

September 28, 2017

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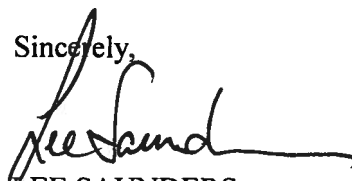
Dear Senator:

I write on behalf of the 1.6 million members of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), especially our more than 11,000 active and approximately 2,200 retiree members living in Puerto Rico. They never quit on the communities they serve; and despite the unspeakable hardships they now face, they are actively engaged in the fight to save lives and restore order in the Commonwealth. Congress must act immediately to respond to the dire humanitarian crisis unfolding on American soil, by approving a relief package that provides substantial financial, material, and technical assistance for recovery and rebuilding efforts. Congress should not leave town before these American citizens are assured that the help they so desperately need is on the way.

The initial federal response has been shockingly inadequate. Hurricane Maria virtually leveled Puerto Rico a week ago, and the situation is worsening every day. Millions are without power, adequate food or water. Puerto Rico's needs are grave – hospitals and nursing homes lack power and food, dams are failing, schools are closed, security and law enforcement is needed to stem looting, and the list goes on. No legislative or political priority is more important than addressing this rapidly escalating crisis.

On top of Hurricane Maria's wreckage, the Commonwealth remains plagued by longstanding structural financial problems and a vicious downward economic cycle, which are made worse by the federal government's continued neglect. We must begin to consider a massive recovery and rebuilding plan on the scale of the post-World War II Marshall plan. We will continue to urge Congress to grant Puerto Rico parity with the 50 states – especially for Medicaid funding. Even before the storm, Puerto Rico was already struggling to cope with the looming Medicaid cliff, the lingering threat from Zika, and potentially explosive public health crises. Without adequate food, water, medical supplies and infrastructure, these problems are certain to compound.

Again, I call upon Congress to act immediately and comprehensively to support all 3.5 million American citizens living in Puerto Rico, including those struggling every day to survive.

Sincerely,

LEE SAUNDERS
President

LS/SF:mc