



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi  
Five-Minute Floor Statement as Prepared for Delivery  
The Results of the Puerto Rico Political Status Plebiscite  
*November 14, 2012*

Mr./Madame Speaker:

Puerto Rico recently held a plebiscite on its political status. I want to convey the results to the American public, describe their significance, and outline the next steps I will take.

As background, Puerto Rico has been a U.S. territory since 1898. The Island is home to 3.7 million American citizens who cannot vote for president, are not represented in the Senate, and elect one non-voting member to the House. Federal law is supreme in Puerto Rico, but its residents are treated unequally under many federal programs.

**The Results of the Plebiscite**

Plebiscite voters were first asked whether they want Puerto Rico to remain a territory. Over 1.7 million people answered, which is about 75 percent of registered voters. 54 percent said they did not want the current status to continue, while 46 percent said they did.

Voters were then asked to express their preference among the three viable alternatives to the current status: statehood, free association, and independence. Over 1.3 million people chose an

option. 61 percent voted for statehood; 33 percent voted for free association; and 5.5 percent voted for independence. In addition, 472,000 voters did not provide an answer.

### **The Significance of the Plebiscite**

This plebiscite marked the first time voters were directly asked whether they want Puerto Rico to remain a territory. One of the two main political parties in Puerto Rico urged a “Yes” vote. Nevertheless, the “No” vote won by eight points.

Those voting “No” included statehood supporters, as well as advocates of independence and free association. These three groups are united in their opposition to the current status, which is colonial in nature. It deprives Puerto Ricans of the right to choose the leaders who make their national laws and to equal treatment under those laws. Not one of my stateside colleagues in Congress would accept this status for their constituents. So they should respect that my constituents no longer accept it either.

The rejection of territory status fundamentally changes the terms of this debate. After this vote, the question is not whether, but when, Puerto Rico will cease to be a territory and will have a fully-democratic status. Defenders of the status quo may obstruct change in the short term, but in a democracy the will of the people ultimately prevails.

Let me turn to the second question, asking voters which status should replace the current status. Of the 1.3 million people who voted for one of the three options, a supermajority chose statehood. Of critical importance, the 810,000 votes for statehood on the second question exceed the 803,000 votes for the current status on the first question. For the first time, there are more people in Puerto

Rico who want to become a state than who want to continue as a territory. This fact further undermines the democratic legitimacy of the current status.

Some wish to downplay the results of the plebiscite by citing the voters who left the second question blank, but this argument does not withstand scrutiny.

In our democracy, outcomes are determined by ballots properly cast. Power rests with the citizen who votes, not the one who stays home or refuses to choose from among the options provided.

Some voters may have left the second question blank simply because they prefer the current status to its alternatives. Those voters were able to vote for the current status in the first question, so their viewpoint was reflected in the plebiscite results. Others may have declined to answer because they were led to believe there was another option that should have been on the ballot—a best-of-all-worlds proposal called “Enhanced Commonwealth.” But each of the last four presidential administrations has each rejected this proposal, as have all key congressional leaders. A blank vote to protest the exclusion of an impossible status proposal is entitled to no weight.

### **Next Steps**

As Puerto Rico’s representative to the U.S. government, I will work with my allies to ensure that the President and Congress take appropriate action in light of these results. The people of Puerto Rico have spoken—and I intend to make certain that their voice is heard loud and clear.

Thank you.