

## PUERTO RICO

Mr. NELSON. Madam President, this week the Senate is going to consider legislation dealing with the crisis in Puerto Rico. The legislation before us, the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act, has already passed the House by a vote of 297 to 127. We are taking it up this week because Puerto Rico needs help. They have needed help for quite a while, but now we are running out of time to help that island territory of the United States, with 3.5 million American citizens living there.

Last week, I spoke to the Governor of Puerto Rico, Governor Alejandro Garcia Padilla. He explained just how dire the situation is in Puerto Rico.

On July 1, a \$2 billion debt payment is due. That is just a few days from now. There is no way Puerto Rico can make that payment; they don't have the cash. When they don't make that payment, there will be a race to the courthouse to see which hedge fund will sue Puerto Rico first and squeeze out whatever money is left on the island, even if it comes at the expense of the 3.5 million American citizens living there today. Hedge funds have already filed for injunctive relief in the Southern District of New York. In their court documents, they state that they should be paid first in times of scarcity, even ahead of what the government needs for essential services—essential services such as schools, hospitals, law enforcement. In our conversation, the Governor told me that if the hedge funds are granted injunctive relief, then he is not going to be able to pay the salaries of law enforcement and other first responders.

This isn't abstract; this is real. Hospitals have already closed. The Secretary of the Treasury, Jacob Lew, earlier cited in a letter that hospitals can only order dialysis treatments for premature newborns in intensive care. How? Only if they pay cash on demand daily. Let me repeat that. They are so strapped that hospitals can only order the dialysis that is essential for life for premature newborns who are in intensive care—they can only order it if they are paid in cash for that dialysis on a daily basis.

This legislation the House has crafted is certainly not the bill I would have crafted, but it is the only bill we have before us that could get by the tea party element in the House of Representatives. It is not ideal, particularly with regard to the labor provisions in the bill and the way the oversight board is organized.

We will hear bipartisan attacks against the bill in the Senate, well meaning and well felt, but this legislation is needed to get Puerto Rico out of this immediate crisis. Several of us would like to see more in the bill to address the health care disparities in Puerto Rico and the lack of economic growth on the island, but, as Governor Padilla has said, if someone is holding you up at gunpoint and says "Your

wallet or your life," you are going to hand him your wallet because the alternative is worse.

That is where we are. We have to compromise. That is the nature of Congress. That is how the Framers set it up. That is how we get things done. We don't get the perfect, the ideal; we have too many other opinions to consider when we put legislation together.

If we pass this legislation, once we get out of this immediate crisis, then all of us must work as hard as we can to push for solutions for some of the other long-term problems Puerto Rico has. This isn't the end; it is just the beginning. At the same time, we should not look past the achievements in this bill. At the end of the day, this is why this Senator comes down on the side of supporting this legislation. It provides for an orderly process for Puerto Rico to adjust all of its debts, including its general obligation bonds. Those are the bonds held by the hedge funds that are asking for injunctive relief, that they be the ones to get the money first, looking to squeeze the life out of the territory. They are the ones that ran all those ads saying this bill was a bailout. Have you seen those ads? Isn't it interesting that they are the only ones who have the money to run ads saying it is a bailout. Who is paying for the ads? The hedge funds that hold the bonds because they want their money first, to the exclusion of essential services on the island. Well, this is not a bailout. It doesn't spend any taxpayer money. But it has the hedge funds on Wall Street running scared because they know that if this passes, they won't be able to get special treatment and they won't be able to starve Puerto Rico of its vital resources.

Just consider the suffering going on in Puerto Rico. Nearly 200 schools have closed. Public transportation services have been cut. Payments to gasoline suppliers have been delayed, causing vendors to stop supplying gasoline to emergency vehicles like ambulances and fire trucks. Schools have had to cut services to special needs kids. Eighty percent of the businesses in San Juan's main business district have closed.

This isn't something we can continue to debate ad infinitum. Real people are suffering now. Every day we go without providing some sort of relief, more harm is done to the people of Puerto Rico. We are out of time. We need to act. And this bill is the only bill moving. I ask my colleagues to support the bill and send it to the President as soon as possible because, as the Governor said, the alternative is worse.

