



Democratic Party of Puerto Rico



March 18, 2021

The Honorable Raúl Grijalva
Chairman, House Committee on Natural Resources

The Honorable Joe Manchin
Chairman, Senate Committee on Energy & Natural Resources

The Honorable Bruce Westerman
Ranking Member, House Committee on Natural Resources

The Honorable John Barrasso
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Energy & Natural Resources

Dear Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Westerman, Chairman Manchin, Ranking Member Barrasso:

For over one-hundred years, the U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico have been disenfranchised in federal elections and subjected to unequal treatment across federal programs. Last November, voters stood up to change that when an absolute majority of 53% demanded statehood in a locally sponsored referendum. The Puerto Rico Statehood Admission Act, H.R. 1522 and S. 780, directly respond to that mandate, and we urge you to support it and help get it approved as soon as possible.

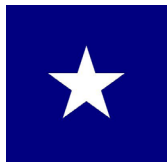
Puerto Rico's referendum was historic because it is the first time that statehood received unquestionable majority support on the island with a simple "YES" or "NO" vote. The 117th Congress is therefore presented with a unique opportunity to make history and put an end to America's inherently colonial rule over Puerto Rico, which runs counter to America's values of democracy, equal justice under the law, and government by the consent of the governed.

We recognize there are some in Congress, such as Rep. Nydia Velázquez (NY) and Sen. Robert Menendez (NJ), who oppose statehood for Puerto Rico and have completely ignored the results of the referendum held last November. Today, they will be submitting a counter-proposal, the Puerto Rico Self-Determination Act (PRSDA), which has faced criticism from representatives of all status options.

The most significant concern, across party lines, is that the PRSDA is ultimately non-binding. Under the bill, Congress would be under no obligation to implement whichever status option is chosen by the convention and later voted on by the electorate. This would represent a huge setback for voters in Puerto Rico who have engaged in multiple acts of self-determination over the last decade and have shown, with increasing clarity, that Puerto Rico's voters reject the current territory status and favor statehood above all non-territory options.

Beyond the will of the people on the island, however, Puerto Ricans stateside also favor statehood by wide margins. For example, recent polls show 81% of Puerto Rican residents in Florida and 69% of those in New York favor the admission of the island as a state. A majority of Americans have also supported the idea for decades according to Gallup. This is a settled issue on the island as well as across the Nation, and Congress has a moral obligation to act.

The only legislative option that respects the will of the people of Puerto Rico, and ensures a binding process of self-determination is H.R. 1522 & S. 780, the Puerto Rico Statehood Admission Act. By offering statehood, stipulating the terms of admission, and requiring a ratification vote, Congress would finally open the door to full equality and democracy for the U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico while leaving the ultimate choice in their hands. If a majority opposes statehood at that point, then the island would remain a territory with the capacity to pursue independence or free association through the procedural mechanism of their choice, including a status convention. Congress has a moral obligation to let the people of Puerto Rico decide their own self-determination process.



Our organizations represent the majority of voters in Puerto Rico, as well as their allies stateside. We believe it's time to put an end to the dysfunctional, outdated, and undemocratic territory status to which Puerto Rico has been subjected. We call on Congress to open the door to full enfranchisement and equality for our fellow U.S. citizens in Puerto Rico by supporting and passing the Puerto Rico Statehood Admission Act. America can and must do better.

Sincerely,

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