

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. BURTON. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I apologize to my colleagues for interrupting these hearings. I will have a more complete statement I would like to submit for the record. The CHAIRMAN. Without objection.

**STATEMENT OF HON. DAN BURTON, A U.S. REPRESENTATIVE
FROM INDIANA**

Mr. BURTON. Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for allowing me to testify regarding H.R. 856, The United States-Puerto Rico Political Status Act. As a senior member of the International Relations Committee, I am a cosponsor of this bill, and I have worked with Chairman Don Young and the Subcommittee Chairman Elton Gallegly to help them put together a fair and balanced bill. This bill is based on complete and open dialog with all the affected parties, and is the result of approximately 30 changes, 30 changes, from H.R. 3024, which was introduced in the 104th Congress.

The status quo in Puerto Rico cannot be maintained. The people of Puerto Rico have lived for far too long under a colonial status with second-class citizenship.

This is not a statehood bill for Puerto Rico, as some people seem to believe. It is not a pro-independence bill. It is not a pro-commonwealth bill. This is a balanced bill that allows the Puerto Rican people to exercise their right to self-determination. It lets the people of Puerto Rico make an informed choice about their political future.

We have compromised with all parties concerned by changing from a two-ballot format to a three-ballot format, thereby giving the citizens of Puerto Rico three options, namely statehood, separate sovereignty, and commonwealth, and giving the options equal positioning.

I have concerns with this change, given the inherent legal differences among the three options. The purpose of the previous two-ballot format was to make certain the voters understood that two of the options were for a new and permanent status consistent with full self-determination.

Those two options, statehood and separate sovereignty, would complete the decolonization process consistent with the commitments the United States made to the people of Puerto Rico and the United Nations when local constitutional government was established in 1952.

The option to continue the current commonwealth structure of local government was presented separately on the ballot under H.R. 3024 because it is not a constitutionally guaranteed or permanent status. Therefore I am afraid it could be misleading to the voters to present the less than full self-governing commonwealth option as a co-equal status with the full integration or separate nationhood status.

However, Mr. Young listened to the concerns of the political leaders of all parties in Puerto Rico, as well as the concerns of his colleagues in the Congress, and granted the change from a two to a three-ballot format. This example of leadership and show of good faith has not been reciprocated by opponents of this legislation. Disingenuousness, deception and in some cases outright falsehoods continue in their rhetoric and in their deeds.

This is unfortunate, because it only adds confusion to the issue. This confusion has disenfranchised voters and has delayed the process of Puerto Rican self-determination.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to end with the following observation. I have intentionally not publicly advocated for a particular outcome with respect to Puerto Rican status. My strong belief in a free people exercising their right to self-determination remains unwavering. The complexities of the history and uniqueness of the island of Puerto Rico do not change that fundamental belief. The citizens of Puerto Rico should have their day at the ballot box without duress and without any impediment to their ability to act out their own collective will.

Puerto Rican people also have a great responsibility in understanding their options and choosing the option they most agree with. They need to understand that there is no free lunch.

If they choose independence, the United States will deal with them as a partner in peace and a strong ally. If they choose statehood, we will add another star to our flag and welcome them officially as an equal partner into the greatest union known in the history of mankind. But keep in mind that with that benefit comes a great responsibility. If the Puerto Rican people choose to maintain commonwealth status, turning away from self-rule, we as a Congress will maintain the supreme administrative control of the island.

These are the options for the citizens of Puerto Rico to choose from. We as a Congress must facilitate the process in a fair manner. That is exactly what H.R. 856 seeks to accomplish and is why I am a strong supporter and cosponsor of the bill.

Thanks again, Mr. Chairman, for affording me the opportunity to testify today before you and the Resources Committee.

[Statement of Hon. Dan Burton follows:] ???

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Dan. And I appreciate your showing up, even if you are late. I know you have got a lot more responsibilities.

José Serrano, New York.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JOSÉ SERRANO, A U.S.
REPRESENTATIVE FROM NEW YORK**

Mr. SERRANO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity. I want to thank you and commend you for your work on this bill. I want to commend my colleague George Miller, the ranking member of the Committee, for his work and for his support.

The reason I support this bill, Mr. Chairman, is because I believe that this bill brings about what needs to be brought about, a legislative confrontation between Puerto Rico and the Congress of the United States, a legislative confrontation that will allow the people of Puerto Rico to fully understand whether in fact the United States is willing to take them in as a State or whether it wishes to begin a process to let them go as an independent nation.

It is interesting to know that since 1898 that question has truly never been asked in Puerto Rico. We were not asked, as Mr. Gutierrez said, whether we wanted to be part of this country. We were simply invaded. And that invasion is the longest running invasion in the world at this moment. It has gone on 99 years.