



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi  
Five-Minute Floor Statement as Prepared for Delivery  
“Why Puerto Rico Statehood is in the U.S. National Interest”  
*March 4, 2015*

Mr. Speaker:

This is the fifth time this year that I have addressed this chamber about Puerto Rico’s political destiny. I recently introduced a bill that would provide for Puerto Rico’s admission as a state once a majority of Puerto Rico’s electorate affirms their desire for statehood in a federally-sponsored vote. The bill already has 70 cosponsors—56 Democrats and 14 Republicans.

In contrast to Puerto Rico’s current territory status, statehood would deliver to my constituents what all free people deserve: full voting rights, full self-government, and full equality under the law. And unlike separate nationhood, which is the only other non-territory option available to Puerto Rico, statehood would help rebuild the island’s shattered economy and improve quality of life. Indeed, the fact that statehood would be in the best interest of *Puerto Rico* is beyond reasonable dispute. There will always be politicians in Puerto Rico who claim otherwise for ideological reasons, but their arguments are detached from reality.

Today, I want to outline why statehood would also be in the *national* interest of the United States as a whole. There are three main reasons—one moral, one economic, and one political.

First, the moral reason. In 2012, my constituents held a free and fair vote in which they rejected territory status and expressed a preference for statehood. At a subsequent Senate committee hearing, then-Chairman Ron Wyden said that the current relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico “undermines the United States’ moral standing in the world.” Senator Wyden posed this question: “For a nation founded on the principles of democracy and the consent of the governed, how much longer can America allow a condition to persist in which nearly four million U.S. citizens do not have a vote in the government that makes the national laws which affect their daily lives?”

If Puerto Rico desires statehood, I cannot identify any moral basis upon which Congress could decline that petition, especially in light of the enormous contribution that island residents have made in our armed forces over generations. How could the U.S. government, a champion of democracy and self-determination around the world, disregard those principles with respect to its own citizens, without losing credibility at home and abroad?

The second reason that statehood is in the national interest is economic. Last year, the GAO published a report about the fiscal impact of statehood on the federal government. The report confirms that statehood will enhance quality of life in Puerto Rico, but it also alleviates any concern that statehood would have an adverse impact on the U.S. treasury. As GAO explains, new federal outlays to Puerto Rico would be significantly counterbalanced by new federal revenues generated from the island.

The truth is this: this nation will benefit when Puerto Rico's economy is strong, when its residents do not need to move to the states to achieve their dreams or vote for their national leaders, when individuals and businesses on the island flourish, and when the corporate and individual tax base expands. The U.S. stands to gain from the state of Puerto Rico's success, just as it currently pays a severe price for the territory's shortcomings.

Finally, let me turn to the political dimensions of this debate. The evidence indicates that either national party could be competitive on the island. I am a proud Democrat, but the pro-statehood party I lead includes hundreds of thousands of equally proud Republicans. Voters in Puerto Rico have elected two Republican governors and numerous Republican senators, representatives and mayors at the local level. I can say to my colleagues on both sides of the aisle that they should not view the prospective state of Puerto Rico as either a blessing or a curse for their party's fortunes, but rather as an opportunity.

Statehood is not only in Puerto Rico's interest, it is also in the national interest. Statehood will make Puerto Rico stronger and it will make the United States a more perfect union.

God bless Puerto Rico, the next state of the United States of America.

Thank you.