

**H.R. 900, PUERTO RICO  
DEMOCRACY ACT OF 2007;  
AND H.R. 1230, PUERTO RICO  
SELF-DETERMINATION ACT  
OF 2007**

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**LEGISLATIVE HEARINGS**

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON INSULAR AFFAIRS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

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But to continue to ask for a commonwealth that is colonial in nature is a disservice to the people of Puerto Rico, is a disservice to this country, and it is a disservice to democracy throughout the world.

I will not rest until the colony is gone. It served a purpose for a long time perhaps, and I give credit to those who took it from where it was to where it is. But it was never the intention of the founders of the commonwealth to keep it as a permanent condition, and it is a condition.

And so I find myself today in a unique situation, a situation similar or identical to what Nydia finds herself in. We were both born in the colony, and now we serve in the Congress of the power that holds the colony. As a Puerto Rican, I don't want my birthplace to be a colony. As an American Congressman, I think it is indecent that my country has colonies in 2007. And this must end.

For that reason I proposed this bill. For this reason I think that the American family will resolve this problem jointly, and the Puerto Rican family will do the same.

Thank you.

Ms. CHRISTENSEN. Thank you, Mr. Serrano. Before I move to the author of H.R. 1230, I ask unanimous consent that the gentleman from Illinois, Mr. Weller, be allowed to sit on the dais and participate in the hearing. Hearing no objections, so ordered.

I also understand, Mr. Weller, that you need to leave us in a few minutes? And we are limiting our opening statements, but I will allow you to acknowledge the witnesses that have traveled today.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. JERRY WELLER, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ILLINOIS**

Mr. WELLER. Madame Chair, let me just thank you for the courtesy of being able to join you and our colleagues on this very, very important Subcommittee.

I come here today both to support H.R. 900, as well as to echo the comments of the lead sponsors of H.R. 900, my friend, José Serrano, as well as Luis Fortuño, the elected representative of the people of Puerto Rico on behalf of H.R. 900.

I believe Congress has a role to play, and I also believe that H.R. 900 puts into place the appropriate response. I have been a witness as well as a participant in this process over the last 12 years. For some it has been frustrating, but I believe H.R. 900 provides the true answer.

I have a much longer statement I would like to submit for the record. But again, I am here to support H.R. 900. And Madame Chairman, thank you very much for the courtesy of allowing me to present my very brief comments, as well as to express my support. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Weller follows:]

**Statement of The Honorable Jerry Weller, a Representative in Congress from the State of Illinois**

Madam Chairwoman, I am here today to support H.R. 900, the Serrano-Fortuño bill, because I believe Congress has a role to play and a responsibility to enable a process to achieve democratic majority rule in Puerto Rico on the status issue.

The history of frustrating and disagreeable locally sponsored status votes teaches us that a three way choice among options that include a commonwealth definition

already repeatedly rejected by Congress virtually ensures minority rule in the form of indecisive plurality votes.

We need to sponsor a vote with a ballot that enables a majority to vote to continue the current status as defined by federal law, or to seek change. Only if a majority vote to seek a new status would there ever be a vote on statehood or some form of nationhood, either independence or free association. So who is afraid of majority rule, and how is it unfair?

I have heard all the hype about exclusion of commonwealth as an option, and it is just not true. This bill is fair to commonwealth as it really is under current federal law, and may even give it an advantage by asking voters to choose between the known and the unknown.

What is not fair is to return to the practice of asking voters to choose among unattainable options defined in the ideological hot house of local politics, without any federally sponsored process of legitimate and informed self-determination based on constitutionally defined options.

H.R. 1230 will invite yet another agonizing debate and inconclusive process focused on an option that is not legally possible or politically realistic. That does not empower people, that disempowers people.

We should not waste any more time on the notion of a bilateral compact to make Puerto Rico a separate nation under the American flag. I agree with those who believe this is just a delaying tactic to preserve the status quo. The only way the status quo should be preserved any longer is if the majority consent to it in a democratic process, and that is what H.R. 900 ensures.

So we need to shift the focus away from flawed ideology and delay tactics embodied in H.R. 1230, and focus on the real issue and legitimate self-determination as proposed by H.R. 900.

I know there are economic and political arguments that can be made for and against statehood. Personally, I think statehood is probably the best way to ensure that Puerto Rico will develop economically, so that the current \$15 billion federal subsidy of commonwealth status ends, and Puerto Rico can prosper enough to afford to pay its own way in the union. Every territory that has become a state has developed and risen to and with the level of the national economy.

I also think it is silly to try to predict whether Puerto Rico will send more Democrats or Republicans to Congress if it becomes a state, because they elect both Republicans and Democrats now, and they are not different than the rest of the U.S. politically. What really matters is whether they have full democratic participation, because what we know is that both parties are competitive in Puerto Rico and will thrive when Americans in Puerto Rico not only attend the national party conventions, but vote in the elections that follow.

However, I don't think the economic and political arguments are as important as the constitutional and moral issues. The territorial clause in Article IV of the Constitution was never intended to result in a century of territorial status for what is now close to 4 million U.S. citizens in Puerto Rico.

How can 4 million U.S. citizens be represented by one non-voting member of the House?

Madame Chairwoman—thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts and testimony here today.

Ms. CHRISTENSEN. Thank you, Mr. Weller. The Chairman now recognizes the author of H.R. 1230, Representative Velázquez, for any statement she may have.

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Thank you.

Ms. CHRISTENSEN. And my Chairwoman of the Small Business Committee.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. NYDIA M. VELÁZQUEZ, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF NEW YORK**

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Thank you, Chairwoman Christensen and Minority Ranking Member Fortuño, for holding this important hearing today.

I appreciate the opportunity to be here and offer my views on H.R. 1230, the Puerto Rico Self-Determination Act of 2007.