

course, can share it with a hospital or a doctor or whomever we want, but our doctor can't share it with other doctors without our permission. Our hospital can't share it with other hospitals without our permission. But our personal financial data doesn't fall into those categories.

We know how this happens. Equifax is a company that many have rarely thought about. A lot of people have never thought much about it, and many have never really explored who they are. Equifax is a company in Atlanta. There are three data agencies like this. They get your data without your permission. They get it from a utility company or from a bank or from somebody else. They have two jobs: to collect your data and then to protect your data, your personal financial data.

This company—this CEO has been paid \$69 million over the last 3 years. The CEO we met with, who has retired, has been compensated very generously. Who knows if he will end up getting bonuses and golden parachutes and all? The American public has come to unfortunately expect that these CEOs will abuse the public trust.

Look at what happened at Wells Fargo, creating all kinds of accounts for people who didn't even want those accounts, who didn't even know they were having those accounts opened. And look at Equifax.

In far too many cases, these companies don't protect our information the way they have promised they would. It makes all of us, the 145 million, subject to some kind of criminal activity in all kinds of ways—to violate our privacy and to take advantage of us financially and all the identity theft and all the things that come with that.

If you were a student at Bowling Green State University who graduated and you miss a student loan payment after you have graduated, you get your credit dinged by Equifax. If you are a homeowner in Mansfield, OH, or in Ravenna, OH, and you miss a monthly payment or a couple of monthly payments, you get your credit dinged. You are held accountable by Equifax, but Equifax hasn't really been held accountable much by anyone.

The cynicism people in this country have toward our financial system, toward Wall Street—then we see Wells Fargo do what they have done; then we see Equifax do what they have done. It is time for Congress to push away these special interest groups that have far too much influence in this body.

The White House has not been helpful. The White House looks like a retreat for Goldman Sachs executives, with all the people around the President who do the bidding of Wall Street and protect far too many of these Wall Street firms and Wells Fargo and the Equifaxes of the world.

I am hopeful that we will sit down in a bipartisan way and begin to figure out what to do here. Maybe we do consider the protections we have for peo-

ple's medical records—we ought to have the same protection for their financial records. It simply makes sense, and I am hopeful we can come to a solution.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. 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 RECOVERY EFFORT

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I rise today, as I have on so many occasions, to give voice to the 3.5 million Americans who call Puerto Rico home. Their lives have been turned upside down by Hurricane Maria, and now more than ever, they desperately need to be heard. I invite my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join me in amplifying the voices of millions of Puerto Ricans calling out for help and the millions here on the mainland who have yet to hear from their families.

Here on the floor with me today are aerial photos of the destruction caused by Hurricane Maria, the astounding damage I saw firsthand when I toured Puerto Rico by helicopter on Friday, pictures largely taken by me.

Take this collapsed bridge in the municipality of Utuado, situated in the central mountains of Puerto Rico. Every day, the 30,000 Americans who live in Utuado depend on these bridges to cross the beautiful rivers that run through it, but today those 30,000 Americans are secluded, waiting in the dark, and wondering when help will arrive.

Images like these have stayed with me from the moment I left Puerto Rico, and I share them today because the people of Puerto Rico need our collective voices and support to stop this humanitarian crisis from devolving into a full-blown American tragedy.

This is another example of some of the devastation of a large number of homes in a community.

If we hope to overcome the monumental challenges before us, we need a full grasp of the reality on the ground. I thought that is why President Trump went to Puerto Rico this week—to get a dose of reality. Instead, the President continued to feed on his own warped version of reality. The President told the people of Puerto Rico that they should be “very proud” that the death count was only “16 versus literally thousands of people” who died in “a real catastrophe like Katrina”—a real catastrophe like Katrina. And certainly that was a catastrophe, but this is no less real for the people of Puerto Rico. Yet, moments later, the AP reported that fatalities in Puerto Rico have tragically risen to 44. And while I pray it is not the case, I fear that it may be even worse, because we have secluded communities that still have not

gotten access, so we don't know what is happening there.

In short, the situation is perilous, and we don't have a moment to waste.

Like many, I had hoped that during his visit to Puerto Rico, the President would take the high road and set a new tone after his administration's woefully delayed and inadequate response to Hurricane Maria. Instead, the President took victim-blaming to a whole new level. He told emergency responders and local elected officials: “I hate to tell you, Puerto Rico, but you have thrown our budget a little out of whack.”

Well, Mr. President, perhaps we have to dial back the budget-bursting, trillion-dollar tax cuts you want to give to billionaire families like yours, because it is going to take more than paper towels to help the people of Puerto Rico.

