

And it is not binding on this Congress. Once we have the results, we will act accordingly. We will have discretion to deal with these results. Residents of Puerto Rico have contributed so much to this country. Our sons and daughters have served alongside their fellow citizens from the States on countless battlefields in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.

The CHAIR. The time of the gentleman from Puerto Rico has expired.

Mr. PIERLUISI. I yield myself 1 additional minute.

As I was saying, during a late night patrol behind enemy lines, soldiers from Puerto Rico, Utah, Georgia watch each others' backs. Any differences in culture or language mean nothing. I went to Afghanistan recently to visit our troops in Afghanistan. I know what we're talking about. What matters is that the flag on their uniform is the same.

As I have said many times before, I support statehood because I believe the people of Puerto Rico have earned that right, should they choose to exercise it, to become full and equal citizens of the United States. But this is not a statehood bill. And that's why, with all due respect to the gentleman from Washington State, we will cross that bridge when we get to it.

The time and the day that Puerto Rico, the majority of the people request for statehood, you will have ample time to debate it, to deal with it, to impose a transitional period, whatever this Congress or a future Congress might want to do.

I was elected to represent all of the people of Puerto Rico, including those whose vision for the island's future differs from my own.

The CHAIR. The time of the gentleman from Puerto Rico has again expired.

Mr. PIERLUISI. I yield myself 15 additional seconds.

The intention of H.R. 2499 is to sponsor a fair process of self-determination in Puerto Rico, not to predetermine the outcome of that process. I have to say, in the 21st century, it is about time that this Congress, at the very least, ask the 4 million American citizens if they want to continue having the second-class citizenship they're earning and they're having today.

Vote in support of H.R. 4599.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Alaska (Mr. YOUNG).

(Mr. YOUNG of Alaska asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. YOUNG of Alaska. Mr. Chairman, this is a rehash of 12 years ago. I want to compliment the Delegate from Puerto Rico for representing his people.

The Governor supports this legislation, the Senate supports this legislation, and the House supports this legislation. Strongly, the Puerto Ricans that represent their people support this

legislation. I think it's inappropriate for those that do not represent those people to speak out against this legislation. I think it's wrong not to recognize that this is long overdue.

Mr. Chairman, 112 years ago, 112 years ago Puerto Rico became Puerto Rico. They were supposed to be a State. And I am the only Member of this House that has gone through the statehood battles. This is not a statehood bill. As the Delegate has said, this is an opportunity to make that decision. Puerto Rico is not a territory. They're a Commonwealth. We were a territory. There is a great deal of difference. We did make that decision with the help of Congress, and we became a State. And I am proud of that, and I was proud of this body.

I am a little disappointed in some of the arguments that I hear against this bill: This is a statehood bill. This is a sneak attack. It was brought on us unexpectedly.

This bill has been before this Congress for 18 months, and we have discussed this issue for 12 years and longer. My bill, as I call it, the Young bill, was a statehood bill. That is a bill I would have preferred, but this is not. But this is what the Governor wants, the Delegate wants, the Senate wants, the House wants, and the people of Puerto Rico want. I think that's what we have to consider in this House. We are not the body as a whole. We are the body of the individual that represents the people, and I've argued this for many years because I am one, as the Delegate is.

The CHAIR. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. PIERLUISI. I yield the gentleman from Alaska 1 additional minute.

Mr. YOUNG of Alaska. It is time that we act on this legislation. Let it go forward. Let us do what is fair.

And the arguments against this legislation, some of them are very frivolous. The English language. We were not required to have English when we became a State. We had many different languages, and we became a State. We do speak English, and we speak other languages within my State. That doesn't hold us back or make us any less.

But the idea that we have 4 million people that have waited for an opportunity to become a State, an independent nation, or whatever they wish, a free association, it is time we give them that opportunity. To have a body that is supposed to represent all the people but individually represent an area, we should recognize that right, as we did when we became a State.

I am proud that the Congress made us a State. We worked for that, and I think it's time we give an opportunity for the Puerto Ricans to make a decision as to whether they are a State again or whether they're a territory, or whatever they want to be, but to give them the opportunity.

And again, when that bridge comes—and again, I can talk about bridges, la-

dies and gentlemen—when that bridge happens, we will cross it, as far as cost goes. But it's time we recognize the great people, the warriors of Puerto Rico as they serve this country, but yet they cannot vote for their Commander in Chief. It's time we pass this legislation.

Mr. Chairman, as an original co-sponsor of H.R. 2499, I am pleased that the House of Representatives is now considering this important legislation. I want to compliment the author of the bill, Resident Commissioner PEDRO PIERLUISI and my good friend the Governor of Puerto Rico, Luis Fortuño for their tireless commitment on behalf of democracy in Puerto Rico.

I have been involved in Puerto Rico democracy for most of my Congressional career. In fact, it was my bill, H.R. 856 that was approved by the House of Representatives on March 4, 1998. Prior to passage, I conducted two public hearings in Puerto Rico and literally heard from hundreds of Puerto Ricans who passionately love this country and thirst for the opportunity to determine their own political future.

The Puerto Rican people are warm, hard-working, passionate and patriotic. In fact, only one state has proportionately sent more of their sons and daughters to fight for this nation than Puerto Rico. Yet, for over a century, we continue to deny these brave warriors, who proudly wear the uniform of this nation, the chance to vote for their Commander in Chief. This is fundamentally wrong and must be changed prior to our next Presidential election.

As someone who arrived in Alaska 50 years ago, I can certainly relate to the pleas of those of my good friend former Governor and Resident Commissioner Carlos Romero Barcelo who reminds us that: "We are now being ruled by the President and Congress without the consent of the people of Puerto Rico."

I still vividly remember the words of our Former Territorial Governor and U.S. Senator, Ernest Gruening, who would shout to anyone who cared to listen that: "Let us end American colonialism." While he was talking about Alaska, similar statements have been made by Puerto Rican elected officials for decades.

H.R. 2499 may not be a perfect bill. It is, however, a fair bill which does not exclude or favor any status option.

It is frankly hard to believe that it has been 12 years since the House last voted on a Puerto Rico status bill and 112 years since Puerto Rico became a U.S. territory. It is far past time to allow the 4 million people of Puerto Rico to vote in a federally sanctioned plebiscite and it would be appropriate if this the 111th Congress were to make that vote a reality.

I urge an "aye" vote on H.R. 2499. We should no longer deny the people of Puerto Rico their right to determine their own political future.

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Mr. Chairman, I would like to inquire as to how much time is remaining on each side.

The CHAIR. The gentlewoman from New York has 24 minutes remaining, the gentleman from Puerto Rico has 14¼ minutes remaining, and the gentleman from Washington State has 22 minutes remaining.

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Mr. Chairman, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from New York (Mr. RANGEL).