

PETITIONS AND MEMORIALS

The following petitions and memorials were laid before the Senate and were referred or ordered to lie on the table as indicated:

POM-184. A concurrent resolution adopted by the Legislative Assembly of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico requesting the United States Congress to extend the unemployment and the Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA) benefits for an additional twenty-six (26) weeks, due to the catastrophic impact of Hurricanes Maria and Irma on Puerto Rico; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 50

STATEMENT OF MOTIVES

Only two weeks after Hurricane Irma hit the Island, on September 20th, 2017, Hurricane Maria struck Puerto Rico. The eye of this Category 4 hurricane made landfall in the municipality of Yabucoa.

Puerto Rico suffered damages estimated in at least ninety billion dollars (\$90,000,000,000), and a never-before-seen devastation. The power grid as well as the telecommunications and drinking water systems were down. One month after landfall, a mere eighteen percent (18%) of the population had power service, fifty-nine percent (59%) had telecommunications service, and seventy-three percent (73%) had drinking water service.

Many businesses have been unable to operate due to the lack of these services. Consequently, a significant number of employees have lost their jobs or their work hours have been reduced considerably.

Through a contribution based on a percentage of payroll expenses, employers participate in a program where job-seeking unemployed persons are able to receive financial assistance and labor advisory from the Government.

Workers who have been wrongfully discharged may receive the following benefits:

Unemployment compensation equivalent to a percentage of the salary earned up to one hundred thirty-three dollars (\$133.00) a week. Such compensation may be extended for an additional twenty-six (26) weeks, if eligible.

Job search assistance through their job center locations.

Furthermore, the Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA) is available for employed and self-employed persons who have been determined not otherwise eligible for regular unemployment insurance benefits. This program provides unemployment benefits to individuals who have become unemployed as a direct result of a major disaster. Just as the unemployment benefit, this assistance is available for twenty-six (26) weeks.

Hurricanes Irma and Maria have had a major impact on the economy. Countless Puerto Ricans have lost their jobs, either temporarily or permanently. The lines at the regional offices of the Department of Labor are endless.

Moreover, it has been estimated that more than sixty thousand (60,000) Puerto Ricans have left the Island over the thirty (30) days following Hurricane Maria, forty thousand (40,000) of which have relocated to Florida.

If the U.S. Congress approves the unemployment benefit extension it will greatly contribute to the recovery of the People of Puerto Rico and prevent many others from making the difficult decision of moving from Puerto Rico.

This is not the first time that such a request is made. The U.S. Congress approved a similar extension in 2006 after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita struck Louisiana and Texas, respectively.

For all of the foregoing, this Legislative Assembly of Puerto Rico deems it meritorious to request the Congress of the United States of America to extend the unemployment and the Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA) benefits for an additional twenty-six (26) weeks, due to the catastrophic impact of Hurricanes Maria and Irma on Puerto Rico.

Be it Resolved by the Legislative Assembly of Puerto Rico:

Section 1.—To request the Congress of the United States of America to extend the unemployment and the Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA) benefits for an additional twenty-six (26) weeks, due to the catastrophic impact of Hurricanes Maria and Irma on Puerto Rico.

Section 2.—It is hereby directed that a copy of this Concurrent Resolution, translated into English, be delivered to the leadership of the Congress of the United States of America, including the Resident Commissioner of Puerto Rico in Washington, D.C., the President of the United States of America, and the U.S. Secretary of Labor.

Section 3.—This Concurrent Resolution shall take effect upon its approval.

POM-185. A concurrent resolution adopted by the Legislative Assembly of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico urging the United States Government to prioritize, increase, and accelerate the recovery, restoration, and reconstruction efforts of Puerto Rico in the wake of Hurricane Maria; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 53

STATEMENT OF MOTIVES

On September 20, 2017, the people of Puerto Rico experienced one of the most catastrophic events in its history. The onslaught of Hurricane Maria and the devastation it caused not only resulted in the loss of dozens of lives, but also had a disastrous effect on the basic infrastructure, thus disrupting the economic stability and fraying the social fabric of the Island.

Thousands of families deprived of their homes, the loss of industries and jobs, the lack of access to essential medical services, and the lack of reliable means of communication, the difficult access to roadways and communities, and the alarming rate of migration to the mainland are just some of the adverse consequences with which the Island is dealing, while experiencing a serious economic recession that has lasted for over a decade. Almost one and a half months later, thousands of students have been unable to return to their classrooms, hundreds of communities continue without water service, and more than half of the Island still has no power. In short, the Island has essentially fallen into a humanitarian crisis.

