



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi
Statement As Prepared For Delivery
Service Academy Day
San Juan District Office
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Good afternoon to you all—and welcome to Service Academy Day, which I intend to make an annual event. I want to begin by welcoming the representatives from the U.S. Military Academy, the Naval Academy, the Air Force Academy, the Coast Guard Academy, and the Merchant Marine Academy. We are looking forward to hearing each of you describe the admissions process, the academic and physical standards for acceptance, what daily life at your institution is like, and the obligations and opportunities for students after graduation. I hope that you will also discuss your respective preparatory schools, which can help students from Puerto Rico acquire the skills they need, especially in English, to gain acceptance to their chosen service academy. For many talented young people, one year at prep school can serve as a stepping stone to success.

I also want to thank the college guidance counselors who have taken the time to attend this event. Your interest in learning more about the service academies, so that you are able to provide accurate advice to your students, is very gratifying.

And I especially want to thank the young men and women from around the Island who have expressed interest in attending one of the service academies, and who are here with us today. To you and to your parents—welcome. The mere fact that you are contemplating this course of

action says a lot about you. It shows that you are highly motivated, that you want to challenge yourself, and that you are brave. It also shows that you believe there are things in this world—principles and ideals—that are worth defending and, if necessary, fighting for. And so each of you has already earned my admiration. Finally, I want to acknowledge retired Colonel José Olmos, who is the president of the Puerto Rico Chapter of the Reserve Officers Association. Colonel Olmos: thank you for your service to our country—and welcome.

Before I talk very briefly about my role in the nomination process, and then turn the floor over to the academy representatives, I want to say just a few words about Puerto Rico's rich tradition of military service. This tradition is—as it should be—a source of great pride for our people.

As most of you know, residents of Puerto Rico have served with distinction in every U.S. military conflict since 1917, when Congress granted American citizenship to individuals born on the Island. It is estimated that 18,000 Puerto Ricans served in World War I, 65,000 served in World War II, 61,000 served in Korea, 48,000 served in Vietnam, and 2,600 served in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

This tradition continues to this day. As we meet, thousands of Puerto Ricans are serving in Afghanistan, Iraq and in countless other places around the globe. Their specific missions—and their individual roles in those missions—vary widely. Some pilot jets or helicopters, others are highly-trained mechanics who make sure these million-dollar machines remain airworthy. Some deliver troops and cargo into combat zones; others drive tanks, gather and analyze battlefield intelligence, or handle logistics. Some serve as military spokesmen, explaining operations to the press and to the public. Others serve in the shadows in the elite special forces—silent warriors who perform their jobs with neither the expectation nor the desire that accounts of their actions

will ever appear in the media. Back in February, I traveled to Afghanistan—and had the honor of meeting several soldiers from Puerto Rico who are risking their lives to combat violent extremism and to bring freedom to the Afghan people. It is hard to put into words what an emotional and humbling experience that was for me.

My point is this. If you make the decision to serve this nation in uniform, you will not walk alone. Rather, you will be following in the footsteps of a long line of Puerto Ricans who came before you—men and women devoted to their country and to their comrades. You, in turn, will serve as a model for future generations of Puerto Ricans who dream of one day becoming an officer in the military, the merchant marine, or the U.S. Coast Guard.

It should go without saying that the decision to seek appointment to a service academy is not one you should take lightly. It is a life choice that promises great rewards, but also carries with it certain risks. Therefore, it is imperative that you make this decision with your eyes open, having thoughtfully weighed all the pros and cons. I hope today's briefing will serve that educational purpose.

Let me turn very briefly to my role in this process. As the Member of Congress from Puerto Rico, I am authorized by law to nominate candidates to all of the academies—with the exception of the Coast Guard Academy, which does not require a congressional nomination for appointment. What am I looking for in a candidate? Naturally, you should have a strong academic and extracurricular record. Those who write your letters of recommendation should speak highly of your character, your integrity, and your leadership abilities. Don't worry if you are not perfect; none of us are. The academies are not looking for robots; they are looking for human beings.

Now let's begin the presentations. Afterwards, I am happy to speak to any of you about deadlines, about the person in my office you should contact, and about any other logistical questions you may have.