

**H.R. 900, PUERTO RICO  
DEMOCRACY ACT OF 2007;  
AND H.R. 1230, PUERTO RICO  
SELF-DETERMINATION ACT  
OF 2007**

---

**LEGISLATIVE HEARINGS**

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON INSULAR AFFAIRS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

March 22, 2007 and April 25, 2007

**Serial No. 110-8**

Printed for the use of the Committee on Natural Resources



Available via the World Wide Web: <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/congress/index.html>

or

Committee address: <http://resourcescommittee.house.gov>

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

34-236 PDF

WASHINGTON : 2007

---

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office  
Internet: [bookstore.gpo.gov](http://bookstore.gpo.gov) Phone: toll free (866) 512-1800; DC area (202) 512-1800  
Fax: (202) 512-2250 Mail: Stop SSOP, Washington, DC 20402-0001

before us appearing as witnesses, Mr. Serrano and Ms. Velázquez, be extended the opportunity to make an opening statement. If any other Members have statements, they can be included in the hearing record under unanimous consent. Hearing no objection, so ordered.

The Subcommittee is meeting today to hear testimony on H.R. 900 and H.R. 1230. H.R. 900, sponsored by Mr. Serrano, will provide for a Federally sanctioned self-determination process for the people of Puerto Rico.

H.R. 1230, sponsored by Ms. Velázquez, will recognize the right of the people of Puerto Rico to call a Constitutional Convention to which the people would exercise their natural right to self-determination, and to establish a mechanism for Congressional consideration of such decision.

I now recognize myself for an opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. DONNA M. CHRISTENSEN, A  
DELEGATE IN CONGRESS FROM THE VIRGIN ISLANDS**

Ms. CHRISTENSEN. As a co-sponsor of H.R. 1230, it is clear that I favor a bottoms-up approach to resolving Puerto Rico's long-unresolved political status question, one that empowers the people of Puerto Rico to translate their hopes and aspirations into a new and even possibly unique political relationship with the mother country, instead of one that dictates what their choices can and cannot be.

But above any support for one bill over the other, I support the right of the people of Puerto Rico to be fully informed, to have a fair process, and to have all of the possible status options clearly and accurately defined and placed before them.

Keeping this in mind, I want to thank Chairman Rahall for reestablishing the Subcommittee on Insular Affairs. It is well known that Chairman Rahall has been a long-time friend of Puerto Rico, most notably leading the effort in Congress for the funding of Trans Urbano. His presence this morning underscores his continuing interest in Puerto Rico, its people, and his desire to see progress on the status issue.

We will also be joined by the committee's Ranking Member, Mr. Young, as well. As a sole representative of Alaska, one of the last U.S. territories to become a state, he knows political status issues. As we all know, Mr. Young, as Chairman of the Committee, was the main sponsor of the legislation to resolve Puerto Rico's political status in 1998. His leadership and efforts resulted in the House approval of legislation providing for a process to resolve that status.

During today's hearing, all sides of the Puerto Rican status debate will be heard through an ambitious agenda, which includes some four panels consisting of 13 witnesses, all of whom understand the issue and its history well, and the overwhelming majority of whom are full-time residents of the Commonwealth. And we welcome all of you.

Because of the large number of requests to participate in the deliberations on these bills, we found that it was not possible to have a full hearing on the issues involved today. So in approximately one month from today we will convene a second hearing on the bills, at which time we will hear from the leadership of the political

parties, as well as from the Commonwealth, government, and legislature.

I have to say, though, that I am very disappointed that after such a harsh evaluation of Puerto Rico's current status and such a strong statement on the process they feel should be adopted, the Administration is not here with us this morning. I hope that this does not mean that their intention is to drop that bombshell and disappear, but that the Administration will see fit to testify at the second hearing.

It has been more than 108 years since the United States acquired the island of Puerto Rico along with Guam in the Philippines at the end of the Spanish-American War. Since that time, the people of Puerto Rico have been seeking to have their relationship to the United States resolved according to their wishes. It is high time that this occurs, and it is my fervent hope that beginning with this hearing today, we will all see this happen in short order.

I look forward to the testimony we will receive both in person and in writing. And before I conclude and yield to my Ranking Member for his opening statement, I want to say two last things.

First, as I made reference to last year, I do hear dissatisfaction from the people of Puerto Rico with the status quo. But on the socioeconomic issues—housing, education, healthcare, crime, even the politics—and also corruption inside and outside of government. I cannot see, but I stand ready to be educated on how changing political status will improve the conditions that the Puerto Ricans care most deeply about.

I see them as not necessarily being connected, and I also see a danger in tying too closely together as we move through this process.

