

going on and showing their patriotism, we left them with a Superfund site. This bill won't do anything to take care of that responsibility and that cost, so it continues to tell the people of Puerto Rico: You are good enough to wear the uniform of the United States, you are good enough to serve the country, you are good enough to bleed for it, good enough to die for it, but you are not good enough to determine your own future.

I think amending the bill in front of us to provide real relief would give us the opportunity to do right by the people of Puerto Rico, possibly even to do right by the people of Vieques, to do right by the American citizens who have given so much of their lives to their country and to our military and who have been taken advantage of for our benefit.

So, again, when we look at this bill and we see a control board totally unrepresentative of the Puerto Rican people, except for one person who must have either their primary residence or their primary business there—you can even have your primary business there without being a resident of the island and be part of determining the future of the island's 3.5 million people—then you get a sense of why they feel they are being taken advantage of.

(Ms. AYOTTE assumed the Chair.)

I hope we do not continue the legacy of misuse and exploitation. We cannot let this opportunity pass by. We owe it to the people of Puerto Rico to have open and robust debate on this bill and to ensure that it provides real relief. That means having amendments. We can do it in time. I know some of my colleagues have suggested that there is a risk if we don't have the July 1 deadline, but this bill calls for retroactivity as it stands right now. It takes actions and says retroactively—I believe to December of last year—that any actions would be, in essence, frozen. So if the bill is retroactive to December, then it would be retroactive from whenever it gets passed and signed into law, which means we could freeze any potential action and get it right on behalf of the people of Puerto Rico.

Again, I want to focus on what I believe are the most significant failings of this bill, most notably the vast power and undemocratic nature of the board. Not only does this legislation remain silent on so many important issues, it actually exacerbates the colonial status and second-class citizenship view that some Members of Congress seem to have of the 3.5 million Americans who call Puerto Rico home. I don't. That is why I am on the floor trying to fight for their rights. Unfortunately, under their common-law status, they don't have a voting representative in the House of Representatives, they don't have a voting representative in the U.S. Senate.

I have one-half million U.S. citizens of Puerto Rican descent in my great State of New Jersey, many who have deep ties to family and friends on the

island, and they tell me of the challenges. In fact, they also tell me how they cannot believe this is the status of where they are. We have a letter that speaks for one of those national organizations, which I will get to shortly to speak to how those people who largely represent the Puerto Rican people feel in this regard. That is why many of them feel this legislation perpetuates what happened in places like Vieques, what happened in the disproportionate payment in Medicare and Medicaid, in health care. Yet one flight away, they have all the rights of any one of us in this Chamber or any one of us in this country.

Under the legislation, the control board would have colonial-level powers, which are certainly completely unacceptable to me and certainly to the people of Puerto Rico. In fact, according to a recent poll commissioned by Puerto Rico's largest newspaper, *El Nuevo Día*, 69 percent of all respondents opposed the PROMESA bill, while 54 percent opposed the very idea of an oversight board. Think about that. This is Puerto Rico's largest newspaper. Sixty-nine percent of all respondents oppose the PROMESA bill—69 percent of the people of Puerto Rico. Ultimately, how are you going to have an attempt by an undemocratic control board to make dictates over 3.5 million U.S. citizens, when 69 percent said: We oppose the legislation, legislation which is supposed to be there to help them, and 69 percent said: No, what you are offering us is not something we want. Fifty-four percent oppose the very idea of an oversight board, and that consensus is talked about by a coalition of many civil society groups in Puerto Rico, the Puerto Rican Consensus Against the Fiscal Board. They say:

We write to you on behalf of the Concertación Puertorriqueña Contra la Junta de Control Fiscal (Puerto Rican Consensus Against the Fiscal Board); we are a broad-based organization that represents numerous civic and political organizations in Puerto Rico and the continental United States.

Our signing members comprise labor syndicates and cooperatives; local business leaders, social, environmental and human rights organizations, artists, students and academics, religious organizations, LGBTQ and feminist movements, special community organizations, cooperative institutions, political parties and immigrants organizations, Puerto Rican diaspora groups as well as many individual citizens.

This multi sectorial coalition has been formed as a common front to oppose H.R. 5278. Because of the negative consequences that it will have upon all of Puerto Rican society, we respectfully urge you to vote against this bill when it is presented in the Senate.

After studying the H.R. 5278 bill we have reached a unanimous agreement that this bill is totally unacceptable. While it is certain that Puerto Rico faces serious economic and social challenges, there is simply no way that we can consider a solution that would require our country to surrender its right to a democratic government while putting such broad dictatorial powers in the hands of a few unelected individuals.

In addition to a categorical refusal to give up our human right to representative democracy and government, we consider the economic policies in this bill to be grossly inadequate and detrimental to the goal of restoring economic growth and stability. The bill has no clear mechanism for restructuring the debt and there are no defined measures for economic development. Instead it is clear that this bill is designed to impose even more. . . .

These are the people of Puerto Rico, who are very bright people, believe me. They have read the bill. They have come together in a coalition, as I described at the beginning and the introduction of their letter. Here is what they say:

Instead it is clear that this bill is designed to impose even more austerity measures which would further depress the economy, exacerbate the ongoing exodus of young people and professionals and have the effect of shrinking the tax base.

What lies ahead for Puerto Rico should H.R. 5278 be passed in the Senate is untold hardship for the most vulnerable sectors: the elderly, children and the working poor. With a poverty rate of 46 percent and a shrinking economy, the idea of imposing austerity measures that would reduce government services such as in health and education is unthinkable.

Puerto Rico, as of this moment has no clear mechanism for restructuring its debt but an unspecified restructuring mechanism in exchange for giving up our pensions—

An unspecified restructuring mechanism. It goes to what I said, which is the only reason we should be considering the bill in the first place—

our employment, our health care program and our representative democracy is not a path to recovery and cannot be considered an option.

The imposition of H.R. 5278 or similar legislation on the part of the U.S. Congress, where we have no voting representation—

Which is why I am standing on the floor today to speak on their behalf—

constitutes a violation of our human rights. Furthermore, it places in evidence that the relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States has never been anything other than that of a colonial subjugation; which is considered a crime under international law regarding the rights of non-self-governing territories.

The most recent SCOTUS decisions permit the U.S. Congress to approve H.R. 5278, using in effect its powers to unilaterally take over our governance in order to protect the interest of hedge funds and bondholders. While this action by Congress will be seen internationally as one that unmasks the intrinsic 118-year-old colonial relationship, such a measure would also evidence the underlying racism that infuses relations between Puerto Rico and the United States.

We will do everything within our power to stop this bill from being enacted. If the bill were however, to be approved, we are ready to resist its implementation by all available means. Furthermore, we have also declared our collective willingness and disposition to go forward with a plan of broad protests as well as acts of civil disobedience in Puerto Rico and in the United States. As a broad coalition defending the people of Puerto Rico against a great injustice—

These are all their words, not mine—we have the duty and right to vigorously pursue a policy of consistent noncooperation until the legislation is withdrawn.