

U.S. Senate shoots down disaster relief bills for Puerto Rico aid



Washington, April 5 (RHC)-- In the United States, two competing disaster relief bills have stalled in the Senate as Democrats and President Donald Trump continue to fight over federal relief funds for Puerto Rico. The Senate bill supported by Republicans -- which fell short of the 60 votes needed to pass Monday, contains just \$600 million for Puerto Rico's food stamp program, a number Democrats say is far too low as many Puerto Ricans are still recovering from the devastation of 2017's Hurricane Maria.

Democrats also say aid should cover rebuilding and other forms of disaster relief. A second bill -- a companion to a January package passed in the House -- also failed, after Republicans objected to the lack of relief funding for recent flooding in the Midwest.

Earlier this week, Donald Trump lashed out at Puerto Rico's political leaders, tweeting: "Puerto Rico got far more money than Texas & Florida combined, yet their government can't do anything right, the place is a mess -- nothing works."

In September, Trump reportedly told White House officials he thought Puerto Rico was misusing federal funds and that he wanted to withhold any additional recovery assistance from the island. Over one million Puerto Ricans started to see cuts to their food stamp benefits starting last month, including hundreds of thousands of children and elderly people.

Because the island receives funding for government programs through block grants, congressional approval is required, and the amount of funding is much smaller than for U.S. states.

Hawaii Senator Mazie Hirono blasted Republican tactics, tweeting: “Instead of passing an inclusive disaster supplemental, Donald Trump and Mitch McConnell are picking winners and losers and pitting citizens against each other by playing politics with disaster relief. This is an unconscionable, false choice. Whether they live in Ponce, Puna, Lincoln, or Saipan, they are all Americans. We should not discriminate as to which Americans should receive disaster relief.”

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