclosed costs. And none of them show an interest in even discussing ways to help Puerto Rico return to a more sustainable fiscal and economic course. Yet they repeatedly have the audacity to accuse Republicans of indifference to the struggles faced by the residents of Puerto Rico. Sometimes I feel as though I am all alone, trying to solve this problem without any help from the other side, and there are even difficult times on our side.

The absurdity of this debate, if that is what we want to call it, is compounded by the fact that the only practical and fiscally responsible legislation introduced in Congress to address these issues has come from Republicans.

As most of my colleagues should know, even with the severely incomplete information we have, Senators GRASSLEY and MURKOWSKI, who chair the Judiciary and Natural Resources Committees, and I have introduced a bill that would provide some tax relief and fully offset funds to Puerto Rico for transition assistance as well as an oversight authority to help ensure that Puerto Rico establishes credible budgets and future fiscal plans. Our bill provides the platform needed for sustained economic growth and a return of access to credit markets.

However, neither the administration nor any of my friends on the other side

of the aisle have shown much interest in discussing the substance of our bill. One would think they would want me to bring it up, and if they wanted to amend it, they could amend it. We have to do this. We can't just play around with this. Instead, we have seen the aforementioned proposals to send tens of billions of dollars in health funds to Puerto Rico, no questions asked, and a proposed bankruptcy scheme that my colleagues have misleadingly claimed would simply give Puerto Rico access to chapter 9 debt relief—the same access we give to every municipality in the country.

Of course, as I have made clear on a number of occasions, the so-called chapter 9 access they are seeking for Puerto Rico doesn't really resemble the actual chapter 9 of the current Bankruptcy Code. In reality, their proposal would create, for lack of a better word, a super chapter 9 specifically for Puerto Rico and grant the territory unprecedented authority to restructure its debt. And that is the territory not having a special supervisory board to make sure they do restructure its debt.

Before I say more about the super chapter 9 proposal, I just want to make clear that I and others have been working for quite some time now to find an agreeable solution to these problems. We have done so even while the Government of Puerto Rico refuses to provide anything resembling a complete picture of its finances, which, it seems to this Senator, ought to be the first thing that is done.

I have been working with colleagues in both the House and the Senate to explore legislative options. And while I don't want to speak for anyone else at the moment, I will say we have been willing to consider various debt restructuring mechanisms for Puerto Rico, balancing the need for fairness and equal treatment for similarly situated parties.

However, as we consider various approaches, I want to make three things perfectly clear.

First, the Government of Puerto Rico must negotiate in good faith with its creditors, and creditors must do the same with Puerto Rico. It would be a mistake for officials in Puerto Rico to hold out or drag their feet on good-faith bargaining efforts in an anticipation of congressional action.

Second, contrary to claims made by some of my colleagues, none of us have any interest in helping out the "vultures" or "speculators" looking to profit out of the misery created in Puerto Rico. If anyone uncovers illegal actions taken by investors in Puerto Rico, then by all means they should be prosecuted. If anyone can identify any investors whose actions are clearly predatory and unethical, we should all rain shame upon them. And, if former Federal Government officials who travel through the revolving door of the administration are found to be unduly enriching themselves off of Puerto Rico's plight, their actions should be brought

to light. I have no qualms with any of that because my goal and the goal of my Republican colleagues is to provide sensible and reasonable solutions to help the people living in Puerto Rico.

However, this does bring me to my third point. Innocent and ethical investors from Utah, New York, New Jersey, and every other State in the Union, as well as good-faith investors in Puerto Rico, should not be casually labeled as "vultures" or "speculators" and should be treated as any other similarly situated investor. A retiree or near-retiree in Sandy, UT, who invested part of her retirement savings in Puerto Rican debt instruments, which carry Federal tax preferences, is no less deserving of repayment than any other similarly situated claimant. It is easy to make exaggerated claims that the bondholders are all rich people; they are not. Thousands and thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, are average people who have trusted the bonds.

Teresa and Julio Garcia, who are residents of Puerto Rico, along with other middle-class Puerto Ricans who own a significant share of Puerto Rico's debt, are certainly not vultures and don't deserve unequal treatment. Residents of Puerto Rico who are retired or near retirement and who are numbered among Puerto Rico's bondholders, but don't happen to receive public pensions, do not deserve to see their savings depleted in order to favor certain public pension benefits in Puerto Rico. To some, that last example may seem oddly specific; however, if you look at the super chapter 9 proposals put forward by Democrats, the intent to favor public pensions over private bondholders—even those whose retirement savings are invested in those bonds—is explicit. What is wrong with worrying about private bondholders who are like Julio and his wife?

