

# PUERTO RICO STATUS

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## FIELD HEARING BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED FIFTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

ON

**H.R. 856**

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SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO, APRIL 19, 1997

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**Serial No. 105-28**

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Printed for the use of the Committee on Resources



U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE  
WASHINGTON : 1997

43-194 CC

We now will have the first panel, the Honorable Charlie Rodriguez, the designee for the New Progressive Party, San Juan, Puerto Rico; the Honorable Anibal Acevedo Vila, President, Popular Democratic Party, San Juan, Puerto Rico; the Honorable Fernando Martin-Garcia, designee for the Puerto Rican Independence Party, San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Please take your seats.

Gentlemen, because you are representatives of the three different parties today, I will use a little discretion and allow you more time than the 5 minutes. We will try to keep to the 5-minute rule, but with respect to your individual positions, I will be very lenient for a moment as long as you don't go on all day.

Charlie—Mr. Rodriguez, you are up first.

**STATEMENT OF HON. CHARLIE RODRIGUEZ, DESIGNEE FOR  
THE NEW PROGRESSIVE PARTY, SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO**

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Thank you.

Good morning, Chairman Young, Ranking Democrat George Miller, Congressman Romero-Barceló, members of the Resources Committee. On behalf of Governor Pedro Rossello and the 3.7 million U.S. citizens, welcome to Puerto Rico.

Today I come before you wearing two hats, representing the New Progressive Party of which the Governor is president, and as the president of the Puerto Rico Senate. In both capacities I support the Committee's tireless efforts over the last 3 years in the exercise of its responsibilities under the Constitution's Territorial Clause toward crafting Federal legislation that will finally offer Puerto Ricans, for the first time, the right to freely determine their political status and to resolve our century-old political relationship with the United States under a congressionally sponsored plebiscite.

We have talked long enough in Puerto Rico about our political status. We have talked for 100 years. It is time now to act and to find out how strong is the creed of equality, democratic values, and pluralism of our Nation once the voice of the people of Puerto Rico is heard in the proposed 1998 plebiscite.

I want to make three essential points:

First, that the constitutional integrity of the status options offered in the 1998 plebiscite must not be compromised. These options must reflect what is constitutionally attainable within the powers of Congress under the Territorial Clause. They must honestly describe to the people of Puerto Rico what is legally possible, not what is inconsistent with the Constitution, impractical economically or politically, or subject to the vicissitudes of future negotiations. The people of Puerto Rico are closely monitoring these events, and they are expecting a clear and precise message from Congress of what may constitutionally be offered in the definitions of the three competing formulas.

For these reasons, the Committee should adopt, in their entirety, the three status option definitions as set forth in the proposed legislation. Congress must state with clarity that U.S. citizenship cannot exist in a status formula with sovereign powers.

Second, it is important that the process you have developed to provide for full self-government for the island through a self-deposition of the people of Puerto Rico in conjunction with the Federal

Government must not be compromised. It is crucial that the process be sound, all inclusive, and provides a peaceful, democratic, and internationally recognized process for all persons, parties, and interests in the island to finally resolve Puerto Rico's 500-year old march toward decolonization.

Finally, your presence here today is due in part to the initiative of the Puerto Rico Legislature's two concurrent resolutions seeking Congress's response to our island's ambiguous political status left unresolved by the 1993 plebiscite. We hope to continue to work with you to realize our objective, a 1998 plebiscite in which full self-government for Puerto Rico is initiated.

As the Governor's representative, I want to reaffirm our party's support of the definition of statehood contained in H.R. 856. We believe it fairly and accurately reflects both the benefits and obligations that Statehood entails. It should be adopted in its entirety as a stated valid option for the status plebiscite scheduled for 1998.

Puerto Ricans should be well informed of what statehood means under this definition. They should know that statehood is the only formula that guarantees our U.S. citizenship, putting us on equal footing with all other Americans. They should know that statehood is the only formula that guarantees the protection of the U.S. Constitution. They should know that statehood is the only formula that guarantees the Presidential vote and the election of two Senators and at least six Members of Congress who will shape the laws that affect our daily lives.

They should also know that statehood is the only formula that guarantees Americans citizenship to our children, grandchildren, and all future generations born in Puerto Rico. They should know that only statehood guarantees the entire application and full funding of Federal programs, which will be provided to the State of Puerto Rico on parity with the rest of the States of the Union.

They should know, too, that these benefits—citizenship, equal rights, full funding—carry with them the duty to pay Federal income tax, a duty that will ultimately be offset by a corresponding reduction in island taxes as Federal funds compensate for local outlays.

They should know that the 51st State of Puerto Rico can continue to have both Spanish and English as its official State languages, a right reserved and guaranteed to all other States under the Constitution's 10th Amendment, a right that can only be changed through a constitutional amendment made applicable to all the States, not just one or a few.

They should know the commitment of our Nation to democratic values, multiculturalism, and pluralism, all central to the American Dream.

