



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi
Five-Minute Floor Statement as Prepared for Delivery
Introduction of the *Puerto Rico Status Resolution Act*
May 15, 2013

Mr. Speaker:

Today, joined by a bipartisan group of my colleagues, I am introducing the *Puerto Rico Status Resolution Act*.

This bill is a response to the results of a referendum held in Puerto Rico in November. The first question asked voters if they support Puerto Rico's current territory status, which deprives my constituents of the most fundamental democratic rights. Fifty-four percent said no.

The second question asked voters for their preference among the three alternatives to territory status. Of those who chose an option, 61 percent favored statehood.

More voters said they want Puerto Rico to become a state than to maintain the current status, which is unprecedented.

The White House has recognized the importance of the results, which is why the President is seeking an appropriation to conduct the first federally authorized vote in Puerto Rico's history, intended to "resolve" the territory's future status.

The legislation I am filing today is consistent with the President's budget request and serves as a blueprint for how the vote conducted pursuant to that appropriation could be structured.

After outlining the rights and responsibilities of statehood, the bill authorizes a ratification vote on whether Puerto Rico should be admitted into the Union as a State. If a majority of voters affirm Puerto Rico's desire for statehood, the bill provides for the President to submit legislation to admit Puerto Rico as a State after a reasonable transition period. The bill also expresses Congress's commitment to act on such legislation.

Now, I want to speak directly to the men and women who voted for statehood in November. Our movement has become the predominant force in Puerto Rico. Every day, we grow stronger. Like you, I believe that justice delayed is justice denied. And, like you, I find it difficult to be patient. But we fight with our heads as well as our hearts. Perfecting our union requires passion, but it also demands perseverance. There are no shortcuts on the path to statehood—and politicians who suggest there are will lead us to a dead end.

The statehood movement is powerful because we are united by a single principle—the principle of equality. The November vote has fortified our spirit and renewed our sense of purpose. We will not shy away from a fight. History teaches that once a people have chosen democracy, self-government and progress, they are unlikely to reverse course. Rest assured: now that the people of Puerto Rico have withdrawn their consent to second-class citizenship, the question is no longer whether, but when, Puerto Rico will obtain equality through statehood.

To my colleagues who represent states, I know you will respect my constituents for seeking the same rights and responsibilities as your constituents. This respect must take the form of concrete action. The U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico have made their voices heard, and they deserve a meaningful response from their national government.

There is overwhelming evidence that territory status has impaired Puerto Rico's political, economic and social development. And it has become clear that the status quo does not serve the national interest either. The U.S. succeeds when Puerto Rico succeeds; when the island is strong, stable and secure; and when its residents do not feel obligated to relocate to the states to achieve their dreams. From the U.S. perspective—a robust and resilient state of Puerto Rico would advance the national interest.

The position of every president since Harry Truman has been that their administration would accept whatever status choice is made by a majority of Puerto Rico voters. The U.S. government is a champion of democracy and self-determination around the world, and it must adhere to those principles with respect to its own citizens. This is especially true in light of the service that generations of men and women from Puerto Rico have rendered to this nation, most notably in the armed forces, but in so many other ways as well. In a very real sense, Puerto Rico has earned the right to be equal. And equal we will become.

Puerto Rico has been called the shining star of the Caribbean. The time has come for our star to shine, alongside the others, on the flag of the United States of America.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.