

Mr. PIERLUISI. Mr. Chairman, I yield 1 minute to the gentlelady from Guam (Ms. BORDALLO).

Ms. BORDALLO. Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of H.R. 2499, the Puerto Rico Democracy Act of 2009, introduced by my colleague, Congressman PEDRO PIERLUISI.

As the chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife, I fully support this bill which the full Natural Resources Committee reported out favorably on July 22 last year.

H.R. 2499 is an important bill for Puerto Rico and the other U.S. territories. As the delegate from Guam, I understand the desire of residents in the territories to decide their future and make a determination about their political future. Unlike other speakers here this afternoon, we on Guam are also in this same process of trying to determine our status. H.R. 2499 will provide the people of Puerto Rico a congressionally sanctioned process to express their preference regarding their political status.

Each territory, Mr. Chairman, is on a different path towards self-determination, and what is appropriate for Puerto Rico may not be suitable for other territories. But I firmly believe that the process established by H.R. 2499 is the best way, and I urge my colleagues to vote "yes."

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON), and I understand the gentleman from Puerto Rico will yield him 1 minute as well.

Mr. PIERLUISI. That is correct.

The CHAIR. The gentleman from Indiana is recognized for 2 minutes.

Mr. BURTON of Indiana. Mr. Chairman, this is so muddled up I don't know if anybody that's paying attention really understands what's going on.

This is just a process, that's all it is. The people who are going to decide whether or not any territory becomes a State is this body and the Senate. What we are asking for is a recommendation from the people of Puerto Rico. They're dying for this country; more have died percentage-wise in conflicts than any State in the Union. Their Governor wants this plebiscite, their Representative wants this plebiscite, their state senate wants this plebiscite, and the state house of representatives want this plebiscite. They know what this bill is. They've come and they've testified before the Resources Committee. They know, and they represent the people of Puerto Rico.

So these people coming down here from New York and everywhere else, they don't know; they don't know what they're talking about.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIR

The CHAIR. The gentleman will suspend.

The Chair will remind all persons in the gallery that they are here as guests

of the House and that any manifestations of approval or disapproval of proceedings or other audible conversation is in violation of the rules of the House.

Mr. BURTON of Indiana. The people who want to have this determination made are the people of Puerto Rico, and their elected representatives altogether say let's have this bill passed. And yet people from New York and from Washington—I mean, I don't know how close the State of Washington is to Puerto Rico, but it's about 4,000 miles, maybe 5,000, and New York is quite a ways away. Why don't we listen to what the elected representatives of Puerto Rico want.

And it's Democrat and Republican. This is not a partisan issue. So my view is, let's let them have the plebiscite. Let's come up with a process that will work. We've tried this before, and it has been split up all over the place. This process will work. It will boil it down to what the people of Puerto Rico really want. I believe they want statehood, and we ought to let them determine that. If their representatives want it, if their Governor wants it, if everybody else wants it, and if they are sacrificing their lives for this country, then by gosh we ought to give them a chance to be a State.

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Mr. Chairman, may I inquire as to how much time remains on every side.

The CHAIR. The gentlewoman from New York has 8½ minutes remaining; the gentleman from Puerto Rico has 12¼ minutes remaining; and the gentleman from Washington State has 20 minutes remaining.

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. PIERLUISI. Mr. Chairman, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER).

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Chairman, I rise in support of H.R. 2499, the Puerto Rico Democracy Act, introduced by our colleague, Mr. PIERLUISI.

Many of us on the Natural Resources Committee, including myself, Mr. RAHALL, and Mr. YOUNG, have been grappling with this issue of political status for Puerto Rico for decades, and we each have the scars to prove it. We have held numerous hearings over the years in Washington and in Puerto Rico. We have listened to the representatives of not only the political parties, but the citizens of Puerto Rico, and we've heard testimony from across the spectrum, including the representatives of each of the political parties in Puerto Rico. In light of all that experience, I am convinced that Congress must provide the people of Puerto Rico the opportunity to voice their preferences. That is what today's legislation would do, a fair opportunity for a self-determination process.

Puerto Rico has been a territory for 112 years, and it has been an important part of this country in peacetime and

in war. Four million residents of Puerto Rico are American citizens and they are bound by Federal law, and yet Congress has never asked Puerto Ricans to officially express their views on the island's political status.

This legislation does not bind future Congresses. H.R. 2499 doesn't require the Federal Government to create a Puerto Rican state, nor does it force us to work toward Puerto Rican independence. This bill simply asks the citizens of Puerto Rico whether they want to remain a U.S. territory in their current status or whether they would prefer another political status. And if it turns out they favor another political status, another vote would then be authorized to determine which status option they prefer.

Considering the context and the history wrapped up in this issue, this legislation is as fair as you can possibly expect. I would hope that this House would respond by passing this legislation and sending the message to the people of Puerto Rico that Congress would welcome their telling us what they prefer their status to be. That is a choice that they will make in a free and open process, and they can proceed to the second question or not. But we will have asked them, instead of what we've seen in the past is people scrambling, depending upon political advantage in Puerto Rico, one particular time trying to rush to get a vote or get a statement or get a plebiscite. This is a process that's set out, it's fair, and we should support it.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to yield 1 minute to the gentleman from California (Mr. MCCLINTOCK).

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Chairman, the proponents have a problem. They want statehood for Puerto Rico, but the people of Puerto Rico keep voting "no." Well, what to do. Well, they replace a straightforward up-or-down vote with a very clever two-step process. If 40 percent support the Commonwealth and only 20 percent favor each of three alternatives, the overwhelming plurality is defeated on the first ballot, and they're left only to choose among three options, none of which they support. And then, just to be sure, proponents stuff the ballot box by letting non-Puerto Ricans vote just as long as they were born there. Well, that means that, as a Californian, I should be entitled to vote in New York's elections because I was born there.

This bill isn't needed for a referendum. Puerto Rico can do that on its own. The purpose of this bill is to imply congressional support of this rigged election process that has no legal effect, that has surrendered any moral validity, and that promises only to set off bitter divisions within the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to yield 2 minutes to the gentlelady from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN).