

Thank you for allowing me to testify before this committee on such an important matter. This legislation is about what is right and what is fair.

Since 1898, residents of Puerto Rico have been deprived of full and equal political representation. Though its residents are American citizens, the island is not a state, and its residents have no equal voting representation in Congress. Given the choice, Puerto Ricans might opt to change this situation. Some in Puerto Rico might opt for statehood for the island, some might opt for independence, and some might opt for sovereign association of the status quo. But Puerto Ricans have never been invited by Congress to make this choice. They are American citizens, but deprived of voting rights.

If Puerto Rico were a state, it would have six Representatives in Congress, instead of one who cannot vote on the floor of the House. If Puerto Rico were a state, it would have two Senators instead of none. If Puerto Rico were a state, the people there could help choose our President. Now they cannot. A host of policy decisions are made in Puerto Rico's name, on behalf of Puerto Rico's people, without their full and equal input or consent. That is deeply, deeply unfair.

Whether Puerto Ricans decide in favor of statehood or not, there is an existing inequality that needs to be addressed. The people of Puerto Rico could have more representatives in Congress than they have today, with or without statehood.

While I do not represent Puerto Rico, there is a very large Puerto Rican population in Central Florida. And I'm here because the people on the island of Puerto Rico have the right to be full and equal representation. Under this legislation, voters will be asked by Congress whether they wish to maintain Puerto Rico's present form. If a majority of voters cast their ballots in favor of a different political status, the government of Puerto Rico will be authorized to conduct a second vote among three options: independence, statehood, or sovereignty in association with the United States.

Residents of Puerto Rico have laid down their lives in defense of American democratic values for over nine decades. In that time, they have never been given the chance to express their views about their political relationship with the United States by means of a fair, neutral, and democratic process sponsored by Congress. This must change. I am proud to be one of the original co-sponsors of the Puerto Rico Democracy Act of 2009.

In any case, we owe it to the people of Puerto Rico to let them make this choice. This is what democracy means. This is what freedom means.

Thank you for allowing this testimony before the committee.