

**Wednesday, June 16, 2021, 1:00 p.m. (ET)
Full Committee Legislative Hearing**

**H.R. 2070, "Puerto Rico Self-Determination Act of 2021" and
H.R. 1522, "Puerto Rico Statehood Admission Act"**

OPENING STATEMENT

We are meeting today for a second day of hearings on, H.R. 1522, the Puerto Rico Statehood Admission Act and H.R. 2070, the Puerto Rico Self-Determination Act of 2021; both of which are seeking to conclusively address the island's future political status after 123 years as a territory of the United States.

When we met for the first hearing in April, we heard from elected officials from Puerto Rico – including the Governor and Speaker of the House of Representatives – who urged passage of the bill they supported. Today, we will hear from academics, residents of Puerto Rico, and diaspora leaders, who will also passionately advocate for their preferred solution to Puerto Rico's political status.

The journey to address Puerto Rico's political status began in 1952 when the U.S. enacted legislation establishing the current relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States. Since then, there has been a series of plebiscites to find out whether the residents of Puerto Rico were satisfied with the current territory status or if they wanted to change it. The most recent of those plebiscites yielded support in favor of statehood, which led to introduction of the two bills before us.

At our last hearing there was a spirited debate and discussion of whether the residents of Puerto Rico desire a permanent union with the U.S. that guarantees their U.S. citizenship, and equal rights and responsibilities as Americans residing in the fifty States. We also heard arguments insisting that the residents of Puerto Rico are still unsure of agreeing to a permanent union and should therefore be allowed to debate and discuss all the non-territory status options available to them through a status convention.

As you are all aware, we reached out to the Biden Administration's Department of Justice for an assessment of the two bills. I want to thank the Department for submitting the information to the Committee. In summary, the official reports indicate that the Department of Justice supports providing the people of Puerto Rico the opportunity to vote on whether to become a state of the Union, as H.R. 1522 would do. Also, that the Department would support H.R. 2070, if it facilitates a choice among three constitutionally permissible status options – statehood, independence, and territory status.

We can anticipate that today's hearing will likely be as lively as the first hearing. Once again, I want to be straightforward with the residents of Puerto Rico, this is a divisive issue in Congress – for both delegations – and there is great uncertainty around what would happen if there were a Committee or Floor vote on either of these bills.

Nevertheless, I recognize this Committee's responsibility in playing a leading and constructive role in resolving this issue, which is a priority for the people of Puerto Rico. For this

reason, I am committed to moving this process forward. The Committee is approaching a decision-making point, which is what the residents of Puerto Rico expect and deserve.

With that in mind, I want to welcome our witnesses. I also want to welcome our former colleague, former Representative Luis Gutiérrez. I look forward to receiving all your testimonies.