

Health Fund established under the so-called Affordable Care Act. Redirecting from that fund helped provide offsets for the 21st Century Cures Act and for the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018, both of which received bipartisan support.

I hope all of my colleagues can join Senator RUBIO and me in support of this bill. After all, our prior efforts have not solved many of the ongoing issues in Puerto Rico. For example, toward the end of 2015, we passed PROMESA into law.

PROMESA was the result of the efforts by the Obama administration officials to share in Puerto Rico's outstanding debt obligations. It largely took their bankruptcy scheme but usefully added provisions intended to spark economic development in Puerto Rico, particularly in the energy space. One promise of PROMESA touted by the Obama administration officials was that it would circumvent a viscous and wasteful sequence of lawsuits. Theoretically, the law was going to stop creditors and the government of Puerto Rico from facing off in prolonged court battles.

I voted for PROMESA because Puerto Rico's long span of fiscal irresponsibility needed to be stopped, and a promise of limiting litigation was inviting. Unfortunately, the law has failed to prevent a tidal wave of litigation as was promised.

PROMESA also set up an oversight board to facilitate voluntary debt resolution negotiations or movement of disputes to a court-supervised, bankruptcy-like process. The promise of voluntary debt resolutions has not been fulfilled, even for a restructuring agreement between creditors and Puerto Rico's power authority called PREPA, which had been agreed upon by both sides.

The oversight board was also intended to oversee and monitor budgets for the various indebted arms of the government of Puerto Rico. On this front, I have also been disappointed as it seems the oversight board has largely been operating in the dark, often relying on the government of Puerto Rico for information of questionable validity. That said, I am not without hope. The oversight board has recently been slightly more aggressive in its demands for transparency from the government of Puerto Rico, and I hope they are successful in obtaining useful, verifiable information.

However, the government of Puerto Rico has been and remains largely opaque. As just one example, I have asked government officials in Puerto Rico for audited financial statements for nearly 3 years now. Let me repeat that. I have been waiting nearly 3 years for audited financial statements from Puerto Rico. Unfortunately, to the best of my knowledge, the government of Puerto Rico has not provided audited financial information since fiscal year 2014. This is obviously problematic when trying to figure out how to best help Puerto Rico, and this is

not a one-off issue. Recently, following numerous claims by government officials in Puerto Rico of severe, even crisis-level liquidity shortages, Puerto Rico finally got around to looking into hundreds of scattered government bank accounts and revealed late last year that it found nearly \$7 billion of stranded cash. This is just one of many examples of how disorganized and inconsistent accounting continues to prevail in Puerto Rico, damaging the credibility of the government, but it doesn't end there.

There have recently been attempts by the government in Puerto Rico to potentially politicize the Puerto Rico Institute of Statistics. Obviously, this is concerning. In a report by the Congressional Task Force on Economic Growth in Puerto Rico, Members of Congress from both Chambers and both sides of the aisle expressed that the Institute of Statistics "has emerged as a highly professional, autonomous, and apolitical organization that is bringing greater transparency to economic, financial and fiscal conditions on the island." Indeed, a recommendation of the task force was for the institute to continue to protect its independence. Unfortunately, the institute has been forced to litigate its independence, given an ill-conceived effort by the government of Puerto Rico to overhaul and potentially politicize the institute.

I know there is bipartisan support for our fellow Americans in Puerto Rico. Indeed, I heard a lot of support by Members on the floor following the devastating hurricanes that hit the island. Some Members seemed genuinely concerned, while others seemed more interested in trying to cast doubts on or politicize the disaster response from the Federal Government led by the administration. Nonetheless, I remain committed to working with anyone from either side to help and support the people of Puerto Rico.

However, that work must involve compromise and mutual understanding of each other's concerns, and that has not always been the case, in my view. I have tried to work to provide tax relief to people in Puerto Rico. Yet I continue to hear from some, including former Obama administration officials, that I must include access for Puerto Rico to the earned-income tax credit.

I have been clear about my concerns that administration of such a provision carries with it many possible problems, as highlighted by a report by the non-partisan Joint Committee on Taxation. Moreover, Puerto Rico already had its own earned-income tax credit, which it subsequently did away with. It seems to want to resurrect the idea now, and they have every right and ability to institute such a credit on the island. However, I cannot support the "advice" from some that I must support a provision involving cutting a big check from the Federal general fund to the government of Puerto Rico for them to administer such a credit.

