



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi  
Five-Minute Floor Statement as Prepared for Delivery  
An Update on Puerto Rico's Political Status  
*July 24, 2013*

Mr. Speaker:

As we approach the birthday of the late Dr. José Celso Barbosa, the father of the statehood movement in Puerto Rico, I rise to update my colleagues on the progress that has been made to resolve the territory's political status.

Last November, Puerto Rico held a referendum. As I described in a floor speech the following week, the results show that a majority of the U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico do not support the current territory status, a supermajority favor statehood among the three alternative options, and more voters want statehood than any other option, including the current status. These results are now part of the historical record, and they cannot be dismissed or diminished by those who find them inconvenient.

Now that American citizens living in an American territory have informed their national government, in a free and fair vote, that they do not consent to a political status that deprives them of the most basic democratic rights, it is incumbent upon the federal government to take appropriate action in response. For the President and Congress to do otherwise would be to contravene the principles that have made this country a light to the world.

Today, I can report that positive steps have been taken—despite the fierce opposition of one party in Puerto Rico, which seeks to preserve the *status quo* despite its rejection by voters and the overwhelming evidence that it has crushed the island’s political, economic and social advancement. In April, the Administration requested an appropriation of \$2.5 million dollars, which would be provided to the Puerto Rico Elections Commission to conduct the first federally-funded status vote in the territory’s history, with the specific purpose of “resolving” the issue. The Administration’s action was favorably received by Members of Congress from both sides of the aisle who rarely find common ground. Earlier this month, thanks to the leadership of Congressmen Wolf, Fattah and Serrano, that funding was approved by the Appropriations Committee—confirming that the effort to secure fair treatment for Puerto Rico is not, and should never become, a partisan issue.

The Committee’s report endorses the conditions proposed by the Administration, stating that federal funding will not be obligated until DOJ has certified that the ballot and voter education materials are compatible with U.S. laws and policies, thereby ensuring that the vote will be among one or more status options that can actually be implemented and that would settle the issue.

I will continue to fight for the approval of this appropriation by the full House and for its retention in any conference negotiation with the Senate.

There is additional progress to report on another front in this struggle. In May, I introduced standalone legislation that proceeds from the indisputable premise that statehood obtained more votes than any other option in the November referendum. The bill outlines the rights and

responsibilities of statehood, and asks voters in Puerto Rico whether they accept those terms. If a majority says yes, the bill provides for the President to submit legislation to admit Puerto Rico as a State after a transition period.

Two months after its introduction, this bill already enjoys support from 100 Members of Congress from both parties and every region of the country, despite the predictable opposition of the status quo party in Puerto Rico and its allies in Congress. I always find it ironic when some of my colleagues from the states—who, along with their constituents, enjoy all the benefits of statehood—seek to prevent my constituents from exercising those same rights and responsibilities. I have concluded that these forces cannot be reasoned with; they must simply be defeated. And they will be.

Next week, I will appear as a witness at a Senate hearing on the November referendum and the federal response to that vote. Just as I told a United Nations committee last month, I will testify that I have faith that the federal government will fulfill its obligation to facilitate Puerto Rico's transition to a democratic and dignified status, but that deeds—not words—are required.

Much work remains to be done. And like any civil rights struggle, it will not be easy. But, through our sound and steady action, we are closer than ever to finally realizing Dr. Barbosa's dream of equality for the U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico.

Thank you.