In this country, we don't turn our backs on Americans in need. We don't complain about how much it costs to restore power to hospitals or rebuild roads in ruin that connect people to their government and essential services or get clean drinking water and food and medicine to the hungry and the frail. We are the United States of America, and we are there for each other, whether it is Texas after Harvey or Florida after Irma or New Jersey after Sandy or Puerto Rico after Maria.

If you heard the President speak earlier this week, you would heard that everything is going great and that he in particular is doing the greatest job any President has ever done in the history of the world. The administration will tell us that the majority of hospitals are open but leave out the fact that many are running on emergency generators at significantly reduced capacity. They will leave out how the shortages of ambulances and fuel and functional roads have made getting to the hospitals nearly impossible. Even if you do find a way there, the hospitals might not have the medicine, supplies, or doctors you need.

The administration will boast that it has set up 11 distribution points for food, water, and other necessities, but what good is a distribution center that takes hours to reach and is out of supplies before you get there?

They will brag about how half of the people have access to running water but neglect to say that in some rural areas in the north, barely over 13 percent of people have access to running water.

They will boast about all of the buildings being inspected—something that even the Governor of Puerto Rico questioned—but look at this image I took 5 days before the President landed. This is just 25 minutes outside of San Juan. Hurricane Maria destroyed many of the wooden homes that populate the island and weakened many of its immense structures, as the picture showed that we had up before. Here is an example of it. So you see that all of

these homes are destroyed. Some of them are not made in the same way. Here is a cement structure that is also totally destroyed. I saw the same sights across Puerto Rico in communities near the capital, in the mountains, and along the coast.

What does all this tell us? It tells us an unfortunate truth: that the administration's response to this crisis has been woefully inadequate from the start.

For 2 weeks, Puerto Ricans cried out for help—help accessing clean water, help powering hospitals, help feeding families. Yet the President accused them—the victims of this historic natural disaster—of being ingrates clamoring for handouts. He dismissed the urgency of their situation, and he effectively called the mayor of San Juan another nasty woman who should pipe down.

Well, this is the mayor of San Juan, wading hip deep in water. Does this look like a woman who isn't taking responsibility? No. To me, it looks like a leader doing everything she can to save lives.

I knew from the start that we weren't getting the full picture, and because the administration went out of its way not to provide support for a bipartisan congressional delegation to visit the island, I decided to go myself. After all, it will be the responsibility of Congress to fund disaster relief and long-term recovery on these islands, and we need the facts in order to produce the right legislation. So last Friday, I boarded an Americans Airlines flight to Puerto Rico.

Now, let me be clear. I have visited the island of Puerto Rico I don't know how many times over the past 25 years, both in my official capacity as a Member of Congress and personally to vacation. It is no exaggeration to say that the island I saw on Friday is not the island I have known and loved. The lush, green, tropical landscape that comes to mind when we think of Puerto Rico was mostly devoid of life.

I met with the Governor of Puerto Rico. I spoke to local law enforcement officials, first responders, and Federal FEMA officials. With the help of the Governor's office and the Puerto Rico Joint Forces of Rapid Action—or FURA, as they are known on the island—I saw the damage by helicopter. I saw debris and mudslides and fallen trees on the inland streets, destroyed homes sprinkled with the occasional yet all-too-familiar blue of FEMA tarps. A dead green hue covered the landscape that was such a foreign sight to me that I caught myself thinking I was somewhere else.

This was an all-too-familiar scene—the scene of a strong cement structure of a building, on the surface impervious to the strong winds of a hurricane, yet now on the verge of sinking into the Earth. The hurricane eroded so much land that in some inner parts of the island, landslides have become the new norm. The people who live here may

never be able to return. Entire generations of close-knit communities may never be the same.

Despite these dire conditions, during my visit to Puerto Rico, I felt the spirit of community and commitments shared by so many Americans across the island. After Hurricane Maria, they woke to devastation, no communication, and the isolating affects of roads being cut off by fallen trees, electrical posts, and debris. As they wait and wonder when their government will come to their aid, they are doing everything they can to survive. They have taken matters into their own hands. They are clearing roads, sheltering relatives who lost their homes, and working together to care for the most vulnerable. So through it all, I saw the hard-working spirit alive in Puerto Rico that I see whenever I speak with Puerto Rican families there and across New Jersey, where so many of my constituents are mobilizing to send help as they anxiously wait to hear from their families.

Like so many Americans, I too worried about my family on the island. My brother faces health challenges, and I worried about his care. Fortunately, we had a brief moment to meet, and I was able to give him some supplies—help one person. But as tough as this situation was, he is one of the lucky ones. He lives in a suburb of San Juan which is relatively better off than the more remote, rural areas.

