The Times’ editorial went on to read, “The bill is deliberately designed to unfairly make it harder for Puerto Rico to keep its current status as a territory with special benefits rather than as a State.”

The fairest way to have a vote on this issue would have been to have a simple, straightforward ballot with three possible states: statehood, Commonwealth, or independence. However, the proponents of this bill seem to know that the statehood option would not receive over half of the vote in a fair, simple, straightforward ballot. Each time Puerto Rico has voted on this issue, less than half the people have voted for statehood.

When Alaska and Hawaii were admitted to the Union, some 80 or 95 percent of the people in those States voted for and wanted statehood. This is not the case in Puerto Rico.

I have serious reservations about making a territory a State with less than half the people being required to ratify that status. In addition, the last time this issue came up, it was estimated that it would have an immediate impact of several billions of dollars on the Federal budget. With the economy the way it is now, statehood for Puerto Rico would be even more expensive today. As one previous speaker pointed out, “You can’t set up a vote on this any time they want, but the statehood proponents want Congress to rig the election in favor of statehood.”

That is not the right way to do this. Mr. Chairman, so I oppose this bill. For all of these reasons, I urge my colleagues to vote “no” on this bill and to defeat the gimmick process that we are dealing with here today.

Ms. VELAZQUEZ. Mr. Chairman, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. RAHALL. Mr. Chairman, I yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from New York (Mr. SERRANO).

(Mr. SERRANO asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. SERRANO. I thank the gentleman.

So much has been said today about what this bill does. Yet so little is understood, perhaps, about what this bill really does. The bill continues to be a bill I support strongly because, if nothing else, the strength of it is that it begins a process.

When I have told many Members of what the bill doesn’t do, they ask me, “Then why do you support it?”

I support it because it begins a process. I support it because, for the first time in 112 years, the people of Puerto Rico will have an opportunity to express their will to the world as they wish. Then we don’t have to act on it. I suspect that we will, but we won’t be imposing anything on anyone.

Another argument is that this bill forces statehood on Puerto Rico, but that argument is made by people who say there is no majority in support of statehood in Puerto Rico. Therefore, people would be voting out of—what?

One very important point: People say that the Commonwealth is defeated. No. In the first vote, you can choose to remain a Commonwealth. In the second vote, you stop being a colony.

Vote for this bill.

Mr. RAHALL. I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. DANIEL E. LUNGREN).

Mr. D. E. LUNGREN of California. Mr. Chairman, I am an original cosponsor of H.R. 2499, the Puerto Rico Democracy Act. I stand here proudly in support of this bill. I am somewhat surprised by some of the criticism registered here. I understand how we can have differences of opinion, but to suggest that somehow this undermines the authority of the Congress to deal with States or that it is somehow contrary to the Constitution is just beyond the pale as far as I can see.

As the gentleman who just spoke before me said, this is an attempt to get an idea of how the people of Puerto Rico feel about one of their most important issues. They are American citizens. People have raised all sorts of scenarios about what may or may not happen. Go back and look at how other States have been admitted to the Union. Ultimately, the decision is made by the Congress.

Remember reading about Utah. When they were a territory, Utah wasn’t accepted in the Union until they changed a certain policy on marriage. It was an extraordinary change that was required, but that was what happened. Congress didn’t suddenly stand up and say, ‘Oh, yes. You’ve said you want to be a State. Therefore, we take no action.’

This is a way of our getting a measure of the sentiment of the people of Puerto Rico. I don’t see why we should be upset about that. I know there are some people who observe and have suggested that somehow this undermines the Constitution and that somehow there is the Tennessee’s plot. Examine the history of Tennessee. Examine the history of the response of Congress. It is absolutely historically factual that Congress decides under what terms a new State will be formed, when and how we will accept a new State.

So all I am saying is allow this to go forward. Allow us to find out what the sentiment is here. Our good friend Luis Fortuno is not someone who shows little respect for the Constitution.

Pass this bill.

Ms. VELAZQUEZ. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I just want to ask the gentleman from California a question: So, basically, if this legitimate argument, you are clearly stating that this is a pro-statehood bill, aren’t you?

Mr. D. E. LUNGREN of California. If the gentlewoman would yield, No.

Ms. VELAZQUEZ. Reclaiming my time, Mr. Chairman, I would like to inquire why it takes so long.