



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi  
Five-Minute Floor Statement as Prepared for Delivery  
The Path to Statehood  
*April 17, 2013*

Mr. Speaker:

In November 2012, Puerto Rico held a referendum on its political status. The results demonstrated that a clear majority of the U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico want to end the island's current territory status, that a supermajority prefers statehood among the possible alternatives, and that—for the first time in history—more voters favor statehood than the current status.

As I have remarked before, not a single one of my stateside colleagues in Congress would accept territory status for their own constituents. So they must recognize—and respect—that the American citizens in Puerto Rico no longer accept it either. I also trust that my colleagues who represent states will credit my constituents for aspiring to have the same rights and responsibilities as their constituents.

Last week, the President took an important step. As part of the proposed budget the Administration submitted to Congress, the Justice Department is seeking \$2.5 million dollars to conduct the first federally-sponsored vote on Puerto Rico's political status in the 115 years that the territory has been under the U.S. flag. The funding would be granted to the Puerto Rico Elections Commission to conduct objective voter education and a vote on "options that would resolve Puerto Rico's future political status."

Key congressional leaders in the House and Senate, Republican and Democrat alike, have already issued statements of support for the President's action, calling it an appropriate response to the local referendum.

Mr. Speaker: My constituents may not have a vote in the government that makes their national laws, but they do have a voice—and they made that voice heard loud and clear in November. A budget reflects one's priorities and values. I support the President's budget because it shows respect for the democratically-expressed aspirations of the U.S. citizens that reside in Puerto Rico. And it demonstrates a clear desire to move forward on this complex but critical issue.

As the budget request states, the federally-sponsored vote is to be among options that would *resolve* Puerto Rico's political status. The only way to resolve the island's status is through statehood or national sovereignty. Puerto Rico cannot resolve its status by maintaining the same undemocratic status that my people have endured since 1898 and that they soundly rejected in November. The current status is the root cause of Puerto Rico's political, economic and social problems, so it cannot also be the solution to those problems.

In addition, the budget language clearly states that the Department of Justice shall not provide funding until it certifies that the ballot and voter education materials are consistent with the Constitution, basic laws and policies of the United States. The purpose of this language is to ensure that the ballot does not include impossible status proposals that have been repeatedly declared unworkable as a matter of both law and policy by the federal government. I am pleased the Administration understands that true self-determination is a choice among options that can be implemented, not an exercise in wishful thinking.

The President's request represents one path forward, but it is important to underscore that it is not the only path forward. In the coming weeks, I will introduce standalone legislation on the status issue that will both complement President Obama's request and reflect the indisputable fact that statehood won the November referendum.

Puerto Rico stands in a far different place today than it did six months ago. An historic referendum was held, the President responded to the results, and Congress now has a responsibility to act. Those who seek democracy, equality and progress for Puerto Rico are on the forward march, while those who support the failed *status quo* are in retreat. We drive the debate, while they merely react to the debate. And, in the end, mindful that the arc of history is long but that it bends towards justice, I am confident we will prevail.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.