

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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defining commonwealth without a U.S. citizenship, basically you are preordaining the result. And I know this Congress doesn't want that.

Mr. ROMERO-BARCELÓ. I have my doubts about that pride in the U.S. citizenship of some of the commonwealth leaders because of the way they talk about—

Mr. ACEVEDO-VILÁ. I am talking on behalf of the PDP and the President of the PDP.

Mr. ROMERO-BARCELÓ. And when you—my question is if that were eliminated from your definition, would you participate in the process or not?

Mr. ACEVEDO-VILÁ. I don't see where we can vote under those circumstances.

Mr. ROMERO-BARCELÓ. All right, thank you very much. For the New Progressive Party, Governor Luis Ferré, former governor. Luis, welcome to the Congress, the Committee. A couple of the members of the Committee have indicated to me that they have to go to vote, so they are trying to get back as soon as possible, including Chairman Young. The problem is that the bill that is now being taken care of in the House has certain votes that are pass votes one right after the other. They don't even have time for debate in between. That is why they have to stay there till those votes are taken.

If you would like to wait for them, we can accommodate and we can wait for them. Would you like to start now? Whatever you wish.

Mr. FERRÉ. I understand that, Mr. Chairman. I know that they are voting now, but do you think I should start now? Your suggestion is that we should wait?

Mr. ROMERO-BARCELÓ. Well, if you want to wait for them to come—a couple of them to come back or we can start and then they will be coming.

Mr. FERRÉ. Is Mr. Farrow going to make a statement?

Mr. ROMERO-BARCELÓ. No, go ahead, sure.

Mr. FERRÉ. Mr. Farrow.

Mr. ROMERO-BARCELÓ. Oh, Mr. Farrow. I am sorry. Mr. Farrow is here also. I think we better proceed. I think we better proceed then.

STATEMENT OF LUIS FERRÉ, PRESIDENT OF THE NEW PROGRESSIVE PARTY, SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO

Mr. FERRÉ. Mr. Chairman and members of the Natural Resources Committee, good afternoon. It is a pretty light day this afternoon, but also it's early to do things that is right.

My name is Luis A. Ferré. I have advocated statehood for Puerto Rico during my adult life, which extends to more than 93 years.

I served as Governor of Puerto Rico from 1969 to '73, and I appear before you as Founding President of the New Progressive Party, committed to achieve statehood for Puerto Rico, which won in 1996 election with a majority vote of 1,006,331 or 51.4 percent for Governor of Puerto Rico, a majority of the Senate with 19 seats out of 28, a majority of the House with 37 out of 54 seats, 54 mayors of a total of 78 municipalities and a vote of 973,654, or majority

for our Resident Commissioner who is presiding today at this meeting.

I am—the New Progressive Party, of course, stands firmly behind the Young bill, H.R. 856. And of course today when I sit here before you and I see Congressman Serrano, who presided this House three years ago when we voted in favor of another bill for statehood, when I see all these Members of—the Puerto Rican Members of the Congress of the United States here today, I say I am very happy that I have stood for statehood all the time, because all of them who have testified here say that they are proud to be Puerto Ricans, but they also are very proud and happy to have U.S. citizenship.

And that is the feeling that we have respect today. We have 2 million Puerto Ricans in the United States who are U.S. citizens and we have 3,600,000 in Puerto Rico. The 2 million in the United States are all enfranchised. They can vote for the President and for the Members of Congress. The 3 million in Puerto Rico are not enfranchised, the 3,600,000.

And those are the ones that want this thing to be defined finally. We cannot wait any longer. The ones who live up here can wait, but we cannot wait. And that is why it is very important to have the Young bill finally approved. A decision must be made, and we cannot permit that this bill be delayed unnecessarily.

We are all happy in this, that you have subscribed H.R. 856, which finally opens the road for Puerto Rico to make a decision on its ultimate political status in the dignified manner that becomes the United States Congress and the people of the United States, including statehood as an alternative, which was the implicit understanding under which the people of Puerto Rico welcomed the American forces of General Nelson Miles in 1898.

