

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Okay, thank you. [Tapping microphone] Now, okay. Thank you, we will shortly begin this... This... This forum. But before that, I wish to introduce a team member of the Natural Resources Committee, Margarita Varela, she will be giving you the basic instructions concerning how we will conduct this forum. Margarita, if you please. Yes.

Committee Deputy Director, Margarita Varela:

Good afternoon, I will now begin sharing today's instructions with you all. We will be conducting a series of panels consisting of six people per panel. Those with tickets allowing them to provide public commentary will be called by Committee personnel when their panel is up. Once the panel is underway, the Committee will invite the panel to provide commentary from my left to my right. We also request that you provide your full name at the beginning of your comments. Each member of the panel will have five minutes per statement. Considering that the purpose of this forum is to listen to the panelists, at the end of the comments of each panel all Committee members will be able to direct clarifying questions to certain panelists. There will be a visible timer indicating when each panelist's time has run out. It is not necessary to speak for the full five minutes. However, if you go past the five minutes, you will be requested to finish your comments. We are deeply grateful for your assistance because it is important for the Committee's objectives of transparency and public participation that we hold today's forum. Everyone's entries will be transcribed and made available to all Committee members and entered into the official registry for future proceedings in Congress concerning this legislation. It is fundamental that the members of each panel are able to present their statements without interruptions or expressions of support or opposition from the audience. Interruptions, outbursts, or expressions of support or opposition from the audience will not be tolerated. Anyone who refuses to follow these rules when requested to sit in silence and respectfully observe the event shall be escorted out of today's proceedings. Chair Grijalva.

Committee Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you very much and... Let me begin by saying good afternoon to everyone. I want to welcome you all to this congressional public input forum held under the auspices of the Natural Resources Committee of the United States Congress. I am Raúl Grijalva, and I chair the Natural Resources Committee that has jurisdiction over the legislation relative to Puerto Rico's political status. The purpose of this forum is to listen to the people of Puerto Rico on the Puerto Rico Status Act Discussion Draft. The Committee has invited panelists with specific perspectives and expertise relative to this important issue to address our delegation and share their views. Members of the public have also been asked to share their views as panelists during this afternoon's proceedings and the Committee deeply, deeply appreciates those that we will hear

from today and that took the time to register for a speaking opportunity at today's proceedings. The Committee is holding this forum to help inform the legislative process and Congress's action on the Puerto Rico Status Act. Which I will speak... Which... Many of you are familiar with, and we look forward to the information as it will impact us, our decisions going forward. I want to thank you and I want to stress that this forum is one of several mechanisms the Committee has made available to the public in Puerto Rico to share their views and perspectives on the legislation. I encourage stakeholders and the people of Puerto Rico that care about this issue to share their perspective with us on the Committee's website at [Naturalresources.house.gov](https://naturalresources.house.gov); thank you. Good afternoon to all. Welcome to this public opinion forum of Congress held under the Natural Resources Committee of the United States Congress. I am Raúl Grijalva, presiding over the Natural Resources Committee that has the authority over this legislation relative to the political status of Puerto Rico. The Committee is holding this forum in order to help inform the process and actions of Congress concerning the Puerto Rico Status Act. The details of which many already know, and we hope to become better informed about that document based on the comments and opinions of panelists. I wish to... This meeting is not the only one. There are other ways to communicate with the Committee, but our urgency today is for us to receive, initially, the opinion, the recommendations, and also the criticisms that some have with this document. It is important to the process. Today I am accompanied by my colleagues: Nydia Velázquez and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez from New York. And your Congresswoman, Jennifer González Colón. I want to deeply thank Velázquez, González-Colón, and Ocasio-Cortez for their dedication to solve this issue concerning the future of Puerto Rico. I also wish to thank you for the true leadership you all have shown concerning this situation... It has not been an easy process, it has been a difficult process, with lots of risk, but it's also a historical opportunity to take a step forward. I wish to thank you all, and with that, I wish to acknowledge my colleague, Puerto Rico's Resident Commissioner, Congresswoman González-Colón. If you please.

Resident Commissioner Jennifer González Colón:

Many, many thanks Mr. Chairman of the Committee. My colleague Nydia Velázquez and colleague Ocasio-Cortez who accompany us today. Today is a very different day. It is rare that we have the Natural Resources Committee on the island holding a forum of this magnitude to discuss an issue that we as Puerto Ricans have been discussing for many decades. The reality is that, historically, everybody presents their measures – in our case, the people of Puerto Rico voted in favor of Statehood in 2012, in 2017, and in 2020, which led us to introduce a bill in the House, HR 1522, which has bipartisan support and, at the same time, Congresswoman Velázquez and Congresswoman Ocasio-Cortez introduced House Bill 2070. Both of these bills are part of the evaluation of this Committee that has held public hearings throughout this process. As part of a real effort to decolonize Puerto Rico, we decided to sit down at the table together, alongside Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, Congressman Darren Soto, who apologies for not being at this hearing, though we have his staff present. Likewise, I... For other colleagues... We decided to

prepare a draft bill in those areas where we were able to come to agreements. It is not a perfect bill for any of the ideologies involved, it is not a perfect bill for any of the processes, however, it is the first draft that provides a mechanism that, to my judgment, has two fundamental reasons. The first, that, for the first time Puerto Rico has a binding vehicle where the Congress of the United States allows Puerto Rico to choose non-colonial and non-territorial status options, which would allow us to be able to exit this discriminatory, indecorous, and colonial situation that the people of Puerto Rico have lived in the past decades. This bill... This draft bill meets both of those two precepts. Today is nothing more than a continuation of the work we began on Thursday, yesterday, when we met with the different political parties and today with the national political parties. And what better way than to have the input of people that are in favor, against, or that could represent the ideologies contained in this bill. So once again, I thank Chairman Grijalva, the members of the Committee that are here, and that have been listening to what the people of Puerto Rico have to say, and, well, I am... I am welcoming people's comments.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Many thanks. And representative Velázquez, please.

Representative Nydia Velázquez:

A very good afternoon to the people of Puerto Rico. I wish to thank Chairman Raúl Grijalva, my colleagues Jennifer González Colón, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and Darren Soto. As we all know, Puerto Rico is a colony of the United States. More than 100 years ago, the United States invaded Puerto Rico and since then, the topic of Puerto Rico's political status has been an inconclusive issue that has always been an issue. We are here because we are in agreement that we must advance a process of decolonization. The current status is unsustainable, it is unjust, and it is undignified. The wait for change has been long for Puerto Rican families. As you know, I introduced a bill, a bill jointly with Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. And obviously, I understand that it was the best possible vehicle to obtain a Constitutional Assembly where the people could have direct participation in that mechanism and to achieve the necessary agreements in relation to definitions of status, transitional plans, and other subjects that are extremely important. But here we are. I believe we are at a historic moment where, for the first time, factions that were in opposition, that had a different vision of how to decolonize Puerto Rico, we have joined together to reach an agreement. I have always wanted to help provide a democratic mechanism including...which is inclusive and transparent. To advance a process that could allow the people and all sectors to have wide, democratic, and transparent participation. It was not the rejection of any particular option, but rather so we could get participation to all sectors and all options without tilting the balance in favor of any given option. So, we are here because it is the people of Puerto Rico that will have to face the consequences of the solution that the people democratically decide. It is the moral responsibility of the United States Congress

to tell the people of Puerto Rico what they can offer and negotiate. And here we are. Providing a binding process and that will have three options: Independence, Statehood, and Free Association. In order for this draft – and I want to indicate that I insisted it be a draft because... If we wish to decolonize Puerto Rico, we must begin by providing a process where the people of Puerto Rico feel like they have invested in the construction of this process. A process that must be...that must respect the right to free participation and where the definitions that are included are widely shared to provide a mechanism through which the people of Puerto Rico and every voter can understand the consequences of each one of those definitions. I wish to thank all the panelists, because their participation will contribute so that the bill introduced before the Congress of the United States reflects the aspirations and dreams of Puerto Rican people. Thank you very much.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Many thanks. I wish to acknowledge my colleague, Representative Ocasio-Cortez for her comments.

Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez:

Many thanks and good afternoon. We are here today because... After more than 100 years... With Puerto Rico... As a territory of the United States, the federal government of the United States is prepared to recognize, for the first time, their relationship with Puerto Rico. To recognize the colonial relationship. After years of disasters, hurricane Maria, earthquakes, and now with the developments in the Supreme Court, we know that we are at a moment where we have to change and develop the role and status of our island of Puerto Rico. Today... and the point today and our mission today is to listen to the people of Puerto Rico to build a transparent and inclusive process, with integrity and transparency, that anyone in this island can have faith in...that this is a process that respects the people of Puerto Rico. With that, I wish to thank all the panelists that are here and thank all the people, the audience...that are here to participate in this process. Thank you very much.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you. Allow me to invite... The first group of panelists, please. And let us begin with introductions, from my left to my right. And let me just say that is not a political opinion [background laughter] and... Let's begin, and many thanks.

First Panel

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

We recognize the first panelist, please [background conversation].

Aníbal Acevedo Vilá:

Good afternoon, for the record, I am Aníbal Acevedo Vilá, former Governor and former Resident Commissioner. I am here in that capacity. As former Governor and Resident Commissioner. Thank you for this opportunity. Although I take full responsibility for the statements, the ideas I will present, to a great extent they are also supported by the Steering Committee of the *Frente Puertorriqueñista*. This draft bill, while not perfect, is a step in the right direction. I will make some general comments on the definitions put forward but will use most of my limited time to make comments on the definition for Free Association. Regarding Statehood, there is a need to clarify that the official language of daily businesses in the state government, especially the courts, will be in Spanish, as well as it will continue to be the official language in public schools. That has been the representation made by the Statehood party to the People of Puerto Rico. But Congress has demanded in the past that states wishing to be admitted to the Union with different prevailing linguistic groups, such as Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona, and Louisiana adhere to certain English-speaking guidelines.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

True.