Furthermore, the issue caused by the large accumulation of debris that has yet to be removed from the streets and the communities is specifically worth noting. Such debris adversely affects the quality of life of the residents of Puerto Rico. This situation not only constitutes a public safety hazard, but also affects the health of Puerto Ricans, because it promotes the proliferation of pests and mosquito breeding sites due to standing water. According to several experts, as well as the State epidemiologist, we have experienced an increase in the number of Leptospirosis cases and other diseases in many municipalities. In addition, debris affects vehicle traffic, limits accesses, and interferes with recovery efforts.

At this critical time, we are compelled to find effective solutions to protect life and property.

Even though the Government of Puerto Rico, its agencies, instrumentalities, and

municipalities have made a massive effort in an attempt to solve these issues at the state and local level, it is clear that the restoration and reconstruction of Puerto Rico is a Herculean task that we could not undertake without the intervention of the Federal Government. Now more than ever, the U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico require Federal assistance to set in motion their recovery.

We recognize that the concerned agencies and the different federal officials have expressed their unwavering commitment to the recovery and reconstruction of Puerto Rico. The truth is, however, that the pace at which works are being carried out is at odds with the needs of the People of Puerto Rico.

Indeed, on many occasions, local authorities have been compelled to raise a red flag about the adverse effects that the slow pace at which the works contracted with federal entities are being carried out could have. Several mayors of both political parties have resorted to the Executive Branch to increase the resources allocated to debris recovery and the overall reconstruction and recovery efforts being carried out in Puerto Rico. In some instances, the municipal executives have taken on the task to petition the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers directly and have been successful in arriving at agreements for the recovery of demolition and vegetative debris. However, some of these municipal executives have expressed that despite entering into these agreements, the demolition and vegetative debris recovery efforts have yet to begin. Likewise, it was reported that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has been slow to contract the resources necessary to restore the power grid of the Island as well as to install reinforced blue plastic sheeting to protect the property of those residents who have lost their roofs.

Once again, we stress that allocating resources, establishing long-term plans, and claiming that essential services shall be restored eventually is not enough. The U.S. citizens residing in Puerto Rico deserve and warrant that their needs be addressed with the same promptness and urgency with which the needs of our fellow citizens have been addressed under similar circumstances. It is not out of sheer convenience that we make this claim, but rather it is based on the most basic rights that the residents of Puerto Rico are entitled to enjoy.

In light of the foregoing, and with the utmost sense of urgency given the critical time that the U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico are living in, we deemed it necessary to emphatically demand from the Government of the United States of America that the pace with which the recovery and reconstruction works are being carried out in Puerto Rico is increased and accelerated. Time is of the essence.

Be it resolved by the Legislative Assembly of Puerto Rico:

Section 1.—To demand from the Government of the United States of America that they prioritize, increase, and accelerate the recovery, restoration, and reconstruction efforts of Puerto Rico in the wake of Hurricane Maria.

Section 2.—As part of the efforts, the President shall direct the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to expedite the debris removal efforts in the municipalities of Puerto Rico and reestablish the power grid of the Island, among other matters, including specific instructions on the recovery works that Puerto Rico needs and a work schedule.

Section 3.—A copy of this Concurrent Resolution, translated into English, shall be delivered to the President of the United States, Donald Trump; the Vice President of the United States and President of the United States Senate, Michael Pence; the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, Paul Ryan; and the Senate Majority Leader, Mitch McConnell.

Section 4.—This Concurrent Resolution shall take effect upon its approval.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The following reports of committees were submitted:

By Mr. RISCH, from the Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, with an amendment in the nature of a substitute:

S. 526. A bill to amend the Small Business Act to provide for expanded participation in the microloan program, and for other purposes.

By Mr. RISCH, from the Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, without amendment:

S. 791. A bill to amend the Small Business Act to expand intellectual property education and training for small businesses, and for other purposes.

By Mr. RISCH, from the Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, with an amendment in the nature of a substitute:

S. 1538. A bill to amend the Small Business Act to establish awareness of, and technical assistance for, the creation of employee stock ownership plans, and for other purposes.

S. 1961. A bill to amend the Small Business Act to temporarily reauthorize certain pilot programs under the Small Business Innovation Research Program and the Small Business Technology Transfer Program, and for other purposes.

By Mr. RISCH, from the Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, with an amendment:

S. 1995. A bill to amend the Small Business Investment Act of 1958 to improve the number of small business investment companies in underlicensed States, and for other purposes.

By Mr. RISCH, from the Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, with an amendment in the nature of a substitute:

S. 2283. A bill to amend the Small Business Act to strengthen the Office of Credit Risk Management within the Small Business Administration, and for other purposes.

S. 2419. A bill to amend the Small Business Act to improve the technical and business assistance services under the SBIR and STTR programs.

