



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi
Five-Minute Floor Statement as Prepared for Delivery
To Honor Military Veterans from Puerto Rico
November 13, 2013

Mr. Speaker:

Monday was Veterans Day, when our nation pays tribute to those who have served honorably in the armed forces. Today, I rise to express my gratitude to the soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines from Puerto Rico that have worn the uniform, both those who are living and those who have left us.

Generation after generation, from World War I almost a century ago to Afghanistan today, American citizens from Puerto Rico have built a rich record of military service. If you visit any U.S. base, at home or abroad, you will see warriors from Puerto Rico, fighting to keep this nation safe, strong and free. They serve as officers and enlisted personnel; as special operators; in infantry, artillery and armored units; as pilots and aviation technicians; in intelligence; on ships and submarines; in combat support positions; and in every other military specialty.

In his book, "Puerto Rico's Future: A Time to Decide," former U.S. Attorney General Dick Thornburgh observed that: "Historically, Puerto Rico has ranked alongside the top five states in terms of per capita military service." In the foreword to that book, former President George H.W.

Bush noted: “This patriotic service and sacrifice of Americans from Puerto Rico touched me all the more deeply for the very fact they have served with such devotion even while denied a vote for the president and members of Congress who determine when, where, and how they are asked to defend our freedoms.”

As I address this chamber, men and women from Puerto Rico are serving in harm’s way in Afghanistan and other locations. Since the attacks of 9-11, island residents have deployed about 35,000 times in Overseas Contingency Operations. Many have deployed on multiple occasions. Each time they go, they leave behind spouses, children and parents. As veterans will tell you, military life requires enormous sacrifice from their loved ones, those quiet heroes who support our uniformed personnel, who must live and work in their absence, and who pray for their safe return. On Veterans Day, we honor not only those who fought, but their families as well.

There is a frame on my office wall containing photographs of service members from Puerto Rico that have fallen in the last 12 years. I often look at those photos: row after row of young faces, sometimes smiling and sometimes stern, usually posing in their dress uniforms against the backdrop of the American flag. Those images make me sad, but they also give me strength. They inspire me to keep working for my people. They remind me what courage is, and what sacrifice means. And they help me remember why representing Puerto Rico in Congress is the greatest honor I have ever known.

I have met many veterans from Puerto Rico. I have found that they value deeds over words. They expect their elected leaders to produce results—or at least to work tirelessly towards that end.

I am proud of the record we have compiled on behalf of veterans from Puerto Rico. We have obtained funding to renovate the VA Hospital in San Juan, to improve existing clinics and build new clinics throughout the island, and to provide vehicles so that residents of our state veterans home can visit their families and travel to medical appointments. We achieved Puerto Rico's inclusion in a federal initiative to encourage the hiring of unemployed veterans.

I am also working to honor a military unit that perhaps best exemplifies the service that residents of Puerto Rico have rendered to this nation. Congressman Bill Posey of Florida and I have introduced legislation to award the Congressional Gold Medal to the 65th Infantry Regiment, known as the "Borinqueneers"—a unit composed mostly of soldiers from Puerto Rico that overcame discrimination and won admiration for their performance in the Korean War. Our bill has nearly 160 bipartisan cosponsors, and there is a companion bill in the Senate that has also garnered strong support. I hope all of my colleagues will join me in honoring this special group of veterans.

This Veterans Day, I renewed my commitment to fight for the men and women who have fought so valiantly for us. And I thanked them, from the bottom of my heart, for their service. I do so again today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.