



THE AMERICAN LEGION

The World's Largest Veterans Organization

**EIGHTY-FIFTH NATIONAL CONVENTION
OF
THE AMERICAN LEGION
ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI
AUGUST 26, 27, 28, 2003**

RESOLUTION NO.: 37

SUBJECT: PUERTO RICO SELF-DETERMINATION

WHEREAS, Puerto Rico became a territory of the United States as a result of the treaty concluding the Spanish-American War of 1898; and on February 12, 1990 a mounted battalion of Puerto Rico was added to form the Puerto Rican Regiment U.S. Volunteers; and

WHEREAS, Over 200,000 United citizens from Puerto Rico have served valiantly in every war and armed conflicts our nation has fought, including the current war against terrorism; and four heroic Puerto Ricans, Hector Santiago-Colon, Euripides Rubio, Carlos James Lozada, and Luis Fernando García, were awarded the Medal of Honor; and four other courageous Puerto Ricans were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for their valor in defending American democracy and freedoms; and

WHEREAS, the United States Constitution promises equal protection under the law to all U.S. citizens, and yet the island's current political status treats U.S. citizens residing in Puerto Rico differently than citizens residing in the 50 states of the Union, reminiscent of the 'separate but equal' standard of a past era which, although eventually overturned, causes our society to continue to struggle with its repercussions; and

WHEREAS, There exists an ever-growing consensus among American veterans and leading Hispanic organizations, such as the American GI Forum, the largest organization of Hispanic veterans of the United States, that the time has come to empower Puerto Ricans men and women who have served with courage and distinction in the armed forces of the United States, and their fellow Puerto Ricans to make a decision regarding their island's ultimate political destiny; and

WHEREAS, in 1997 the legislature of Puerto Rico petitioned the United States Congress to respond to the democratic aspirations of the United States citizens of Puerto Rico by means of a federally sanctioned plebiscite to be held no later than 1998 and Congress has yet to respond to said petition; and the continued disenfranchisement of the island's 3.8 million residents constitutes a clear violation of the civil rights of these United States; and

WHEREAS, the legislature of the State of California passed a joint resolution, SJRR 21, on September 12, 2001 supporting self-determination for the 3.8 million U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico, including the thousands of Puerto Ricans who have served with distinction and valor the armed forces of the United States; and

WHEREAS, the American Legion, Department of Puerto Rico, declares that the time has come to enable Puerto Rico to exercise its right to self-determination and urges all citizens of the United States to support the enactment of a federal law leading to full self-government for Puerto Rico within the context of a congressionally sanctioned plebiscite; and therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By the American Legion, in National Convention assembled in St. Luis, Missouri, August 26, 27, 28, 2003, that The American Legion, Department of Puerto Rico, requests that the Congress pass, and the President sign into law, legislation that would define the political status options available to the United States citizens of Puerto Rico and authorize a plebiscite to provide and opportunity for Puerto Ricans to make an informed decision regarding the island's future political status.