Let's look at a chart of our recovery status. Fifteen days after the storm ravaged the island, where does it stand? Well, 93 percent of our fellow Americans are still without power. I can tell my colleagues firsthand that the heat and the humidity from all of the water that came from Maria is stifling. It is oppressive. It is hard to breathe.

Sixty percent of Puerto Rico has no cell phone service, meaning people have no way of connecting to their families on the island and outside of the island or calling for help if they needed it. If they did, we could have pinpoint accuracy of search and rescue missions.

Day by day, fewer and fewer Puerto Ricans have access to clean, running water. From October 2 to October 3, the population with running water dropped from 29 percent to 13 percent.

The truth is, this situation would be unacceptable in any major city on the U.S. mainland, but, as the people of Puerto Rico know all too well, they don't get the same treatment as their fellow citizens on the mainland. The ugly truth is that for generations, Congress has treated the people of Puerto Rico not as our fellow Americans, not as people who have fought and bled for their country, like the famous Borinqueneers, an all-Puerto Rican infantry division, who received, recently, the highest decoration Congress gives collectively—the Congressional Gold Medal. They haven't treated them as first-class citizens but as second-class citizens.

Hurricane Maria didn't create this disparity, but it exposed the longstanding inequities that have hindered the island's success for generations. The people of Puerto Rico don't receive equal Medicaid funding, Medicare coverage, or access to tax credits. They aren't just numbers on a ledger; they are long-term care for a grandparent, treatment for a critically ill child, and a fair shot to make a living wage and raise a family.

This didn't happen overnight. These wrongs add up over time. As Governor Rossello said so eloquently:

I invite you to reflect on why Puerto Rico is in the current state of disadvantage and inequality. It's not something that happened just a few months or few weeks before this storm. It is a condition that has happened for more than a century in Puerto Rico.

I invite you to reflect on the reality that even after the storm hit Puerto Rico, even when it was evident it was a disaster in the United States, only half of our U.S. citizens knew Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens. So when Hurricanes Irma and Maria slammed into Puerto Rico, these disparities, these inequalities, were laid bare.

None of this should have taken the Trump administration by surprise. We knew the storm was coming. We knew for days that a category 5 hurricane was on a collision course with Puerto Rico, just as communities across the island were picking up the pieces after Irma. We have known for years about the island's aging infrastructure, like the downed power line pictured here.

In short, all of us knew Hurricane Maria was a recipe for disaster that would leave 3.5 million Americans imperiled, disconnected, and in the dark. It should not have taken the administration 12 days to issue a disaster declaration—something I called for—for 100 percent of the island because, as I saw on Friday, there is no community in Puerto Rico untouched by this tragedy. Focused leadership would have had a three-star general on the ground the moment the clouds parted, not 8 days after the storms struck.

We needed medical evacuation vehicles and vessels, aid and relief delivery systems on standby, the USNS *Comfort* ready for immediate deployment—something I called for. Instead, the administration told us helping Puerto Rico is hard because it is an island in a big ocean—but it happens to be an island of 3.5 million U.S. citizens.

We have no more time to waste. That is why it is so urgent that we take action now. If we could send 20,000 troops to Haiti, surely, we can get more boots on the ground saving American lives in Puerto Rico. We need more helicopters airdropping food and water to secluded communities. We need generators delivered and the repair of communication towers expedited.

It is up to the President to mobilize every resource possible—to save lives, to get the lights turned on, to rebuild bridges, to reach secluded communities, to reconnect families. We can't

afford to waste any more time, not when lives are on the line, not when elderly residents in nursing homes grow frailer by the moment, not when hungry American children have nothing to eat, not when communities are without clean drinking water for days on end. We need to keep the pressure on the administration.

That is why I wrote the President, urging that he activate the Defense Production Act of 1950 so the military could more quickly deliver vast private sector resources to those in need. That is why my colleagues and I wrote to the White House and urged FEMA to waive disaster relief cost sharing because, as the Governor told me: I have no revenue coming in. I have no revenue coming in, and the likelihood of revenue coming in, certainly in the short term, is not there. How do you acquire the 70 or 75 percent Federal assistance if you don't have the 25 percent to put up? That is why we have written the USDA asking that they use all available resources to get food to the people of Puerto Rico.

This is an all-hands-on-deck situation for the Federal Government, but Congress also has a responsibility to act. That is why I sent a letter to Leader MCCONNELL and Speaker RYAN urging that they bring forward an emergency supplemental aid package and fund community development block grants for disaster recovery. It is up to us in Congress to immediately authorize, not just the emergency funding needed to save lives in Puerto Rico but also the assistance needed for a full-powered recovery.