Might I also add that since this Senator comes from a part of the country—Florida, Central Florida, the Orlando area—where there is such a concentration of citizens who have moved from the island—there is one of the highest concentrations of Puerto Ricans in the United States right in the Orlando area. What is happening is that as the island deteriorates as far as

all of its essential services—doctors can't get paid, the people do not have the essential services for life, the health, welfare, and happiness of people—what is happening is that the professional people are picking up roots and moving to the mainland United States. A good number of them are coming to my State. We are glad to have them, but look what is happening: The very people who will help Puerto Rico come out of this financial and health care crisis—by the way, with Zika piled on top of it, with huge percentages of the population already infected with the Zika virus, that is all the more compounding the problems of the people of the island. This is why we have to act.

I have a letter from the Department of the Treasury to our majority leader—from the Secretary of the Treasury—that outlines some of the island's medical woes, talking about the island's doctors in the neonatal intensive care unit. In order to get the drugs for dialysis, they have to get cash every day in order to deliver those services.

I also have Governor Alejandro Garcia Padilla's letter to me, stating why he supports the legislation. I might also say that another Member of the Government—the delegate to the U.S. House of Representatives, whom we call Congressman PEDRO PIERLUISI and is of a different party than the Governor—likewise strongly supports this legislation.

I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD those two letters.

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

DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY,

Washington, DC, June 27, 2016.

Hon. MITCH MCCONNELL,  
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate,  
Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. LEADER: Puerto Rico is in crisis, and its only hope for recovery and growth is legislation that authorizes the tools necessary for better fiscal management and a sustainable level of debt. Early in June, the House passed a compromise bill, with an overwhelming bipartisan vote, that will give Puerto Rico the tools to recover without any federal spending. The Senate should take up the matter immediately. Delay will only jeopardize the ability of Congress to conclude its work before July 1, a critical deadline Puerto Rico's leadership has publicly highlighted for months.

On July 1—only four days from now—the crisis in Puerto Rico will ratchet up to an even higher level. Puerto Rico has \$2 billion in debt payments coming due that day, including payments on constitutionally prioritized debt on which Puerto Rico has not previously defaulted. In the event of default, and if creditor lawsuits are successful, a judge could immediately order Puerto Rico to pay creditors over essential services such as health, education, and public safety. This could force Puerto Rico to lay off police officers, shut down public transit, or close a hospital. Even a retroactive stay on litigation passed by Congress a few days later would not reverse such a court order. This is one of many reasons Congress must act before July 1. Creditors are hoping to gain the protection of legal judgments as quickly as possible,

and this could impair Puerto Rico's chances of getting on a path to stability and eventual growth.

The people of Puerto Rico are already suffering, as I saw firsthand on my most recent visit there. About 80 percent of businesses have closed in the Plaza de Diego, once the heart of San Juan's business district. Doctors at the island's only neonatal intensive care unit described how they can order dialysis treatment for premature newborns only if they pay cash-on-demand daily for lifesaving drugs. While we do not know the full ramifications if Congress fails to act before the end of the month, we know for certain that it is the 3.5 million American citizens who live in Puerto Rico who will be further harmed.

Congress must do more in the future to address long-term economic growth and Medicaid inequalities in Puerto Rico, but doing nothing now to end the debt crisis will result in a chaotic, disorderly unwinding with widespread consequences. Some well-funded creditors are working hard to delay legislative action this week, even if it comes at the expense of the Puerto Rican people. I urge Republicans and Democrats to come together in the Senate as you have before to help our fellow citizens, and get a bipartisan bill to the President's desk before July 1.

Sincerely,

JACOB J. LEW.

ESTADO LIBRE ASOCIADO DE  
PUERTO RICO GOBERNADOR,  
San Juan, PR, June 22, 2016.

Hon. BILL NELSON,

*Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, DC.*

DEAR SENATOR NELSON: I write to request that you vote in favor of the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA) before the end of the month. On July 1, 2016, more than \$1 billion in general obligations and Commonwealth guaranteed bonds are due. We do not have the cash to make those payments. A default of that magnitude, without the automatic stay granted by PROMESA, will affect our ability to pay our public workers, including police, nurses and therapists for special needs children.

For more than a year we have been requesting Congress to provide us the tools we need to restructure all the debt. The House of Representatives passed PROMESA, which provides Puerto Rico a solution to its decade-long economic crisis. Although imperfect and intrusive to Puerto Rico's autonomy, it is the only alternative available to reach a sustainable level of debt. PROMESA also protects us from all creditor litigation. The fiscal crisis we inherited does not leave us any options.

The 3.5 million United States citizens on the island are threatened by a debt crisis that can disrupt essential public services such as health, security and education. As Governor, I am responsible for protecting the safety and well-being of the people of Puerto Rico. PROMESA is just the first step in what will be Puerto Rico's long road to recovery. I urge you to approve PROMESA before July 1st, 2016.

