



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi
Floor Remarks as Prepared for Delivery
My Tenure as Resident Commissioner
December 7, 2016

Mr. Speaker:

After eight years, this will be my last floor speech as the Resident Commissioner of Puerto Rico in Congress. I want to thank my constituents for giving me the opportunity to serve as their voice in Washington. They are enduring difficult times, but they never lose their hope, dignity, or appreciation for life's blessings.

I also want to thank my colleagues in the House and the Senate. I respect your dedication to public service, energy, and commitment to the causes you champion.

In addition, I want to thank my staff, which has served me—and the people of Puerto Rico—with skill, passion and loyalty.

Most importantly, I want to thank my wife, Maria-Elena; my four children; and the rest of my family. They have walked alongside me on this journey, through the peaks and valleys, and my love for them cannot be captured with words.

It is impossible to condense eight action-packed years into five minutes. However, if there is a central theme to my tenure as Resident Commissioner, it has been “fighting the good fight” on behalf of the 3.4 million American citizens in Puerto Rico, who have been treated unfairly for too long.

In an example of baptism by fire, the battle began almost as soon as I assumed office in 2009, when Congress was debating the stimulus bill known as ARRA. Even as I was still learning to navigate my way through the Capitol, we managed to secure virtually state-like treatment for Puerto Rico, injecting almost \$7 billion into the island’s economy when we needed it most.

The fight continued the following year with the Affordable Care Act, which resulted in the largest funding increase in history for Puerto Rico’s Medicaid program. Separately, we secured legislative and administrative action eliminating many of the disparities that Puerto Rico faced under the Medicare program.

I am also proud of our work to combat drug-related violence in Puerto Rico, requiring the federal government to prepare a Caribbean Border Counternarcotics Strategy and persuading federal law enforcement agencies to increase the resources they assign to Puerto Rico. The number of homicides on the island was cut in half between 2011 and 2015. This is not about statistics. It is about preserving human life.

Moreover, I have tried my best to serve those who have served us. Residents of Puerto Rico have a rich military tradition, and no unit exemplifies their courage and character better than the 65th Infantry Regiment, which fought the enemy on the battlefield and discrimination in the barracks.

After we enacted legislation to award them the Congressional Gold Medal, these warriors—now in the twilight of their lives—stood beside President Obama as he signed the bill into law and were honored at a ceremony in the Capitol that I will never forget.

The toughest fight of my tenure came earlier this year, when Congress and the White House worked together to enact legislation—called PROMESA—to prevent the government of Puerto Rico from collapsing. Nobody was pleased that such legislation was necessary, and nobody liked every provision in the bill, but I firmly believe that PROMESA—if properly implemented—provides a path to a better future for Puerto Rico.

I close with this thought. Puerto Rico's current territory status, which gives Congress license to treat my constituents like second-class citizens, is undignified and unsustainable. Following a 2012 local referendum in which island residents expressed their opposition to the current status and their support for statehood, Congress enacted legislation providing funding for the first federally-sponsored referendum in Puerto Rico's history. The significance of this achievement has yet to be sufficiently appreciated. Puerto Rico should use this authority to conduct a vote on whether the territory should become a state. If the people of Puerto Rico ratify their support for statehood, as I expect they will, it will be incumbent upon Congress to implement that result. This country, which was founded on the principles of equality and justice, must live up to its creed.

May God bless Puerto Rico and the United States of America.