



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi
Five-Minute Floor Statement as Prepared for Delivery
A Response to Two U.S. Senators Regarding Puerto Rico Statehood
February 27, 2014

Mr. Speaker:

Yesterday afternoon, the junior Senator from Mississippi and the junior Senator from West Virginia spoke on the Senate floor about Puerto Rico's political status.

Because Puerto Rico is a territory and not a state, we have no senators who can respond to these two Senators on the Senate floor. So, as the only elected representative in Congress of the 3.6 million U.S. citizens that live in Puerto Rico, I respond now.

The Senators discussed the referendum that was held in Puerto Rico on November 6, 2012. However, neither Senator mentioned that, on the first question in that referendum, 54 percent of voters said they do not want Puerto Rico to be a territory, which means that my constituents are being governed without their consent. Likewise, neither Senator noted that, during a Senate hearing on the referendum held last August, the senior Democrat and Republican on the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources agreed that it was "indisputable" and "clear" that the people of Puerto Rico oppose the current territory status. Finally, in their remarks yesterday, neither Senator acknowledged that statehood received 834,000 votes on the second question of the

referendum, which is more support than any other status option—including the current status—obtained. In short, the Senators’ discussion of the historic referendum was profoundly deficient.

In addition, both Senators expressed opposition to the *Puerto Rico Status Resolution Act*, which I introduced last year in the House and which was introduced earlier this month in the Senate. The two Senators have every right to oppose this legislation, which calls for an up-or-down vote in Puerto Rico on the territory’s admission as a state and outlines the steps the federal government would take if a majority of voters favor admission. But to argue, as the Senators did, that the bill excludes options other than statehood is illogical. A binary vote, by definition, is not exclusive: those who support statehood can vote “yes” and those who oppose it can vote “no.” This was precisely the format of the votes that led to Hawaii and Alaska becoming states. I ask the Senators: Do you believe those earlier votes were unfair or exclusionary? In any event, there are now 132 Members of the House and Senate who have cosponsored the *Puerto Rico Status Resolution Act* and therefore disagree with these two Senators’ characterization of the bill.

Both Senators sought to contrast their opposition to the *Puerto Rico Status Resolution Act* with their apparent support for a Puerto Rico-related appropriation that the President included in his Fiscal Year 2014 budget request at my urging, that I helped usher through the legislative process, and that recently became law. Under this appropriation, funding would be provided for the first federally-sponsored status vote in Puerto Rico’s history, to be held among one or more options that are consistent with U.S. law and policy and that would “resolve” the status issue. Contrary to the suggestion made by both Senators, a vote on Puerto Rico’s admission as a state is a perfectly valid and logical way to structure the federally-sponsored plebiscite held pursuant to this appropriation.

The Senators also expressed the view that the status debate is a “distraction” from efforts to tackle Puerto Rico’s severe economic and fiscal challenges. This argument is familiar, but it is false. The reality—obvious to anyone not blinded by ideology—is that Puerto Rico’s economic problems are structural in nature, rooted in the territory’s unequal, undemocratic and un-American status. There is a reason my constituents are relocating to the states in unprecedented numbers.

I look forward to the day when the men, women and children I represent have the same rights and responsibilities as their fellow U.S. citizens residing in the states that the two Senators represent. We do not seek special or preferential treatment. We seek only equality. And we intend to achieve it.

Thank you.