

take action, despite the political perils, and be prepared to raise the national interest above their personal interests and reelection. It will not be easy, but it must be done.

For officials in Washington who are in search of a comeback story, I suggest the case of Puerto Rico. In January 2009, the U.S. territory stood on the brink of disaster. The new government had inherited a deficit of \$3.3 billion. As a percentage of revenue, this was the largest deficit of any U.S. administration. The new administration was even forced to take a loan to meet its first payroll. Major rating agencies had downgraded Puerto Rico's credit to near junk status. Simply put, the island's economy was about to implode.

Leaders in San Juan faced a stark choice. Like their predecessors, they could usher Puerto Rico down this unsustainable path, paralyzed by the fear that tough choices would antagonize voters; or they could place their responsibility to protect Puerto Rico's future above their desire to preserve their poll numbers.

Fortunately for Puerto Rico, the new leadership chose the right course. For 2-plus years, Governor Luis Fortuno and the island's legislature have taken decisive action to impose fiscal discipline and create a leaner, more responsible government. They have cut government spending by nearly 20 percent, sharply reducing the deficit as a percentage of revenue. Indeed, by this metric, the island has moved from last in the Nation to a fiscal position that is better than 30 States. The rating agencies have rewarded Puerto Rico's progress, with Moody's giving the island its highest rating in 35 years.

To achieve savings, the government cut expenses and political appointments and was compelled to reduce its payroll. In my experience, rational leaders do not lay off workers because they think this will play to their political advantage. To the contrary, few actions are likely to arouse greater public displeasure. After all, work does more than put bread on the family table. It gives men and women dignity and a sense of purpose. But the Government of Puerto Rico's actions were absolutely necessary and were taken despite serious political risks.

Measures were taken to cushion the blow for those workers who were let go, and layoffs did not include teachers or first responders. More importantly, the government factions prevented an economic disaster, which would have resulted in far greater suffering and job loss.

It is important to emphasize that these decisions were not partisan. Governor Fortuno is a Republican and I, as Puerto Rico's only Representative in Congress, am a proud Democrat, and I supported his policies. The island legislators who voted to advance this agenda are affiliated with both national parties. And unlike in some States, Puerto Rico's leaders did not politicize ARRA or other Federal funding which

served as a lifeline for the island. Rather, they have worked to put every dollar to good use.

So for leaders in Washington who say it will be impossible to achieve bipartisanship in the budget debate, the case of Puerto Rico should provide a measure of hope. As it nurses the economy back to health, the Puerto Rico Government is also advancing a long-term, pro-growth strategy. For example, the government has reduced individual and corporate tax rates and ensured that everyone contributes their fair share; boosted sales of housing and commercial properties through other incentives; and worked to address Puerto Rico's high energy costs and dependence on foreign oil, including through the development of a natural gas pipeline that will create thousands of jobs, lower carbon emissions and significantly reduce energy bills for individuals and companies on the island.

In closing, Puerto Rico's leadership has proven that it is possible to work across party lines to control spending and create growth. I urge my colleagues in this Chamber to work in this same spirit and to set aside partisan differences to secure the long-term fiscal health of the country we love.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until noon today.

Accordingly (at 10 o'clock and 45 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess until noon.

□ 1200

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. POE of Texas) at noon.

PRAYER

Reverend Wallace Shepherd, Second Baptist Church, Santa Barbara, California, offered the following prayer:

Our Heavenly Father, we bless You, Lord, in this season, while our homeland faces difficult decisions and conflicts across many nations.

We bow before You this day, requesting Your mercy and Your grace. Grant this Congress Your guidance as they work collectively as one. We pray, dear Lord, as resolutions are prepared, that there will be a united commitment to the development of comprehensive laws.

Lead this Congress and Nation in the direction of tranquility that reflects the intent of our forefathers. Endow us as a Nation to be humble, as we transcend the norm, without forgetting those that are in need. Anchor our hearts with prudence, as we consider the development of our youth. Protect our troops, as they fight for democracy and freedom throughout the world.

Steer us on the path of righteousness with temperance. Bless our government, and bless this Nation.

In Jesus Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House his approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Will the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Mrs. ELLMERS) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mrs. ELLMERS led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

WELCOMING REVEREND WALLACE SHEPHERD

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the gentlewoman from California (Mrs. CAPPS) is recognized for 1 minute.

There was no objection.

Mrs. CAPPS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor a valued constituent and a good friend, Dr. Wallace Shepherd.

Dr. Shepherd came to the Second Baptist Church of Santa Barbara as pastor in 2006. Since then, Pastor Shepherd has reestablished Santa Barbara's Martin Luther King Day event as a capstone celebration on the central coast of California.

He is an active board member of the Endowment for Youth program, which supports the education of underprivileged children through tutoring and scholarships. Dr. Shepherd also helped to found Eco Faith, a nonprofit organization that promotes conservation of energy in churches and houses of worship.

He has been appointed evangelism director of the Central District of California, and also the vice president of the Third Sunday Fellowship for Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties. But as our House has just witnessed, he is at the core a powerful presence and a humble servant in the name of his faith.

I am honored to welcome him here to Congress, and thank him for his invaluable service to our community and to our country.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair will entertain up to 15 further requests for 1-minute speeches on each side of the aisle.