

I do not move back from that commitment. I support the Young bill with every bit of strength in this body, because after 100 years with the U.S. and 405 years with Spain, it is time that Puerto Rico knew whether it can join the community of nations as an independent Nation or gain sovereignty by joining the Union.

Either one is correct. The present is not. I support the rule. Vote for it. And I will support the bill strongly today. I am sure that if I am given time, you will hear from me a few times during the day today.

Mr. MOAKLEY. Mr. Speaker, I yield 6 minutes to the gentleman from Puerto Rico (Mr. ROMERO-BARCELÓ).

(Mr. ROMERO-BARCELÓ asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. ROMERO-BARCELÓ. Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the rule for this H.R. 856. Today this House will consider the United States-Puerto Rico Political Status Act. For the people I represent, the 3,800,000 United States citizens living in Puerto Rico, the enactment of this legislation would be the single most important political development in 100 years. Yet many of my colleagues may wonder why this legislation is necessary and why they or their constituents should care about Puerto Rico.

They should care because, geography aside, no citizen and no constituency in this Nation is an island. They should care because the rights and privileges denied to one group of citizens threaten the rights and privileges enjoyed by the entire body politic. They should care because as individuals and as a Nation, to paraphrase the English author C.S. Lewis, we are defined by the choices we make. Incrementally, in seemingly insignificant small steps, we make decisions, and those decisions define us. Our choices tell us who we are.

The fundamental choice before this House today is this: Do we cherish the principles of our democracy enough to put an end to 100 years of colonialism and extend the right of full self-determination to the U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico? A century ago when the victorious United States signed the Treaty of Paris ending the Spanish-American War, it acquired Puerto Rico as a possession. Article 9 of the treaty stated that the civil rights and political status of the native inhabitants of the territories hereby ceded to the United States shall be determined by the Congress. Subsequent Supreme Court decisions have ruled that Puerto Rico's status is that of an incorporated territory subject to the plenary authority of Congress under the territorial clause of the Constitution.

Exercising its powers, Congress granted citizenship to the residents of Puerto Rico by statute in 1917. And in 1950, with the passage of the Puerto Rico Federal Relations Act, Congress authorized the people of Puerto Rico to draw up a Constitution and organize a local government.

Let us be clear about what the Puerto Rico Federal Relations Act did and did not do. After nearly a half century of obfuscation, some partisans would have us believe that Puerto Rico's current commonwealth status is the product of a bilateral pact between Puerto Rico and the United States and that the island is really a free associated State or an associated Republic. But the unvarnished truth is that Puerto Rico's colonial status remains unchanged. As a territory, we are self-governed in local matters not covered by Federal laws, but we have never exercised self-determination.

The Congressional record is clear. The intent of the Puerto Rico Federal Relations Act was to create a provisional government until the issue of status was resolved, and if anything was decided in the 1993 plebiscite, it is that for the first time since the United States arrived on our shores, Puerto Rico is being ruled by Congress under an agreement that does not have the support of the majority of the people of Puerto Rico. We are being governed without the consent of the governed.

Like Dorothy in the Land of Oz, we could sit here, click our heels three times, and wish the problem would disappear. Where would it go, to Kansas? But it will not. The fact is that only Congress has the authority to resolve this dilemma, and only Congress can create an environment in which Puerto Ricans can legitimately address this issue.

This is precisely what the United States-Puerto Rico Political Status Act is designed to do. This legislation does not endorse one political choice over another. It is status neutral. All it seeks to do is create constitutionally sound and congressionally approved definitions of status options to be considered by the people of Puerto Rico.

The bill proposes a timetable for referendums on status, and it makes provisions, should they prove necessary, for a smooth transition to and for the implementation of a new political status. These measures are critical if the status process is to go forward and if self-determination by the people of Puerto Rico is to have any meaning of legitimacy. The people of Puerto Rico, to borrow words of Israel's Golda Meir from 1946, only want that which is given naturally to all peoples of the world, to be masters of our fate. That for which the Puerto Ricans fought side by side with our fellow citizens in the mainland, defending other countries on foreign shores, to stand for the right of people's self-determination, is being denied to 3.8 million U.S. citizens.

Some of my colleagues in this House whose districts include large Puerto Rican communities would deny us this. But unlike my constituents, these expatriate Puerto Ricans enjoy voting representation in Congress and the right to vote in Presidential elections, and although the economic, social and political affairs of the residents of

Puerto Rico are in great measure controlled by the government in which we have little to say, they would still deny the right to vote and the right to voting representation by opposing this bill.

All of my colleagues here today have the privilege of voting yes or no on the United States-Puerto Rico Political Status Act. Yet I am the sole Representative of this House for 3.8 million U.S. citizens in Puerto Rico. I cannot vote. This is the defining legislation for my constituents, and I cannot vote. This legislation would end 100 years of Puerto Rico's colonial relationship with the Nation, yet I cannot vote.

I ask you, do you cherish the principles of our democracy enough to dismantle 100 years of colonialism and extend the right of full self-determination to the U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico? I hope you do, for our sake and for the Nation's sake.

Mr. SOLOMON. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume just to respond somewhat to the last several speakers.

Just responding to the statement of the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MOAKLEY) about the position of President Ronald Reagan on this bill, I did not read the last sentence in this letter from his Chief of Staff Joanne Drake. It says, I hope this clears up any misunderstandings that these ads may have caused. These ads did not receive the authorization of Ronald Reagan to run.

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Now, let me also state for the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MOAKLEY) that I had another idol, too, that I idolized very much, and he used to sit in that chair up there. He was a good friend of the gentleman's, and his name was Tip O'Neill. He was one pretty tough hombre, but he was pretty fair to us in the minority and that is why I also respected him a great deal.

Mr. MOAKLEY. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. SOLOMON. I yield to the gentleman from Massachusetts.

Mr. MOAKLEY. Mr. Speaker, I would point out to the gentleman that he just used a non-English word. Is the gentleman sure he wants to put that in the RECORD, "hombre"?

Mr. SOLOMON. Well, Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, let me also respond a little bit on the colonialism issue by my very, very good friend, the gentleman from Puerto Rico (Mr. ROMERO-BARCELÓ). And I was willing to even yield him an additional minute if he had needed it. But it really hurts a lot of our feelings on both sides of the aisle to talk about this issue of colonialism because, my colleagues, there is no colonialism.

If the people of Puerto Rico overwhelmingly want statehood in this country, I will be the first to help lead the fight to bring them in, just as we did for the Northern Marianas, for the Marshall Islands, for Palau and for Micronesia. When the issues came up, we