Regarding those public pensions, it is true that Puerto Rico tried to reform the retirement systems for its government employees and did end up making some lasting changes from one of its programs. Nonetheless, the territory has not followed through on some aspects of the reforms it did make, and even in the face of dire fiscal conditions, some of Puerto Rico's major public pension systems remain unchanged. And for my friends on the other side, it appears that any effort to encourage Puerto Rico to substantially improve its public pension systems as the island restructures some of its debt would be out of the question. That just can't be.

Madam President, as we see increasingly large municipal bankruptcies and States with mounting fiscal pressures, severely underfunded public pensions almost always seem to be lurking in the background. Until now, Detroit was probably the biggest municipal bankruptcy in U.S. history, with a debt of around \$18 billion. Now Puerto Rico is coming to Congress for help to deal with \$73 billion of debt and \$43 billion of shockingly unfunded public pension obligations, bringing the total to more than \$115 billion.

It would be beyond irresponsible to offer aid to Puerto Rico without taking at least some action to improve public pension reporting and transparency. Given the growing crisis of underfunded public pensions around the country, which I have been warning my colleagues about for years now, taking no action will ensure that States and municipalities that have been responsible with their pensions and their fiscal planning will see their costs go up as a result of the bad and imprudent actors. On this point, officials of the Securities and Exchange Commission and municipal market analysts overwhelmingly agree: Increased transparency on public pension liabilities is clearly necessary.

Earlier this week, while our bicameral work to produce passable legislation to address the problems in Puerto Rico has progressed, some of my friends on the other side of the aisle decided to chime in once again with another round of implausible policy proposals and fresh political attacks. The latest group of bills introduced by Democrats includes a number of repackaged ideas from last year, including unscored and unsound proposals to allocate funds and direct aid as well as a renewed effort to grant unprecedented debt resolution authority for Puerto Rico. The only real difference between the ideas we have seen already and those that were included in the bills this week is that Democrats are apparently now willing to be upfront about the fact that the debt resolution authority they are seeking isn't just the same chapter 9 everyone else has, but an entirely new animal altogether.

Last year, my friends on the other side had a bill to provide Puerto Rico with an ability to apply chapter 9 debt resolution authority on a retroactive basis. The reasoning and rhetoric behind the bill was that municipalities in every State have access, and so should Puerto Rico—never mind the retroactivity.

Now, however, the goalposts are being moved. My friends have now introduced their super chapter 9 bankruptcy scheme devised by administration officials. Of course, this new super chapter 9 is not something available to other municipalities or States. It is, in fact, without precedent. It includes virtually all government debt in Puerto Rico and blows right through a payout protection afforded to general obligation debt that is in Puerto Rico's Constitution. This not only steps directly on Puerto Rico's autonomy, but it also sends dangerous signals by telling municipal bond markets to no longer regard general obligation debt issued by States as being safe, as previously expected. That, of course, means higher costs to States for funding things like infrastructure projects, and it is something that many State Governors have said they worry about and do not support. Needless to say, this freshly constructed bankruptcy scheme is ex-

tremely risky. Though my friends are now being transparent about the relief they want, it doesn't make their proposals any more palatable.

The bills introduced this week include proposals beyond the super chapter 9 proposal. While these ideas are not at all new, it is worth taking a few minutes to go through them individually.

First, we have provisions, as poorly constructed this year as they were last year, calling for additional Medicare and Medicaid funds for Puerto Rico.

Second, we have proposals to extend parts of the U.S. personal income tax system that provide direct aid to U.S. taxpayers to people in Puerto Rico, excluding any part that requires positive tax payment. Residents of Puerto Rico do not file Federal income tax returns or pay any personal Federal income tax, yet my colleagues want the earned-income tax credit and child tax credits to be paid out to residents of Puerto Rico. Of course, the Joint Committee on Taxation—the nonpartisan scorekeeper and adviser when it comes to tax policy—has already indicated that such a scheme would be rife with administrative difficulties and fraud. It is, at the very least, difficult and counterintuitive to expect the IRS to properly operate an income tax program for people that are not subject to the income system to start with. However, that doesn't seem to faze my friends on the other side.