Aníbal Acevedo Vilá:

The bill must clarify this. Also, there is a need to have a clear transition plan for Statehood. Especially regarding the negative economic consequences of federal income taxation. Regarding Independence, there is no moral or political reason to impose upon those who decide to keep their US citizenship a different set of rules to transmit that citizenship to their children than those living in other foreign countries. Moreover, to establish a different set of rules would clearly be unconstitutional. The language on the bill is not clear about that. One of the most important elements of this draft is the inclusion of Free Association as a different status alternative from the others. But because this will be the first time in US history that Free Association will be available to a territory that has been unincorporated for more than 100 years, and whose citizens have been US citizens by birth for more than 100 years, there needs to be more details on the definition and transition plan. Starting point: If the United States is willing to offer Free Association, it is because Congress has made the intelligent decision that this kind of

relationship could benefit both. Therefore, the bill must include at least the element that Congress is willing to consider as part of the negotiation of a compact of Free Association. Without those clear elements, Congress will be making an offer without any real context. The main issue regarding the definition of Free Association is citizenship. Free Association means that the US has some strong interest in Puerto Rico, obviously, more than under Independence. The right for Puerto Ricans to keep their US citizenship will open the door to making that citizenship one of the bases of the compact. The current language on the bill is confusing. The final proposal should include language stating that the US is willing to recognize the right to claim US citizenship to those born in Puerto Rico from a US citizen. The language say [sic] in “the transmission of citizenship will be for the duration of the first agreement” is a political poison pill with no legal or constitutional effect. It is well-known that one Congress cannot oblige [sic] another one. If after 25 or 35 years of a compact of Free Association, a future Congress is willing to extend the automatic transmission of US citizenship, nothing in this bill could limit them in the future. Therefore, that language must be deleted. The bill includes the same economic transition for Independence and Free Association. Again, if you are offering Free Association, it’s because you are making an intelligent decision that having a special, close relationship with Puerto Rico is good for both. Therefore, the economic transition must be different than the one offered for Independence. It is in the interest of the US to guarantee its farmers, retail, and industrial sectors free access to Puerto Rican markets. Under Independence, that’s something that the government of the new Republic will have to decide. But under Free Association it will be, it should be included in the bill, that the permanence of a free and open market will be part of the new compact. Many independent countries use the US dollar as its currency. There should be language clarifying that the US will have no objection that the compact may include US dollars as currency in Puerto Rico. And it is also in the interests of the US under Free Association to maintain its current mutual defense understanding with Puerto Rico. If the US is willing to offer Free Association, all these elements must be part of the offer. Not only because they are... They will benefit Puerto Rico, but because they are of [sic] the interests of the US as well. Two final general comments: To move this process forward significantly, it must really become a bipartisan bill. And after more than two weeks since this draft has been made public, so far, we haven’t received much enthusiasm on the Republican side. From the meetings you had yesterday and the testimonies you will hear today, I am sure that you will get that this is a complicated process and that there are many details of the different options that need negotiation and fine tuning. That’s why many people, myself, and those who are part of the *Frente Puertorriqueñista* still believe that the status convention as described in our HR 27 is the best procedural option. You are trying to do in three days what the Status Convention and Negotiation Committee created by HR 27 will have to do with adequate timing. Thank you.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you very much, and let me invite the next speaker please. Thank you.

Zoraida Buxó:

First and foremost... Thank you, thank you. First and foremost I'd like to thank God for this opportunity and I want to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this initiative. And of course, a champion of consensus bills, Chairman... Congresswoman Nydia Velázquez and Jennifer González Colón and of course, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. I'm going to switch to Spanish because I want to avoid any misquotation by the local press [laughter in the background]. My name... I am Zoraida Buxó. I am the, I am one of the congressional delegates elected to the Federal Senate and today I appear before you as a spokesperson for two citizens organizations that have spent decades fighting to send out the message of and educate about Statehood as the best alternative for full democracy for all Puerto Ricans of the Island. These are *Puertorriqueños Pro-Unión Permanente Inc*, and *Accion Civil Para El Estatus*. After 124 years under the American flag, 105 years as American citizens, 70 years with a Constitution ratified by the People of Puerto Rico and supported by federal law; six local plebiscites celebrated between 1967 and 2020, finally, the Puerto Rico Status Act brings to the People of Puerto Rico the right to exercise their self-determination. For the first time in history. We wish to emphasize on various advances on this bill of consensus. First off, the bill is neutral in that it does not favor any of the recognized status alternatives: Statehood and Independence in two different ways. With and without a Free Association treaty. In terms of public policy and after the decisions we all know came from the Supreme Court, the Congress establishes providing an end to the colonial condition. An antidemocratic condition that implies unequal treatment to the citizens of this Island in comparison to our brothers and sisters residing in the states of the Nation. Including yourself, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and yourself, Nydia Velázquez. It deprives us from the right to vote for our President. Or for elected representatives in the legislative bodies of the Federal House and the Senate where they discuss and approve the laws that affect us. It is morally unsustainable for a nation that presents itself to the world as the standard bearer of democracy to continue to keep 3.2 million of American citizens, under a territorial condition of indefinite length, of political subjugation and one repudiated by the vast majority of the citizens of this Island. This bill sets the stage for the end of this condition that has caused injustices which limit our economic and social development. And it is just a relic of an imperialist model relying on colonial forms. Therefore, we support your firm determination to empower the citizens of Puerto Rico, liberating us, once and for all from the territorial clause, and providing constitutionally viable options. These include: Providing Puerto Rico with the same sovereign powers of a state protected by the tenth amendment of the Federal Constitution; or on the other hand, transforming the Island into a foreign country through the recognition of the Republic of Puerto Rico with or without a Free Association treaty. [Pause] We have no doubt that the natural progression of the territory of Puerto Rico is towards Statehood. That is the true culmination of the current status. The bill precisely reflects the guidelines of Statehood; in a correct and accurate manner, it presents that the only alternative that guarantees American citizenship to the citizens of Puerto Rico, with all rights, responsibilities, and privileges, permanently and in equal conditions with the 50 other

states of the Nation is Statehood. This is not the case with the other two forms of Independence that the bill offers. As described in sections 109 and 108, the status of citizenship of those born in Puerto Rico would then end up in the hands of what the Republic of Puerto Rico decides in its constitution and laws. About the American citizenship, it provides a different treatment for the children born posterior to the declaration of Independent Sovereignty and that a son or daughter who wishes to acquire it would have to go through the tedious process of naturalization established by federal laws same as any other foreigner. As for the Free Association option, any representation of permanent union or guarantee of American citizenship is defeated by article 211, which clearly states that treatment of Free Association can end at any moment at the will of either party. The bill is clear. As part of this process of meetings, discussion, and public forums, we understand that you will receive multiple petitions and various guidelines that the bill establishes. And that evidently, they have been exhaustively studied by their authors. I respectfully ask you to evaluate them closely and to refute all language that creates a false expectation in the voters concerning aspects as important as American citizenship. Regardless of whatever clarifications they request, Independence with or without Free Association will continue to be a leap into the unknown for all of those that believe in the permanent union and the preservation [stutters] of American citizenship in the permanent union and the preservation of citizenship with its protections and guarantees.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you.

Zoraida Buxó:

We respectfully request that you file this bill and obtain overwhelming bipartisan support for it from each of your colleagues in Congress. You can do it. And without taking a step back//

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

//Your five minutes have passed, thank you very much.

Zoraida Buxó:

Of course.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Next person, please.

María De Lourdes Guzmán:

Good afternoon, I am María De Lourdes Guzman, I am the President of *Movimiento Unión Soberanista*, a political-educational organization that supports Puerto Rican sovereignty from the options of Independence and Free Association. In representation of the organization that I preside, I thank you for this invitation and the presence of all of you and your interest in discussing the situation regarding Puerto Rico's status. This subject has historically suffered the indifference and apathy of the Federal government of the United States despite the legitimate claims from many sectors of this country demanding it be addressed. In less than a month, it will have officially been 124 years since the United States militarily invaded us, making our citizens believe that they would bring us the liberty and democracy that the Spanish regime had denied us for over four centuries. Nonetheless, we have been utilized politically, militarily, and economically for the benefit of the colonizing power, supported by those who have served it unconditionally to this day. We have been colonized politically, economically, and psychologically for over a century. The same day that marks 124 years of the American invasion also marks the seventieth anniversary of the creation of the *ELA* [Commonwealth of Puerto Rico], which has been nothing more than a disguise for the colonialist regime that we live under, a reality that the very government of the United States has taken pains to unmask. Both of these events must be extremely shameful for a country that calls itself a champion of civil rights and defender of liberty and democracy. Thanks to the *ELA*, Puerto Rico finds itself deprived of establishing commercial relationships with other countries, of controlling its immigration, customs, and borders, the areas, precisely, where the drugs and weapons enter to empower the underground drug trafficking market that is bleeding our country dry. We are forced to use the least efficient and most expensive of Merchant Marines in the world and we have become a country dependent on the markets of the United States, importing more than 85% of what we consume. Nearly half of our population lives below the poverty level. Our youth, the wealth of all nations, has known nothing but precarious survival. Our accelerating poverty has expelled from our country hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans that don't find here an opportunity to make their aspirations a reality. After the colossal bankruptcy forced on us by colonial and annexation enthusiasts, we are now placed under a despotic financial control board [sic] that has only managed our budgets for the benefit of speculative investors, threatening our university, undermining the retirement funds of thousands of laborers, our essential services, and our fundamental right to a dignified life. This, in a tight synthesis, is what the *ELA* has represented to our People. A dismal reality that you, as protagonists of this effort must transmit to your congressional colleagues. As we face the complexity of solving this problem of the status of our Country and despite the fact that we favor the mechanism of Constitutional Assembly of Status, we applaud this effort of achieving this draft that excludes definitely the so-called solution that

is and always has been a problem: The territorial option. This draft allows us the opportunity to have a deep, mature, serious, responsible, and fearless discussion on a subject that keeps us divided over our preferences; divisions that the United States have used as an excuse to not do anything and conveniently propose for us to get into an agreement, abdicating its moral responsibility that is imposed by their occupation of our Island for over a century and having exploited us for its own benefit. We applaud that, despite the historic old posture of the executive branch of the Federal government to defend the territorial option, it not only has been discarded, but it has been included, as a separate option, Free Association, which will give our People the opportunity, in its exercise of its sovereignty the right to negotiate a treaty of Free Association with the United States, like how [sic] that country has done with other islands in the Pacific Ocean. It seems quite accurate that with Independence, the only inalienable right of the People, the right of Puerto Ricans to have free transit towards the United States is recognized; this considering that the conditions created under the ELA have forced over 5 million Puerto Ricans into exile. It has dismembered families and has turned us into a divided nation. We, however, understand that the definition of Statehood must be further elaborated upon. Simply saying that our rights are guaranteed under the United States Constitution seems insufficient. Its self-enforceability is unreal. Especially if we consider the irrefutable fact that Statehood is a concession emanating from the United States Congress, who reserves the right to impose the conditions required to enter the Federation of States. Yet nothing is said about the taxation responsibilities nor about our language or the economic feasibility of a Puerto Rican state in such a precarious financial situation. What is more, is a majority of 50% plus one enough to guarantee admission? On the other hand, Puerto Ricans deserve to know what truly represents to keep us as an incorporated territory previous to the admission as a state, which would be catastrophic for our country. As we face the inescapable truth that the United States has been the architect of the ELA, which has so impeded our development as a nation, it is urgent that a process of decolonization begins, to rescue us from the quagmire we find ourselves in. Puerto Rico cannot continue to be the hostage to stagnation. Thank you very much.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you. Please.

Ramon Luis Nieves:

Good afternoon.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Good afternoon.

