



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi
Resident Commissioner of Puerto Rico
Remarks as Prepared For Delivery
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Presidential Awards Banquet
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Thank you for the warm introduction, Tony.

Buenas noches a todos. I want to begin by thanking LULAC, which strives every day to seek justice for Latinos in the United States. I particularly want to thank Margaret, Brent, Ivonne Quiñones, and my friend Elsie Valdés. LULAC is a national treasure, and I am honored to be with you tonight.

My remarks will be very brief, because I know you are anxious to continue enjoying the good food and the good company. I just want to touch upon two public policy issues that are distinct—and ought to be treated as such by policymakers—but that share an important principle in common, namely the principle of equality.

The issues are, on the one hand, the need to create a reasonable path to U.S. citizenship for millions of undocumented immigrants in the United States by enacting comprehensive immigration reform and, on the other hand, the imperative to create a path to full and equal U.S.

citizenship for millions of American citizens residing in Puerto Rico by enacting federal legislation to facilitate the territory's transition to a democratic and dignified political status.

LULAC is to be commended for its moral clarity on immigration and Puerto Rico's status. This organization understands that each subject—while different in key respects—raises fundamental questions about the nature of our democracy and the meaning of American citizenship. How we answer these questions will demonstrate what we stand for, and who we aspire to become, as a nation.

As a member of the House Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security, I strongly support comprehensive immigration reform that includes a path to citizenship. I also support enhanced border security, but I oppose the cynical efforts being made by some politicians to require a level of border security that is unattainable in a free and open society before undocumented immigrants can take the first steps on the journey to citizenship.

America has always been—and remains today—a work in progress. And since the country's founding, the hard work of perfecting our Union has often been carried out by intrepid men and women born outside of America, immigrants from other shores who chose to leave behind everything and everyone they know, who came here in search of economic opportunity or to escape poverty or persecution, and whose character, passion and talent have enriched the life of this nation and replenished its spirit.

These men and women are the engine of our economy. Without them, this country could not function. They get up early, and go to bed late. They toil day and night, for low wages and little recognition. They may lack the proper documents, but they have tremendous dignity. They deserve a chance to become citizens of the nation that their labor has helped build and sustain. And so it is vital for political leaders to give them that chance by enacting sensible legislation.

I am a Puerto Rican and, as such, a natural-born American citizen. But, I must tell you, I can relate to the experience of the undocumented immigrant in this country. Those of us who are from Puerto Rico know how it feels to be excluded or treated differently because of our place of birth. Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens, but our citizenship is second class.

Like our immigrant brothers and sisters, we, too, aspire to be treated equally by the country to which we have given so much. And we are making our aspirations heard loud and clear.

Last November, Puerto Rico exercised its right to self-determination by holding a free and fair vote on the question of our political status. The results demonstrate that a clear majority of my constituents do not wish to maintain the current status, which deprives us of the most fundamental democratic rights. To the extent that the people of Puerto Rico ever gave their consent to the current status, that consent has now been withdrawn. The results further demonstrate that, for the first time in Puerto Rico's history, there are more people who want Puerto Rico to become a state than who want to continue the status quo.

It is now essential for the U.S. government to respond by enacting legislation to offer Puerto Rico one or more of the status options that would provide its people with a full measure of self-government.

In April, President Obama sought an appropriation from Congress to conduct the first federally sponsored vote in Puerto Rico's history to "resolve" the territory's status.

And, last month, I introduced the *Puerto Rico Status Resolution Act*, which outlines the rights and responsibilities of statehood, and then asks the people of Puerto Rico if they accept those terms. If a majority of voters say yes, the bill provides for the President to submit legislation to admit Puerto Rico as a State after a transition period.

My bill has already been cosponsored by over 80 Members of Congress from both political parties, representing districts all over this great land.

Just as I have faith that the U.S. government will act to reform our unprincipled immigration laws, I have faith that it will fulfill its legal and moral obligation to facilitate Puerto Rico's transition to a democratic and dignified status. And I know that LULAC, because of its ironclad commitment to equality, will continue to remain at the forefront of both of these fights.