

# Committee on Resources

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## Witness Testimony

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### STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE DON YOUNG HEARING ON THE *UNITED STATES-PUERTO RICO POLITICAL STATUS ACT, H.R. 856*

**April 19, 1997, San Juan, Puerto Rico**

It is indeed a pleasure to return to Puerto Rico to continue the work of the Congress in resolving Puerto Rico's status. I believe the hearings today in San Juan and Monday in Mayaguez on the *United States-Puerto Rico Political Status Act*, [H.R. 856](#), are an important part of the process leading to a response to Puerto Rico House Concurrent Resolution 2 of January 23 of this year, asking for a federally authorized vote on Puerto Rico's political status before the end of 1998.

When our plane approached Puerto Rico today, I was once again stunned by the sheer beauty of the island's green mountains, white beaches, and blue tropical sea. It is an impressive view every time I arrive. Another fact that struck me as I looked out over San Juan was the realization that the population of this historic city is twice the size of the entire State of Alaska! What an island! It is no wonder the islands of Puerto Rico have been so prized and the object of many battles during the past centuries, including the Spanish-American War in 1898.

In fact, the principal reason we are here today dates back to when the U.S. flag was hoisted nearly 100 years ago. A legitimate question has since been raised that has yet to be answered: *Should the United States flag in Puerto Rico remain as it is today, be eliminated, or replaced by a flag with an additional star?* Each choice has a corresponding effect on the applicability of the United States Constitution and nationality and citizenship. While the U.S. Constitution follows the flag, Congress determines the extent of the application, and today in Puerto Rico the U.S. Constitution applies only in part. United States nationality also follows the flag and the Constitution, which in Puerto Rico today is both U.S. nationality and statutory U.S. citizenship. This is one of the fundamental questions with related issues we are attempting to resolve through these hearings.

Last month the House Committee on Resources began consideration of the *United States-Puerto Rico Political Status Act*, H.R. 856, with testimony in Washington from six members of Congress, the Governor of Puerto Rico, the three political party presidents of Puerto Rico, and the Administration. Their views are only the beginning of the record which will be added to by the statements which will be presented in San Juan and Mayaguez. It is not the location of the hearing where the statement is given that is important. It is the substance of the testimony that is important.

During congressional consideration last year of the *United States-Puerto Rico Political Status Act*, numerous thoughtful and meaningful suggestions were offered in testimony. Before the end of the 104th Congress in 1996, over 30 major and minor changes were incorporated into the bill, which was re-introduced this year as H.R. 856. I expect many of the proposals presented during these hearings will result in additional changes to the current bill, H.R. 856.

However, the bill's fundamental structure for resolving Puerto Rico's political status has broad bi-partisan support in the Congress. The multi-staged approach is sound and offers the best approach to address the many legal, economic, and political issues that are part of this self-determination process. A multi-staged process will insure that each step taken is manageable and practical for both the United States and Puerto Rico. In addition, the bill guarantees that the people of Puerto Rico will have the final say in each stage of the process. Although after these hearings the Congress will enact the law defining the terms of the process and any change of status, the people of Puerto Rico will have the final say in approving each step in the path to full self-government.

In order to obtain a broad cross-section of views of the people of Puerto Rico regarding their political status preference and this process, a large number of witnesses have been invited to appear before the Committee. I appreciate the cooperation of each participant in complying with Congressional rules which are required in other hearings throughout

the nation.

Before we begin with our panel of distinguished witnesses representing the three political parties of Puerto Rico, followed by elected officials and other leaders, I want to share part of a letter I received the day after our hearings on this bill in San Juan on March 23rd of last year from Pilar Barbosa Rosario, Official Historian of Puerto Rico:

*Greetings to my friend...Don Young.*

*This is a personal note...written this morning March 24, 1996.*

*As daughter of José Celso Barbosa and Official Historian of Puerto Rico, I try to be impartial and see others point of view. But when you are almost 99 years of age, and have done research for 45 years (1921-1966) on Barbosa's private and public life, it is quite difficult to maintain completely neutral in our historical interpretations.*

*Let me congratulate all persons involved in preparing the hearing. The hearing was well organized and the people involved, Congressmen, visitors and Puerto Ricans we all learned a lot.*

*To me it was a demonstration that in spite of all our colonial status Puerto Ricans have developed and adapted American democracy to our own political ideologies. They are a product of our relations with the U.S. but adapted to our Puerto Rican way of life, different from U.S. and different from other Caribbean neighbors and Hispanic American countries. To us Puerto Ricans that is not surprising but to our visitors from U.S., Hawaii, or Latin America it's something unique-It's Puerto Rican.*

*So help us God that Pilar Barbosa could live three more years to see what all this results in. So help me God - It's now or never.*

*Sincerely yours,*

*Pilar Barbosa Rosario*

I was saddened to hear of our loss earlier this year with the passing of Doña Pilar. What a grand lady and fellow citizen. Her opinions regarding this process to resolve Puerto Rico's political status deserve respect and should be treasured, particularly as one who was born in the Nineteenth Century before the United States flag was raised in Puerto Rico.

I believe Doña Pilar's hope for results within three years will happen. "Now" definitely is the time for Congress to formally start the process to permit the people of Puerto Rico to vote to continue local self-government under Commonwealth, separate sovereignty, or statehood. There is a serious determination in Congress to solve Puerto Rico's status problem as a top priority of national importance. I also believe that everyone who participates in these hearings on the *United States-Puerto Rico Political Status Act*, or in any part of the bill's self-determination process, will contribute to the final resolution of Puerto Rico's status, and will in fact one day, "see what all this results in."

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