

I really appreciate the opportunity that he has given for both of us to kind of clear the air about the perceptions that could have been drawn by reading such an article.

PUERTO RICO

Mr. REID. Mr. President, 18,000 Puerto Ricans served in the Armed Forces in World War I; 65,000 in the Second World War; 61,000 during the Korean war; 48,000 in the Vietnam war. Since 1917, more than 200,000 American citizens from Puerto Rico have served in the U.S. Armed Forces, serving in every conflict since World War I.

A previous leader of the Senate asked me to represent the Senate in a ceremony in Puerto Rico a number of years ago as they were dedicating the monument to fallen soldiers of Puerto Rico in conflicts involving the United States and other countries. I have never forgotten that. I have a warm spot in my heart for Puerto Rico, a wonderful part of our country and a territory of the United States with a beautiful rain forest. I have been there. I have fond memories. I have been there a few times, but I really like Puerto Rico.

Today, as they have helped us in these battles, Puerto Ricans who live in Puerto Rico need our help. Right now, the people of Puerto Rico are drowning in over \$72 billion in debt. It is a sparsely populated territory with, I think, about 3.5 million people. They have more debt per capita than any U.S. State, of course. The territory is facing a severe economic and fiscal crisis, and it is becoming a humanitarian crisis.

Leader PELOSI and I fought to include meaningful provisions in an omnibus spending package to assist Puerto Rico, including empowering Puerto Rico to readjust a significant portion of its debt.

Unfortunately, Republicans refused to work with us to address Puerto Rico's massive debt in a meaningful way. Instead of seizing the last chance Congress has this year to do the right thing for Puerto Ricans, they turned their backs on 3.5 million citizens of the United States who are Puerto Ricans and live in Puerto Rico.

To be clear, helping Puerto Rico doesn't mean bailing the island out of its massive debt. They don't need that. They don't need a massive check from the taxpayers. This is about giving Puerto Rico and their leaders the same tools that every State has—the same tools that are currently available in every State. Puerto Rico is part of the United States, and the people of Puerto Rico are looking to Members of Congress to step in as partners. That is our job.

The territory is facing a massive \$900 million payment in bond payments on January 1 to its bond holders. Puerto Rico's Governor said yesterday that the island will default in January or May. We can't wait.

Next year—likely the first half of 2016, the same period in which Puerto

Rico is expected to default on its debt—Congress will present a Congressional Gold Medal in honor of the 65th Infantry Regiment, which suffered such massive casualties over time. This infantry regiment was a U.S. Army unit consisting mostly of Puerto Rican soldiers that distinguished itself for its remarkable service during the Korean war. It is shameful to think that Congress can at once recognize the extraordinary contributions of Puerto Ricans, who have made the ultimate sacrifice for their country, and then do nothing to protect Puerto Ricans when they turn to us for help in a time of crisis.

Inaction is not an option. Puerto Rico needs to do its part, and so must Congress. As Puerto Rico's Resident Commissioner has said: "This is not just a Puerto Rican problem; this is an American problem, requiring an American solution."

We can do something to help, and we must do something to help. We can work together to pass legislation that allows Puerto Rico to restructure a significant part of its debt without costing U.S. taxpayers a penny.

These bonds are not bonds of the U.S. Government. People have made investments. Like every other investment, sometimes they go bad. Theirs went bad as a result of the crash we had here 9 years ago or so on Wall Street.

The Obama administration and congressional Democrats want to do something to help. We have asked Republicans to join us in this effort, but so far they have only stood in the way. All we want is to simply say that a territory of the United States—and we will limit it, of course, to Puerto Rico—has the ability, like every other State, to file for bankruptcy protection.

Just last week, the senior Senator from New York asked for unanimous consent to adopt the Puerto Rico Chapter 9 Uniformity Act—a bill that would extend chapter 9 of the bankruptcy code to Puerto Rico and allow it to restructure its municipal debt in the same way other States can.

But instead of giving Puerto Rico the same rights as Kentucky, Nevada, Illinois or Utah, the chairman of the Finance Committee, from Utah, blocked this critical legislation.

I understand there are important issues that must be discussed, such as the nature and scope of this authority, but to deny Puerto Rico any restructuring authority, as the Republicans have done, is negligent.

I hope that recent comments by Republican leaders, including Speaker RYAN, will translate into meaningful action.

Senate Democrats are ready to work across the aisle on a real solution for Puerto Rico, with the understanding that any viable plan moving forward will be a Federal process that allows Puerto Rico to adjust its debt.

To deny Puerto Rico any restructuring authority is not just bad for

Puerto Rico, it is bad for the creditors as well.

So I say to my Republican colleagues: Let's work together to extend a helping hand to our fellow citizens in Puerto Rico. It should be in this bill that we are going to vote on tomorrow. Giving the people of Puerto Rico the tools necessary to resolve this fiscal crisis is the right thing to do. It is the moral thing to do.

Mr. President, would you announce the business of the day.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 6 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The assistant Democratic leader.

SYRIAN REFUGEES

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, it is amazing some of the people we get to meet in our lives as Senators. There is a medical doctor in Chicago who I didn't know several years ago, but he and his wife have become dear friends in a short period of time. His name is Dr. Zaher Sahloul. He asked for an appointment in my office in Chicago a few years back, and I agreed to it. He came in to tell me a story and to show me some pictures. He is originally from Syria, and he is head of the Syrian-American Medical Society in the Chicagoland area. Because of the tragedy of the civil war in his home country of Syria, he has felt a special obligation to help.

What he has done on many occasions now was to get as close to the action as he could in Syria to provide medical assistance to the victims. Many times he risked his life to do it. And other doctors—some Syrian-American and some not—have joined him in that effort. He would bring me back photographs of what casualties of war look like in Syria. They were heart-breaking—pictures of children who had been maimed and seriously injured by the barrel bombs of President Assad in Syria and stories about parents killed in the bombings that continue day after weary day.

Dr. Sahloul would ask me: What can you do, Senator? Can't you help us? Can't you stop this?

Of course, that civil war in Syria, which has gone on for 4 years, is almost intractable, almost impossible to define. There are so many forces fighting one another that at any given moment, your ally today may be your enemy tomorrow.

I tried, since meeting Dr. Sahloul, to do some things: to come out for a safe