



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi
Five-Minute Floor Statement as Prepared for Delivery
To Honor Luis Ferré on the 10th Anniversary of His Passing
October 23, 2013

Mr. Speaker:

Monday marked the 10th anniversary of the passing of the Honorable Luis Ferré. I rise this morning to pay tribute to this giant of a man, whom the *New York Times* called the “dominant force in the politics, economy and culture of Puerto Rico” for much of the 20th century.

In a real sense, Don Luis personified his beloved Puerto Rico, embodying both its progress and its struggles. He was born in Ponce in 1904, just a few years after Puerto Rico became a territory of the United States; was a teenager when island residents were granted U.S. citizenship in 1917; served as a delegate to the convention that drafted Puerto Rico’s congressionally-authorized local constitution in the early 1950s; was elected—after persistent efforts—as the island’s governor in 1968; served as a member of the Puerto Rico Senate, including as its president, in the late 1970s and early 1980s; and remained engaged in public life as a revered elder statesman well beyond his formal retirement from politics.

Don Luis lived to age 99, but it was the *fullness* of his life—not its length—that is so remarkable. Trained as an engineer at MIT and as a classical pianist at the New England Conservatory of

Music, Ferré was a true renaissance man. He loved ideas, intellectual debate and culture, founding the renowned Ponce Museum of Art. But he was also at home in the intensely practical world of business, taking a small company founded by his father and transforming it into one of Puerto Rico's largest and most successful conglomerates. He published a newspaper, now called *El Nuevo Día*, that is run by his grandchildren, and has the largest circulation of any periodical on the island. Don Luis was also a committed philanthropist who took to heart the biblical axiom that 'to whom much is given, much is expected.'

In 1991, Ferré was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor, by President George H.W. Bush, who called Ferré "a public servant of the first order" and an "extraordinary leader in the life of Puerto Rico."

On a personal level, Ferré refuted the notion that *great* men are seldom *good* men. Like any effective leader, he was tough when he needed to be, but he was also kind, warm and generous, inspiring affection and loyalty as well as respect. Don Luis was a gentleman, through and through. He was 'old school' in the best sense of the term.

Few, if any, Puerto Ricans have accomplished as much in their lives as Don Luis, or left behind such a lasting legacy. A proud Republican and founder of the local New Progressive Party, Ferré did not live to see his goal of statehood for Puerto Rico realized. But he encouraged and mentored and inspired a new generation of leaders who understand that Puerto Rico's "colonial status," as Don Luis called it, deprives island residents of political and civil rights, hinders their economic progress, and harms their quality of life. As I and other pro-statehood advocates work to perfect

Puerto Rico's union with the United States, we are guided by Don Luis' example and draw strength from his memory.

Ferré once described himself as “revolutionary in my ideas, liberal in my objectives and conservative in my methods.” Thanks to Don Luis and others, statehood is no longer a revolutionary idea. Instead, it has become the predominant force in Puerto Rico politics, while support for the *status quo* continues to decline and support for separate nationhood remains slight.

Last November, a clear majority of voters in Puerto Rico rejected territory status and more voters expressed a preference for statehood than for any other status option. I wish Don Luis had been alive to witness this historic event. When Puerto Rico does become a state, as I know it will, we will look back upon Luis Ferre's life and say that this man, as much as any other man, was responsible for this crowning achievement.

Thank you.