



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi
Floor Statement as Prepared for Delivery
Rule for H.R. 890, the *Preserving Work Requirements for Welfare Programs Act of 2013*
March 13, 2013

Although I strongly support the TANF program, which provides payments to low-income families with children, I rise in opposition to the rule and to the underlying bill. Yesterday, I filed a budget-neutral amendment to H.R. 890. However, the Rules Committee reported a closed rule, thereby foreclosing debate—and a vote—on my amendment.

My amendment sought to eliminate disparities that the territories face under TANF. Under current law, the territories are not eligible for TANF supplemental grants, contingency funds and mandatory child care funds. Moreover, federal law imposes an annual cap on the overall funding that each of the territories can receive under a variety of public assistance programs, including TANF. I have introduced legislation to repeal this funding cap, which has not been increased since 1996, and to make the territories eligible for TANF grants they do not presently receive. The amendment I filed yesterday was rooted in this legislation, but modified to comply with pay-go rules.

Those who seek evidence of how Puerto Rico is hurt by its territory status need look no further than the unequal treatment my constituents receive under TANF and other safety-net programs.

These programs are designed to help our nation's most vulnerable residents, none of whom—I must emphasize—earn enough to pay federal income taxes.

This treatment would be unprincipled under any circumstances, but it is particularly unfair when one considers that, last November, voters in Puerto Rico rejected the current status and expressed a desire for statehood: a status that would entitle them to equal treatment under all federal laws.

If Congress elects to undertake a comprehensive reauthorization of the TANF program, I hope my colleagues will work with me to eliminate the disparities that Puerto Rico faces under current law, especially in light of the fact that my constituents have rejected the political status that allows for such unequal treatment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I yield back the balance of my time.