



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi
Five-Minute Floor Statement as Prepared for Delivery
The Fight for Puerto Rico Statehood
January 7, 2015

Mr. Speaker:

As the new Congress begins its work on behalf of the American people, I rise to address my colleagues about an issue of national importance, namely Puerto Rico's quest to discard its status as a U.S. *territory* and to become a U.S. *state*.

Puerto Rico has been a territory since 1898. If Puerto Rico does not desire to remain a territory, it can follow one of two paths. The territory can become a state or it can become a sovereign nation, either fully independent from the U.S. or with a compact of free association with the U.S. that either nation can terminate. If Puerto Rico becomes a nation, future generations of island residents would not be American citizens.

My constituents have made countless contributions to the United States in times of peace and war, serving in every military conflict since World War I. They fight today in Afghanistan and other dangerous locations, in the same units as young men and women from states like Florida, Texas and New Mexico. Many of them have made the ultimate sacrifice in battle. When they do, their casket is flown back to this country, draped in the American flag.

It takes a special kind of patriotism to fight for a nation that you love, but one that does not treat you equally. Although Puerto Rico is home to more American citizens than 21 states, my constituents cannot vote for president, are not represented in the Senate, and have one non-voting delegate in the House. Moreover, territory status gives Congress a license to treat Puerto Rico worse than the states, and Congress often uses that license.

Everyone other than apologists for the status quo comprehends that territory status is the root cause of the economic crisis in Puerto Rico. As a result of the structural problems this status has created, residents of Puerto Rico are relocating to the states in staggering numbers. I know it breaks their hearts to leave behind the island they love, but most see no other option.

Yet, through the clouds, a bright sun is emerging. The people of Puerto Rico have finally said: “No more.” They have come to the conclusion that they deserve a status that is democratic and dignified. They will no longer tolerate being second-class citizens. They do not want *special* treatment. Rather, they demand *equal* treatment. Nothing more. But nothing less.

The will of the Puerto Rican people was expressed in a 2012 referendum sponsored by the Puerto Rico government. There, a majority of my constituents expressed their opposition to territory status; statehood received more votes than territory status; and statehood received far more votes than independence or free association, proving that Puerto Rico has no desire to weaken the bonds forged with the United States over nearly 12 decades. In short, statehood is now the predominant force in Puerto Rico.

At my urging, and in response to this landmark referendum, the Obama Administration proposed—and Congress approved—an appropriation of \$2.5 million dollars to fund the first *federally-sponsored* vote in Puerto Rico’s history, with the stated goal of “resolving” the status issue.

I have proposed that the funding be used to hold a simple, federally-sponsored, yes-or-no vote on whether Puerto Rico should be admitted as a state, just as Alaska and Hawaii did. This approach would yield a definitive result that nobody could reasonably question. And it has broad congressional support, since a bill I introduced last Congress that embodies this approach had 131 cosponsors and led to the filing of an identical Senate companion bill.

All that remains is for the Governor of Puerto Rico to schedule the vote. Yet, a year has passed, and we have seen only inertia and indecision. All talk and no action.

For my part, I will continue to press for action in both San Juan and Washington, D.C., using any strategy and technique that will advance the statehood cause. Since none of my colleagues in this chamber representing states would accept territory status for *their* constituents, I know they will understand that I will not accept it for *my* constituents.

Thank you.