Unless we—I would like to note the American forces did not invade Puerto Rico. They landed in Puerto Rico, because there was no Puerto Rican fighting the American forces in Puerto Rico. In Cuba it was a different story. In Cuba they had to fight with the Spaniards, a big fight. In Puerto Rico, the Puerto Ricans immediately welcomed them and there was no fighting in Puerto Rico because the Spanish had to admit that—surrender and leave.

And then the Puerto Ricans said we want to keep—to be part of the United States. We want to be U.S. citizens, because we want in the long run to be a State of the Union. In Cuba, they said no, we want independence. Well, Cuba got its independence. We got our U.S. citizenship. A hundred years later, here we are. Cuba is a Latin American country. Puerto Rico is part of the United States. That is the big difference. And you can see how different it is. That is why the people of Puerto Rico want to maintain their U.S. citizenship and consolidate that citizenship with the Nation on an equal basis and with equal dignity.

I will not go into the historic elements, details of the landing of General Miles. It has been covered already here, but I would like to say the following thing. In 1950 Congress authorized the people of Puerto Rico to vote in referendum to accept or reject Law 600, which provided for the adoption of the local constitution, as well as to other amendments to the Jones Act of 1917. The Federal Relations Act remained unchanged, maintaining Puerto Rico as a non-

incorporated territory under the Territorial Clause of the United States Constitution and the full sovereignty of Congress.

I want to state that because it has been discussed here today and I want to maintain that there was no amendment to the territorial clause. And I am talking now from experience. I was a member of that constitutional assembly. And at that constitutional assembly, which considered Law 600, we looked into the matter of the way Law 600 was approved by Congress. And in all the years in this Congress where the law was discussed, it was always clearly stated that Puerto Rico was not being removed from the territorial clause of the United States.

And the Former Governor of Puerto Rico, Luis Muñoz Marin, said many times at these Committee hearings if Puerto Rico goes crazy and does something that is not quite in accordance with what we have agreed, you can—Congress can immediately repeal every thought of power it has given Puerto Rico. And that is why there was nothing passed.

In order to get the law approved in Congress, the lawyers of the Department of Interior had to work out a solution that was acceptable to Congress. Congress would not accept the compact, but they did accept something in the nature of a compact. And in the nature of a compact is not a compact. It is something similar to a compact, but not—doesn't have the binding quality of a compact. And that is why after that Governor Muñoz Marin and the Popular Party, and I have been fighting them since 1940, because do you know why I say so trying to make people of Puerto Rico believe that there has been a compact, that things have changed, that we were a different thing. But that was not true.

Now finally Congress has said let us go, let us look into this matter now. There was no compact. You are still under the clause of territory because that was the way the Congress approved Law 600. So therefore, it is today necessary to decide the question of Puerto Rico by this Congress.

In 1949, and many of you were not born then, I testified before a Committee of Congress, a subcommittee in Congress, on the subject of statehood for Puerto Rico. And at that time I said we are behind in our economic development because we are not a State of the Union. You have to give us our full—all the instruments that the States have to be able to bring Puerto Rico up to the same level as the rest of the nation. We don't want gifts, but we want the tools so that we can do it.

And at that time, I pointed out that a State of the Union, Mississippi, in 1940 had a personal income of \$268 and Puerto Rico had \$122, 45.5 percent. In '49, Puerto Rico had \$250 and Mississippi \$555, 45 percent, the same ratio. Since then, the United States has worked with the Former Governor of Puerto Rico in bringing new ideas of how to solve the problem of Puerto Rico, but they haven't worked. The only idea that would work is statehood.