Ramon Luis Nieves:

I dedicate my words to William Miranda Marin on the twelfth anniversary of his death. He would have been here. My name is Ramon Luis Nieves. I am an attorney and former Senator for the District of San Juan, Puerto Rico. For the past 25 years I have advocated for Free Association as a status option for the People of Puerto Rico and the government of the United States. Even though I am a member and former Senator of the *Partido Popular Democratico*, I appear before you in my personal capacity. That's said, it's an undeniable fact that thousands of *Populares* support Free Association. Also, for the past 32 years, the *Partido Popular Democratico* has formally advocated for a non-colonial, non-territorial association between Puerto Rico and the United States. I appear before you in support of the draft bill known as the Puerto Rico Status Act. This draft represents an important turning point in the colonial drama between Congress and Puerto Rico. The legislative intent of the draft is to propose non-colonial, non-territorial options to be voted by the People of Puerto Rico. Including or excluding territorial options on this draft is a policy decision made by Congress. I welcome the opportunity of starting a serious conversation on Free Association. This draft closes the door on misleading statements suggesting that Free Association is some kind of Independence. The attack on the so-called two Independences is actually a political lie. Read the bill. Free Association is perhaps the most flexible of status options. Understanding this fundamental characteristic of Free Association is critical. Political will is the only parameter to be followed in shaping a compact of Free Association between both nations. This draft fails to clearly distinguish between both options: Free Association and Independence. It proposes basically the same terms regarding [the] so-called withdrawal of US sovereignty. I propose that even though this language works under Independence, the terms of Free Association actually become effecting... Effective after formal signing of the compact, its approval by the voters, a compact implementation act, and a presidential proclamation. I will now address the controversial issue of US citizenship in a compact of Free Association. Perhaps one of the most important myths destroyed by this draft is the alleged impossibility of continued transmission of US citizenship under Free Association. However, the draft imposes conditions on continued transmission of citizenship that make no sense under a Free Association scenario. Puerto Ricans, US citizens since 1917, wish to remain so, and to retain their rights to further transmit such legal status to their sons and daughters. Continued transmission of US citizenship by Puerto Ricans under Free Association is a policy decision governed by political will and the terms of the compact. There are no legal, constitutional, or significant policy constraints on the United States agreeing on continued transmission of US citizenship after the effective date of the compact. Finally, I propose that the Committee engages advocates of Free Association in the following days to further refine this draft. Respectfully, we cannot pretend this process to be serious if advocates for Statehood insist on imposing conditions on Free Association while being quite vague on their preferred option. Perhaps that is why the draft is silent on critical issues such as federal taxation under Statehood, the impact of federal taxes on the recent plan of adjustment to deal with Puerto Rico's post-

bankruptcy scenario and the issue of language. This, while including a nonsensical proposal under Free Association to transfer Social Security funds of Puerto Rican individuals to the local government. I imagine that Statehood advocates are already drafting copies for political attack ads using this nonsensical Social Security business. Self-determination principles require that Congress sits down with advocates of non-colonial, non-territorial options and offer the best possible and mutually agreeable conditions to the People of Puerto Rico. Thank you very much.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you. Let me invite the next speaker, thank you.

Zoe Lavoy:

Thank you. Good afternoon, my name is Zoe//

Staff:

No, that is not on.

Zoe Lavoy:

Can't hear? No?

Staff:

Hello?

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Now.

Zoe Lavoy:

Now? Okay? Thank you. Good afternoon. My name is Zoe Lavoy. Since I was a young girl, I've been a Statehood supporter. Throughout my life and in different forums I have been able to defend the belief that Statehood is the best status option for Puerto Rico. Everywhere, from the Puerto Rico Senate to the United Nations, I have had the honor of being able to raise my

voice on behalf of hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans that, like me, firmly believe Puerto Rico should become a state of the United States of America. Today, I want to start by saying thank you. Thank you for putting your differences aside and making the well-being of Puerto Rico the priority. For the first time, after so many attempts, I really believe that we are closer to ending the current undignified status. Enough of being a colony. [Brief background unintelligible conversation].

Zoe Lavoy:

Regarding this draft, based on my experience as a former Senator, I know that there is not [sic] such a [sic] thing as a perfect bill. But I am confident that coming to Puerto Rico to hear, not only from political leaders but also from regular citizens like myself will allow you to improve this bill. And for that, I thank you again. I want to take this opportunity to stress those points that I believe are the most important of Puerto Rico Status Act. With this draft you have achieved five important things. One: To bring closer to resolution what we believe is the basis of our problems. We might be solving this issue once and for all within the next 17 months. Two: To exclusively include non-colonial, non-territorial status options. Three: To demand respect from Congress towards what we will... Oh, towards what will be our decision. Our land, our decision. And Congress will have to abide. Four: Providing for the decision to be made through direct vote through a democratic process which will allow all Puerto Ricans to vote. And five: Ensuring Puerto Ricans will be making an informed decision by validating the meaning and the consequences of each alternative through a nonpartisan voter educational campaign. Although I am confident that the majority will choose Statehood, truth is that whichever status option wins, that is what we will become. I am pretty sure that one of the main takeaways from this trip will be that Puerto Rico or Puerto Ricans want this problem to be solved. Our current status is the main reason our Island has stalled in its full political, economic, and social development. That is why I believe that those who live in this Island cannot leave all the work in your hands. It is obvious that this bill will be challenged by many Congress [sic], or members of Congress, particularly, from the Republican party. And that is why, as a *Puertorriqueña*, I know that many of us will ask from our many family members and friends who have had to leave the Island, not out of choice but necessity, to become actively involved in the support of this bill. We will ask from them to call their congressmen and women and senators to demand their support for the approval of this bill, making this an important issue for the upcoming elections. And due to limitation of time, I will only add one more aspect... Actually, a request to all of you. As mentioned, I have been an elected official. Thus, I know that too many times, that decisions are supported by some and rejected by others. But our duty as representatives of the People is to make decisions based on what we believe is the right thing to do. Regardless of their support or rejection. So, my ask [sic]: do not give into demands from a group of people, including leaders, who insist on not resolving our status, who insist on having the *ELA* as an option. As so many of us know, to include what we suffer today will only result in keeping Puerto Rico hostage of an anti-democratic state where

others make decisions for us without the right to have a say or a vote. Let me finish by saying: I am a very proud grandmother of two and based on the decisions made at the federal level I worry about their future. This horrendous tendency to try to take away rights, abortion, just to mention one, from minorities, is dangerous. It is because of Valentina and Diego, my grandchildren, and all our children in Puerto Rico that I know that today, more than ever, we cannot be excluded from the right to representation and vote.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you.

Zoe Lavyo:

We are counting on you. Thank you.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you. Sir.

Brigadier General Víctor Perez, retired:

Good evening. Good afternoon. For the record, I am Brigadier General retired Victor Perez. President of the Veterans for Puerto Rico Statehood. Our group visited Congress this past 25, 30th of April and have had audience [sic] with 35 representatives and senators lobbying for Puerto Rico statehood. And we stand ready to go again. We all agree, thank God and Congress, finally Puerto Rico's colonial status will come to an end. Voted by Puerto Ricans in Puerto Rico. We thank Honorable Hoyer, Honorable Grijalva, Honorable Velázquez, Honorable Ocasio, our Resident Commissioner, Honorable González, and our governor, Honorable Pierluisi, for coming together and marking history. Presenting the soon to be bill, the Puerto Rico Status Act. Binding Congress to conduct and accept a referendum in Puerto Rico voted by Puerto Ricans in Puerto Rico to choose between non-colonial and I repeat, non-colonial options of Independence, Free Association, and Statehood. This is the expressed will of the People and that is what we want. After 125 years of being a territory colony of the United States we finally see the light at the end of the tunnel. We have debated the subject throughout those 125 years enough to conclude that we are hearing from Congress in this, the Puerto Rico Status Act. Puerto Rico is a colony, that we will not a hide it [sic] anymore, and it needs to be resolved for the good and prosperity of the 3.2 million Puerto Ricans living in this island as well as the other five millions [sic], among them many veterans who have moved to one of the 50 states looking for equality. How ironic can it be for

Puerto Rican veterans living in Puerto Rico that we do not have the same rights that our federal comrades in arms in the States? Listen to this. For all of us that have served and continue to serve, there is no greater honor than to serve our Nation, the United States of America. We have done it in the past, and we will continue to do so, proudly, selflessly, and without hesitation. More than 250,000 Puerto Ricans has [sic] honorably and bravely served our nation throughout its history. All wars, all contingencies, per capita, Puerto Rico has served much more than many other states. Nine Puerto Ricans have been recognized with the medal of Honor [sic], the highest distinction presented by the President of the United States to any service member. Our 65th Infantry Regiment, who fought in World War II and Korea was recognized by Congress with the Congressional Gold medal. As said by President Obama, who signed the same [sic], "My hand has more fingers than the amount of congressional gold medals given by Congress." Today, over 100,000 veterans live in this island. Approximately 35,000 men and women currently serve in the Armed Forces worldwide. Yet, even after all our service and sacrifice defending democracy, liberty, and justice, we come back home, Puerto Rico, and we are denied full voting rights and equality which the US Constitution guarantees to all citizens living in the States. How can this be? We are sent to war; we have no choice. We fight, we sacrifice ourselves and our families. Many of us do not return. But when we come back to Puerto Rico, we cannot vote for the President, our commander-in-chief, nor we have representation with voice and vote in Congress. They send us to war. You send us to war. We don't have a Resident Commissioner, Honorable Jennifer González, who you know very well, she is very vocal, she is a great congresswoman, she has a great voice but she don't [sic] have a vote. The only income for many veterans as well as Puerto Ricans living in the Island is Social Security. But yet, as ratified by the US Supreme Court, Congress can discriminate against Puerto Ricans living in Puerto Rico not to receive Supplemental Security Income, SSI. Clearly discrimination and a matter of human rights. Puerto Rico has been a territory of the United States, it's part of the border, it's part of the continent. But incredibly and... [Stutters] For the matter of Tricare we are treated as a foreign country. We do not receive the same Medicare, and we don't receive the same federal funds, as many other states. So why is this? Because we are a colony. For all veterans. For all service members, for all 3.2 million Puerto Ricans living in Puerto Rico, this cannot continue and Congress is finally acting now. Listen, thank you for acting now, right now [scattered applause]. Thank you for giving this Puerto Rico status act, the binding of colonial decisions by Puerto Ricans in Puerto Rico. God bless our veterans//

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

//Thank you//

Brigadier General Víctor Perez, retired:

//And service members. God bless Puerto Rico. God bless our Nation, the United States of America, do you have any questions for me?

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

I couldn't cut you off in the middle of a "God bless", you know, that would've been very bad of me [laughter, scattered applause]. But... No, let me... No, I don't have any questions for the panels other than, my friend, to thank you for your service and the men and women//

Brigadier General Victor Perez, retired:

//An honor//

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

//And, from Puerto Rico//

Brigadier General Víctor Perez, retired:

//I am accompanied by many veterans here. In the audience here today//

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

And thank them as well. Thank them as well. With respect and admiration. Any questions for the panelists? Let me turn to my colleagues, I don't have any questions.

Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez:

I have one question, actually.

Brigadier General Víctor Perez, retired:

Please.

Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez:

Mr. Aníbal Acevedo Vilá... You had mentioned an assertion about clarification regarding maintaining the official language as Spanish in the event of a Statehood option. Are there any

other linguistic or cultural um... Ascertainment's that that you would like to...? That you wanted to point out, or is it solely language?

