



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi  
Statement as Prepared For Delivery (Via Taped Video Message)  
Club Puertorriqueño de San Francisco, Inc.  
100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration  
*March 3, 2012*

Saludos!

Greetings from our nation's capital.

As Puerto Rico's sole representative in the U.S. Congress, I want to begin by thanking all of you, especially President José Soliz, Vice-President Al Ruiz, Treasurer Peter Padilla, Assistant Treasurer Irma Dominicci, and Secretary Irma Vargas. I am honored that you invited me to be the keynote speaker at this event to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Club Puertorriqueño de San Francisco. I wish I could be there with you in person. Unfortunately, my responsibilities in Washington made that impossible. But I hope you will be pleased by this video message.

As you may know, while there are 3.7 million residents of Puerto Rico, there are now 4.7 million individuals of Puerto Rican origin living in the 50 states. Except for our brothers and sisters from Mexico, Puerto Ricans are the largest Latino group in the United States. Indeed, the number of Puerto Ricans residing in the states exceeds the combined population in this country

of individuals coming from all of Spanish-speaking Central America: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama.

When people think of the Puerto Rican diaspora in the 50 states, they naturally think of the nation's east coast. And that's not unreasonable. For many years, New York has been home to the largest number of Boricuas outside of La Isla del Encanto itself—with a community that is over one million strong. The jurisdiction with the second-highest number of Puerto Ricans is Florida, where the population is now nearly 900,000. Florida is an increasingly popular destination for individuals who have chosen to relocate from Puerto Rico to the states, and I expect that the Sunshine State will overtake the Empire State for first place in the near future. In addition to New York and Florida, there are also between 250,000 and 450,000 Puerto Ricans living in four other east coast states: New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Connecticut and Massachusetts.

To my pleasant surprise, my research has revealed that, despite the 3,500 miles that separate Puerto Rico and California, the Golden State has the seventh-highest number of Boricuas in the country, at nearly 200,000. This is a 40 percent increase since the year 2000.

I was even more surprised to learn about the Puerto Rican community in the San Francisco area. In San Francisco County itself, there are roughly 3,200 Puerto Ricans. But if you add in the neighboring or nearby counties of Alameda, Santa Clara and San Mateo, that number rises to nearly 30,000.

I am told that your organization was founded in 1912 by 12 Puerto Ricans who were on their way to Hawaii to work in the sugarcane fields. After 20 days on crowded ships and trains, they decided they had just about enough. Choosing to forego Hawaii, these intrepid travelers in search of economic opportunity instead put down roots in lovely San Francisco. Through this Club, those men created a physical and emotional space where they, and the generations of Puerto Ricans that followed them, could preserve and celebrate their Puerto Rican identity; could enjoy the food, music and art of home; and—most important—could belong to a proud and close-knit community. You, the current members of Club Puertorriqueño de San Francisco, have honored the legacy of the Club's founders, not only through your work to keep Puerto Rico's cultural heritage alive, but also through your efforts to raise scholarship money to send local students to college or vocational school.

Let me turn now to español. Me encanta poder hablarle a puertorriqueños desde Washington que extrañan nuestra Isla de Encanto cuando están por acá en los estados. Tengo que decir que a donde quiera que viajo como Congresista me encuentro a un boricua que ha hecho de un estado su hogar pero sigue sintiéndose puertorriqueño. Con el crecimiento que está teniendo la comunidad hispana aquí, es común escuchar buena salsa, ver un artista nuestro en el cine o en la televisión o encontrar un chinchorrito que venda lechón y arroz con gandules. ¡Ahora hasta hay una guagiita que vende manjares boricuas por las calles de Washington y de verdad me ha salvado la vida! Y es que son muchas las contribuciones que han hecho los puertorriqueños a esta nación. Desde las artes, las ciencias, los deportes, la política, y más que nada en el servicio militar, con valentía y lealtad, los boricuas hemos estado ahí en el crecimiento de los Estados Unidos hombro con hombro con nuestros conciudadanos.

Yo les felicito por mantenerse conectados con Puerto Rico y nuestros compueblanos en San Francisco, así como por todo California. Les exhorto a aumentar el grupo, a educar a nuestros conciudadanos de los estados sobre Puerto Rico y a mantenerse activos en la comunidad. Tenemos que hacernos sentir pues nuestras aspiraciones tienen que ser conocidas por los líderes políticos en California y en Washington, y nuestras aportaciones deben ser reconocidas por todos en esta nación.

Gracias por invitarme a dirigirme a ustedes y espero que pronto podamos compartir juntos personalmente.

¡Un abrazo boricua desde la capital federal!

¡Muchas gracias!