

Committee on Resources

Witness Testimony

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE DON YOUNG
Hearing in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, April 21, 1997
the *United States-Puerto Rico Political Status Act*, H.R. 856

This is a real pleasure to hold the third hearing of the 105th Congress on the *United States-Puerto Rico Political Status Act*, [H.R. 856](#), in the well-known city of Mayaguez, Puerto Rico. All the testimony we will hear today in Mayaguez will be as important and considered equally with the statements received by the Committee in the earlier hearings in San Juan and Washington.

The Puerto Rico Legislature enacted a valid request on January 23, 1997, House Concurrent Resolution 2, asking the 105th Congress to authorize a vote on Puerto Rico's political status before the end of next year. This bill will answer that request by permitting the nearly four million U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico to exercise the right of self-determination by choosing in a Federally authorized vote, to be held no later than the end of 1998, to continue the Commonwealth structure of local self-government, separate sovereignty, or statehood.

Not only would such a *Congressionally* sanctioned political status referendum next year be an unprecedented event in Puerto Rico, but it would most likely occur before the centennial of the signing of the Treaty of Paris ending the Spanish-American War and the subsequent transfer of sovereignty over Puerto Rico to the United States. It will be in the best interests of the United States to provide an adequately timed transition to the political status form of full self-government preferred by a majority of the people of Puerto Rico.

The United States-Puerto Rico Political Status Act has three stages to permit the change to full self government in a manageable and practical way: first the initial decision vote in 1998, followed by a transition period and final implementation. This multistage approach permits a smooth transition to address economic, fiscal, legal and political concerns.

Although the bill's approach may seem to add additional years to the decolonization process, it represents a relatively small number of years compared to the five centuries under Spanish and then American rule. Puerto Rico certainly has waited a very long time for the United States to provide the people of Puerto Rico with the most cherished right in our democracy. In every respect, the people of Puerto Rico are every bit as ready as the people of our states were to exercise that right when their time came.

It is in the national interest, and in the best interest of preserving and strengthening our democracy, for the United States to move promptly to adopt the *United States-Puerto Rico Political Status Act*. The people of Puerto Rico will then be able to exercise their right of self-determination and decide in 1998 whether they want to continue the Commonwealth structure for local constitutional self-government, separate sovereignty or statehood. Puerto Rico's political status referendum will be an incredibly historic event of epic proportions befitting the sacrifice, loyalty, and patience of the inhabitants of Puerto Rico who will have waited a hundred years for the Congress to finally provide for full civil and political rights as charged in the 1898 Treaty of Paris. The witnesses' views and suggestions today will help the Committee and the Congress meet that obligation and take the appropriate and necessary action to enable the people of Puerto Rico to resolve their political status.

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