



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi
Statement for the Record
One-Minute Speech
February 17, 2011

Mr./Madame Speaker:

I rise to address the chamber this morning with disappointment, sadness, and a deep resolve to set the record straight. I am compelled to respond to remarks delivered yesterday on this floor by my colleague, the gentleman from Illinois, in which he harshly criticized the duly-elected government of Puerto Rico, the officers who serve honorably in its police force, and the chief judge of the U.S. district court for the District of Puerto Rico. The speech was inappropriate and insulting to the people of Puerto Rico. I hope such action will not be repeated. But if it is, make no mistake: I will return to this floor again to defend my constituents—and the government they chose in free and fair elections—from all unwarranted attacks. I will rise then in the same capacity that I rise now: as Puerto Rico's only elected representative in Congress and the only member of this chamber who can make any claim to speak on behalf of the Island's nearly four million American citizens. I will fight for my people because it is my privilege, my honor, and my duty to do so.

To compare Puerto Rico to an authoritarian country is beyond the pale. It demeans not merely my constituents, but also the millions of men and women around the world who suffer under real

dictatorships, who are truly oppressed, and who lack the dignity that comes only with genuine freedom. Puerto Rico is a rich and vibrant democracy, with strong institutions, governed by the rule of law. Fundamental rights protected by the U.S. Constitution—including the right to free speech, free assembly and due process of law—apply fully in Puerto Rico. So does federal civil rights law. This is not to suggest that violations of individual liberties never take place in Puerto Rico. On occasion they may, just as they do in every jurisdiction. And I would be the first person to condemn such conduct if it occurs. But, in Puerto Rico, unlike in a dictatorship, there are legal remedies available to citizens who claim to have been deprived of their rights. Those who fail to grasp this basic distinction do not understand Puerto Rico or appreciate its strengths.

Moreover, I believe it is wrong for a member of this body to insult a federal judge simply because that judge ruled in a way the member finds objectionable. To use an enlarged photo of that judge as a prop is, in my view, particularly unfortunate. Such theatrics undermine, rather than strengthen, the argument being made. Judge Fusté, a man who has devoted over 25 years of his life to public service, does not deserve such treatment.

Yesterday, a great disservice was done to the good name and reputation of the people of Puerto Rico. I regret that it occurred. I hope—and expect—that it will not happen again.

I yield back the balance of my time.