I also cannot support the views of some in Puerto Rico, including govern-

ment officials, that they were somehow left out of our tax reform efforts because they did not receive a special carve-out unavailable to anyone else.

Subsidiaries of firms headquartered in the United States that are organized as controlled foreign corporations in Puerto Rico for Federal tax purposes were treated the same as similarly situated taxpayers anywhere else. In addition, if being somehow left out of tax reform means provisions to provide some sort of tax haven status, as some in Puerto Rico asked for, then I think proponents of such a view do not understand recent history. In my more than 40 years in the Senate, I have always been a proud advocate of accountability and oversight. That is why I support greater transparency in the Puerto Rican government, as well as the oversight board.

I also support ongoing Federal efforts, including those of the Treasury Department, to carefully and closely monitor Federal funds provided to Puerto Rico for disaster and other relief. As always, we owe a duty to taxpayers to prudently safeguard their hard-earned dollars from being channeled to inefficient or wasteful uses.

These and other reasons are why, in conjunction with Senator RUBIO and anyone else here who wishes to join us, I am advocating for the provisions contained in the Puerto Rico Economic Empowerment Act of 2018 that I introduced.

Let me end by reiterating that I want to work on a bipartisan basis and in the spirit of compromise with anyone in this Chamber to help our fellow Americans in Puerto Rico. Truly, theirs is an uphill battle as they continue to face many different adversities. That has been the case for years, and I hope we can set our troublesome partisan politicking aside and get to work.

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

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Democratic leader is recognized.

SANTA FE HIGH SCHOOL SHOOTING

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, on Friday morning there was yet another shooting in a school in America. Another community was torn apart by senseless violence. It was another week when parents must bury their children. We are still learning the tragic details of what happened in Santa Fe, but the basic reality in America remains unchanged: Far too many people are dying from gun violence.

What we need now more than ever is real, substantive debate on gun violence in America—a real debate about universal background checks, a real debate about protective orders, and a real

debate on regulating assault weapons, which are often the weapon of choice in the most deadly mass shootings.

In the wake of Parkland, it looked like President Trump would finally get religion on this issue. He promised a serious debate on gun violence, but as soon as the NRA and their special interest cronies closed ranks around him, he backed off. That seems to be the pattern of this administration. The President says something one day, and then some powerful interest says: Don't do it, and he backs right off. That is not the kind of strength he wishes to show, and he sure hasn't shown it on this issue.

After this most recent tragedy in Santa Fe, we have heard no new calls for commonsense gun safety from the White House, but this Chamber can still act. I implore my friends across the aisle to take up this debate. We owe it to the people of Santa Fe, TX, to the people of Parkland, FL, and to every other community that lives at the mercy of the gaping loopholes in our gun laws.

TRADE WITH CHINA

Mr. President, on the matter of ongoing trade negotiations with China, as I have said many times, when it comes to being tough on China's trading practices, I am closer to President Trump than to either President Obama or President Bush. I think the President recognized that fact in a tweet this morning.

When President Trump threatened tariffs and investment restrictions in the face of China's blatant theft and extortion of our intellectual property, I gave the President a pat on the back. Our companies need to be able to sell our goods and services in China without having to turn over intellectual property.

I have mentioned this before, but here is one example that pains me, and it is so typical. GE employs thousands in Schenectady. They have intellectual property and know-how to make turbines spin very fast and not overheat, but China wouldn't let them sell them. So what did they do? The Chinese blackmailed them, and GE went along. There is a 51-49 company that now makes those turbines in China. That is great for the heads of GE, great for their board, and great for the stock for a few years. But after that, once China—now in this 51-49 company—has learned how to make these turbines themselves, we are gone. More good-paying jobs could be lost in upstate New York, as they have been throughout America.

President Trump's actions at first helped bring China to the table, but now President Trump and his team have to stick with it, be strong, and negotiate a strong, concrete agreement. The worst thing to do would be to sell out for a one-time, temporary purchase of goods without addressing the real issue: the theft of intellectual property and know-how, which costs us millions of American jobs.

