

PUERTO RICO STATUS

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED FIFTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

ON

H.R. 856

A BILL TO PROVIDE A PROCESS LEADING TO FULL SELF-
GOVERNMENT FOR PUERTO RICO

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Mr. ACEVEDO-VILÁ. But I am not asking from this Congress now to make a judgment on the plebiscite from 1950, '52.

Mr. SERRANO. Right. The problem is, Mr. Acevedo, that that is what is holding us back. If there is a problem here, it is the fact that there is a segment of the leadership in Puerto Rico that is saying this is not what we are. Now let me tell you the strange and painful position that I find myself in. I was born in Mayaguez. My father was born in Anasco, my mother in Maricao. I came here to this country when I was seven years old. I am 53. I probably should not say that in public, but I am 53. When I think with my Puerto Rican hat, which is X amount of time during the day, I also don't want to believe Puerto Rico is a colony. It hurts me to admit that. But when I am a United States Congressman, which is a lot of the day, and I see how I treat Mississippi, New York, and Puerto Rico, I know that my cousins live in a colony.

Now at what point do we say—maybe "colony" is not the word to use. Maybe the concept is a totally unfair relationship and we don't want it as an option. And let me ask you the last question. Do you think it would be proper for me as an American Congressman, forget the Puerto Rican part, to offer to people on the island an option that I believe to be unjust and unfair?

Mr. ACEVEDO-VILÁ. Well, I repeat again, I am not asking you to offer the commonwealth as defined on the bill as it stands right now. I am asking you to offer commonwealth as I have defined on my presentation and which you voted back in 1990 in favor of it. You voted. You were speaker pro tempore of that session.

Mr. SERRANO. In a great moment.

Mr. ACEVEDO-VILÁ. So what we are asking is something that already has been approved by Congress, by the House.

Mr. SERRANO. So, one last question. If an amendment was to come to this Committee proposing what you propose in this bill, and this Committee turned it down because it wasn't willing to give Puerto Rico that arrangement, would you then propose that your party participate in the plebiscite or not participate?

Mr. ACEVEDO-VILÁ. We will fight in other forums, including the Senate, the White House, everywhere else. As I said before, perhaps the same question was made in a different way, I believe that the U.S. Government, Congress and the President, would leave 48 percent of the people in Puerto Rico without option and that power.

Mr. SERRANO. Well, but let us clarify that. I believe that that really is an unfair statement to me as a Member of Congress. The notion that the 48 percent voted for—and I know that Puerto Ricans are beautiful for analyzing numbers when it comes to this issue. The 48 percent voted for an option that this Congress feels you haven't reached yet. And so when you say Congress is leaving out 48 percent, yes, Congress may be leaving out the wishes of 48 percent, but not the actual living conditions and political arrangements of 48 percent.

Mr. ACEVEDO-VILÁ. That is why I am talking now about the future here. And we said—we are talking about a new commonwealth consistent with the principle we have believed. And that new commonwealth was on the bill in October 1990.

Mr. SERRANO. All right, let me close by saying this. I don't have a problem with a new commonwealth. I have a problem with a new

commonwealth being presented in the ballot as the old commonwealth, because the old commonwealth is not the new commonwealth.

Mr. ACEVEDO-VILÁ. I invite you to read carefully the definition I am proposing today. And as I said, that was approved back in 1990.

Mr. SERRANO. All right. Then again, Mr. Chairman, one last point, any time a system of relationships allows me to run for Congress but doesn't allow my American citizen cousins in Mayaguez to run for Congress, that is not a fair relationship. I shouldn't see that on the ballot. Any time a system allows me to institute agreements with foreign countries but doesn't allow you the sovereignty to institute agreements with foreign countries, meaning you are not a State, and you are also not independent, then I can't see that as a fair relationship.

Mr. ACEVEDO-VILÁ. The solution to your concern is on paragraph C of the definition.

Mr. SERRANO. Which is not the actual status, is what I am trying to get at.

Mr. ACEVEDO-VILÁ. Yes.

Mr. SERRANO. What you——

Mr. ACEVEDO-VILÁ. I am going to——

Mr. SERRANO.—doesn't exist right now.

Mr. ACEVEDO-VILÁ. I am going to repeat my statement. So far I have been talking about the historic precedent that clearly showed that the assumptions under which this bill has been drafted are wrong. Now is the time to talk about the future.

Mr. SERRANO. OK.

Mr. ACEVEDO-VILÁ. And I am proposing a new commonwealth which is the definition that was approved by this Committee and the House back in 1990.

Mr. SERRANO. I respect that, and I won't badger you anymore. I do respect you. I respect what you stand for. I respect what your party stands for. I think the tragedy here is that Congress may be ready to stop lying and some people can't accept that Congress will finally stop lying. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ROMERO-BARCELÓ. One last question before we finish. If the Congress were to, both the House and the Senate, and the White House were to take a look at this suggestion that you have for the new commonwealth and accept everything but including the citizenship and the bill were adopted, passed as a law into law as to the new commonwealth as you define it, but without the U.S. citizenship, what would your party do?

Mr. ACEVEDO-VILÁ. It would be unacceptable for us, you know.

Mr. ROMERO-BARCELÓ. So what would your party do? Would you vote, wouldn't vote?

Mr. ACEVEDO-VILÁ. We would have to decide at the time, but that definition wouldn't be acceptable for us.

Mr. ROMERO-BARCELÓ. So you wouldn't participate?

Mr. ACEVEDO-VILÁ. That would be another way to tilt the process in favor of statehood.

Mr. ROMERO-BARCELÓ. So you would not vote?

Mr. ACEVEDO-VILÁ. You know that statehooders and commonwealth in Puerto Rico, we are proud of our U.S. citizenship, so by