

The Register-Guard

OPINION HOME

GUEST VIEWPOINT

Why Oregon should care about Puerto Rico



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For The Register-Guard

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Puerto Rico is an archipelago in the Caribbean and a U.S. territory since 1898. Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens, serve in the U.S. military and have contributed to the economic growth and defense of the

United States. Yet most Americans on the mainland ignore Puerto Rico's existence and its significant place in U.S. history.

This is dangerous at a time when Category 4 Hurricane Maria has left the island and the U.S. Virgin Islands devastated — without electricity or water; with limited access to food, water, medicines and transportation; with thousands of people displaced from their homes; and with floods and ruptured dams that threaten its most vulnerable populations. Public health and safety are compromised more by the minute.

As a friend stated: "I have supplies for a week for me, my mom and my grandmother who are elderly and require medical attention. Diesel is running out. I will have to go out in a week. But where? And will I find what I need? Everything is chaos and desperation." Why should Oregonians care?

Why should we call our representatives in Congress to ask for urgent relief and multiyear commitments for the economic recovery of Puerto Rico? Here are a few reasons.

- 1) People's lives are in immediate danger — especially children, the elderly, people needing medical attention, those who lost everything, and those who are trapped in their houses.
- 2) As Oregon representatives seek aid in the wake of damage produced by wildfires and climate change in Oregon, they may face roadblocks similar to those encountered by those advocating for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. We can set precedents that support assistance to multiple locations at once.
- 3) A strong Puerto Rican community in Oregon contributes to the state's educational, legal, medical, environmental and public service sectors. This community should be supported right now. We are Oregonians, too.
- 4) Puerto Rico has no voting representative in Congress, which means that it needs the advocacy of others. Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens who can vote in presidential elections only when living on the mainland, not in the islands.
- 5) We owe it to Puerto Rico. Why? The current crisis is the product of long-term U.S. policies that have left the archipelago in dire economic circumstances and with serious infrastructure problems. Yet Puerto Rico has provided the United States with multiple opportunities to grow economically, test foreign policy and further defense agendas.

Puerto Rico served as a strategic post of the U.S. armed forces during both world wars, as the testing ground for military interventions — including the Gulf War — and as an experimental site for explosives and weapons that have left significant sites uninhabitable and polluted.

U.S. health authorities initially tested the birth control pill on Puerto Rican women who were not aware of the experiment and at times were left infertile.

Puerto Ricans provided significant farm and factory labor in the northeastern U.S. and other areas in the mid-20th century. For most of the 20th century, U.S. textile, pharmaceutical and other companies were exempted from taxes and benefited from a workforce that had been displaced by U.S. economic development policies. For many U.S. corporations, Puerto Rico was the testing ground of sweatshop manufacturing models of production now employed throughout Latin America, the Caribbean and Asia.

Today, Puerto Ricans continue to contribute — serving on the Supreme Court, in universities and in the armed forces, among other institutions.

After the federal minimum wage was guaranteed for Puerto Ricans in the 1970s and tax exemptions were lifted in the 1990s, factories began to leave the island at an accelerated pace. For more than a decade, an extraordinary economic crisis has entailed large layoffs by government agencies, and, in 2016, bankruptcy and a fiscal control agency to which the president has assigned all appointees with almost no input from Puerto Ricans.

Puerto Rico now has one of the highest unemployment rates in the United States (10.1 percent) and is seeing an exodus of young professionals seeking opportunities on the mainland. That exodus may increase as living conditions are becoming unbearable and dangerous for many.

Puerto Ricans continue to imagine other possibilities. Many are questioning measures that would disproportionately harm low-income and middle-class populations, such as the privatization of the public university system. There have been new investments in local agriculture by young people seeking sustainable ways of producing food, protecting natural resources and increasing food security. And eco-tourism has become a site of creative endeavors to support the local economy.

We owe those young people an opportunity to survive this natural disaster and succeed. We do not know when Oregon youth may need others to advocate for them.

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All 3 billion Yahoo accounts were hit in 2013 hack

Names, phone numbers, birthdates and security info for 3 billion accounts were compromised in 2013

BOSTON — Yahoo has tripled down on what was already the largest data breach in history, saying it affected all 3 billion accounts on its service, not the 1 billion it revealed late last year. ...

Puerto Rico Needs You Now!

Puerto Rico is currently facing a humanitarian crisis exacerbated by the political neglect of Congress and the Trump administration. It has been 2 weeks since Hurricane Maria began its destructive path that permanently changed the lives of 3.4 million people on the island of Puerto Rico.

Last week we asked you to put pressure on Congress to include emergency supplemental appropriations for Puerto Rico before the government spending bill expired on Sept. 30. **CONGRESS FAILED TO ACT.** Instead, our lawmakers approved a 10 day lift of the Jones Act which has, to date, done little to nothing to expedite the immediate distribution of emergency aid to the most impacted municipalities on our beloved island.

Now more than ever do we need YOU, to use your voice to demand JUSTICE FOR PUERTO RICO.

What you can do: Your Senators and U.S. representatives have the power to do *something*, but they are neglecting Puerto Ricans by dragging their feet. Take 2 minutes to make a call to TELL THEM THAT PUERTO RICO MATTERS, TOO. There are lives at stake. Here are our demands:

1. **Extend FEMA deadline:** Puerto Ricans have 60 days from the date that the President declares the area a disaster to apply for federal aid. The majority of Puerto Ricans remain without electricity and access to basic communication. This deadline is nearly impossible to meet under the current circumstances in Puerto Rico. We demand an extension so that ALL affected have the opportunity to file individual claims in a reasonable amount of time.
2. **Repeal the Jones Act:** The Jones Act requires that all goods shipped between waterborne ports of the United States be carried by vessels built in the United States, owned, and operated by American citizens. Shipping costs from the United States (stateside) to Puerto Rico have been estimated to be twice as much as from neighboring foreign islands. The Jones Act has been instrumental in devastating Puerto Rico's economy and our people. A 10 day waiver from the White House, is wholly inadequate to address the (decades old) harm it imposes on Puerto Rico and to begin to recover from Hurricane Maria. As such, we demand that the Jones Act be repealed for Puerto Rico.
3. **Cancel the Debt:** We call on Congress to absolve Puerto Rico of their current billion dollar debt. Any efforts to reconstruct Puerto Rico in the aftermath of this (un)natural, political disaster requires bondholders, debtors, and insurers to take their losses. The austerity that has been imposed by Congress as a result of the debt, must be replaced by legislation that would help Puerto Rico recover, not drown further. To move closer to recovery, we demand that the debt be fully canceled.
4. To sign the petition go to: <http://defendpr.com/action>

CALL-IN Talking Points:

[*YOUR SENATOR / CONGRESS MEMBER'S NAME*], it's been two weeks since Hurricane Maria devastated our island of Puerto Rico. We demand that you TAKE ACTION NOW! There are 5.3 million Puerto Ricans and countless more allies in the U.S. calling for JUSTICE FOR PUERTO RICO. What does that look like?

The federal government's response needs to be increased immediately. We demand that Congress, [*insert demand*] so that Puerto Ricans can receive the aid that they need to rise and rebuild.

Will [*SENATOR/CONGRESS MEMBER'S NAME*] ensure that we get this done?

Ways to donate: mariafund.org Fondos Unidos Mercy Corp
<https://www.gofundme.com/shipping-donations-to-puerto-rico>