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House of Representatives

The House met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. ESPAILLAT).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
March 12, 2019.

I hereby appoint the Honorable ADRIANO ESPAILLAT to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

NANCY PELOSI,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 3, 2019, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate.

The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties. All time shall be equally allocated between the parties, and in no event shall debate continue beyond 11:50 a.m. Each Member, other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip, shall be limited to 5 minutes.

END HUNGER NOW

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MCGOVERN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, in September 2017, Puerto Rico was hit by two major hurricanes, Irma and Maria, both of which caused catastrophic damage, displaced thousands of families, and killed almost 3,000 American citizens. Adding insult to injury, the Trump administration organized an embarrassingly slow and ineffective response during Puerto Rico's time of need.

Last July, FEMA released a report acknowledging many of their shortcomings in responding to Hurricane Maria. And I am sure we all remember images of the President tastelessly throwing paper towels at families during his relief visit, as if he were shooting free throws at a basketball game.

It has been a year and a half since Hurricane Maria, and Puerto Rico has made incredible strides to rebuild, but many, many families are still struggling. These are American citizens who pay taxes and who work hard, just like mainland Americans, but for some reason, the Trump administration is having a hard time empathizing.

When I think of all the ways the Trump administration has attacked low-income and working families, I can't say I am surprised.

Last week, The Washington Post reported that Puerto Rico was forced to start cutting its Nutrition Assistance Program, NAP, benefits. Puerto Rico's food assistance program is funded by a capped block grant separate from SNAP. While other Federal nutrition programs like WIC and school meals operate in Puerto Rico the same as in other States and territories, Puerto Rico remains disadvantaged because their Nutrition Assistance Program funds are static.

In order to receive nutrition assistance in Puerto Rico, you have to have a lower income—to receive less assistance—than someone who lives on the mainland. It also limits the program's flexibility to respond to changes in demand. When the hurricane struck, additional funds had to be given to NAP to accommodate more participants.

These forced cuts will reduce Puerto Rico's food assistance benefits by 25 percent for 1.3 million people. That is 43 percent of Puerto Rico's population. While it is true that this cut will restore the overall benefit amount to where it was before the hurricane, we must remember that these participants

often need more assistance, given the circumstances. It is not easy to rebuild your entire life on an empty stomach.

Mr. Speaker, on more than one occasion, House Democrats have asked for an additional \$600 million to help Puerto Rico through this rough patch, only to be shut down by the President and his misplaced, ill-informed prejudices toward Puerto Rico. Even Leader MCCONNELL seems to be helping the President do his dirty work by refusing to take up the supplemental appropriations bill that we sent to the Senate during the shutdown in January, probably because it would force them to address relief funds for Puerto Rico.

Pulling out the rug from beneath Puerto Rico does not solve the problem; it creates a bigger one. This won't disappear. That is why I urge my colleagues in the U.S. Senate to appropriate an additional \$600 million for Puerto Rico's Nutrition Assistance Program.

I also urge my colleagues in the House to support these funds and speak out on this issue. The least we can do is empathize with our fellow Americans who are recovering from a natural disaster.

It doesn't happen overnight. It doesn't take months. It takes years to recover from the devastation that Hurricane Maria caused, and Puerto Rico has continued to fight and advocate for disaster funds, unlike States on the mainland.

Time is running out, and we can't allow these cuts to continue. This is a moral question for all of us here in this Chamber. This is about how are we going to treat our fellow citizens in Puerto Rico.

It is all on us to act. It is all on us to end hunger now.

CELEBRATING NATIONAL AGRICULTURE WEEK

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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