

## ADDITIONAL VIEWS

During the Full Natural Resources Committee markup of H.R. 2499, the Puerto Rico Democracy Act, Congressman Jason Chaffetz offered an amendment that required that a two-thirds vote, not a simple majority, apply to any federally sanctioned plebiscite vote to end the current 111 year relationship the United States has with the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. In addition, the amendment stipulated that if less than two-thirds of the voters in Puerto Rico selected either Statehood, Independence or a Freely Associated State status that it was the Sense of Congress that no further legislative action should occur on that option.

The amendment was offered for several reasons. First, during the past 60 years, the voters in Puerto Rico have gone to the polls to express their views on four separate locally sanctioned plebiscites. While the results of the first two plebiscites were an endorsement of Commonwealth status, the last two votes were inconclusive. If the people of Puerto Rico desire to end their current relationship, then we believe that at least 66 percent of those voting should make that decision.

Second, this requirement is consistent with what transpired in the territories of Alaska and Hawaii. In fact, on June 27, 1959, 132,938 residents of Hawaii voted affirmatively on the question of: "Shall Hawaii immediately be admitted into the Union as a State." There were only 7,854 residents who voted no on statehood which means that 94 percent of those voting wanted to end their territorial status. Almost a year earlier, 40,452 Alaskan residents voted on the nearly identical question of: "Shall Alaska immediately be admitted into the Union as a State." By contrast, 8,010 Alaskan residents voted no on statehood. This represented a resounding 84 percent favorable vote for statehood. As we know, 50 years ago, Alaska and Hawaii became our 49th and 50th states respectively and there has been no debate that the overwhelming majority of their citizens supported statehood. Based on the results of the Alaska and Hawaii plebiscites, this level of support should not be insurmountable.

Finally, the issue of Puerto Rico's political status has been debated passionately and in some isolated cases violently for decades. Based on past election results, it is more than likely that up to 50 percent of the population of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico or nearly 2 million people may feel disenfranchised by the results of any plebiscite. As a hypothetical example, if the voters choose to petition the Congress for statehood, then clearly their case is enhanced if 84 or 94 percent of their voters have affirmatively endorsed this idea. In contrast, if only 51 percent of voters support statehood, this may well have a chilling impact on Puerto Rico's success of achieving statehood.

During Committee debate on this amendment, the sponsor indicated that becoming a state is similar to a marriage. On their wedding day, nearly every bride and groom hopes that their respective families will support their decision to enter into this union. However, there are instances where some members of the respective families oppose the impending union and will by their actions or inactions bring marital discord to the newlyweds. In this example, the effect is limited to the married couple. However, in the case of Puerto Rico, unhappy results will have a profound effect on millions of Puerto Ricans who may well feel that a change in their political status is being forced upon them.

We believe that a 66 percent majority vote is not undemocratic, unfair or unattainable based on the experiences in Alaska and Hawaii. Congress can establish any standard it wants as a precondition for statehood. For example, in 1807, the formerly predominantly French territory of Louisiana adopted English as its official language as a precondition for its admission into the Union as a State. Instead of being a deterrent, we believe this level of local support for either Statehood, Independence or a Freely Associated State status will help the people of Puerto Rico make their case to the Congress.

The election outcome in Puerto Rico must be clean, unambiguous, fair and supported by a significant majority of the residents of the Commonwealth. It is regrettable that the proponents of H.R. 2499 felt that this amendment was premature and were unwilling to accept this standard to help them in their effort to clarify the future political status of Puerto Rico. It is our hope that as H.R. 2499 moves through the legislative process, the proponents of this measure will see the wisdom of our approach.

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