

territorial status was never democratic and has now become tyrannical.

Internationally, the community of Latin American and Caribbean states has recently reaffirmed its support for the right of Puerto Rico to its self-determination and independence. And yet Congress refuses to comply with its decolonizing obligation toward Puerto Rico.

This subcommittee is well aware of Puerto Rico's status problem. For decades it has held hearings on the issue, and many in Puerto Rico can reasonably wonder whether this oversight hearing pursues a legitimate legislative purpose, or is merely a pro forma, partisan, quid pro quo. Only time will tell.

I shall utilize this hearing to publicly propose a route map toward the solution of Puerto Rico's status problem. The relationship between Puerto Rico's territorial status and our economic and social problems has been well summarized by Senator Ron Wyden, Chairman of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. I quote, "Puerto Rico faces huge economic and social challenges. . . . The lack of resolution of Puerto Rico's status not only distracts from addressing these and other issues, it contributes to them. As the most recent reports from the President's Task Force on Puerto Rico's status found—and I quote—'identifying the most effective means of assisting the Puerto Rican economy depends on resolving the ultimate question of status'."

Senator Wyden further added, "The present relationship undermines our moral position in the world."

To say that Puerto Rico should first decide what it wants, as President Obama has proposed, is merely an excuse to evade the legal responsibility of the United States as a colonial power, particularly when the President insists that the territorial relationship already repudiated by the Puerto Rican electorate should be one of the options. Colonialism is the problem, not the solution.

We, therefore, propose the following process to resolve Puerto Rico's status problem. Puerto Rico and the U.S. Congress should engage in a collaborative process of self-determination for Puerto Rico.

In Puerto Rico, various proposals have been advanced to initiate the process. The party I preside, for example, has proposed a status assembly in which each status option, proportionately represented, would formulate a proposal for its desired non-colonial, non-territorial option, requiring a response by the U.S. Government by a date certain. Ultimately, only realistic, non-territorial options negotiated with the U.S. authorities would be submitted to the Puerto Rican electorate.

Unfortunately, the present government of Puerto Rico refuses to move in this direction. However, Congress could jump start a process directed toward the same end. Bipartisan representatives of the congressional leadership, in coordination with the executive branch, could convene representatives of the different status alternatives to present their respective decolonizing status proposals. In response, Congress would then specify which alternatives, and under what conditions it would be willing to consider. The Puerto Rican people could then cast a meaningful vote for the available non-colonial, non-territorial options.