



## **Get the Facts on the Puerto Rico Democracy Act**

*Bill would Set up Vote on Potential 51<sup>st</sup> State*

- The Puerto Rico Democracy Act (H.R. 2499) would authorize a federally-sanctioned plebiscite (vote) of the people of Puerto Rico regarding their political future. Currently, Puerto Rico is a U.S. territory with Commonwealth status. Puerto Rico residents are U.S. citizens, but do not pay federal incomes taxes and are represented in Congress by a non-voting Resident Delegate.
- H.R. 2499 provides for 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, free association with the U.S., or statehood.
- While it is said that the results of the plebiscites are non-binding, H.R. 2499 sets the stage for potential Congressional action as soon as next year on making Puerto Rico the 51<sup>st</sup> state.
- The people of Puerto Rico should be able to go to the ballot box and express their views on their future political status. However, H.R. 2499 is not necessary in order for that to happen. Puerto Rico can conduct their own non-binding plebiscites, as they have done three times in the past.
- There are serious questions regarding the implications of this bill that have gone unanswered. If Congressionally-sanctioned vote is specifically sought as with H.R. 2499, then it must come with an open, thorough understanding of what independence or statehood would mean to Puerto Rico and the existing 50 states.
- The two-step process is not an accurate or fair way to determine which political status the majority of people prefer. The first round of voting unites opponents of the current Commonwealth system, but then excludes the Commonwealth option in the second vote.
- The bill does not require a majority vote in the second plebiscite. The “winner” of the plebiscite will be whichever option receives the most votes – event if it just receives 34%. A decision that could start the island down the road to independence or statehood should not be taken lightly and should have the support of the majority of the people in Puerto Rico.
- This path towards statehood significantly deviates from the process used by Alaska and

Hawaii, the last two states admitted to the Union and the only two non-contiguous states. They both held a public “yes” or “no” vote on statehood and both states voted overwhelming (83% and 94%) in favor.

- Those eligible to cast ballots in the plebiscites includes more than just residents of Puerto Rico. H.R. 2499 explicitly allows those born in Puerto Rico and now living in the United States to cast ballots. Longtime residents, registered voters and citizens of the other 50 states could vote on the future of political status of Puerto Rico simply because of where they were born. This is unprecedented. A 70-year-old who was born in Puerto Rico, moved to Washington state as an infant, and has lived in The Evergreen State for the past 60+ years could cast a vote – but their neighbor next door who was born in Seattle could not.
- In Puerto Rico, both English and Spanish are official languages. When the House last debated a Puerto Rico bill (1998), an amendment on the issue of English as the official language was allowed on the House floor for debate. It is unknown whether House Democrat leaders will permit such an amendment and a direct vote during consideration of H.R. 2499. It’s also important to note that during our history, the matter of the English language was addressed during the admission of other states into the Union, including Arizona, Louisiana, Oklahoma and New Mexico.
- If Puerto Rico does become a state, the Congress Research Service (CRS) estimates that with a population of approximately 4 million, Puerto Rico would get six seats in the House of Representatives. Assuming the current 435 seat limit remains unchanged, apportioning 6 seats to Puerto Rico means a number of states expecting to gain a seat after the 2010 census would actually lose representation. According to CRS projections, states that could lose an existing seat or not receive an expected new seat if Puerto Rico became a state include: Arizona, South Carolina, Missouri, New York, Texas, and Washington.
- Federal spending in Puerto Rico would increase under statehood – the amount would measure in the billions of dollars per year. Before voting on H.R. 2499, the full cost should be known.
- The people of Puerto Rico currently do not pay federal income taxes on income earned in Puerto Rico, but pay one of the highest state tax levels in the nation. Statehood would significantly impact the tax structure of Puerto Rico.

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