Aníbal Acevedo Vilá:

Well, I am against Statehood. I just wanted to let you know that the way the Statehood party has presented to the People of Puerto Rico the alternative of, of Statehood, it means that nothing is going to change in terms of our cultural identity. Sometimes they even say that we will... That we might be able to keep our Olympic team because the Olympic team is a... It's a... [sic] It's a private organization, the International Olympic Committee. And, and, so, language is the more clear one because you have in the past experiences. And I mention some of the states. If you look into the admission act of those states, Congress back then said, "You have to guarantee that public schools are going to be in English. You have to guarantee the legislative process is going to be in English." So, being silent on that issue, I don't think would be fair for the People of Puerto Rico to vote for Statehood and then later on realize that what we have today//

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

//Sir//

Aníbal Acevedo Vilá:

//And I'm going to give you an example. God bless you. But if you have a car accident, here in Puerto Rico, and we have to take you to court, we are going to try you in Spanish.

Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez:

Mhm.

Aníbal Acevedo Vilá:

We will provide you a translator, but it's going to be in Spanish. And they make believe [sic] the people of Puerto Rico that if we become a state, that's going to be the case. That the courts are going to be in Spanish and everybody... So that is the main issue. But the whole issue, is to protect the identity//

Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez:

//Okay//

Aníbal Acevedo Vilá:

//The sense that we are unique. That is one of the problems with Statehood.

Alexandria Ocasio Cortez:

And I'd like to just open the opportunity for any other witnesses regarding language and culture as part of any of the... Status options presented in the draft legislation. Okay, thank you.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

You are all invited to comment. If you... If I'm correctly reading... Reading... Ms. Ocasio-Cortez's intention, of... I think any panelist who wants to... To speak to the issues of language, identity, or culture is... Please.

María De Lourdes Guzmán:

Well, I believe it is an issue that, as I stated during my presentation, should be discussed. Because... There are many myths in relation to what the state of Puerto Rico might be. We in Puerto Rico, 90% of our people speak Spanish. To say that we are bilingual, is not correct. And in the United States you speak English, even if it is said that there is no official language, they speak in English. Our Puerto Rican brothers and sisters move to the United States and must speak English. They speak Spanish at home, within their communities, but the reality of the fact is that in order to insert themselves into the labor market and the rest of what American society is, they must speak English, including at the schools that children attend. And I believe there is a void there and that's why I say that this must be discussed with a lot of maturity and a lot of responsibility, without trying to scare people about losing this or that or that. But that one of the things we could actually lose is our language.

Chairman Grijalva:

Yes.

Zoe Lavoy:

If, if I may, in Spanish or English, it doesn't make a difference. But as far as I understand, there is no official language in the United States. So, at [sic] the end, we wouldn't be required, as far as I understand. But I do believe, though, and I have to [applause and cheers from the audience]. But, but... But if I may. If there's one thing that I love about this bill//

Speaker:

//No//

Zoe Lavoy:

//Is that on this draft, nobody is going to be lied to. So, I'm going to have to join their request and I think that, again, starting from the point that there is no official language, we do need to take a look at this and any other doubt. Because at [sic] the end, that campaign that you guys are going to do for the voters need [sic] to be clear as to every aspect for each and every of the options.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you. Nydia Velázquez?

Representative Nydia Velázquez:

Yes, I have a short question.

Committee Deputy Director, Margarita Varela:

About the same question? About, about the same subject?

Representative Nydia Velázquez:

No, another subject.

Zoraida Buxó:

If I may be allowed to express myself on that subject?

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Please.

Committee Deputy Director, Margarita Varela:

Mr. Chairman?

Zoraida Buxó:

The United States is a multicultural nation. To wonder what the United States is going to do in the twenty first century, to believe that a nation would impose a single language over a people is a fallacy. It is a total disconnection from the reality that we are living [cheering]. In addition to, the issue of language is one of the rights reserved for the states under//

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

If you may, please//

Zoraida Buxó:

Under the tenth amendment.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

If you allow me. Please, I know that... I know that everybody has their own way of expressing themselves concerning the opinion that you are listening to as well as the support to that opinion. However, if you please... If we may continue in this encounter in a professional manner, applause, commentary from the public, please resist the desire to. If possible. Now, Ms. Nydia? You had a question?

Representative Nydia Velázquez:

Yes. Either to Mr. Ramon Luis Nieves, or... Aníbal Acevedo. So, what would be, in your opinion, a couple of examples of areas where the US will keep jurisdiction in a Free- Associated Puerto Rico?

Ramón Luis Nieves:

Well, first of all, I think that precisely one of the... One of the problems with the draft is that it fails to identify some of those areas.

Representative Nydia Velázquez:

Mhm.

Aníbal Acevedo Vilá:

For instance, the bill doesn't address what are the... Security obligations of the U. S. under Free Association, for instance. It is silent on that subject, for instance. That's very important. However, I propose that maybe this bill is not the place to legislate the whole compact of Free Association. That's another process//

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

//Thank you//

Ramón Luis Nieves:

//And it is very important to identify that... And I understand that some people are, could be worried we could be voting for something that we don't have the whole details of the compact. And it's fair to be preoccupied with that. But it is... We have to, at least include several areas that are missing there and we can work with the Committee and we can work with Congress in order to address that. And... Very important, the... However, the areas that are mentioned on the bill are quite similar in, regarding Independence and Free Association, as I said in my testimony. And, in some areas it doesn't make sense. And as I mentioned, under Independence, after a presidential proclamation as proposed by the bill, Puerto Rico is independent. But that's not the process under Free Association. And Congress has already done several... Has authorized several compacts of Free Association. Has authorized the renegotiated terms of those compacts and maybe we can learn from that experience but applied to our experience here in Puerto Rico.

Representative Nydia Velázquez:

Thank you.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you.

Zoé Laboy:

May I//

Aníbal Acevedo Vilá:

//Thank you, I want to address... The question that was directed to both of us. I mentioned some of the areas on my testimony [brief background unintelligible comment] but, it has to be, we have to identify those who [sic] are for mutual benefit, both for the United States and for Puerto Rico. And the starting point should be the compacts of Free Association that the United States has with the islands in the Pacific. All of the areas I mentioned here are part of those compacts. So, it makes no sense to offer the People of Puerto Rico the alternative of Free Association and don't start even [brief background unintelligible comment] with what already has worked for the US and those islands. It's common defense, [brief background unintelligible comment] it's done there. They use the dollar. You know? So, so, how, how, in terms of international relations, of course, Puerto Rico will have its own personality but we//

Staff:

//We hardly//

Aníbal Acevedo Vilá:

//But maybe the United States would like to have some way, in terms... Because we are not independent. It is a Free Associated alternative, so the starting point should be the compacts of Free Association and then sit down and identify the other areas//

Representative Nydia Velázquez:

//Thank you.

Ramón Luis Nieves:

Chairman, if I may, very quickly, very quickly.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

This panel will take longer than the other five, but please.

Ramón Luis Nieves:

Okay, very quickly, very quickly. One area which is critical for Puerto Rico, under the Council of Security is the area of drug enforcement. 80% of the drugs that come here into Puerto Rico go to the United States. This is a national problem of the United States [sic] which Puerto Rican people are dying every day on the streets but that's one of the areas.

Representative Nydia Velázquez:

Thank you.

Aníbal Acevedo Vilá:

Thank you.

Resident Commissioner Jennifer González-Colón:

Mr. Chairman, just to clarify.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Please.

Resident Commissioner Jennifer González-Colón:

It's 10 seconds and it is that under [sic] tenth amendment the state... Reserve [sic] the right to select the language.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you. Now we are going to invite the next panel, thank you very much.

[Brief background unintelligible comment]

[Pause 01:01:27- 01:02:30]

Second Panel

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Let me welcome the next panel and thank you very much.

Eliezer Molina [protesting from the audience]:

Two years ago I was here with you. I told you they would sell you a PROMESA law that doesn't exist. They bankrupted this country [unintelligible comment and jeers from the audience].

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Please. [Jeers, shouts of "PROMESA is corrupt", "We need the Board out! We need the Board out!" Gavel 01:02:52- 01:03:05] Please. Please. Have some courtesy [Protestors shouting 01:03:15-01:03:38]. Please. Please, if you will kindly allow us to continue this encounter, the opinion... Everyone here is in agreement with that position because [protests]. Please. The courtesy to allow this encounter to continue, please. No? Let us have a 10-minute recess, please. Let's try and get them out. [Protests intensify 01:04:05-01:04:43] What did you tell them? Ready? We're ah... May we begin again? Many thanks to... Many thanks, it's just that... Democracy is not always pretty, but it is necessary. And I respect the right to protest and opinion but also the right to have this encounter with all the appropriate seriousness of the issue in front of us. I would appreciate that, as well. Well, many thanks.

[Unintelligible comments]

Resident Commissioner Jennifer González-Colón:

Close the door.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Please.

Natalia Catoni:

Good afternoon.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you.

Natalia Catoni:

My name is Natalia Catoni, I speak on behalf of the Puerto Rico Young Republican Federation. I have given a lot of thought to what I'm going to say today. And I'll settle on giving a very brief understanding of the bill and what I believe... And that I believe that the draft should be formally introduced to the Committee and be voted for. I don't aim to be obvious about my pro-statehood stance, which I'm very much pro-statehood. But at [sic] the end I am a millennial, um, I believe that my personal context will provide some idea of why I believe this bill should be introduced and why it's an opportunity for my generation to be heard. I was born into a pro-status quo, pro-colonial family. To give you an idea, my mother's childhood home became the Popular Democratic's Party [sic] headquarters in the municipality of Vega Baja. My first political rally was the 1996 campaign closure for the Popular Democratic Party. And I was part of the fifth column against statehood rallies. All of them. My mom took me to all of them. But with time, when I started to learn how to think for myself and I started seeing different things, my perspective changed. My political perspective changed. I have studied the topic, and I understand that in the nineteen-fifties, my mother's generation, my grandparents' generation had the opportunity to express themselves through a democratic, congressional approved process in which they voted and they were heard and the status quo was imposed. My generation has lived under a political status that was imposed to us. That we have not chosen. And that we all know is wrong. Colonialism is old, and it's bad. My generation deserves a right to be heard regarding the political status. I'm not going to say that the bill is perfect. It's not. I have my opinions on whether things should change or not. But I do agree with two things. Number one, it's binding and number two, the current status is not included, and it should never be included. Puerto Rico needs to move forward, it needs to move forward now. So this bill should be properly introduced and then we should go through the proper democratic process, and all be heard, and all allowed for changes in the bill. But it needs to be introduced. With that, I give you my thanks. Very short statement.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you very much. Sir?

