

this legislation will exclude Commonwealth status in the planned plebiscite by developing a shell game—with a first-round process to legitimize it.

The process that enabled the creation of the Commonwealth was adopted by Congress. The Puerto Rico Constitution was ratified by Congress. This form of government has been upheld by our U.S. courts. That is why it's so appalling, deceitful, and shameful that the people of Puerto Rico will be denied this option. No matter how much statehood supporters complain about Commonwealth, it's the law of the land.

Congress should not be in the business of picking winners and losers for this kind of referendum. It is not our job to create artificial conditions that will enable statehood to win a popular vote in Puerto Rico. Becoming a State of the Union is something that people must embrace knowingly, voluntarily, and openly. If the people of Puerto Rico want to become a State, the statehood option should stand on its own. Why are you so afraid? There should be no need to hide behind process or petty politics.

In a matter so fundamentally important to over 4 million Puerto Ricans, you would think that a public hearing could have been convened to listen to their views. But, no. The Committee on Natural Resources and this Congress know better than the people of Puerto Rico. It is, after all, their future that it is at stake. It is an outrage that a congressional hearing on the status issue has not been held in Puerto Rico since the 1990s. As many know, I have advocated for a constitutional convention to begin the process of determining Puerto Rico's status. Certainly, this is not the only option for going forward. But a sham of a process is definitely not a valid democratic option for choosing Puerto Rico's future.

Mr. Chairman, the concept of self-determination is fundamental to democracy. Sadly, H.R. 2499 turns its back on this very principle. We must not allow politics to undermine our democratic values nor be swayed by arguments that make no sense. If you truly want to honor the contributions of Puerto Ricans and the fabric of the Puerto Rican community, vote "no" on this bill. Stand up for what is truly right. Choose principles over politics. Let Puerto Ricans decide their own destiny without undue—undue—congressional demands. Vote "no" on H.R. 2499.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. RAHALL. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself 2 minutes.

Mr. Chairman, a couple of claims have been made by previous speakers about why not have a direct vote on statehood, yes or no, like Hawaii and Alaska did. I think it's worth clarifying here that those States were already incorporated territories—and the Representative from Alaska can speak to this better than I can—meaning that it was constitutionally clear that they would eventually become States. Puer-

to Rico is unincorporated, meaning it can become a nation as well as a State.

The plebiscites would determine if Puerto Ricans wanted to pursue nationhood or statehood. A number of Puerto Ricans, as we all know, want statehood; some, independence; some, free association with the U.S., such as the U.S. has with Palau and two other areas. It is unclear what the second largest group of Puerto Ricans, those who vote for the Commonwealth Party, want among the real options of continued territory status, free association, independence, and statehood.

Another claim that my ranking member and good friend Mr. HASTINGS made was that the Congress of the United States would be reduced in seats if Puerto Rico were granted statehood. I'm going to quote directly from a CRS report that was done on this issue when it said that, New States usually resulted in additions to the size of the House of Representatives in the 19th and early 20th century. The exceptions to this general rule occurred when States were formed from other States—Maine, Kentucky, and my home State of West Virginia, as I have referenced already. These State Representatives came from the allocation of Representatives of the States from which the new ones had been formed.

So I don't think the assertion that the number of Members of Congress in its totality would be reduced, with the addition, if that were to be the outcome of Puerto Rico being a State were to occur.

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Mr. Chairman, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from Puerto Rico (Mr. PIERLUISI), the sponsor of this legislation and truly the driving force.

Mr. PIERLUISI. Mr. Chairman, I rise in representation of the people of Puerto Rico. In fact, I am the only elected representative of the people of Puerto Rico in this Congress. In such capacity, I introduced H.R. 2499.

I have heard some complaints about process. Let's address the complaints about process, both the process here in this Congress as well as the process that this bill provides for to happen in Puerto Rico.

The process in this Congress, crystal clear. I introduced the bill along with a record number of original cosponsors. When we compared it with any previous bill relating to the status of Puerto Rico, about a month later the committee of jurisdiction, the Committee on Natural Resources, held a public hearing in which all political leaders of Puerto Rico were able to attend and testify before this Congress. A month later, the bill was marked up, like it should have been, and it was amended, it was improved upon by the committee of jurisdiction. Briefings have been held. It has been discussed widely in this Congress as well as elsewhere. So the process in this Congress has been a fair process, and it's about time we get a vote on it.

Talking about the bill itself, H.R. 2499 is simple, and it is fair. It identifies the valid political status options for Puerto Rico and authorizes a congressionally sanctioned plebiscite process among those options. It shows the highest respect for the people of Puerto Rico by being candid with them about their real status choices.

I have heard the word "meddling." We're not meddling. We're assuming a responsibility. The relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States is bilateral in nature. For any change in the status of Puerto Rico to happen, two things must happen: the people of Puerto Rico must request it, the 4 million American citizens strong who live in Puerto Rico, and Congress must grant it. Congress is vested.

It's incredible, indeed, that in the 110 years that Puerto Rico has been a territory, Congress has not even asked the 4 million American citizens living in Puerto Rico whether they want to remain under the current relationship, whether they want to continue having Puerto Rico as a territory of the United States. That is a fair question. It is the threshold question.

The bedrock principle of our system is government by consent, and the first plebiscite provided in this bill informs Congress whether a majority consents to an arrangement that denies the 4 million U.S. citizens the right to have a meaningful voice in making the laws that govern their lives. The latest example was health care reform. I worked harder than anybody else in this Congress to get fair treatment for my people in Puerto Rico, and I got the support of my colleagues from New York of Puerto Rican origin, among others. But you know what? It wasn't good enough. We were not treated like our fellow American citizens. The treatment we got fell far short of that.

If a majority of the people of Puerto Rico, though, do wish to continue living under these conditions, we will abide by that, and that's the first consultation that this bill provides for. However, if a majority of the people of Puerto Rico say to this Congress that they do not wish to continue being a territory, then the bill provides the only three nonterritorial options that we can offer or include in this plebiscite in accordance with both U.S. law and international law. Those options are crystal clear. We don't need studies. We don't need to define them further than necessary. Statehood, independence, and free association. And for anybody who is concerned about the concept of free association, we've done it before. Marshall Islands, Micronesia, the Republic of Palau, those are free associated states with a relationship with the U.S. Let's hear from the people of Puerto Rico.

I want to speak plainly now. This bill has been unfairly characterized as a statehood bill. I am a strong proponent of statehood for Puerto Rico; yes, that's so. But this bill is not a statehood bill. That's one of the options.