Third, we have a control board to oversee the restructuring of Puerto Rico's debt that under the bill would be populated by Puerto Rican political appointees. That is one of the problems—the political appointees in Puerto Rico. Why don't they start thinking about all the taxpayers in America? Clearly, the structure of this proposed control board would subject any financial decisionmaking in Puerto Rico to the same political wrangling that got the territory into this mess in the first place. Yet the obviousness of these problems seems to have escaped my colleagues.

As with last year, we do not know the precise cost of the health funding and refundable tax credit proposals because my friends have not been interested in getting them scored or in disclosing how much they cost. Essentially, my colleagues want to have a debate about their proposals without any real discussion of what they will cost the American taxpayers.

I have been here only about 39 years—actually, 40—but I think that is long enough to know that anyone who puts forward legislation designed specifically to throw taxpayer funds at a problem without disclosing how much they actually want to spend isn't all that interested in passing the legislation. Instead, what people tend to want in those situations is to send a political message that they care about a problem while the other side does not.

Perhaps I am wrong. Perhaps my friends on the other side do want to see their proposals become law. If that is

the case, they would be glad to know that I have worked with JCT and the Congressional Budget Office to get a ballpark figure on the cost of their proposals. All told, the provisions put forward in the bill Senator MENENDEZ and some of his colleagues introduced this week would cost Federal taxpayers more than \$45 billion, and probably closer to \$50 billion, at least from what we can tell from the legislative language, which is not the clearest I have ever seen.

I can only assume that the administration does not support these bills, given that, in what little communication we have had with them on these issues, they have consistently admonished us to address the Puerto Rico problem in a "fiscally responsible way." I have a hard time imagining any argument that the approaches proffered by my friends this week would satisfy even the loosest definition of fiscal responsibility, at least not until they come up with a semireasonable way to offset the \$50 billion cost.

Once again, given all these ominous realities, I have to assume that these bills are more about politics than solutions. As I said, people who are serious about solving a problem typically don't propose tens of billions of dollars in spending without actually disclosing the costs and talking about offsets. No, people who put out big ideas without a plausible path to get them enacted are usually more interested in talking about a problem than they are in solving it and more interested in political posturing than actually helping people.

Let me say that again. People who put out big ideas without a plausible path to get them enacted are usually more interested in talking about a problem than they are in solving it and more interested in political posturing than in actually helping people.

This Senator is not interested in the politics surrounding the crisis in Puerto Rico nor in what the polls say on this issue. I have been working for some time now to craft a legislative solution that can actually pass because I am more interested in enhancing the lives and opportunities of our fellow citizens in Puerto Rico than I am on the political impact this debate could have between now and November. Since last summer, well before almost anyone in Congress really began thinking about the challenges facing Puerto Rico and long before we sought any outlandish legislative proposal from our friends on the other side, I have been calling on my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to work with me to find serious and credible solutions to help the people, not the politicians, in Puerto Rico.

I repeat that call today. If there is anyone who wants to put people far out in front of politics and frankly address these problems instead of merely talking about them, my door remains open—wide open—and I hope some will walk through to help us get this done.

I want to get this done. I believe the people of Puerto Rico deserve having it done, but it has to be done right, and it can't be done by gouging everybody else in America for profligacy and improper conduct in Puerto Rico.

With that, Madam President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

FLINT, MICHIGAN, WATER CRISIS

Mr. PETERS. Madam President, I wish to talk about an issue my colleague Senator DEBBIE STABENOW of Michigan and I have been working on for 2 months. It is an issue that is sad and has been absolutely catastrophic for people who live in our State, in the city of Flint.

In fact, today we had hundreds of folks from Flint come to Washington, DC, to attend a House hearing that was held to talk about what had happened in Flint and to get answers from the EPA Administrator, as well as the Governor of Michigan. The folks came to make sure their voices were heard in this tragedy, to make sure people would see them as human beings who are being afflicted by this horrible tragedy. They are in a situation where they can't turn on their tapwater and have clean water, water free from lead.

I think many folks are aware of what happened. We had a situation where an unelected emergency manager was appointed by the Governor to save dollars, to save money, and in the process contaminated a water system.

The decision was made to move away from clean Detroit water from the Detroit water system—water that comes from Lake Huron in the Great Lakes—and move on a temporary basis until a new system could be put up and running that drew water from the Flint River. The Flint River was known to be water that was very corrosive. In fact, General Motors had an engine plant along the Flint River and used Flint River water in their manufacturing process but found that the water was so corrosive that it was damaging engine blocks. So they stopped using this water because of the damage it was doing to the manufacturing process, but, unfortunately, the unelected emergency manager and the State government decided to use that water for the people of Flint as a source of drinking water, and they did not put in the proper corrosion control chemicals that may have mitigated this disaster. As a result, this highly corrosive water was going through the pipes, damaging the pipes, and released very large amounts of lead that has led to the contamination of an entire water system.

