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# ...Union volunteers mobilize for Puerto Rico

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out a deal: If AFL-CIO unions could recruit 300 skilled union volunteers, United would fly them to San Juan and back. Within days, unions found about 100 health care workers, 100 building trades workers, and 100 Teamsters who were willing to drop everything and leave home for two weeks. Two weeks after Maria hit, a Boeing 777-300 flew them from Newark to San Juan. The charter flight was crewed and loaded by union volunteers, and it carried 17 tons of donated supplies. On board were volunteers from 20 unions, including nurses, doctors, electricians, operating engineers, carpenters and truck drivers.

Among them were four nurse practitioners and two registered nurses from Oregon Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals (OFNHP) Local 5017, an affiliate of American Federation of Teachers. At the union's request, Kaiser Permanente agreed to release them from duty for the duration, but it was unpaid service: Moved to action by the enormity of the disaster, some gave up two weeks pay;



**HERE IS WHERE THE WATER CAME ... ON THE SECOND FLOOR.** A woman points to a line of black mold, the aftermath of flood waters reached the second story of her home in Barrio Ingenio, half an hour west of San Juan.

Photo by Misty Richards

others used vacation time.

Arriving in San Juan, they boarded buses and got a police escort to the sports complex that served as command central. For the next two weeks, women union volunteers slept in locker rooms in the Hiram Bithorn baseball stadium, while men slept in hallways in the adjacent Roberto Clemente Coliseum. In a covered area of the baseball stadium, they bonded over shared meals eaten together as a

group: beans and rice for dinner, and ham and cheese sandwiches for breakfast and lunch. Frills included running water, showers, and intermittent electricity and air conditioning. But that was more creature comfort than most Puerto Ricans were experiencing.

"It's like a war zone," said RN Susan Gillispie, a former army medic who works at an urgent care facility in Beaverton. "We have people with homes to-

tally destroyed, living under tarps."

Union medical volunteers divided up into eight teams of as many as a dozen, each headed by a doctor, nurse practitioner, or physician assistant. Each day, each team would travel to an area in need, in vans loaded with supplies. Arriving at their destination, they'd set up pop-up clinics or split up and go door to door doing "welfare checks," sometimes with the aid of local volunteers as translators. Each would see as many as 20 patients a day, dispensing medicine or changing dressings, referring the worst cases to doctors, or helping them get admitted to hospitals. Often, they encountered medically fragile individuals who had exhausted their supplies of oxygen, insulin, or other life-sustaining drugs.

They also educated those they met about how to treat water to make it safe for drinking.

Seeing the need, nurses used their own funds, and personal appeals on their Facebook networks, to buy and distribute supplies including medicine, food, and hand sanitizer.

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## JOBS

### Permit denied for proposed Longview coal terminal

The Washington Department of Ecology on Sept. 26 denied a water quality permit needed for the Millennium Bulk Terminal in Longview to move forward. If built, it would be North America's largest coal-export terminal. The agency said it denied the permit because the terminal would have caused significant and unavoidable harm to air quality, vehicle traffic, vessel traffic, rail capacity, rail safety, noise pollution, social and community resources, cultural resources, and tribal resources. The permit was needed in order for the company to fill 24 acres of wetlands and dredge 41.5 acres of riverbed.

Millennium says it will appeal the permit denial. The \$680 million project — backed by 15 labor unions and/or councils — would create 1,000 union construction jobs under a project labor agreement, and 135 permanent jobs when complete. Millennium, owned by Ambre Energy and Arch Coal Inc., first began its permitting process in February 2012.

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