Sincerely,

ALEJANDRO J. GARCIA-PADILLA,  
*The Governor of the Commonwealth of  
Puerto Rico.*

Mr. NELSON. Madam President, I will close by saying that we can't let these people dangle there anymore. We have to come to the aid of our fellow American citizens. Let's remember that when it comes to time of war, Puerto Rico provides some of the bravest military people we have. Let's re-

member they serve this Nation honorably. Now let's try to help them.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

#### ZIKA VIRUS FUNDING

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, we will soon vote on a bill that would provide funding for a coordinated response to the Zika virus—a virus that has already ravaged many parts of Latin America and places like Puerto Rico. Over the past few weeks, our Democratic friends have repeatedly stressed the urgency of this matter. And the summer months coming are likely to bring us more mosquitoes, which, of course, are the primary vector that carries this virus. Thankfully, in the United States, no one who has contracted the Zika virus has done so through a mosquito; it has been from people traveling to Central and South America, who have been bitten there—at least that is according to most current statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. We know they are coming, and we need to act with dispatch.

I know many of our friends across the aisle were very eager to get this done because they came down and made unanimous consent requests for \$1.9 billion. As you will recall, the Senate passed an appropriation for \$1.1 billion, and the only difference between the House and Senate was whether this would be deficit spending or whether it would actually be offset or paid for, which was the House's position. I think the House had the better argument. If we could pay for it, that would be ideal, but I think everybody agrees we need to get moving quickly to protect our communities.

Of course, the people most vulnerable to the Zika virus are women of childbearing age. If a mosquito carrying Zika were to bite you, you might not even notice it or you might feel as though you have had a little flu symptom for a day and then it would go away. We simply don't know enough about how long the virus is retained in the body, so even if a woman isn't pregnant when she is bitten, the fact that she was bitten and is of childbearing age and what that might mean is an unknown. It is frightening, particularly if you are a woman of childbearing age.

I hope we will act with dispatch. I know it is not fast enough for some of our colleagues who wanted us to do this without the usual conference committee with the House to try to reconcile differences, but we need to get this done. It is surprising now to hear some of our colleagues on the other side of the aisle say they actually plan to filibuster this legislation, and the President apparently is indicating he might veto it. I am really interested to hear how they arrived from point A to point B, having taken the position several weeks ago that we ought do it im-

mediately, and now, once it has come to fruition, saying we can simply blow it up, that it is not good enough, and not complete our work here.

It really is unfortunate. I hope cooler heads prevail. This country is on the verge of a public health crisis, and talking to Governor Abbott in Texas and also the public health officials there, I know they are very concerned about what this means. And I am sure, like the preceding speaker from Florida—Florida, Louisiana, and Texas are some very temperate, warm weather regions and are particularly vulnerable to this particular type of mosquito and this virus, but it could spread to other parts of the country, too, unless we act with dispatch tomorrow to approve this conference report and to get this bill to the President's desk and to get the money to the researchers and the people trying to develop a vaccine, which ultimately may be the ultimate tool in the toolbox so the people can be vaccinated so that, for example, women who are of childbearing age don't have to worry about the possibility of acquiring this disease or what it might mean to their unborn child.

We need to make sure the doctors and the researchers and other public health officials on the front lines get the resources they need. The good news is that—taking some advice from the Senate and the House, Republicans, in particular—the President decided to reprogram \$589 million left over in the Ebola account. They did that a few weeks ago. As of earlier this month, only \$40 million of that \$589 million has been obligated. There is a cushion there, but I think we should be careful about acting complacently when it comes to dealing with this particular crisis, or impending crisis.

For the President and some of our colleagues who have been insistent that we act on this now to say “We are going to filibuster it” or “The President will actually veto it” is really pretty hard to get your head around, unless you conclude it is completely disingenuous and irresponsible. I would like to give our colleagues a little more credit than that. I am anxious to hear how they have changed their position so dramatically from just a few weeks ago.

We will vote on this proposal tomorrow, and I hope that cooler heads will prevail and our colleagues will vote to support it, so we can quickly get the urgent resources needed to those public health services that are studying the virus, working on prevention—including mosquito eradication, which is an important part of this—as well as creating a vaccine.

The minority leader, in particular, spent a considerable amount of time on the floor stressing how dire the need is to fund Zika prevention efforts. He and the rest of his caucus will have a clear choice. They can either play politics at the expense of the mothers and the children across the country, or they can simply decide to do the right thing and support the bipartisan Zika bill.