By Mr. RISCH, from the Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, without amendment:

S. 2527. A bill to amend the Small Business Investment Act of 1958 to increase the amount of leverage made available to small business investment companies.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND JOINT RESOLUTIONS

The following bills and joint resolutions were introduced, read the first and second times by unanimous consent, and referred as indicated:

By Mr. BROWN:

S. 2567. A bill to amend the Public Health Service Act to enhance the national strategy for combating and eliminating tuberculosis, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

By Mr. BROWN (for himself and Mr. PORTMAN):

S. 2568. A bill to amend section 5000A of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide an additional religious exemption from the individual health coverage mandate, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. WARNER (for himself, Mrs. CAPITO, Mr. MANCHIN, and Mr. WICKER):

S. 2569. A bill to amend the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act to authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to award grants to benefit the Appalachia region, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

By Mr. MARKEY (for himself and Ms. WARREN):

S. 2570. A bill to repeal the funding authorization sunset and the total funding cap for the Essex National Heritage Area; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

By Mr. LEAHY (for himself, Ms. COLLINS, and Ms. HEITKAMP):

S. 2571. A bill to reauthorize the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, and for other purposes; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

SUBMISSION OF CONCURRENT AND SENATE RESOLUTIONS

The following concurrent resolutions and Senate resolutions were read, and referred (or acted upon), as indicated:

By Mr. BROWN (for himself and Mr. SULLIVAN):

S. Res. 437. A resolution supporting the goals of World Tuberculosis Day to raise awareness about tuberculosis; to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

By Mrs. FEINSTEIN (for herself and Ms. HARRIS):

S. Res. 438. A resolution commemorating the 150th anniversary of the University of California; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

By Mr. CASEY (for himself, Ms. COLLINS, Mrs. FEINSTEIN, Mr. COONS, Mr. BROWN, Mr. MARKEY, Mr. MENENDEZ, Mr. ISAKSON, Mr. VAN HOLLEN, and Mr. MORAN):

S. Res. 439. A resolution supporting the goals and ideals of Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Week; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

ADDITIONAL COSPONSORS

S. 109

At the request of Mr. GRASSLEY, the name of the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. TILLIS) was added as a cosponsor of S. 109, a bill to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to provide for coverage under the Medicare program of pharmacist services.

S. 281

At the request of Mr. LEE, the name of the Senator from Maine (Ms. COLLINS) was added as a cosponsor of S. 281, a bill to amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to eliminate the per-country numerical limitation for employment-based immigrants, to increase the per-country numerical limitation for family-sponsored immigrants, and for other purposes.

S. 292

At the request of Mr. REED, the name of the Senator from Idaho (Mr. CRAPO) was added as a cosponsor of S. 292, a bill to maximize discovery, and accelerate development and availability, of promising childhood cancer treatments, and for other purposes.

S. 382

At the request of Mr. MENENDEZ, the name of the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. CASEY) was added as a cosponsor of S. 382, a bill to require the

Secretary of Health and Human Services to develop a voluntary registry to collect data on cancer incidence among firefighters.

S. 487

At the request of Mr. CRAPO, the name of the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. WICKER) was added as a cosponsor of S. 487, a bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide for an exclusion for assistance provided to participants in certain veterinary student loan repayment or forgiveness programs.

S. 497

At the request of Ms. CANTWELL, the name of the Senator from Minnesota (Ms. SMITH) was added as a cosponsor of S. 497, a bill to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to provide for Medicare coverage of certain lymphedema compression treatment items as items of durable medical equipment.

S. 526

At the request of Mrs. FISCHER, the name of the Senator from Illinois (Ms. DUCKWORTH) was added as a cosponsor of S. 526, a bill to amend the Small Business Act to provide for expanded participation in the microloan program, and for other purposes.

S. 528

At the request of Mr. TESTER, the name of the Senator from Maryland (Mr. VAN HOLLEN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 528, a bill to amend the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 to provide leave because of the death of a son or daughter.

S. 781

At the request of Mr. CASSIDY, the name of the Senator from New Hampshire (Mrs. SHAHEEN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 781, a bill to amend the Public Health Service Act to limit the liability of health care professionals who volunteer to provide health care services in response to a disaster.

S. 1016

At the request of Mr. SCHATZ, the names of the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. INHOFE) and the Senator from Maine (Mr. KING) were added as cosponsors of S. 1016, a bill to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to expand access to telehealth services, and for other purposes.

S. 1022

At the request of Mr. ISAKSON, the name of the Senator from Maryland (Mr. VAN HOLLEN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1022, a bill to amend the Public Health Service Act to facilitate assignment of military trauma care providers to civilian trauma centers in order to maintain military trauma readiness and to support such centers, and for other purposes.

S. 1091

At the request of Ms. COLLINS, the name of the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. ALEXANDER) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1091, a bill to establish a Federal Task Force to Support Grandparents Raising Grandchildren.