Second, your neighbors and fellow non-state areas are watching. What happens here, and similarly what happens today with the District of Columbia, while they are not exactly similar, having bearing on us and our process of self-determination.

So let us be mindful, as we pronounce what can and cannot be under the Constitution, that such limitations will have a far greater impact on those of us whose choices are far more limited than our larger cousin, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

I now yield for an opening statement to my colleague and friend, the resident commissioner, Mr. Fortuño.

[The prepared statement of Mrs. Christensen follows:]

**Statement of The Honorable Donna M. Christensen, Chairwoman,  
Subcommittee on Insular Affairs**

As a cosponsor of H.R. 1230, it is clear that I favor a bottom-up approach to resolving Puerto Rico long unresolved political status question; one that empowers the people of Puerto Rico to translate their hopes and aspirations into a new and even possibly unique political relationship with their mother country instead of one that dictates what their choices can and cannot be.

But above any support for one bill over the other, I support the right of the people of Puerto Rico to be fully informed, to have a fair process, and to have all of the possible status options clearly and accurately defined and placed before them.

Keeping this in mind, I want to thank Chairman Rahall for reestablishing the Subcommittee on Insular Affairs. It is well-known that Chairman Rahall has been a long-time friend of Puerto Rico, most notably leading the effort in Congress for the funding of Tran Urbano. His presence this morning underscores his continuing interest in Puerto Rico, its people, and his desire to see progress on the status issue.

It is also a pleasure to have the Committee's Ranking Member Mr. Young here as well. As the sole Representative of Alaska, one of the last U.S. territories to become a State, he knows political status issues. As we all know, Mr. Young, as Chairman of this Committee, was the main sponsor of legislation to resolve Puerto Rico's political status in 1998. His leadership and efforts resulted in the House approval of legislation providing for a process to resolve Puerto Rico's status.

I think the presence of Chairman Rahall and Ranking Member Young sends a clear signal that the Committee looks forward to having progress made on this issue in the 110th Congress. I believe that the proceedings of this Subcommittee will help in that effort; and give the Full Committee a better appreciation of both the complexity of this issue and the desire by the people of Puerto Rico for the process to begin.

During today's hearing, all sides of the Puerto Rican status debate will be heard from through an ambitious agenda which includes some four panels consisting of 13 witnesses—all of whom understand this issue and its history well and the overwhelming majority of whom are full time residents of Commonwealth.

Because of the large number of requests to participate in the deliberations on these bills, we found that it was not possible to have a full hearing of the issues involved in one day.

So in approximately one month from today we will convene a second day of hearings on the bills at which time we will hear from the leadership of the political parties from Puerto Rico as well as from the Commonwealth government and legislature.

I have to say that am very disappointed that after such a harsh evaluation of Puerto Rico's current status and such a strong statement on the process they feel should be adopted, the Administration is not here. I hope that this does not mean that their intention is to drop that bombshell and disappear, but that the Administration will see fit to testify at the second hearing.

It has been more than 108 years since the United States acquired the island of Puerto Rico, along with Guam and the Philippines at the end of the Spanish American War. Since that time, the people of Puerto Rico have been seeking to have their relationship to the United States resolved according to their wishes. It is high time that this occurs and it is my fervent hope that beginning with this hearing today we will all see this happen in short order.

I look forward to the testimony we will receive both in person and in writing and to the answers to some questions that the Committee will have. They will all be taken into consideration as we move to the full committee and seek to move this process to fruition.

Before I conclude and yield to my Ranking member for his opening statement, I want to say two things:

First, as I made reference to last year, I do hear dissatisfaction from the people of Puerto Rico with the status quo—but on the socio-economic issues—housing, education, healthcare, crime, even the politics and corruption in and outside of government. I cannot see, but stand ready to be educated on how changing political status will improve the conditions that Puerto Ricans care most deeply about. I see them as two different things and I also see a danger in tying the two too closely together as you move through this process.

Secondly, your neighbors and fellow non-state areas are watching!

What happens here, and similarly what happens tomorrow with the District of Columbia—while they are not exactly similar—have bearing on us and our process of self determination.

For example, any attempt to "clarify" or make clear that the only two options available to Puerto Rico constitutionally are statehood or independence, automatically limits the options for the Virgin Islands as well as for the other smaller territories to just one; independence or its cousin Free Association—a choice which is not now supported by a majority of constituents.

Commonwealth or some other status under the sovereignty of the U.S., is all that those of us who want to remain part of the United States but are too small to become a state is all that we can aspire to.

So let us be mindful, as we pronounce what can and cannot be under the constitution, that such limitations will have far a greater impact on those of us whose choices are much more limited than our larger cousin, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

I now yield for an opening statement to my colleague and friend, the Resident Commissioner of Puerto Rico, Mr. Fortuño.