One thing we already know is that when the Nation has required our presence in the battlefields in the First and Second World Wars, Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, Somalia, and Bosnia, we have been in the front lines, attesting to our commitment to democratic values and ideals.

I invite you to visit the memorial dedicated by the people of Puerto Rico dedicated to the hundreds of citizens, the people who made the ultimate sacrifice of their Nation. This memorial is located on the south side of our Capitol.

Puerto Ricans are so committed to our American citizenship and to our relation with our Nation that in a poll conducted by a local paper on July 23, 1990, 43.5 percent expressed that if Puerto Rico became a sovereign nation, they would move to the continental United States; 42 percent said they would remain; and 15 expressed to be undecided. The poll revealed that 60 percent of our youth would move to the United States. If the same question were polled today, the numbers would be even higher than those in 1990.

In a more recent poll, 91 percent of those interviewed stated that U.S. citizenship was very important. Surprisingly, 53 percent of independence supporters polled said they consider U.S. citizenship very important.

In sum, the statehood definition clearly and precisely declares to voters that it is the only formula that puts Puerto Rico on an equal footing with all the other States and confers on its residents the same constitutional rights and responsibilities as all other U.S. citizens enjoy.

Chairman Young, as stated in the letter signed by you and Chairmen Burton, Gallegly, and Gilman on February 9, 1996, in response to the 1993 plebiscite, I quote: There is a need for Congress to define the real options for change and the true legal and political nature of the status quo, so that the people can know what the actual choices will be in the future, end of quote.

That you have accomplished with H.R. 856. The status options as defined in the bill meet your criteria. They should stand as written, or otherwise the self-determination process will be compromised, as it was in 1993.

The process is important. The 1998 plebiscite campaign will be free of the demagoguery and rhetoric characteristic of past status votes where one party or the other impugned the legality of one or more of the options or questioned Congress's willingness to implement the results.

Rather, this campaign will be waged on the merits of the status options, what is good for Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans, what can be done, and the implications of choosing one path over the other.

Second, the bill encompasses all status options, thereby establishing its credibility and claim to inclusiveness. Every legitimate internationally recognized status option is offered to voters of every persuasion, a democratic process that denies no one their say but one which recognizes that the majority rules.

Putting on my Senate hat, let us remember that it was a Puerto Rico legislature that requested Congress to respond to the results of our 1993 plebiscite in which none of the options, for the first time since 1952, received a majority vote among our electorate.

H.R. 856 is the final manifestation of Congress's response to our two concurrent resolutions, and, as I have stated already, it is a clear and definite framework, providing both legitimate status options capable of implementation and a self-determination process consistent with democratic norms and internationally accepted practices. H.R. 856 should be enacted as written.

With your continual assistance, Puerto Rico and the residents of this island will enter the next millennium confident in their future

as first class American citizens, confident in their future and the American Dream.

The conscience of the democratic world will be closely watching this process. The international community will finally judge the firmness of our Nation in respecting the will of the people of Puerto Rico freely expressed in 1998, a democratic process which will be a test for the democratic institutions of our Nation.

Puerto Rico stands as the final frontier of the U.S. promise of the American Dream to all who live within its national borders. After 500 years of colonialism, 100 under the U.S. flag, it is time to provide the people of Puerto Rico with full and equal access to that dream, a dream whose constitutional underpinnings we have defended abroad with valor for over 80 years.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of this Committee.

[Applause.]

Mr. YOUNG. I thank the gentleman.

I will allow that to a short degree, but not too much, because we have a long witness list. I appreciate the enthusiasm.

I notice—and I will go to the next witness in a moment—I notice that you carefully said “the final frontier.” If you had stated “the last frontier,” I would have been mightily offended, because that is the motto of our State.

Now we have the president of the Popular Democratic Party. Mr. Vila, you are up.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. ANIBAL ACEVEDO VILA, PRESIDENT, POPULAR DEMOCRATIC PARTY, SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO**

Mr. VILA. Good morning. It is a pleasure to welcome you to the Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico.

[Applause.]

Mr. YOUNG. You have just taken some of the time away, and let's be very careful of what we are doing.

You are up.

Mr. VILA. In my previous experience before you, I expressed the views of our matter regarding the tenets of political formula to which we are audience here. It is, as you know, a formula that stresses the values and aspirations of the United States, preserving at the same time our distinct national and cultural identities. This is a status that has served the people of Puerto Rico well, that has allowed the sons and daughters of this island to work toward a common ideal of progress and well-being and to avoid the clashes between otherwise unaccommodating visions.

If improved, Commonwealth can serve both our people and your people even better. This is why we have tried for many years, and continue to try now, to allow our present status to achieve its full potential. It is not surprising then that our definition of “Commonwealth”—the way in which we describe the essence of our beliefs—is neither new to our people nor alien to this Committee.

Accordingly, I do not come today to go once again over terrain that has been very well covered in the past. Today, I would like to address issues that are most significant for the process that you have commenced and that still wait to be discussed.