

Bill Kaplan: Puerto Rico needs help

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In August, Tennessee GOP Senator Bob Corker said that Trump had “not yet been able to demonstrate the stability, nor some of the competence that he needs to demonstrate in order to be successful.” Case in point, Puerto Rico.

More than a week ago Puerto Rico was left completely devastated by super-Hurricane Maria. 3.4 million U.S. citizens, including thousands of veterans, have been left to live in an unfolding dire nightmare. Most of the island has no power. Many have no access to water. The physical destruction of housing and infrastructure is catastrophic. Hospitals are closed or overwhelmed. Epidemics are around the corner. Stress induced mental health crises can be expected. Food, medical supplies, gasoline, generators and temporary housing are in short supply. And, the communications system has been pulverized (6 Wisconsin National Guard communications specialists are helping in Puerto Rico).

The press is covering the inadequacy of the Trump administration’s response. Trump, from his New Jersey golf club, tweeted: “Fake News CNN and NBC are going out of their way to disparage our great First Responders as a way to get Trump. ...” A paranoid and unhinged Trump. Rebuttal – Lieutenant General (Ret.) Russel Honore, appointed by Bush to turn around the initial failed response to Hurricane Katrina, said: “They (Trump administration)) need to scale up. I had 20,000 federal troops. ... And, Puerto Rico is bigger than Katrina.”

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Trump seems more clueless than Bush flying over a flooded New Orleans. There has been no national address by Trump on TV and radio to explain the horror in Puerto Rico. Nor has Trump laid out humanitarian and rebuilding plans. Moreover, Trump

appears out of touch and uninformed. Empathy is nonexistent. Instead he attacked local officials saying “they want everything to be done for them”. The New York Times reported: Trump “patted himself on the back no fewer than a dozen times about the competence of his administration’s relief effort.” What to do?

Wisconsin Republicans House Speaker Paul Ryan, Senator Ron Johnson and Governor Scott Walker must step up. First, Speaker Ryan should stop kowtowing to Trump and act like he heads part of the legislative branch. That means quickly getting Congress to approve a down payment aid package for Puerto Rico. Now. Moreover, the House has an oversight function over the executive branch. Speak up. Second, Senator Johnson, who chairs the Senate Homeland Security Committee must hold bipartisan oversight hearings on hurricane destruction in Puerto Rico and massive federal aid required. And, Governor Walker has a key role – go to Puerto Rico.

Walker, as Chair of the Republican Governors Association, could lead by example. He should take a bipartisan delegation to Puerto Rico. Bring Wisconsin National Guard truck drivers and electric power specialists. Ask Wisconsin corporations to buy generators from Generac Power Systems (Waukesha) to be donated to Puerto Rico. Take medical supplies – the Wisconsin Hospital Association will help. Wisconsin can make a real impact. Puerto Rico needs help. And, don’t forget Hurricane Maria devastated the Virgin Islands (also U.S. citizens).

— Kaplan wrote a guest column from Washington, D.C. for the Wisconsin State Journal from 1995 – 2009.