We must give Puerto Ricans the tools to rebuild. That means making sure Puerto Rico's financial control board gives the Governor the flexibility to spearhead this recovery. Board members of that control board should be on the island, assessing the damage, speaking to the survivors, allowing Governor Rossello to create a new budget that reflects Puerto Rico's post-Maria reality. The damage, by some estimates, could be as high as \$90 billion, so adjusting expectations and enabling flexibility is absolutely critical going forward.

I have said it before and I will say it again. The people of Puerto Rico must come before Wall Street creditors. As it turns out, this is one area where the President and I can find common ground. Just last night, he called for Puerto Rico's debt to be wiped out. I hope all of us—the administration, my colleagues in Congress, and the fiscal control board—can work together to jump-start Puerto Rico's recovery. That must include enabling flexibility, addressing the island's crippling debt, and ensuring that pensions are protected and paid. Imagine not getting your pension—no longer working, having no income, and then your pension is not protected. How do you make it? All of us in the Senate have a responsibility to stand with Puerto Rico. How we respond to this crisis will have pro-

found consequences, not just for the Americans who live in Puerto Rico today but for generations to come.

We need to pass a disaster package that matches the astounding damage suffered by the island. The photos I have brought to the floor today give a glimpse—not anywhere near the whole picture—of the devastation on the ground. It is not enough to reconnect a faulty, ailing power grid. It is time to be proactive and rebuild Puerto Rico so it is prepared for the next storm and for the 21st century. It is time to fix the underlying disparities which have hindered Puerto Rico's success. Otherwise, we will simply be rebuilding a broken foundation.

Let me close by saying, I remind my colleagues that Puerto Ricans are not just citizens of the United States—which, in and of itself, should speak to the compelling arguments we should be engaged in helping Puerto Rico as our fellow Americans. They have fought to defend our Nation from World War I to the War on Terror. Take a walk down to the Vietnam Memorial, and you will see Puerto Rican names engraved in that stone far in excess of the number of people proportionately to the American population. Throughout our history, Puerto Ricans have given their lives so they may remain part of the “land of the free.” To this day, more than 10,000 Puerto Ricans serve in every branch of the U.S. Armed Forces.

Let's also remember that beyond the 3.5 million citizens living on the island, there are 5 million Puerto Ricans living in our States, in our congressional districts, and in our communities. In the aftermath of this unprecedented disaster, these Americans deserve the same rights, the same respect, and the same response from their Federal Government. That is what I told leaders from New Jersey's Puerto Rican community earlier this week—assemblymen and women, mayors, community leaders, and concerned citizens.

We all remember how hard it was to secure the funding we needed to rebuild New Jersey in the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy. We had to fight tooth and nail every step of the way, and, guess what, we had two U.S. Senators from New Jersey and 13 Members of Congress, joined by our colleagues from New York—two U.S. Senators from New York and a whole host of congressional Members as well as from Connecticut, which was also affected. It was an incredible time here to try to get relief.

Americans in Puerto Rico have no vote in the Senate, they have no votes in Congress, and the fight to rebuild Puerto Rico will be that much harder, but, as I have in the past, I intend to be their voice and their vote in the U.S. Senate.

Now is not the time to pretend like recovery will be a piece of cake. No one—not the Governor, not the President, not any one of us—should sugarcoat the human catastrophe playing out in Puerto Rico. It is time for hon-

esty about the conditions on the ground, the challenges we face, and the actions we must take.

Yes, Puerto Rico is an island in the middle of a very big ocean, but we are the most powerful nation on the face of the Earth. We have the most advanced military capabilities ever known and the most skilled Armed Forces in the world. We have to be there for 3.5 million Americans who are in need. We are the United States of America. We do the impossible. Give our men and women in uniform any mission, and they rise to the occasion.

If we conducted the Berlin Airlift, set up tactical operations in the mountains of Afghanistan, built green zones in Baghdad in the height of the Iraq war, then surely we can save the lives of Americans in danger, and surely we can save those lives and help rebuild Puerto Rico. We must not rest until every American is safe and the work of rebuilding is done.

I yield the floor.

(At the request of Mr. SCHUMER, the following statement was ordered to be printed in the RECORD.)

● Ms. CORTEZ MASTO. Mr. President, I had expected to be able to vote today on the motion to invoke cloture on the nomination of Callista L. Gingrich to be Ambassador to the Holy See. Instead, I am in Las Vegas meeting with victims of and first responders to the deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history.

I support the motion to invoke cloture on the nomination of Callista L. Gingrich to be Ambassador to the Holy See. The U.S. relationship with the Holy See is an important one and is best supported with a confirmed ambassador leading it. Ms. Gingrich's faith and engagement with the Catholic community will support U.S. ties to the Vatican.●

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

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

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that all time be yielded back on both sides.

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

#### CLOTURE MOTION

Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

#### CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Callista L. Gingrich, of Virginia, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Holy See.