

major problems are directly linked to our status. They are rooted in the unequal treatment that Puerto Rico receives because it is a territory.

If you want to understand why Puerto Rico has always had higher unemployment and poverty than any State, you must recognize that the territory is excluded from the earned income tax program, partially excluded from the child tax credit program, excluded from the Supplemental Security Income program, and treated unequally under the Federal nutrition assistance program.

If you want to understand why Puerto Rico has high debt, you must realize that the territory government has borrowed so heavily in the bond market in order to compensate for its disparate treatment under Federal programs.

If you want to understand why patients in Puerto Rico received inadequate care, why physicians and hospitals are not fairly compensated, and why the cost of providing health care is disproportionately borne by the Puerto Rico Government rather than shared equitably with the Federal Government, you must grasp that Puerto Rico is treated in a discriminatory fashion under Medicaid, traditional Medicare, Medicare Advantage, and the Affordable Care Act.

If you want to understand why drug-related violence is pervasive in Puerto Rico, then you must come to terms with the fact that Federal law enforcement agencies have dedicated insufficient personnel and equipment to Puerto Rico because States invariably take priority over territories when it comes to the allocation of finite resources.

To solve its deeply entrenched problems and to reach its enormous potential, Puerto Rico must receive equal treatment. And to receive equal treatment, Puerto Rico must become a State. To pretend otherwise is just that: to pretend.

That is why less than 3 months ago I introduced H.R. 727, the most forceful statehood admission bill for Puerto Rico in history.

I am proud to report that the bill is likely to obtain its 100th cosponsor as early as today. Cosponsors come from 31 States, the District of Columbia, and the four other territories. They are both Democrats and Republicans. Indeed, about 1,900 bills have been introduced so far in this Congress, and H.R. 727 has more bipartisan support than over 99 percent of them.

Every Member who cosponsors this bill is standing up for a powerful principle, which is this: the people of Puerto Rico are American citizens who have enriched the life of this Nation for generations.

My constituents have fought—and many have died—for a flag that contains 50 stars, but no star that represents them. If they reaffirm their desire in a federally sponsored vote to become a full and equal member of the American family, they have earned the right to be first-class citizens.

SHEPHERD'S MEN

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. REED). The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LOUDERMILK) for 5 minutes.

Mr. LOUDERMILK. Mr. Speaker, 13 men, 911 miles, and 1 week to make a difference.

A group of brave warriors known as the Shepherd's Men set out on a journey that will take them from the Freedom Tower in New York City to the Shepherd's Center in Atlanta, Georgia.

Every day, servicemen and -women from across our country return from the fields of combat only to fight another battle at home. While this battle may not include heavy artillery or enemy combatants, it is just as devastating.

Post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, and traumatic brain injuries are disorders that take years—and sometimes a lifetime—to heal. These enemies invade the mind and cause unspeakable pain for those suffering and for their families.

For this reason, 13 brave men, whose mission is to raise awareness and funding for those with PTSD and traumatic brain injuries, have accepted the arduous task of running from the Big Apple to the Peach State.

With each step forward, the Shepherd's Men are one step closer to reaching their goal of raising \$250,000 for the Shepherd Center's SHARE Military Initiative, a comprehensive rehabilitation program that provides assistance and support for servicemen and -women who have sustained mild to moderate traumatic brain injury and PTSD from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

While the wounds may have been inflicted years ago, the scars still remain, and that is why the Shepherd's Men run 911 miles with 22-pound packs strapped to their chests.

These courageous men do not run for their own glory, but for their fellow servicemembers whose lives may be forever changed by the effects of these conditions.

Today, one out of five servicemembers returning home from Iraq or Afghanistan have been diagnosed with one of these debilitating conditions. If left unchecked, these injuries could be life threatening. As our servicemembers return home from Active Duty, it is important for them to know that they do not suffer alone.

This morning, the Shepherd's Men are a few steps closer to reaching their final destination. As the Sun rose gently against the backdrop of the Iwo Jima Memorial, the Shepherd's Men arrived in our Nation's Capital. It was here—at the place that memorialized one of the most historic moments in our history—where I joined the Shepherd's Men for a short 1-mile run out of their 911-mile journey.

As I stood in the shadow, Mr. Speaker, of the Iwo Jima Memorial, one of the Shepherd's Men following our run came up to me and said: When we go into combat, we know that we may not

come back out. And I lost many of my men in combat, and I can accept that, but what is hard is when these men survive combat, and they come back home and lose their life to these debilitating conditions. That is hard to swallow.

As a veteran of the United States Air Force, I am extremely grateful to the unwavering commitment the Shepherd's Men have shown to defend their fellow servicemen and ensure that they have the resources they need to begin their road to recovery.

Although the road may be long and fraught with setbacks, people across this Nation are going the extra mile to ensure our servicemembers are given the help they deserve.

To the Shepherd's Men, Godspeed on the rest of your journey, and thank you for your commitment to our Nation's military.

HONORING BISHOP WALTER SCOTT THOMAS, SR., AND HIS FORTY YEARS OF SERVICE TO GOD

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CUMMINGS) for 5 minutes.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Mr. Speaker, it is with great honor, admiration, and respect that I take this time to honor one of this Nation's most distinguished citizens, Bishop Walter Scott Thomas, Sr., in recognition of his 40 years of service to God as a pastor, mentor, and community leader.

I am honored to rise today to share with my colleagues in the United States House of Representatives the accomplishments of this remarkable man.

For the last 40 years, Bishop Walter Scott Thomas, Sr., has faithfully served as the pastor of the New Psalmist Baptist Church located in the Seventh Congressional District in Baltimore, Maryland. Bishop Thomas is a Baltimore native who was called to proclaim God's Word to the world.

He received a bachelor's of science degree from the University of Maryland in economics, a master's of divinity degree from Howard University School of Religion, and a doctor of ministry degree from St. Mary's Seminary and the University of Baltimore.

In 1975, Bishop Thomas was called to pastor the New Psalmist Baptist Church. He is a devoted leader who cares about the needs of his congregation, the community, and the world.

Under his dynamic leadership over the last four decades, New Psalmist Baptist Church has grown to serve several thousand members. His vision and message of "empowering disciples" has inspired thousands to make a positive impact in their personal lives, communities, the State of Maryland, the country, and the world.

He is an influential leader who graciously uses his gifts to serve clergy and religious leaders. From 1999 to 2002, Bishop Thomas served as the president