Unfortunately, it seems too strong a possibility that President Trump is headed down the road of not being strong. The President said this morning: "China has agreed to buy massive amounts of ADDITIONAL Farm/Agricultural products." Secretary Mnuchin, hardly a tower of strength on this issue, has said that the administration would "follow this up" on this vague commitment and that \$150 billion in proposed tariffs would be put "on hold."

It is deeply disappointing that thus far President Trump has won no concessions on intellectual property and has locked in no new market access. In reality, there were not even specific commitments of U.S. good purchases, not that such a commitment would undo the damage China continues to do to us in its other activities.

If nothing else changes, this deal is a win-win for China. They avoid tough actions on intellectual property and give us some temporary and relatively small relief by buying some goods. China's trade negotiators must be laughing themselves all the way back to Beijing. They know what they are doing. They are playing us for fools. A temporary purchase of some goods, while China continues to steal our family jewels, the things that have made America great, the intellectual property, the know-how in the highest end industries—it makes no sense. China is pushing the President around, and he seems to accept it.

Worse still, the President's team is still talking about giving relief to China's state-backed telecommunications giant, ZTE, a company that violated our sanctions laws and is considered a national security threat. It is totally backward. The way to win real concessions from China is to stay tough, not to bluster and then back off at the first sign of friction.

So I say to President Trump, who knows I genuinely want him to succeed with China: Stay strong. Don't back off sanctions on ZTE. You have to pursue the course, or China will continue to enjoy the upper hand.

Congress also has a say on this issue. I was gratified to see that last week, Democrats and Republicans, in a House Appropriations subcommittee, approved a measure that would block the President from weakening sanctions on ZTE. Senate Democrats will also consider additional measures, if necessary, to block relief for ZTE, and we hope our Republican colleagues will join us in that effort.

The United States cannot let China continue to steal America's lifeblood, our intellectual property, and flout international trade laws. If President Trump doesn't get tough with them now, China will know he is willing to back down at the first sign of resistance. It will be a sad day for America—for America's workers, for our future wealth, and for our future prosperity. It will help make China replace us as No. 1. It is crucial.

RUSSIA INVESTIGATION

Finally, Mr. President, on the probe into Putin's interference in our elections, in a series of tweets yesterday, President Trump demanded that the Justice Department start a counterinvestigation of the Russia investigation itself. That he would issue such an absurd and abusive demand based on no evidence shows just how little regard the President has for the rule of law.

President Trump seems to have the terribly misguided view that the Department of Justice is there to protect his political interests and prosecute his enemies. It is not. The Department of Justice is required to follow the law, not the political bidding of the President's, particularly when they are investigating him.

The President's demand is a blatant abuse of Executive power, an ill-informed, sloppy attempt to discredit a duly-constituted investigation led by the special counsel. As we speak, the President is reportedly meeting with Justice Department officials to press his case, even after they have already called on the inspector general to look into this matter. The President's behavior is the kind of grossly autocratic behavior we would expect in a banana republic, not a mature democracy. By now, we should all recognize that President Trump's latest demand is just another example of a relentless campaign to distract from the serious wrongdoing being uncovered by the Russia probe.

This weekend, it was reported that members of President Trump's inner circle met with emissaries and companies from several other foreign countries during the campaign to discuss manipulation of American voters in order to sway the election. This is exactly what our Founding Fathers feared—attempts by foreign capitals to influence American elections. As a reaction, the President does what he always does when faced with alarming news about the conduct of his campaign and the people in it: He kicks up dust. He tries to distract. He issues a flurry of tweets pointing people in every direction. That is all this demand for a counterinvestigation is—another distraction.

With sadness and some reluctance, I must add that a good deal of the blame for the President's undemocratic behavior lies with congressional Republicans who have engaged in a scorched-earth campaign to discredit the Justice Department broadly and the special investigation specifically. Representative NUNES has been at the center of much of this campaign, but the circle of blame is widening. PAUL RYAN is not doing his duty when he just stands aside and lets NUNES and his cohorts do what they are doing.

Members of the majority here in the Senate have recently demanded that the DOJ hand over copious amounts of information and documents—including potential evidence—about an ongoing criminal investigation. Any prosecutor