



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi
Five-Minute Floor Statement as Prepared for Delivery
“Introduction of the *Puerto Rico Statehood Admission Process Act*”
February 4, 2015

Mr. Speaker:

Today, I am introducing the most forceful and ambitious statehood admission bill for Puerto Rico in U.S. history. The bill, fittingly, has 51 original cosponsors from both parties.

Before I describe the bill, let me explain its background. In 2012, the Puerto Rico government sponsored a referendum in which voters rejected Puerto Rico’s current territory status and expressed a clear preference for statehood.

In the 113th Congress, at my initiative, the President requested—and Congress approved—an appropriation of \$2.5 million to fund the first *federally-sponsored* status vote in Puerto Rico’s history. The funding will remain available until it is used by the Puerto Rico government. While the law does not prescribe the exact format of the ballot, it does establish important conditions. Namely, the law provides that the U.S. Department of Justice must certify that the ballot and voter education materials are consistent with U.S. law and policy.

The bipartisan bill I am introducing today flows from, and builds upon, the 2012 referendum and the federal appropriation enacted in response to that referendum. In other words, this bill is being filed now because the strategic foundation is firmly in place. Every action I take is designed to advance the statehood cause, because it is beyond dispute that territory status is the main source of Puerto Rico's grave economic and social problems. My constituents have no interest in symbolic gestures or empty rhetoric. They care only about concrete steps that bring Puerto Rico closer to equality.

My bill would authorize a vote to be held in Puerto Rico within one year of the bill's enactment—that is, by no later than the end of 2017. The ballot would contain a single question: "Shall Puerto Rico be admitted as a State of the United States?" To conduct this vote, the Puerto Rico government may use the \$2.5 million that Congress already approved, since this format clearly satisfies the conditions of the appropriations law.

If a majority of voters affirm their desire for admission, the bill provides for an automatic series of steps to occur.

First, by February 2018, the President would issue a proclamation to begin Puerto Rico's transition to statehood.

Second, the President would appoint a commission to prepare a report that describes the federal laws that treat the territory of Puerto Rico differently than the states. The commission would complete the report by July 2018. The congressional committees of jurisdiction could then enact

legislation to phase in equal treatment of Puerto Rico during the transition period, so the admission process is structured and orderly.

Third, in November 2020, the American citizens of Puerto Rico would vote for President and Vice-President, two U.S. senators, and voting members of the U.S. House.

Finally, on January 1, 2021, the President would proclaim Puerto Rico to be a state. Puerto Rico's congressional representatives would be sworn into office, and Puerto Rico would be treated on equal footing with all other states.

My bill is modeled on the legislation enacted by Congress with respect to Alaska and Hawaii. When Alaska and Hawaii were territories, they each held votes—sponsored by their local governments—in which voters expressed a desire for statehood. This is also what occurred in Puerto Rico in 2012. Ultimately, Congress enacted an admission act for Alaska in 1958 and an admission act for Hawaii in 1959. Those acts of Congress provided for admission to occur once a majority of voters in each territory affirmed in a *federally-sponsored* vote that they desired statehood. That is precisely what my bill would do with respect to Puerto Rico.

Every Member of Congress who cosponsors this bill is standing up for a powerful principle, which is this. The people of Puerto Rico are U.S. citizens, they have enriched the life of this nation for generations, and they have fought and died to defend her. Thus, if a majority of Puerto Rico voters affirm their desire in a federally-sponsored vote to become a full and equal part of the American family, the will of the people should be honored. Democracy requires no less.