

H.R. 268

Mr. PERDUE. Mr. President, as an outsider to this political process, it is easy to be frustrated with how slowly the Senate moves. It is easy to find fault with colleagues. As an outsider here, it is very easy to think we are not focused on getting results. I usually try to temper that with some rational thought about, well, this is the way things work, et cetera, et cetera, but I didn't see that tonight, and I am very frustrated with the vote. What we just witnessed on the floor of the U.S. Senate was nothing but pure partisan politics.

Our colleagues across the aisle blocked our disaster relief bill because they said it didn't include enough for Puerto Rico. That was one of several reasons. To date, \$40 billion in Federal disaster relief aid has already been allocated for Puerto Rico, and it is eligible for another \$50 billion-plus, potentially, which has already been allocated.

How much aid did the farmers in the Southeast receive after Hurricane Michael just 6 months ago? Not one dime. Now, why is that critical? You say: Well, OK. It takes time. Yes, it takes time. These farmers lost their livelihoods, and it hit them at the very time when their harvests were coming due last fall, October 10. It has been 6 months now. They have not received a dime from the Federal Government. The State has moved in with minor help, but these bridge loans these farmers have been using are running out; therefore, we were hoping this bill tonight would have given them some direct relief.

Let's put this in perspective.

Congress appropriated \$136 billion for 2017's natural disasters across our country. That was for Hurricane Irma, Hurricane Maria, Hurricane Harvey, and the California wildfires—in 2017, \$136 billion. Before then, in 2013, \$50.5 billion was appropriated for Hurricane Sandy, mostly for New Jersey.

In this bill from tonight, we were only talking about \$13.45 billion for unprecedented hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, and wildfires over the last year. Listen to the number of States we were talking about: Florida, Georgia, Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina, Alaska, Hawaii, California, Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri, and Kansas. That is right. This \$13.45 billion included only \$3 billion for farmers across five States in the Southeast.

President Trump visited that damage, and Vice President PENCE visited that damage. I was personally privileged, as was JOHNNY ISAKSON, to travel with him that day to see this damage. You only have to see it to understand how ravaging this was to the businesses that have been built up over generations with regard to these family farmers.

President Trump has done his part. He has been very reasonable in this negotiation. He stepped up and did the right thing with regard to Puerto Rico.

He agreed that because the nutrition benefits were running out under the prior allocations that we just mentioned, he stepped up and said, yes, he would support \$600 million in further assistance for Puerto Rico nutrition so that those benefits would not run out and so that it would, hopefully, in the negotiations, break the logjam.

It did no such thing. This \$600 million was exactly what Puerto Rico needed, and President Trump saw that. I give him high marks for stepping up and taking the political risk to go ahead and do that in addition to what had already been done for Puerto Rico over the last 2 years. In fact, Puerto Rico's own Representative in Congress, JENNIFFER GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN, supports this disaster relief bill that Senator ISAKSON and I and others sponsored.

She said:

I urge for the swift Senate passage of \$600 million for nutrition assistance. Over 1.3 million of my constituents are already experiencing cuts in their food benefits. Puerto Rico needs this funding and needs it now.

When you listen to pleas like that, I can only think of one word for our colleagues across the aisle in this episode, and that is that it is very similar to what has happened on the border. It is hypocritical to me to think that they asked for that and then voted no against it. What we see here is pure partisan politics.

The American people are not stupid. It is clear that this had nothing to do with Puerto Rico and that it really hadn't had much to do with disaster relief. This vote was really pure partisan politics. It had everything to do with obstructing this President and preventing him from keeping his promise of helping the American people recover from the tornadoes, hurricanes, wildfires, and floods that have ravaged our communities.

The Democrats ought to be ashamed. They are holding our farmers hostage right now for the political gain they foresee in their having taken this position. It is unacceptable. They are gambling with people's lives, and I don't overstate that. Some people will not recover from this. They will get out of farming. For those who stay in, it will take a decade to recover even with this government assistance, and many will have to get out of the crops they were growing to just survive in the next year.

We have farmers in Georgia whom I know personally who are on their second bridge loan. As an individual businessperson, I have done those in my career. I know how hard it is to go back after one bridge loan and ask for an extension or for another bridge loan to get to the point at which, hopefully, the Federal Government will step in and provide much needed assistance to back up these bank loans. These farmers are coming to the end of their ability to do that. I empathize with the bankers as well. They have a very difficult time giving bridge loans in addition to what they have already done

until they get some degree of certainty about what it is we in Congress are going to do.

It is unacceptable that this intransigence in Washington continues to threaten the livelihoods the very people who sent us here to represent them. Because the Democrats chose to play politics today, farmers across the Southeast may, indeed, lose their businesses. Puerto Rican families will not have access to the food benefits they desperately need. California wildfire victims will not get any Federal assistance to help rebuild until we get this done. The list goes on.

I challenge each of the Senators in this body who voted against this disaster relief bill tonight to go down to Georgia, to Florida, or to South Carolina and look the farmers in the eye and tell them that, tonight, we chose politics over helping Americans in need. It is a shameful night in the American Senate.

I thank Senator SHELBY, the chairman of the Appropriations Committee, and its ranking member, Senator LEAHY. They have worked diligently to try to find a compromise in here, but it is hard to compromise when there is only one party playing.

In conclusion, I want farmers across the Southeast to understand that I, Senator ISAKSON, Senator RUBIO, Senator SCOTT, and many others—Senator TILLIS, Senator BURR, Senator LINDSEY GRAHAM, Senator TIM SCOTT from South Carolina, and even one of the Democrats, Senator DOUG JONES—are all committed, along with Senator MARCO RUBIO and Senator RICK SCOTT of Florida, and are not giving up. This is not the end of this tale. I want the farmers and the bankers in these five States to understand we are going to continue this fight.

I thank Leader MCCONNELL for continuing to give us this opportunity. It took a lot of time to get to this vote on the Senate floor tonight, and I thank him for that.

For the people of these States who were affected, don't lose heart. We will get this done eventually.

I yield the floor.

ADJOURNMENT UNTIL 10 A.M. TOMORROW

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow, on Tuesday, April 2, 2019.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 7:17 p.m., adjourned until Tuesday, April 2, 2019, at 10 a.m.

NOMINATIONS

Executive nominations received by the Senate:

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

DANIEL HABIB JORJANI, OF KENTUCKY, TO BE SOLICITOR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, VICE HILARY CHANDLER TOMPKINS.

IN THE AIR FORCE

THE FOLLOWING NAMED OFFICERS FOR APPOINTMENT IN THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE TO THE GRADE INDICATED UNDER TITLE 10, U.S.C., SECTION 624: