

Editorial ? 3.4 million ?second-class citizens?

Big news recently was U.S. President Donald Trump's expressed concern over the number of immigrants coming from places like Africa, Haiti and El Salvador, rather than Scandinavia.

Coincidentally, that week also saw another head of state visit Florida to decry the fact that the Trump administration was treating his 3.4 million residents as ?second-class citizens.?

Puerto Rican Governor Ricardo Rossello slammed the administration's response to Hurricane Maria, saying residents of the island, who are U.S. citizens, are being treated like ?second-class citizens.?

The governor and other critics have complained that the federal aid given to Puerto Rico after its worst natural disaster ever has not been anything like that given to Florida, Texas and California after similar disasters.

?One hundred years of U.S. citizenship, but not quite equal,? Rossello lamented during a news conference.

The Puerto Rican governor, a Republican, is pushing for a supplemental disaster-aid package and relief from a federal tax-reform bill. He urged federal lawmakers to grant the island supplemental Medicaid funding and to eliminate cost-sharing requirements, something he said had been done in Louisiana. (He acknowledged Puerto Rico was competing with Florida, Texas and California for such help.)

?It is completely unacceptable, it is inhumane and you have to ask yourself if this would happen in any other state. The answer is no. The reality is this would only happen in Puerto Rico because we are treated as second-class citizens,? he said.

Strangely, he warned that voters would remember this come this year's midterm elections, ?so that everyone in Congress knows that if you turn your back on the people of Puerto Rico . . . there will be consequences.?

We say ?strangely,? because Puerto Ricans will have no vote in the elections unless they have fled the island for the U.S. mainland. Unlike former territories Hawaii and Alaska, the island remains a colony in the same position Massachusetts was at the time of the revolution-triggering Boston Tea Party, when the issue was being subject to taxation without having any representation in Parliament.

Breaking months of relative silence in contrast to the stance taken by San Juan's mayor (a Democrat), Rossello also condemned Trump's comments about immigrants, saying they were unhelpful as the island struggles to find equality.

?It is surreal that this was said by the president. The United States is the greatest nation in the world but we need to act like it . . . That's why we're here today, addressing this,? because Puerto Ricans were being treated as second-class citizens.

His comments may already have borne some fruit. About 100 Duke Power linemen and their trucks headed to Puerto Rico to help restore power lost when Hurricane Maria swept across the island four months ago. With the help of some other U.S. power utilities, they hope to get the power restored by the end of March.

The Duke Power move may be seen as in part recognition of the role played by Ontario's Hydro One and many other utilities in restoring power to millions of Floridians in just two weeks.

As matters stand, it's estimated that 10 to 15 per cent of Puerto Ricans still have no access to safe water and almost as many have no roof over their heads.

Let's hope a similar calamity in our northern territories would get a much better response from Ottawa.