Carlos Vizcarrondo Irizarry:

Before I speak, I must present myself and say that as a Puerto Rican, I feel very pained to see the incident that just occurred here. Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, and distinguished members of this Committee. For the record, I am Carlos Vizcarrondo Irizarry, former speaker of the Puerto Rico House of Representatives and former Judge of the Court of Appeals of Puerto Rico. Today, I would like to address this Committee regarding Title Two; transition and implementation of sovereignty in Free Association with the United States. First, I want to state for the record that in the years I participated in active politics in the Popular Democratic Party, I always favored the enhancement of the present Commonwealth status towards a relationship of autonomy between Puerto Rico and the United States in accordance with international law. More precisely, I was the author of a proposal to define the Commonwealth alternative to be defended in a future plebiscite which was proposed to be held in 1991. The PDP was in control of the executive and legislative branches. Governor Rafael Hernández Colón, who chaired the PDP, gathered the party in a general assembly held on 17th of November, 1980, in Ponce, Puerto Rico. I submitted my proposal to vote which was approved by an overwhelming majority. My proposition stated, required that the status project [unintelligible background comment] makes viable the exercise of free determination of the people of Puerto Rico under the laws of the Commonwealth. Between political formulas of equal dignity, not subordinated to the plenary powers of Congress of the United States under territorial clause of the Constitution to be presented to the People of Puerto Rico by the Congress of the United States. Since 1990, the PDP has recognized this proposal to be its official position regarding the enhancement of the Commonwealth status. In my opinion, the referred enhancement of the Commonwealth status [unintelligible background comment] is perfectly consistent with the proposition of sovereignty for the People of Puerto Rico in a compact of Free Association with the United States like the one you are presenting to us in discussion draft, before us. Finally, I want to summarize my more important recommendations: Add a new subsection D to section 207 to establish accord [sic] of the compact. I explained it in detail in my [unintelligible background comment] written statement. Second, clarify... Section 208 to state that US citizenship [sic] living in Puerto Rico at the time of the proclamation of Free Association will continue to be citizens of Puerto Rico and citizens of the United States. A third, clarify subsection A2 with respect to the persons born in the Free-Associated state of Puerto Rico from parents who are both US citizens. They will acquire US citizenship automatically. Fourth, request that the government of the US abide to its legal obligations pertaining to the services related to the vested rights of American citizens in Puerto Rico instead of referring those services to be provided by the government of Puerto Rico and

finally, demand the same treatment given by the Social Security Administration to American citizens living outside the jurisdiction of the US to the American citizens living in the Free-Associated state of Puerto Rico instead of referring those services to the government of Puerto Rico. Mr. Chairman, [stutters] thank you for this opportunity to address the Committee. Thank you.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Many thanks. Let me turn to the next speaker, thank you.

Lisa Muñoz:

Thank you. My name is Lisa Muñoz and I'm the president of the Young Democrats of Puerto Rico. First and foremost, I would like to thank you, Chairman Grijalva, for allowing me to address the members of the Committee. I also wish to commend Congresswomen Jennifer González and Nydia Velázquez for putting aside their ideological differences and working on a consensus bill to establish a federally binding process that will finally allow the Americans who live on these islands of Puerto Rico to have our voices heard in Congress about the type of political relationship we aspire to achieve with the United States, which I firmly believe will be Statehood. I would also like to recognize Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio's presence today and her steadfast support for young people and for this process. A large majority of us, the 3.2 million Americans who live in the oldest colony in the world believe in decolonizing Puerto Rico and that we must continue causing good trouble to achieve our full civil rights. The national platform of the Young Democrats of America recognizes our desire for political equality and states as follows, "We believe Congress must act on the will of the People of Puerto Rico and approve an enabling act with terms for Puerto Rico's admission as a state of the Union. The People of Puerto Rico have exercised their right to self-determination resulting in overwhelming support for Statehood. Thus, we support granting the full admission of Puerto Rico as a state of the Union. YDPR believes that our rights as American citizens should be fully secured and that no American in this great country of ours should have to choose between remaining in the land of their birth or the opportunity for a better life in some far-away land. As has been well documented, Puerto Rico has been suffering from a major brain drain since our recession began in 2006. Which has only worsened after hurricane Maria. According to the 2020 census, over 300,000 people between the ages 25 and 65 have left our shores. My peers continue to seek a better quality of life and struggle with job, health, and food security after the Covid crisis. And we believe that if Puerto Rico were a state, we would not feel the need to seek better opportunities away from our families. We are tired of being treated worse than any other American in the Nation. If Puerto Rico were to become a state, we would have the political power to have our voices truly heard in our Nation's capital when legislation is being considered and approved in Congress. For example, our current colonial disenfranchisement silences the voices of the women of our islands

on the matter of reproductive rights. It silences everyone in our island on the matter of climate change, which has severely impacted our coasts during the past five years. There may very well be parts of these islands that will be underwater by the time I am eligible to receive our second-class Medicare benefits. As the daughter of a Bronx-raised, US Army Purple Heart recipient, Vietnam veteran, may he rest in peace, and as a type I diabetes patient since I was six years old, I can give testimony of the immense suffering that our family has had to endure because of the discrimination that the Congress and the federal government have imposed upon us by limiting our access to federal healthcare and other social programs. This discriminatory treatment and the burden that it has placed on the very people that these programs are meant to assist have had a cascading effect on the ability [sic] of quality healthcare for and of the social well-being of all Americans in Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico has been a colony of the United States for 124 years. And this is the longest any... Any territory has gone without being admitted into the Union. This is not just morally wrong, it is plainly un-American and our country, through its leaders like yourselves, needs to rid itself of this stain in its moral fabric. In the words of President Kennedy, "I beseech you to not seek the Republican answer or the Democratic answer, but the right answer." The right answer is equality through Statehood for the 3.2 million Americans that call these beautiful islands their home. The consensus reached between the Puerto Rican members of this Congress contained in the federally binding status legislation being considered by this Committee is a step in the right direction. I thank you for your time.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you. Sir? Recognized?

Rolando Emmanuelli:

My name is Rolando Emmanuelli and I am here in a personal capacity due to my knowledge of the PROMESA law and my experience as a litigating attorney in Title Three cases under PROMESA law. Among the merits of this bill, I emphasize the draft of the definitions and transitional project towards Independence. As for the negative aspects, it is indispensable to reiterate that the draft contains the seed of its own destruction and will make its approval impossible before the Senate of the United States. This seed is Statehood. Therefore, if we wish to work on this process in a trustworthy manner and in a way that solves once and for all the ignominy of our colonial situation, Congress must undertake an initial determination prior to approval of this bill concerning the viability of promising Statehood to Puerto Rico. Without that threshold determination, we will all be wasting our time. On the other hand, the Proconsuls' Board imposed upon us by PROMESA law has just confirmed a plan of debt adjustment for the central government. The adjustment plan has deficiencies and problems that could result in Puerto Rico going into a second bankruptcy, because the growth estimates that the Board has prepared bury us in negative territory as soon as the year 2024. With this plan, the debt service

increases to 3,350 million dollars annually considering the payment to pensioners who are also creditors. A colonial Puerto Rico will not be able to collect those annual 3,350 million for debt service. We must also not allow the injustice and violation of international rights where a sovereign Puerto Rico would have to continue to put of with and finally collapse under an odious colonial debt. The adjustment plan to Puerto Rico's debt is not viable because it promises far too many resources for the payment of the debt under a colonial scenario of minimal or zero economic growth. Nobel winner in Economic Sciences, Joseph Stiglitz has stated and reiterated on his visits to Puerto Rico that a country without economic growth cannot pay off its debt, and that 50% of countries that adjust their debt default on their payments within five years. The straw that breaks the camel's back is that the plan to adjust the debt has tied the hands of Puerto Rico's colonial regime because it amended the Constitution of the Commonwealth, changed retirement systems into one of defined payments that at the end of the path will become insufficient to sustain future retirees and prohibits, at least for 10 years, the improvement of pensioned citizens' situation, or reinstate pension systems with defined benefits. These conditions would limit the sovereignty of Puerto Rico to alleviate poverty and inequality among our retirees and render them unable to be part of its state of rights. Remember, in order for the Republic to be viable, it must create a new constitution. That is part of the draft under our consideration. This Constitution could redefine the odious debt and establish prohibition of payment, which could open the door for laws that allowed the bonds to be declared unconstitutional. Puerto Rico's debt is odious due to its origin, process, and execution for it was produced counter to the interests of the People of Puerto Rico. First off, colonialism is an international crime, and this debt was produced under the auspices of the colonial regime. Secondly, it was produced in violation of local and federal laws and with full knowledge that it is unpayable. Finally, the debt is illegitimate because it was used to refinance debt with the purpose of keeping Puerto Rico's colonial apparatus afloat. If you wish to see proof of this, read the infamous report by Kobre & Kim that the Financial Control Board prepared that documents this entire scandal. This debt is unlawful, unpayable, and a sovereign Puerto Rico should not pay it. The draft bill must include specific dispositions that free the Republic of Puerto Rico from the effects of this odious law. Ironically, this odious debt [scattered applause] could only be maintained if Puerto Rico becomes a federal state, because Statehood is the culmination of colonialism and the Constitution of the ELA would continue and be bound by this debt adjustment plan. As a state, we will be condemned to pay for this and in its moment, the federal government would have to manage this issue when the state of Puerto Rico once again defaults on its payments to its creditors. It is urgent that Congress assume any responsibility established by the debt adjustment plan. It is not possible to go forth with the decolonization of Puerto Rico if the Republic of Puerto Rico still has to carry with the weight of an odious and unsustainable debt. Without such reparations, any process of decolonization would be destined for failure. Thank you very much [applause].

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you. Sir?

Néstor Duprey:

Good afternoon. Mr. Chairman Grijalva, members of the Committee, my name is Nestor Dupree. I submitted my statement both in English and in Spanish. For the benefit of our compatriots I will read it in Spanish. I thank the invitation extended by this Committee to share with you a brief reflection in regard to the draft bill concerning the future of relations between Puerto Rico and the United States which are under your consideration. First off, I wish to leave it completely clear that my opinions and comments reflect the dictates of my conscience and my mind and only represent me both as Puerto Rican historian and political scientist. I believe in the recognition of Puerto Rican sovereignty under a pact, convention or treaty of Free Association between the People of Puerto Rico and the United States of America with whom we share a common history that is over 100 years in the making along with human, geographic, and economic ties that force us, despite the colonial reality, into a mutual understanding that precisely solves the colonial character of our current relationship. Free Association is not an option lacking support; it is backed by men and women in Puerto Rico who, beyond partisan lines, recognize it as the best path for the People of Puerto Rico in their relationship with the United States. I have defended and I will continue to defend Free Association not because of convenience, but out of conviction. That is why I am here. Secondly, I believe in the justice of thanking both the interest shown not just by the Chairman of this Committee, Representative Grijalva, as well as Majority Leader Steny Hoyer in being able to obtain a document of consensus between all measures presented by the Resident Commissioner, dear friend Jennifer González and Representatives Nydia Velázquez and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. This document, which we hope becomes legislation in the next few days, is the starting point from here onwards in the inescapable negotiation that ends in a process of mutual determination concerning the future of the relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States. I speak of mutual determination and not of free determination because decisions of public policy that will be reflected on this legislation that shall be discussed and approved eventually by Congress will express determinations of public policy of the federal government as well as the will of the People of Puerto Rico. There are three core issues that require, to my view, a determination of public policy from the federal government. A policy decision. And one that will affect the final content of this present legislation which is currently under a state of draft. How we address these issues will condition the response of the People of Puerto Rico towards these constitutionally viable options offered. First, the bill under consideration forces the United States to decide that its policy toward the territory of Puerto Rico and, by extension, towards its population and the particularities of its relationship require a different treatment from the other territories in regard to the possibility of maintaining the territorial option. What may be desirable and even convenient to other territories due to its particularities and interests, is both undesirable and nonviable already. And I suspect that it is the same for the United States. The territorial option under any other name is

contrary to the best interests of the People of Puerto Rico and delays, for the United States, the resolution of its problem: how to dispose of the territory by offering decolonizing options. Second, the United States as a government, through its political branches must decide if it offers the option of Statehood to Puerto Rico with promises to grant it and under which terms and conditions. The disposition of self-executability contained within this draft explicitly conveys the acceptance of a petition of admission from the territory of Puerto Rico as a state of the Union without first knowing the terms and conditions of said admission. And we all know that the clause of self-executability has been the cemetery where past efforts to promote legislation and address this problem have been put to rest. Third, the option of sovereignty for Puerto Rico concerning Independence or Free Association imply a decision of public policy from the federal government concerning the future of US citizenship of Puerto Ricans. Everything is possible. Everything may be agreed upon if there exists enough political will for it. Those are, in brief, my comments towards these measures. The People of Puerto Rico and the United States must decide the future of our relationship in a manner that recognizes our mutual interests. This bill is a step in the right direction. The conversation has begun, so it must be continued.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you. Thank you. Please?

