

do now is strike a prohibition on displaying the Confederate flag. So if they got their way, you could fly Confederate flags on any military cemetery you want. And, of course, it sets a terrible precedent by offsetting emergency spending with offsets like ObamaCare, cutting Ebola money.

We did the right thing. All the press—you might find a headline someplace on some rightwing blog, but the fact is, the Republicans know they failed on funding Zika, and all the press indicates that is the case.

PUERTO RICO

Mr. REID. Mr. President, today we are going to finally consider legislation addressing Puerto Rico's economic crisis.

For the past year and even longer, Democrats in both Houses of Congress have proposed legislation that would empower Puerto Rico to adjust a significant portion of its debt. Every time we have tried, it has been blocked by the Republicans.

As the weeks and months passed without a solution, the situation in Puerto Rico has worsened, and that is an understatement.

In the New York Times this morning, the editorial board stressed the importance of congressional action, and I quote what they said:

The fiscal crisis in Puerto Rico is also a humanitarian crisis. The Senate now has an opportunity—and the obligation—to address both. It is scheduled to vote on Wednesday on a bill already approved by the House that would restructure the island's debt and could create the conditions for recovery.

If the bill loses, Puerto Rico will default on Friday on a \$2 billion debt payment, creditors will keep suing for full repayment and essential services on the island, including health, sanitation, education, electricity, public transportation and public safety, will continue to decline.

The economic crisis is a humanitarian disaster. Medical services have diminished. Hospitals are unable to pay their bills. Puerto Rico's largest hospital has closed two of its wings and reduced the number of beds by 25 percent and cut pay for all employees. Electricity at one hospital, the Santa Rosa Hospital, was suspended for lack of payment. Can you imagine one of our hospitals having to close because the electricity bill can't be paid? Puerto Rico's only air ambulance company had to suspend operations. At the pediatric center in Puerto Rico's primary medical center, pharmaceutical providers are only going to supply chemotherapy drugs COD, cash on delivery. How troubling is that? Children are being deprived of cancer treatment medication.

The effects of Puerto Rico's debt crisis reach beyond health care. Already, the Puerto Rican government has been forced to close 150 schools. Leaders anticipate closing a total of 500 schools in the next few years. That would be half of all public schools in Puerto Rico. Businesses have shuttered. Labor force

participation is substantially below the U.S. average. Puerto Ricans on the island are fleeing to the mainland at an alarming rate.

Even as Puerto Rico was drowning in more than \$70 billion of debt and forced to take unprecedented austerity measures, Republicans in Congress dithered. They continued to waffle. Finally, this spring congressional Republican leaders agreed to negotiate and address this economic and fiscal emergency.

The legislation before us is far from perfect. Oh, is it far from perfect. What they have done to labor, minimum wage, the oversight board, environmental—it is bad stuff. It is far from perfect. I share my colleagues' very deep concerns about this compromise legislation.

If Republicans were serious about pro-growth measures, they should have addressed some of the disparities Puerto Rico faces under Federal programs. They should have worked with us to fix Puerto Rico's unequal treatment under Medicaid and Medicare or extend key refundable tax credits to the island's government. Republicans should have extended overtime rules and the minimum wage.

I take issue with the oversight board and their excessive powers and appointment structure.

For all the Republican leader's promises about an open amendment process, Democrats have not been allowed to offer amendments to improve the bill. The tree is filled. How many times did we hear the Republican leader come to the floor and say: Oh, it is terrible; REID has filled the tree. Well, I should have waited and taken some lessons from him. We will just add that broken promise to the Republican leader's growing list of not keeping his word, such as the budget, a full workweek, and tax credits that are so vital to renewable energy projects.

If Democrats had written this bill, it would be very different from what we are voting on today. But I am going to vote for passage of this bill because we must help Puerto Rico before July 1. Otherwise, we turn that island nation—country, I should say—all American citizens—turn them over to the hedge funds, and they will sue them to death, and that is too bad. We must do something now.

As the Democrats stated in a letter that every Member of our caucus sent to Senator MCCONNELL earlier this year, Puerto Rico needs a workable debt-restructuring process.

While there are many things we may not like about this legislation, at the end of the day this legislation provides tools that allow Puerto Rico to survive, to hopefully restructure a meaningful portion of its debt. I wish we had something better.

Secretary Lew sent a letter to Senator MCCONNELL and to me a few days ago.

[Puerto Rico's] only hope for recovery and growth is legislation that authorizes the tools necessary for better fiscal management and a sustainable level of debt.

While much work still needs to be done, this legislation meets the Treasury's criteria, and it is a step in the right direction.

Not acting today to provide Puerto Rico with debt relief and protection from creditors' lawsuits will have dire consequences and worsen the crisis.

Puerto Rico's only elected representative in Congress, Resident Commissioner PEDRO PIERLUISI, said it best in a letter he sent to me:

PROMESA—

Which is a word meaning “promise” in Spanish, and that is the name of this bill—

is an imperfect but indispensable bill that constitutes the only realistic means to prevent the collapse of Puerto Rico's government; to protect regular citizens, pension plan participants and bondholders; to stem the tide of Puerto Rico families moving to the states; to enable the Puerto Rico government to regain access to the credit markets; and to lay the groundwork for Puerto Rico's economy to grow.

The Resident Commissioner is correct. Mr. President, 3.5 million American citizens who call Puerto Rico home need this relief, and they need it now. We should pass this legislation today and give Puerto Rico the relief it so desperately needs.

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

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

NATIONAL SEA GRANT COLLEGE PROGRAM AMENDMENTS ACT OF 2015

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the House message to accompany S. 2328, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read as follows:

House message to accompany S. 2328, a bill to reauthorize and amend the National Sea Grant College Program Act, and for other purposes.

Pending:

McConnell motion to concur in the House amendment to the bill.

McConnell motion to concur in the House amendment to the bill, with McConnell amendment No. 4865, to change the enactment date.

McConnell amendment No. 4866 (to amend amendment No. 4865) of a perfecting nature.

McConnell motion to refer the House message on the bill to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, with instructions, McConnell amendment No. 4867, to change the enactment date.

McConnell amendment No. 4868 (to (the instructions) amendment No. 4867), of a perfecting nature.

McConnell amendment No. 4869 (to amendment No. 4868), of a perfecting nature.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until the cloture vote will be equally divided between the two leaders or their designees.