

Congressman Pablo José Hernández, Resident Commissioner of Puerto Rico

U.S. House Floor Speech, As Delivered

Tuesday, February 25, 2025

Mister Speaker,

During the past weeks, the federal government has been cruel to its workforce. It has offered deferred resignations, it has laid off employees, it has sent employees confusing information.

As Jorge Santiago Rivera, a labor leader from the Department of Veterans Affairs in the island has put it:

“The truth is that yes, we live under fear, we live under uncertainty.”

I worry about the wellbeing of our federal workers, I worry in particular about the 13,000 thousand federal employees who reside in Puerto Rico.

But I worry also about the thousands of veterans that rely on the VA for their healthcare needs in Puerto Rico. Why? Because the lack of structure and logic behind these cuts directly affects them. As Mr. Santiago asks: “If you lose 10 emergency workers from the ER, who helps the patients?”

Unsurprisingly, the VA is now scrambling to deny deferred resignations requests and in the past it has had to replace, to rehire workers that it laid off.

The VA is not the only federal agency affected by this chaotic, irresponsible, negligent program of federal cuts. The IRS reportedly laid off around 200 workers. The National Park Service, the USDA, the National Forest Service are also laid off employees.

As Brenda Reyes Tomassini, a labor leader from the EPA, another agency affected, described it: “it’s devastating, truly, a brutal level of anxiety.”

And what makes this even worse is the process.

Some of these employees have worked for the federal government for 15 or 20 years. They were transferred to new positions, appear as they are on probation and have been terminated.

That is unacceptable.

Members of this Congress have not received accurate information about what is happening.

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I'll be the first to acknowledge that government waste exists. It exists at the federal level, it exists at the state level, it exists at the municipal level.

But protecting our veterans is not government waste. Protecting our national parks, protecting our forests like El Yunque is not government waste. Protecting the employees that work hard to ensure that millionaires and billionaires don't cheat on their taxes is not government waste. It is what government is for.

In the coming days, my office will be taking action.

We will share resources for federal employees so they know their rights.

We will host a tele-town hall to hear directly from affected workers.

We will demand transparency from the agencies responsible for these layoffs.

I also urge the government of Puerto Rico to step up, to provide these workers the assistance that the government of Puerto Rico usually provides to workers who are laid off in the tourism or manufacturing sectors.

To the workers affected, I want to send a clear message: I know that being laid off is painful. It hurts your finances, it hurts your stability, and it can even hurt your sense of self-worth. But let me be clear: you are not the problem; your government is the problem.

We see you. We hear you. And we will fight for you.

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