

Puerto Rico and decided to end the colonial status. But ending the colonial status does not mean tweaking the colony to make it a little better or washing the face of the colony to make it a little more presentable. It means getting rid of the colony and either becoming the 51st State or an independent nation. There is no other solution.

□ 1615

And for us, as the people who promote—and rightfully so—democracy throughout the world, to have a colony for 118 years is wrong. And remember, Puerto Rico didn't do this by itself. The indifference and inequality created this problem, as much as everything else.

Mr. BISHOP of Utah. Mr. Chairman, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Idaho (Mr. LABRADOR), my good friend, who has done a whole lot of work on this particular bill.

Mr. LABRADOR. I thank the chairman and Mr. DUFFY for the work they and their staffs have done on this critical piece of legislation. I especially want to thank my staffer, Aaron Calkins, for his work to make this a better bill. We have worked countless hours to improve this bill, and I am proud of the work that we have done.

Mr. Chairman, I rise today as a member of the Natural Resources Committee and as a Representative of Idaho's First Congressional District to support H.R. 5278.

The debt crisis in Puerto Rico is a result of years of liberal policies where the government carelessly borrowed and overspent, while simultaneously encouraging mismanagement and inefficiency. We cannot view Puerto Rico's situation in a vacuum. If left unresolved, the financial crisis in Puerto Rico will impact the rest of our Nation.

The bill imposes fiscal reforms without spending a single dollar of U.S. taxpayer money to relieve Puerto Rico's debt. The bill protects taxpayers from bailing out a government that spent recklessly and avoids setting a horrible precedent that could tempt free-spending States to walk away from their obligations.

Specifically, H.R. 5278 establishes a strong oversight board to require Puerto Rico to balance its budget and achieve fiscal responsibility. The bill includes language that ensures that the fiscal plans and any potential restructuring must honor lawful priorities and liens as guaranteed by Puerto Rico's constitution and laws.

Every State and municipality in this country relies on bond markets to provide funding for government operations. H.R. 5278 creates the balance that will effectively address the needs of Puerto Rico, while ensuring access to these markets for States and municipalities nationwide.

In conclusion, as a person who was born and raised in Puerto Rico and somebody who is very proud of his Puerto Rican heritage, I love the peo-

ple, I love the island, and I hope that this bill sets them on the path to fiscal responsibility and a brighter future.

The House must pass this bill to establish the necessary framework to help Puerto Rico put its fiscal house in order, while also protecting the interests of every American.

Mr. GRIJALVA. Mr. Chairman, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from Puerto Rico (Mr. PIERLUISI), who, at great risk politically, continued to push for this compromised bill we have before us; and for that, we are grateful.

Mr. PIERLUISI. Mr. Chairman, I represent Puerto Rico in Congress, and I rise in support of PROMESA.

Puerto Rico is at a crossroads. Since 1898, it has been a territory of the United States, subject to the broad powers of Congress under the Territory Clause.

In 1917, Congress conferred U.S. citizenship on individuals born in Puerto Rico. In the 1950s, Congress authorized and approved a constitution for Puerto Rico, which provides the island with a republican form of government consisting of three branches.

Because Puerto Rico is a territory, my constituents have never been treated equally relative to their fellow U.S. citizens in the States in terms of either democratic rights or economic opportunities. In large part, to compensate for the lack of fair treatment at the Federal level, the Puerto Rican Government has spent beyond its means at the local level, leading to excessive deficits and debt.

This lack of discipline is regrettable but understandable, since the Puerto Rican Government is seeking to provide a quality of life to island residents comparable to the quality of life in the States. Bear in mind that my constituents can hop on a plane any time, any day, and move to Florida or Texas.

The bill we consider today, PROMESA, is a bipartisan compromise intended to deal with the territory's unprecedented fiscal crisis, which is severe and immediate. The bill will enable Puerto Rico to restructure its public debt in a fair and orderly manner, while establishing an independent and temporary oversight board to ensure that Puerto Rico has a viable, long-term fiscal plan and balanced budgets and that it sticks to both.

In an emergency, the first step is to stabilize the situation, and I believe PROMESA can accomplish this objective. Without this legislation, the Puerto Rican Government is likely to collapse, participants in public pension plans will be terribly harmed, and many bondholders could lose their investments.

PROMESA is in the interest of all stakeholders, and the most likely alternative is chaos, litigation, a rapidly deteriorating quality of life in Puerto Rico, and even greater migration to the States. However, let me be plain. This bill is an essential first step, but it is not an enduring solution.

The Federal Government and, indeed, the Puerto Rican Government must

come to terms with a fundamental fact: so long as my constituents are treated like second-class citizens, Puerto Rico will never have a first-class economy.

Puerto Rico must become a full and equal member of the American family as a State, which is the just and logical next step, or Puerto Rico must join the community of nations as a sovereign country.

Puerto Rico deserves true democracy and true dignity—nothing less—yet first things come first. We have to deal with this immediate crisis. We have to save the house in Puerto Rico. Vote “yes” on H.R. 5278.

Mr. BISHOP of Utah. Mr. Chairman, I, too, would like to express my appreciation and sincere gratitude to the Resident Commissioner of Puerto Rico for his hard work.

I may be known as the historian of this body, but the gentleman from Oklahoma will give a historical perspective.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Oklahoma (Mr. LUCAS).

Mr. LUCAS. Mr. Chairman, I rise today to note that there are only a handful of my colleagues on the floor or in the body who were here when the precedent for this process was set in 1995.

Some of my colleagues on this side of the room argue that we are setting a new precedent. We are not. Some of you remember 1994, when I came as a new Member in a special election. Some of you remember the economic chaos, the near collapse of the District of Columbia and the city of Washington. Some of you remember how we were told in those days that you can't go into certain parts of town because it is not safe. Some remember the stories about how a high percentage—if not almost half—the police cars wouldn't run at any one time.

I remember waking up one July night and looking out the fifth-floor window of the apartment building I was in as the firemen were hosing down a spot not many paces from the corner of First and D Streets where someone had been killed, literally within hundreds of feet of the Federal campus. Washington, D.C., the District of Columbia, was about to collapse into chaos—1994.

So what did we do in 1995? We passed a bill very similar to this. We set up a supervisory board that took control of the finances to help right the ship.

For 2 years, there were tremendously painful decisions made here in Washington, D.C., at the municipal level; but after those 2 years, we had 4 years of balanced budgets, and the Control Act, as it was called, was suspended. It was successful. And the renaissance this town, this community has gone through all started with that bill in 1995.

Now, I am voting for this piece of legislation because I believe my fellow American citizens who live in Puerto