This should have never happened. This is a disaster that was clearly man-made. It was a result of negligence on the part of those folks who were given the trust to run the system properly. Now we are left with an absolute catastrophe in the city.

Although every resident is hurt, there is no question that it is primarily the children of Flint who have been impacted as a result. That is what is so insidious about lead poisoning. Even though it will eventually be flushed out of your body, if you are ingesting this when you are young while your brain is still developing, it can have permanent brain damage. That damage can be mitigated, but it is going to require the use of wraparound education services. It is going to make sure those children have proper nutrition and make sure they have health coverage, but certainly this is every resident in Flint, not just children but also the elderly and everybody who is a resident of that city.

What has been so frustrating about this effort is that certainly we know this is the State's responsibility. The State broke it. They need to fix it. The State needs to put substantial resources in place. The Governor was here today talking about some of those efforts. He needs to do a whole lot more. Everybody agrees the State has to do a whole lot more, and taking responsibility means making sure the resources are there to provide the services that are going to be necessary—not just now but for what will likely be many decades in the future.

What I am concerned about, what the residents of the city of Flint are concerned about, is that although right now this issue has received national attention and the eyes of the country are focused on Flint, they know that sooner or later the TV cameras will go, that the lights will not be shining on Flint, and people may forget what happened in Flint. However, the people of Flint will be left dealing with this problem for decades to come. We cannot let that happen. These people cannot be forgotten. Certainly Senator STABENOW and I have been working aggressively to hopefully force the Governor to create a future fund that will provide resources for years to come for the people who have been impacted by this horrible crisis.

Even though this is a State responsibility and the State needs to step up and do more, there is also a role for the Federal Government. Wherever there has been a disaster anywhere in the country, the Federal Government has stepped up and helped those folks who have been the victims of disaster. Some argue this is a manmade disaster, the Federal Government shouldn't be involved in it, and we only deal with natural disasters, but I would just say ask the people of Flint: Does it matter who actually caused this problem? Can we be there to help folks? They don't care. They don't really care where it came from. They just know

their children have been poisoned. They have ingested lead. They know they can't use the water. Even now, although they have filters, a lot of them can't use the water. They are living on bottled water.

Today I had a woman named Gladys who came up to me. She traveled to Washington to tell her story. She brought a bag with hair in it. She is losing her hair as a result of using some of this water. She can't use her home. She was in tears as she talked about the lost value of her home, her entire life's savings in this house. Now she doesn't know what that house is worth because she is not sure whether the water is safe to drink.

Folks in Flint don't care who caused this problem, they just need help. In the past, the Federal Government and this body, the Senate, have always stepped up to help those in need. That is the right thing to do. That is what the American people expect us to do. The American people look to make sure that they are always in a position to help those in need. It is our values. It is who we are as a country. It is who we are as a people. Yet it has been extremely difficult to get that help out of this body.

I am pleased to say that in the last 2 months we have made some progress. Senator MURKOWSKI of Alaska and Senator INHOFE of Oklahoma have been great in working with Senator STABENOW and me. We have been able to build a list of cosponsors who are also helping us in this effort: Senator BURR, Senator CAPITO, Senator KIRK, and Senator PORTMAN. A number of Senators have come together on both sides of the aisle to say: Here is a solution we can get behind.

The proposal Senator STABENOW and I have worked on will provide money through the Safe Drinking Water Fund. It will provide grants for any community that has an emergency. Any community, not just Flint, that finds itself in an emergency of this kind could re-access these resources. Although Flint is the only community right now that would qualify, we believe there are other communities that will likely qualify in the future. In fact, there may be some in a relatively short period of time.

It also creates a loan fund of potentially up to \$700 million—perhaps even more—that every single community can access. This is an issue every community in our country may potentially face. With aging infrastructure, we know there are incredible infrastructure needs that have to be met, and the legislation we have worked on helps every community of every single State deal with this very important issue.

It also addresses some of the health issues I mentioned earlier in my talk—issues that help the children and the residents who have been poisoned by lead—by plussing up public health programs for lead abatement and helping the CDC do its great work to help folks.