

Even today the words of Governor Brady still ring true when referring to American citizens who call the island of Puerto Rico home.

While the plight of Alaska being charted from its humble beginnings as a Department in 1867 to its progression as a District, then as a Territory, then ultimately its admission as the 49th state of the Union in 1959, the overall journey that citizens had to endure lasted for roughly 92 years.

For the past 117 years, another clock has been keeping time on the relationship between the United States and an exotic land off its shores, that of the island of Puerto Rico. Since 1898, the United States of America has held in its possession the island of Puerto Rico.

Since establishing self-governance with the passage of the Federal Relations Act of 1950 and the ratification of the Puerto Rican Constitution in 1952, the United States has allowed Puerto Ricans to govern themselves on internal matters. However, Congress has maintained plenary powers over the islands through the territorial clauses of the U.S. Constitution, Article IV, Section 3, Clause 2.

Today's hearing will aim to continue the discussion on the issue of Puerto Rico's political status, an important discussion given the current economic crisis the island faces today.

For the last 8 years, the island's economy has been mired by recession, a result of misguided management policies from within the public utilities and irresponsible debt trading practices.

As Puerto Rico struggles to solve an economic and financial crisis that is causing a migration of residents off the island to the mainland, Congress must consider how the island's unresolved political status is related to its economic and fiscal problems, and what legislative measures are necessary to restore Puerto Rico's financial stability.

The discussion of political status for the island always sparks lively debate from Puerto Rico and among my colleagues here in Congress and on this committee. I anticipate the same here today, and I welcome it; such spirited debate is healthy.

Holding hearings such as this will further the discussion and drive the point home that Congress maintains its duty to serve the Americans of the island, just as we do to the Americans here on the mainland. We must show the 3.7 million Americans living in Puerto Rico that although they may not have voting representation in the House or the Senate, those of us tending this Nation will hear them when they speak. It is our duty and we honor that duty to listen today.

On a personal level, I have been involved in this project since 1994. I believe very strongly, right up front with you, in statehood. That is no hidden secret. But that is up to the decision of the Puerto Rican people. But the status quo cannot exist—the unfairness to Americans not being listened to by this Congress, and I think the responsibility to the people of Puerto Rico.

A little history about this. Puerto Rico was supposed to become a state first, and Alaska slipped in. I apologize for that. We did a good job.

[Laughter.]