If we would have two senators and six or seven Members of Congress, we would be able to work in Congress the solutions to our problem and we would have an economic position today where we would be similar to your States, but too much has happened since 1949. In 1956, Puerto Rico had \$468 per capita and Mississippi \$964, 48.5 percent. In 1996, now, this last year, Puerto Rico had

\$7882 and Mississippi \$16,966, 45.8 percent of Mississippi. That is why we need so much help from Congress, because we have not been able to pull up our economy to the level of Mississippi at least, and not even to the average of the United States.

So why? Because we are not a State of the Union. So all this discussion is really impractical. We have to solve the problem with the only way it can be done, which is by becoming a State of the Union.

Now the admission of Puerto Rico as a State of the Union would directly enhance the position of the United States in foreign affairs. It would be the logical conclusion of a process which started in 1898 when Puerto Rico came under the American flag. Puerto Rico before the year 1900 had the old European authoritarian social structure. This structure has gradually evolved into a democratic society under the American influence, which began by teaching our youth the American principles of individual liberty, equality of opportunity and respect for human dignity, through the school system and the political institutions, which were established after the year 1900.

That is the way Puerto Rico has grown. That is why I can see today Mr. Gutierrez sitting here, Congressman of his people, Mr. Serrano sitting here in the Congress of the United States. Mr. Serrano, who as I said, chaired the U.S. House three years ago for awhile brought forth the bill on Puerto Rico. And that is why I think it is important to understand that change in Puerto Rico. We are not a Latin American country anymore. Cuba is, because we changed, we took a different route. We became part of the United States. And we have wanted to be—we want to work up to the same level of dignity and equal rights as the rest of the country.

This, therefore, has been, to my mind, the most significant change that Puerto Rico has undergone under the American flag. The successful achievement of our economic well being is, therefore, a challenge to the American citizens of Puerto Rico and to our fellow citizens of the mainland, a challenge to show the world that the American way is the way to both economic success, social improvement and political freedom, which can usefully serve as a pattern to solve the vaster problems of other underprivileged countries of the world. A challenge of great political and human potentialities, which may be of great world significance.

With respect to the relations of the United States and Latin America, statehood for Puerto Rico would have still greater significance. It would serve to improve and solidify the position of America as a friend and partner, for it would be the best proof that our good-neighbor policy is not a mere diplomatic posture, but that it is an honest and sincere expression of respect of North America for Latin America. It would make Latin America feel that through Puerto Rico and through its representation in Congress, their problems and aspirations would be better understood because of our common cultural origin and tradition.

As Americans identified with the political and social philosophy of America and its institutions of law, we would be able to better interpret our foreign policy to them and help the United States to succeed in bringing better understanding and cooperation in the common problems of our hemisphere.

And at the present moment, the need to maintain and further develop the commercial interchange with Latin America, which is our natural market, when we are losing the European market to United Europe and the Pacific markets to Japan and China, is essential to our success and prosperity.

The growth of statehood forces in Puerto Rico have been overwhelming since 1968. In 1964, the Pro-commonwealth Party had 487,000 votes or 59.4 percent of the vote, and the Pro-statehood Party had 284,000 or 34.6. In the last election of 1996, there was a complete reversal. The Statehood Party obtained 963,000 votes or 51.3 percent, and the Pro-commonwealth Party 855,000 or 45.5 percent, which shows that statehood is the growing movement in Puerto Rico.

And remember that the Commonwealth Party also wants to keep U.S. citizenship. They are not thinking of giving it up. They want to hold onto it, so really when you come to think about it, 90 percent of the people of Puerto Rico want to continue to be U.S. citizens.

Now can they be U.S. citizens without statehood? That is the issue. That is the issue. And all this playing around isn't going to solve the problem, because United States is determined and understand that constitutionally the only way you can be a U.S. citizen is by being born in a State of the union. And therefore, that is the only solution that we can find.

