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House to Consider “Puerto Rico Democracy Act” Next Week, Bill would Set up Vote on Potential 51st State

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Next week, the U.S. House of Representatives is expected to vote on H.R. 2499, the Puerto Rico Democracy Act. This bill would authorize a federally sanctioned plebiscite (vote) of the Puerto Rican people regarding their political future.

The bill mandates a two-step voting process. The first vote would allow the people of Puerto Rico to choose between selecting a “different political status” or maintaining their “present political status.” If the majority of the people vote in favor of a “different political status,” then a second vote would be held allowing people to choose between three options: independence, statehood, or a freely associated state. Puerto Rico is currently a territory of the United States and has “Commonwealth” status.

“There are some important factors that should be made clear and be carefully considered before Congress votes on this bill. While it is said that the outcome of the plebiscites are non-binding, the results could set the stage for future action as soon as next year – including a Congressional vote on statehood for Puerto Rico,” said House Natural Resources Committee Ranking Member Doc Hastings. “Action towards potentially creating a 51st state is not a decision that Congress should make casually and has very serious implications for both the 50 existing states and the people of Puerto Rico. Congress needs to have an honest and forthright discussion of these issues. For example, under this bill, a majority vote is not required for statehood or independence to be declared the winner. There is also the question of a common language and Puerto Rico’s recognition of Spanish as an official language. In addition, if Puerto Rico were ever to become a state it could get six new members of the House of Representatives and cost billions of dollars per year in federal spending. The people of Puerto Rico would also have to pay federal income tax on income earned on the island, which they currently don’t pay. As we approach this vote, I will be encouraging Members of Congress and the people of 50 states and Puerto Rico to educate themselves on the details of this bill and its potential implications.”

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