

Mr. CANTOR. I thank the gentleman from Washington for yielding.

Mr. Chairman, for 93 years individuals born in Puerto Rico have been U.S. citizens, but Puerto Rico itself has been a Commonwealth. And as neither State nor an independent political entity, it has, as Ronald Reagan once said, an unnatural status. It is part of our country, but not entirely. Separate from our country, but not really.

Ronald Reagan was motivated to support possible statehood for Puerto Rico in part because our communist enemies were at the time exploiting Puerto Rico's status to sow unrest in Latin America by calling for an end to "Yankee imperialism." While the Soviet Union may no longer be with us, Hugo Chavez is attempting to sow the same unrest, calling for an end to U.S. imperialism in Puerto Rico.

Reagan said back in 1980 that we must be ready to demonstrate that "the American idea can work in Puerto Rico." Over the past 2 years, my friend, Governor Luis Fortuno, has worked to do just that. The Governor and others are actively working to increase economic opportunity by reducing the burden the government places on the people, introducing competition and choice to education, lowering taxes, restoring law and order, and defending traditional values.

Listening to these achievements, I am reminded that the great experiment begun by our Founding Fathers is not in its last days, but instead is being constantly renewed as we work to expand what it means to live in a land of opportunity.

Our best export has always been our ideas. And first and foremost amongst those ideas is the promise that limited government based on the consent of the governed that respects the inalienable rights granted by God is the best hope for mankind on Earth. These ideas have also served as a magnet drawing all those who wish for a better life to our shores.

The citizens of Puerto Rico share in this American inheritance. They share in our values and in their belief in the American Dream. The citizens of Puerto Rico deserve the opportunity to speak to their aspirations for the future in a sanctioned plebiscite.

If I were drafting this bill, Mr. Chairman, I would draft it differently. And while this legislation is far from perfect, I am motivated at the end of the day to support it by the belief that America's promise is not finite in terms of space or time.

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Mr. Chairman, I yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. GUTIERREZ).

Mr. GUTIERREZ. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Look, let's take another look at it. Mr. LUNGREN came before us, and on numerous occasions, what did he say? Allow Puerto Rico to become a State. Just check his words. Before that it was Mr. BURTON from Indiana. In other words, they equate American citizen-

ship with a fundamental, inalienable right to statehood.

There's no one right, inalienable right, that the people of Puerto Rico have. It's to their independence. And the Founding Fathers that we like to talk so much about would agree with us here today. If Thomas Jefferson were here today, he would say one thing: There is one and only one inalienable right of the people of Puerto Rico, something that could never be taken away from them, and that's to their independence.

And why do I bring this issue up today? I bring the issue up today so that we can understand that Puerto Rico is not just 4 million American citizens on an island; it is a culturally, it is a psychologically, constituted geographically, linguistically constituted nation of people, Puerto Ricans. Go to that nation of people today, and while they may love and cherish America, which is actually a good thing if you think about it today, a nation of people who love and cherish America, they still are fundamentally Puerto Rican. Ask them.

Has anybody been to a Puerto Rican parade in New York? Go out there with American flags on the day of a Puerto Rican parade. See how much money you make at the Puerto Rican day parade in New York or Chicago. No, it's an affirmation of who we are. Very different than the Italian day parade, than the Irish parade, than the Polish parade, in which you see many American flags.

Why is it that we continue to affirm this? Why is it that even those proponents of statehood for Puerto Rico have not been able to banish the Olympic team? They dare not. Why is it they have not been able to banish the language of Spanish? They dare not. Because those are things that are intrinsic to the people of Puerto Rico.

Look, let's stop kidding ourselves. Let's stop kidding ourselves. This is an attempt to do one thing and one thing only. Everybody talks about the American citizens and their right to statehood. What about the American citizens, and I say the only inalienable right that they have, to their independence? What about the 1.8 million pages that were sent to Congressman SERRANO on the backs of the FBI and intelligence agency for those of us that fought for Puerto Rican independence? What about those that have been jailed? What about those poets? What about those great Puerto Rican patriots who believe and will continue to believe in independence for Puerto Rico? That is a reality that we need to deal with.

So when Mr. CANTOR was speaking about the inalienable right, he was speaking about the inalienable right that the Founding Fathers bestowed upon those to be free from colonialism.

The current situation in Puerto Rico is deplorable. The current status of Puerto Rico is a colonial status. And we should move forward to eliminate

that stain in our relationship with the people of Puerto Rico. But they have just as much right to independence, they have just as much right to independence as they do to statehood. And as a matter of fact, they have asserted that right.

Let me end with this: We keep saying let them, congressionally sanction. Ladies and gentlemen, they have come together on numerous occasions, and on each and every occasion, they have said, We don't want to be a State. They would like something different. Why are we imposing?

And really, look, everybody talks about the Founding Fathers. You know how the Founding Fathers did it? They had a Constitutional Convention. They got together and they had delegates from different States come together so they could have a Declaration of Independence, so they could build a Constitution. You know what? Let not the Congress of the United States say that this is democracy. Do you know what true democracy is? This Congress saying to the people of Puerto Rico get together in a constitutional convention, assemble yourselves, decide among yourselves, and we the Congress of the United States will respect that decision. We will not impose a process. We will not impose definitions upon you.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Chairman, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. PIERLUISI. Mr. Chairman, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. GRAYSON).

Mr. GRAYSON. Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the opportunity to speak on this important matter. This legislation is about what is right and what is fair.

Since 1898 residents of Puerto Rico have been deprived of full and equal political representation. Though its residents are American citizens, the island is not a State and its residents have no equal voting representation in Congress. Given a choice, Puerto Ricans might opt to change this situation. Some in Puerto Rico might opt for a statehood for the island, some might opt for independence, and some might opt for sovereign association. But Puerto Ricans have never been invited by Congress to make that choice. They are American citizens, but they are deprived of equal voting rights.

If Puerto Rico were a State, it would have six or seven representatives in Congress instead of one who cannot vote on the floor of the House. If Puerto Rico were a State, it would have two Senators instead of none. If Puerto Rico were a State, the people there would help to choose our President. Puerto Rico is, in fact, one of the largest populations in the entire world that has no say in choosing the leadership of its country, a democratic country. Now they cannot do anything like that. A host of policy decisions are made in Puerto Rico's name by us, by Congress and by the President, on behalf of Puerto Rico's people without their full or equal input or consent, and that is deeply, deeply unfair.