We feel, therefore, that Puerto Rico is ripe to become a State after almost 100 years of successful democratic apprenticeship and to assume its full political rights and responsibilities. During all this century, more than 200,000 Puerto Ricans have served with distinction in all the wars that United States has been involved with more than 6000 casualties and in several cases with higher casualties than some States. More than 2000 Puerto Rican soldiers served in the Gulf War, amongst whom was a grandson of mine in the First Armored Division. Four, such as Fernando Luis Garcia, who gave their lives, heroically, in the line of duty, have been decorated with the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Other distinguished leaders who have also served the Nation are Admiral Horacio Rivero, in 1968, Commander in Chief of NATO Forces in Southern Europe and later Ambassador to Spain; Vice Admiral Diego Hernandez, who was in command of the Mediterranean Fleet; Major General Pedro del Valle commanded the U.S. Marine Corps, First Division, in the Pacific; General William A. Navas, Jr., who is Deputy in Command of the National Guard; Dr. Antonia Novello served as U.S. Surgeon General, and Dr. Enrique Mendez, Jr., as Deputy Surgeon General of the U.S. Army, amongst many.

The real test for Puerto Rican statehood should be how much we share common values with fellow citizens of the 50 States and how much Puerto Ricans believe in, honor, and defend the Constitution of the United States. A look at the myriad ways Puerto Ricans have served the United States over the last 99 years is enough to pass the test.

President Clinton has just appointed Mrs. Aida Alvarez, another Puerto Rican, to his Cabinet as head of Small Business Administration.

Puerto Rico is participating, successfully and with distinction, in Mainstream America to enrich its economy and its culture. There are about 2 million Puerto Ricans, as I said already, living throughout the nation, doing constructive and creative work as factory workers and professionals, in all fields of activity, thousands of physicians and engineers, thousands of teachers and professors in schools and universities.

In the arts and humanities, our rhythms and melodies have contributed to enrich American music. Justino Diaz and Pablo Elvira have been great voices at the Metropolitan Opera. Our great actors, like José Ferré and Raul Julia, have been American favorites.

We are contributing to enrich our cultural patrimony through museum collections. Today you can see on loan by the Fountain Museum at the National Gallery here in Washington the painting "Flaming June" by Lord Leighton, which is the key painting and masterpiece of the Victorian Exhibition.

We are also contributing to the richness of America in the area of civil government, amongst many others, Judge Juan Torruella, Chief Justice of the U.S. First Circuit of Appeals. Judge José Cabranes is a member of the U.S. Second Circuit of Appeals. And we have here all these members of this Congress, who are our pride to have them here.

In the area of sports, we have contributed with many baseball players, among whom Roberto Clemente has been included in the hall of fame. Charles Pasarell in 1969 was the first number one tennis player in the U.S., and now Gigi Fernandez is a tennis champion. Chi Chi Rodriguez is a golf professional.

And last, but not least, and I repeat this in the last meeting of the past Congress, but not least, to show how much Puerto Rico is embedded in the American life, it was the Puerto Rican judge of the Southern District of New York, Sonia Sotomayor, who was a fearless jurist a couple of years ago, decided to issue an injunction that could break the deadlock in the baseball strike, and by doing so, sent the baseball players back to Americans, after more than a year, the enjoyment of one of their favorite sports. Nobody could be part of America more than this competent jurist of 40 years of age. She was the true image of the freedom and respect of law America stands for.

Mr. Chairman, I think that the time has come for Congress to live up to the commitment of equality under which we were brought into its fold. It is time to do justice to more than 3.6 million disenfranchised American citizens of Puerto Rico. We congratulate you for taking the proper step with H.R. 856 to comply with your moral duty, as it becomes the United States Congress and our fellow citizens of the United States.

Thank you very much.

[Statement of Luis Ferré may be found at end of hearing.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Governor. And you are always an inspiration for me. As you get more mature, I see there is hope for me yet. And I want to thank you for your testimony. At this time, I understand, with the agreement of the other members—Mr. Kennedy, do you have to go somewhere?

Mr. KENNEDY. Thank you. Yes, I have a caucus I have to go to.