Karina Claudio Betancourt:

For the record, I will speak in Spanish and also with inclusive language. Greetings, esteemed Congress persons and the personnel of the Natural Resources Committee of the House of Representatives of the United States. Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity of being able to address you today. My name is Karina Claudio Betancourt. I am a resident of San Juan, Puerto Rico and as many young and queer people in this island, I live the ravages of colonialism every day. We do not live in this colony. We scrape by. It is a constant negotiation between the mediocrity of austerity and the losses of services imposed upon us by the Financial Control Board and the desire to truly be happy and live fully in this country. I think that this is one of the things that hurts the most about being a young person in this colony. We love it, we treasure it, we fervently defend its beaches as you could see today [laughs] and its land. Our right to be and to love who we wish and be who we are, right, but the colony chokes us. Therefore, I believe that in this panel we are in agreement that the issue of colonialism is unsustainable. That is why I joined the conversation concerning the Puerto Rico Status Act. Because I understand that the time has come to solve the problem of the colonial situation of Puerto Rico, but I also urge you that this process should not be rushed and, on the contrary, we don't repeat the same mistakes that with PROMESA, when in a nondemocratic manner it was imposed on us a Board that has made us miserable. Although I am thankful personally and representing the organization Open Society Foundation, for the leadership of Congresswoman Nydia Velázquez, Alexandria

Ocasio-Cortez for pushing forward [stutters] a Convention of Status that would have been, right, the ideal manner to solve this issue... I understand that there are many ways to... Look at the draft of this legislation bill and see how we can improve this legislation bill, as well as the way that we continue our dialogue. Particularly to involve and listen to Puerto Ricans most impacted by the tenacity of the colony. The problems that our organization and our community of local allies have identified in this draft bill includes the lack of detail and clarity concerning certain options of status, a language that attempts to make the Puerto Ricans lean towards one particular option of status, which is annexation, and that Congress wants to dictate, for example, what type of Republic Puerto Rico would establish under Independence. There are also issues with the definition of US citizenship, yes? As mentioned before, under the status of Free Association, and various other things that the draft neglects to mention, such as: What will happen to the debt of Puerto Rico, yes? As our colleague, Mr. Emmanuelli had mentioned, concerning the different options for status. What will happen, for example, with the language that controls our laws, our schools, our courts; federal taxes, as many others have mentioned today, right? And, besides that, there's no mention of the participation of the Puerto Rican diaspora in this vote. As another colleague said, there are many of us who have had to leave Puerto Rico but we keep going, yes? We follow what happens here politically. It also fails to mention the applicability of the Jones Act, or the lack thereof in the different options of status. The Jones Act increases the cost of a lot of products in Puerto Rico and, right, it truly impedes the economic growth, as mentioned previously. Lastly, I wish to reiterate, right, our desire to have congressional hearings in Puerto Rico, in Spanish, and in Washington DC in a bilingual manner in order to maintain an official record of the different opinions of the Puerto Rican People concerning this project. As a young person, I also wish to reiterate that the youth of Puerto Rico no longer trust the traditional political parties. I don't know if you saw yesterday, but the governor of Puerto Rico was booed at the University, yes and so, any process that occurs in Puerto Rico must have an element of neutral outreach and it must be financed by the United States government to reach out to youth and to also oversee the role of the colonial parties, whether it be the PNP or the PPD, in this process, since many of us have already seen how the traditional parties have used past referendums to favor their own status options and advance their partisan agendas.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you.

Karina Claudio Betancourt:

Thank you again for your time and I remain attentive [coughs].

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you. I turn to my colleagues, are there any questions... Any questions? No?

Representative Alexandria Ocasio Cortez:

A question. For Karina Claudio Betancourt. You spoke about the perspective of young people concerning political parties here in the Island. And I wanted to know, well... Are there any alternative mechanisms in which Congress could also receive other perspectives on top of the ones... Besides those of the parties that we have... That have already offered their perspectives?

Karina Claudio Betancourt:

Yes, hello?

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Please.

Karina Claudio Betancourt:

Well... I believe that speaking to the rest of the civil society is very important, especially with groups that are not affiliated to political parties, with people that, well, live at the margins of this archipelago and... I would gladly, through our organization, we might be able to arrange some of these conversations which may lie outside of traditional Puerto Rican partisan politics.

Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez:

Thank you.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you. Anybody else? Thank you very much.

Karina Claudio Betancourt:

Thank you.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Anyone else? Appreciated. Thank you very much. Let me invite the next panel up.

[Pause 1:34:45-1:35:17]

Third Panel

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

I see... I understand that there is much discussion between the audience included here, and I'd like to request, please, keep conversations... Keep them at a low volume or if it is a slow conversation to continue it outside [chuckles] and... Because... The... We, here we can hear exactly the conversations going on in the audience and... We will not be able to hear the panelist as we should. So, if you would kindly do me the favor. Thank you. Let me now... You are invited to your comments. No? Well... It's time for commentaries, your opinion?

Yvette Chardón:

May I?

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Absolutely, it's your turn.

Yvette Chardón:

Very well, good afternoon, distinguished and honorable members of the panel. Mr. Robles and Ms. Varela and Mr. Brian Modeste. Welcome to Puerto Rico, this is the pearl of the Caribbean. My name is Yvette Chardón. I am a Puerto Rican baby boomer from Ponce, Puerto Rico who feels honored...

Committee Deputy Director, Margarita Varela:

Yes, we cannot hear you.

Yvette Chardón:

I'm sorry.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

You need to talk into the mic for the record.

Yvette Chardón:

I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Well, my name is Yvette Chardón. I am a Puerto Rican baby boomer from Ponce, Puerto Rico who feels honored by this unique opportunity to express my feelings and beliefs about my Island's situation. I thank all of you for your effort and dedication to reach consensus and design this compromise draft. I am a very proud US citizen like most of my fellow Puerto Ricans on the Island. Yet I cannot feel proud of the fact that my Nation, maintains 3.2 million disenfranchised second-class US citizens living under colonialism in the 21st-century. Being a baby boomer, I have lived the history of this colonial status and have seen how the economic and social development model of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico has not worked. It has failed. It has kept us stagnant and poor. It has driven us into bankruptcy. My Puerto Rico has become the tax haven tropical paradise for others. Thank you, Representative Velázquez, you could not have described it any better when you said, and I quote, "The current status is unsustainable, unjust, and undignified." You have made my day, Nydia Margarita. I know you must have looked deep into your heart, into your Puerto Rican heart and as Jennifer González-Colón, Resident Commissioner said, "I respect you more." Um, doing some little [sic] research I learned that Puerto Ricans have loyally and bravely sacrificed. They have shed sweat, blood, and tears to defend our... Oh, my God. I'm nervous. Our noble flag ever since the Revolutionary War and even during the Civil War. [Sighs] As I speak here today, 35,000 Puerto Ricans are on active duty. And 330,000 veterans have bravely and proudly served in every single military conflict since World War I. But the military is not the only place where Puerto Ricans have excelled themselves [sic]. They have received the Congressional Gold Medal and multiple medals of honor. But us Puerto Ricans have also excelled in science, the arts, music, Grammys, Oscars, NASA, even a Judge in the Supreme Court and a Surgeon General. These last two, Puerto Rican women. Can you imagine how much more we would contribute if we were to enjoy full equality and democracy? Like our fellow citizens do in the States? Puerto Rico is the southernmost border to this Nation. We are the bridge to South and Latin America. As a state, we would not be a burden to our Union. To the Union, I'm sorry. Au contraire, we would add another flag... Another's star to our noble flag, assuming all the responsibilities and rights it implies to be a state of the greatest, most democratic nation on Earth. As a woman, wife, mother, and grandmother, I respectfully ask of you today to allow... Us to reach our dream. The American dream. Without the need to split our families and without feeling forced to move stateside to search for equality, voting rights, better opportunities, and a better quality of life. Our families are the nuclei of our society. And this colonial territory is tearing them apart and this has to stop. I respectfully ask of you today, please

be on the right side of history and make it part of your legacy in Congress to give us Puerto Ricans the opportunity to democratically express ourselves in [sic] the ballot box and define our political future.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you.

Yvette Chardón:

You have the power to stop 124 years of colonization, discrimination//

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

//Thank you. We need to go onto the next speaker, thank you very much. Please?

Yvette Chardón:

Well, thank you.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you.

Irma Rodríguez:

Do I begin?

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Yes, please.

Irma Rodríguez:

Esteemed Chairman Grijalva, and all esteemed members of the Committee, my name is Irma Rodríguez, President of Puerto Rico Pro-Statehood. We wish to express our most sincere

gratitude for the time you have all dedicated to help the American citizens that live in this island solve the colonial situation that has defined our destiny since 1898, quite a long time ago. The conditions of deterioration, economic and social decadence in which our Island finds itself in demonstrates that the utilized formula does not work. Since it does not provide the necessary economic tools to grow at the same rate as a state. It is time to decide, it is time to solve this dilemma. As you all know, Puerto Rico is subject to the plenary powers of Congress in virtue of the territorial clause. We are a territory, yes. We are a territory of the most powerful nation in the world. We are a territory of a nation that symbolizes equality and defends the liberties of all human beings in all corners of the planet. We are the territory of a great nation. A nation of opportunities for whomever wants to better themselves. A nation of equal protection under law. A nation where you can wake up with the hope that the efforts of our work will provide a better future for ourselves and for our children. And for our grandchildren and great-grandchildren. We wish to be part of the American Nation, but this great nation has forgotten us. It has kept us under a condition of social disadvantage. We are American citizens, and we want that full citizenship with all the rights and responsibilities. It is not about the aids we will receive once Puerto Rico becomes a state. It is also not about the safety we will have in our borders or how the government might improve or the stability that Statehood will bring us. It is about giving us the opportunity of declaring fully who we are. We are Puerto Ricans, American citizens, a part of this great nation. Sorry, my mouth is dry. We do not exist under equality of conditions that our co-citizens of the United States; all you need to do is take a walk through this beautiful Island to realize that this inequality has had a significant impact on our quality of life, on our infrastructure, and our economic development; on our health, on our education, on our security. Our great American Nation has forgotten that it must allow us the opportunity to choose what path we wish to take, with no more excuses; we dream of the path towards equality and progress. That is the hopeful future that we all want, along with all the rights and responsibilities that this includes. So, in the end, we will obtain the respect and social justice that we deserve. That is why many Puerto Ricans have opted to relocate themselves to one of the 50 states. At the moment, it is the only way to enjoy a full citizenship and to share in the benefits that the rest of our co-citizens, our brothers and sisters in the North enjoy. The Island is the oldest colony in the world, but our soldiers, who are also American soldiers have been fighting and dying with bravery and selflessness to defend the principles of liberty and equality since World War I. It is inconceivable that the nation that is the world leader in democracy across the world, that has been an inspiration, to this day has refused to support clearly and vigorously the same rules for its citizens in Puerto Rico. The struggle for Statehood is a fight for civil rights, therefore, this subject transcends political partisanship. It is neither liberal nor conservative because it is a single cause. And this cause is equality. After 124 years of inequality, which has continually manifested itself, we understand that it is far past time that we are granted the same rights and responsibilities as our American co-citizens. In 2017... In 2012, 2017, and in 2020, it was demonstrated that a vast majority prefer Statehood amongst the possible alternatives. It has been demonstrated through past electoral events that Puerto Ricans wish to end the current territorial status of the Island. I wish to make the best of this opportunity that we have to improve our quality of life by taking up

the tools that permanent union provides us. We wish to evolve at the same rate as our fellow citizens in the United States so we can push forward. I am an example of this desire for progress that we Puerto Ricans have. Allow us the opportunity to decide. On the referendum of November 2020, we were asked, "Should Puerto Rico be admitted immediately into the Union of States? Yes or no?" This provided the voters with the option to vote in favor of or against becoming a state of the United States during an unprecedented election where the Island's candidates won with a very narrow margin, the result for "Yes" reached 53% of the votes which is a clear mandate leaving no room for excuses nor interpretation. We must keep moving forward so we can end this political stagnation so we can achieve equality and demand Congress put an end to unjust treatment and [knocking] and give Puerto Rico//

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you.

Irma Rodríguez:

Into the twenty-first century the respect. I will finish//

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

//Yes//

Irma Rodríguez:

//By saying that I approve this legislation for consensus that will allow us to choose between options of decolonization with non-territorial alternatives, constitutionally accepted to definitively end the colonial status.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you. Thank you for your commentary. Sir, please?

Francisco González Magaz:

Chairman Grijalva and distinguished members of the Natural Resources Committee, thank you for the opportunity to express our position regarding the Puerto Rico Status Act. My

name is Francisco González Magaz. I appear on behalf of the League of United Latin American Citizens, Puerto Rico chapter. LULAC is dedicated to protecting and promoting the civil rights of Hispanics in the United States. On April 30, 2022, LULAC Puerto Rico approved a resolution expressing its opposition to Puerto Rico's political status under the territory clause. Also, LULAC's National Assembly has, on multiple occasions, approved resolutions advocating for admission of Puerto Rico as the fifty-first state of the Nation, reflecting the will of the People Puerto Rico as expressed in 2012, 2017, and 2020. Our status as a territory hinders any significant efforts at economic growth. We have no voting representation in Congress, and although Puerto Ricans proudly serve in the American Armed Forces, we cannot vote for our commander-in-chief. Between 2010 and 2020, the population of Puerto Rico fell by 11.8%. This is only a small sampling of the impact colonialism is having on Puerto Rico. Furthermore, colonialism is contrary to what the framers of the Constitution had in mind. The Constitution of the United States does not contain any provisions for the administration of colonies. Rather, it has Section 3 of Article 4, also known as the Territory Clause. It is revealing that this is the same section of the Constitution where the process for admission as a state of the Union is established. Territories were not meant to be retained indefinitely. They were meant to become a state. In 1898, Puerto Rico and other territories raised the Star-Spangled Banner for the first time. Legal questions and controversies regarding how these territories would be governed quickly arose and ultimately reached the United States Supreme Court. Although there are a number of what came to be known as "The Insular Cases", particular attention should be paid to *Downes v. Bidwell*, where the distinction between incorporated and non-incorporated territories was first made. And in *Balzac v. Puerto Rico*, which held that Puerto Rico was not an incorporated territory and Congress could therefore decide which parts of the Constitution would apply. It is because of this judicial distinction that Puerto Rico's current colonial status has been upheld and has endured for 124 years. In 1952, by virtue of Public Law 600, the Constitution of the *Estado Libre Asociado* of Puerto Rico or the Commonwealth, was ratified. This created the illusion of autonomy and a false narrative that a bilateral agreement existed between the United States and Puerto Rico. However, this carefully created fiction of the Commonwealth as anything other than a colony began to unravel. In 20... In 2005, the President's Task Force on Puerto Rico's Status issued a report reiterating that Congress retains the constitutional authority to revise and even revoke the powers of self-government currently exercised by the government Puerto Rico. In 2012 local referendum, the first question asked citizens whether they wished Puerto Rico to remain subject to the territory clause. A clear majority of almost 54% voted no. And, in 2016, by virtue of the territory clause, Congress passed PROMESA. Now, one can argue the merits and flaws of PROMESA. However, its authority over any local law, including Puerto Rico's Constitution, is unquestionable. PROMESA is there for the practical manifestation of Congress' plenary powers over Puerto Rico. Also, in 2016, the Supreme Court issued the opinion on *Puerto Rico v. Sanchez-Valle*. The Court reasoned that federal sovereignty was granted by [sic] the states, whereas Puerto Rico's sovereignty was granted by the federal government. And concluded that Puerto Rico's self-government was subordinate to the federal government in general and to Congress specifically. This holding was reiterated as recently as two months ago in *United States v. Vaello-Madero*. In the last two

decades, all three branches of the federal government have declared that we are a colony. However, although we cite Vaello-Madero as an example of this, we must, we must also note that it revealed the precarious footing that the “Insular Cases” currently have. Both Justice Gorsuch and Justice Sotomayor strongly criticize the Insular Cases heavily. Justice Gorsuch went as far as stating that he hoped one day soon it could be overturned. Two conclusions can be drawn from this. The first is that Puerto Rico’s current political status is colonial in nature, definition, and effect. The second is that Puerto Rico’s colonial status is unsustainable. Final resolution of Puerto Rico’s status is proper and necessary and it cannot happen under the current *Estado Libre Asociado*. The *Estado Libre Asociado* is the problem. It cannot also be the solution. The resolution of Puerto Rico’s status is beneficial to the United States as well. The advantages of a prosperous Puerto Rico serving as a bridge between the United States and the Caribbean and South America are evident. And in answer to the question of Puerto Rican status will serve to reassert America’s place in the world as an example of democracy, the Puerto Rico Status Bill is a democratic and viable mechanism for the final resolution of Puerto Rico’s political status. But it can only be so as long as it calls for a direct vote, the options given are non-territorial and the result is binding. Given that these elements are present in the consensus bill being discussed, we believe it to be an [sic] historic milestone.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you.

Francisco González Magaz:

And pursuant to our resolution, we endorse and support it and lastly, we... I thank you again for the opportunity.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Sir. Good afternoon.

Lefranc Fortuño:

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, and other distinguished members of the Congressional delegation [clears throat]. I recognize the efforts of Congresswoman González-Colón and Governor Pierluisi and I thank each one of you for working together and finding common ground to create a draft discussion bill on the status of Puerto Rico. I thank you as well for visiting our Island and to hear firsthand from the People, as well as the local committees of the national

parties. My name is Delegate Lefranc Fortuño. I am a Shadow Representative elected by the People of Puerto Rico to US Congress to fight for full equality and democracy for the US citizens living in Puerto Rico. But today, I stand before you among many Puerto Ricans who, like me, are concerned about the dark path that Puerto Rico has been subject to for the last couple [sic] years. [Clears throat] Like [sic] if it wasn't enough that Congress imposed an undemocratic, unilateral fiscal control board on the Island, our People have been subject to discrimination on numerous federal programs like Medicare, Medicaid, and most recently, SSI. Nevertheless, it makes no sense for the US to hold 3.2 million American citizens hostage of democracy. We've been US nationals and citizens for over 120 years. And it is about time we are treated as such. Therefore, this Committee must stay firm and deny any remote possibility of including the current colonial territorial condition as an option going forward. After all, we can't decolonize Puerto Rico by including a non-democratic [sic] colonial option. Statehood is the only option that will give the People a right to have a say on their president, two US senators, and members of Congress with full voting rights; same funding and inclusion as the rest of the States, and first-class US citizenship for generations to come. Our veterans will be able to have a say on who their commander-in-chief is. This is simple, and the People of Puerto Rico know it. That's why, on the last three locally legislated plebiscites, the majority has rejected the current colonial condition and has voted for Statehood overwhelmingly. Independence and sovereignty in Free Association with the United States of America are two modalities of Independence. This has been recognized by the DOJ on numerous occasions. But they are both decolonizing and democratic options for the People of Puerto Rico to choose from. And even though when asked, I am sure that we will vote in favor of Statehood overwhelmingly, once again, this Committee needs to revise the language of citizenship included in Section 208 of this draft bill. Congress should not impose US citizenship on residents of an independent, separate sovereign nation. The procedure should be uniform to any other immigration request done by a son [sic] of two American citizens. After all, if you are a US citizen living outside of the US, you are obligated to pay federal taxes. Is this the intention of the Committee? What about the citizenship of the Nation of Puerto Rico? Is Congress considering a dual citizenship for the residents of Puerto Rico under this compact? These questions remain to be unanswered [sic]. If we want to make sure that Puerto Rico has full sovereignty, and has the tools to prosper economically, and stop young professionals from leaving this Island every single day and moving stateside looking for better opportunities for them, their families, let's work together to perfect this bill so Congress can act now and convert it into US law and leave behind in history the oldest colony in the world. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you. Sir?

Ángel Cintrón Jiménez:

Hi, hello? Hi, and good afternoon to all. I am Ángel Cintrón Jiménez, finding myself grateful for the privilege of addressing the esteemed Committee today in a dual capacity. Both as the CFO of the Young Democrats of Puerto Rico and I'm a concerned father seeking equal rights under the Constitution. First, as a board member of the Young Dems, I have defended many liberal causes with one of the most critical being equal rights for all US citizens. This includes defending the democratic will of the majority of Puerto Ricans for admission to the Union as an equal and sovereign's state. Now, as father to 10-month-old Angelito, who along with his mom, make up my whole world, I have to act. With both Louisiana and Puerto Rican roots, Angelito could be considered an authentic Cajun-Rican born here in San Juan. Living proof that the American and Puerto Rican melting pots are not only a theory, but a tangent [sic] reality for many. I cannot begin to tell you the complications that his mother and I have had to endure from healthcare and banking as far as retirement and family planning. All made burdensome under the weight of colonialism. The knowledge that we are suffering from a lack of sovereignty which hinges on the sole fact that we live on this Island, my home, spurs me to action in the hopes of achieving equality through self-determination. In that spirit of progress, I propose we call this draft bill the Puerto Rico Self-determination Act. Since it is a real and binding process to ensure the supreme definition that is a final solution to colonialism and the lack of sovereignty that ails us. I also humbly propose that Title Two be amended to read Independence in Free Association with the United States. In the name of honesty and transparency, either Title Two is amended to read Independence in Free Association or Title One is amended to read Sovereignty Without Free Association. In the alternative, and just to drive the argument home, both could be renamed. Title One could be Independent Republic and Title Two could be Associated Republic. All that matters is that they are named the same at their core. Since they are, in essence, the same. In that spirit, everywhere in the PRSDA, and most importantly in the plebiscite, it must be made clear that Free Association is Independence and naming it something else is incorrect and misleading. In truth, I believe the options should be reworded to a choice between Independent Sovereignty, Independence; Associated Sovereignty or Free Association, and Federated Sovereignty, Statehood. To clearly distinguish between the options. But any synonym will suffice so long as it is expressed identically in all variations of the same essential option. Yesterday afternoon, the proponents of Independence expressed to this Committee that as long as the draft bill was self-executing with respect to Statehood, they would not support it. Although they did not express the same concern on the self-executing nature of Independence or Free Association. I think that speaks for itself. In fact, I will go just a bit further to argue that the Independence Party is actually seeking Sovereignty with Free Association. According to their party platform, which under status outlines some of the crucial concessions that Title Two of the PRSDA contemplates like foreign affairs, trade, finance, taxation, security & defense, dispute resolution, immigration, economic benefits, grants, and determination of the Free Association. The first item on the status portion of the Independence Party's platform is to maintain friendly ties with the US, and it does not get friendlier between two sovereigns than Free Association. It is known that very few seek the total Independence contemplated in Title One largely due to citizenship. And the main objective of the Independence Party's status transition strategy as outlined in their own

party platform are largely those contemplated under Title Two's Free Association. The implications of SCOTUS' historical but not surprising Sanchez-Valle case, which made clear that this territory and every territory lacks a sovereignty that a Republic or a Federated State possesses, leaves no room for interpretation other than the current colonial status is unyielding, leaving only two real options: Independent Sovereignty with or without Free Association; and Federated Sovereignty, or Statehood. The outbursts of disapproval from the status quo PPD party to the honest consensus contained in the PRSDA with respect to its decolonizing effect should speak for themselves, since it correctly rejects the current territorial and colonial status quo. This historic compromise, the newly minted PRSDA makes me proud to believe in the democratic process and proud of these United States of America. For I truly believe that the addition of Puerto Rico will only strengthen the Union with diversity, culture, and fresh blood in Congress. Thank you all for the time and effort invested//

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

//Thank you//

Ángel Cintrón Jiménez:

//In solving the sovereign status of the world's oldest colony and my family's home of Puerto Rico//

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you very much. Sir? [Applause]

Luis Herrero Acevedo:

That was great, Angel. My name is Luis Herrero Acevedo, I am a lawyer, political consultant, and commentator. I would like to start by commending the draft proposed bill and the process led by Majority Leader Hoyer and Chairman Grijalva. Getting proponents of Statehood and Sovereignty to discard old tropes and bring forth new ideas and processes to resolve Puerto Rico centenary political conundrum is no small feat. Thank you, Nydia. Thank you, Jennifer, for sitting down to talk. In theory, this is how the democratic process should work. Thank you once again for getting it done. If approved by Congress, this draft bill will send a clear signal of what a democratic majority in the House of Representatives is willing to offer Puerto Ricans. The draft is a starting point for future discussions and a solution to the status issue. But, as we all learned in elementary school, a bill does not become a law until approved by the Senate and

signed by the President. And therein lies the problem. As a political consultant, I understand very well how political[sic] talk on the record, especially in the Congressional record, vis-à-vis how they talk behind closed doors. Every one of these guys and every politician who has served in the Natural Resources Committee since the United States took Puerto Rico by military force has had multiple off-the-record conversations about Puerto Rico and every one of these guys must agree, off-the-record of course, there are no votes in the Senate to make Puerto Rico a state. Not to date, not yesterday, not tomorrow. Since 1898, Puerto Rican Statehood has been a mirage. Lip service to score cheap political points or raise a few dollars for a campaign. I compare it to a mythical animal. Much talked about, but never seen. A unicorn. Through all its stages as a US colonial territory, there has never been 51, much less the 60 votes needed in the Senate to make Puerto Rico a state. Puerto Rico has been many things to the United States: a naval base and shooting range, a profitable sugar plantation, a tax haven, a biolab, a Cold War theater used to foster revolutions and counterrevolutions in the Caribbean, a winter vacation spot, an *Estado Libre Asociado*, and much more, but it has never been nor will it ever be a state. And that is the truth off-the-record. So let me be the first to say on-the-record, Puerto Rican Statehood is impossible in the Senate. It is a unicorn. Why will Puerto Rico never become a state when 37 other territories were able to join the Union? The reasons are many and my time is short. But my preferred theory is that although Puerto Rico is owned by the United States, it has never been successfully Americanized. All histories on how territories become state have the same protagonist: a white American man. It is no coincidence that the last names of the fathers of Texas Statehood were Austin and Houston, and not González or Hidalgo. The last names of the fathers of Alaskan Statehood were Grooming and Bartlett, not Kaitac, or Kiluki. In its 172 years as a state, California has never had an elected governor with a Spanish surname. I wonder why. No congressperson will say this on-the-record. Especially those with a couple thousand Puerto Rican voters in their district. But you know it to be true. Even with a Democratic majority, there is no filibuster-proof coalition to make Puerto Rico a state in the Senate. No matter when you read it. Even this draft bill confirms the unicorn theory. To this date, except for our Republican Resident Commissioner González, not a single Republican in the House or Senate has endorsed the draft. Senators Marco Rubio and Rick Scott, who represent over a million Puerto Ricans from Florida do not even bring the subject up. The mere possibility of adding Puerto Rico as a state dooms this or any other draft in the Senate. If the, if politics is the art of the possible, then Puerto Rico's Statehood politics is the art of the impossible. To end this Gordian knot, Congress must design a process that can garner the 60 votes needed in the Senate. We need to bring Republicans to the table and hammer out a deal. Puerto Rican politicians have used status as a political tool for decades. A cure for all our diseases; a handy excuse to justify their many terrible local governments. Millions of Puerto Ricans truly believe Statehood is possible because five generations of pro-Statehood politicians have promised that. "Statehood is right around the corner." Only Congress and this Committee can tell Puerto Ricans the truth. Puerto Rican Statehood is not in the cards. The same way that after many years you are now saying, for the record, that *Estado Libre Asociado*, as it was originally conceived, is not viable, you should be as straightforward with Statehood. The wording can be simple and succinct. "Puerto Rico, it's not

you. It's me. Let's stay friends. Signed, US Congress." Puerto Rican politics are changing, a new generation is ready to partner with Congress and design a process that can bring Democrats and Republicans together and make Puerto Rico a prosperous, democratic, and independent nation. But first, you must speak the truth to us on-the-record. Thank you for your time [applause].

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you. Let me begin there if I may, Mr. Herrero. A question: And... And your analysis of the Senate... And why that is vital is... That's true. Absolutely. But let's just talk about the role that we have... The Resources Committee and the House of Representatives. Shouldn't we do our job, too?

Luis Herrero Acevedo:

Yeah, of course.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Okay. And shouldn't we produce a product that has some level of consensus?

Luis Herrero Acevedo:

Of course.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

And if we do that, then, the responsibility for people doing their job shifts, que no?

Luis Herrero Acevedo:

Of course.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Okay. Just wanted to make that clear... We are here to do our job, whatever the Senate does//

Luis Herrero Acevedo:

//I know, I only//

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

//They need to do their job.

Luis Herrero Acevedo:

That's why I commend this process because you are doing something good [applause and cheers].

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Any questions? Any? Yes? Please, Ms. Ocasio?

Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez:

It's Francisco, right?

Luis Herrero Acevedo:

No, Luis.

Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez:

Luis? Pardon?

Luis Herrero Acevedo:

Luis, Luis.

Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez:

Luis, Luis, pardon. Well... I will say on-the-record [laughs] the points you make about the Senate are... Completely legitimate. And, and we have been a colony for over 100 years for one reason. Because this is difficult, right? It's not easy//

Luis Herrero Acevedo:

//Correct//

Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez:

//And I think your points are absolutely well taken. I think what we are in now, as a Puerto Rican from the Bronx, with Puerto Ricans here from the Island, we have to... We are in the messy process of trying to exercise some form of self-governance. It is imperfect, we will get to dead ends, there will be disagreements. I think what we need to figure out for ourselves, at least is what does a legitimate process for us look like? And if we can figure out a process that has legitimacy, that at least we can agree on first, regardless of ideology... We need to figure that out because... The negotiations shouldn't be in Congress. It should not be up to the imperial power to impose a process on us. It should be us who create a process for ourselves [scattered applause]. And so... My... Pardon [laughs]. But... So... Oh, my earring, too. So, my question is, is, and I don't say this even as a criticism or a rebuttal to your remark, but my... One of my questions here is like... What parts of this process do you think should be added, amended, changed, removed?

Luis Herrero Acevedo:

The problem is how do we get to a bill that can be made into a law.

Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez:

Mhm.

Luis Herrero Acevedo:

And the thing is that using Statehood as a valid option, which it is, there are 50 states, we all understand that legally, politically, legitimately, Statehood exists. But there's no right to Statehood. There's no intention of the United States to give us Statehood. What that does, by putting Statehood here in the process, is guaranteeing that we are going to be a colony for another 122 more years [applause].

Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez:

Mhm, mhm.

Luis Herrero Acevedo:

That's the issue. Because... How do we get this bill to the President? How do we make a law? I love this bill, I am in favor of it, I have been in favor of it since the first time I saw this draft. I understand how the process works, I read every single article, I've talked to whoever... And he who has been available and let me know how the process was made. I know it was hard.

Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez:

Mhm.

Luis Herrero Acevedo:

But how do we get to the White House in the first place//

Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez:

//I think, um, Chairman, it's... I don't know what impact this has on the legislative text itself, but I just think it's important to underscore the point that's being made here. That we have an imperial power that has de facto//

Luis Herrero Acevedo:

//You do//

Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez:

//Jurisdiction... Over a colony//

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

//No question//

Luis Herrero Acevedo:

//We are... A territory... We are in the presence of the Natural Resources Committee.
We are not in the Puerto Rico Committee//

Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez:

//UN//

Luis Herrero Acevedo:

//Or in the foreign relations//

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

//No, no, and you are absolutely right. The central premises of this legislation and the difficulty in getting to where we are right now... It's around two points that there is agreement on this table.

Luis Herrero Acevedo:

Yeah, mhm.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

That is decolonization.

Luis Herrero Acevedo:

Correct.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

And the other one is the agreement to use that imperial authority for a binding... Um... A binding... Um... Authority for the vote that the People in Puerto Rico take. That Congress is bound to use that authority to make sure that that happens.

Luis Herrero Acevedo:

And I want to make a very important point, since we are a colony owned, wholly owned by the United States, Puerto Ricans, we cannot go to the UN. We cannot go to the Organization of American States, we can only come here, to the Natural Resources Committee, you are our sovereign. You literally are the sovereign of our People. So here we are, addressing our grievances, and trying to please... I commend the process and the progress that has been made with this bill. But the real alternative has to be to create something that can be made into a law and that can change Puerto Rico's status.

[Overlapping voices]

Francisco González Magaz:

May I make... Can I comment, can I make a comment about the discussion that is going on right now? About his argument?

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Of course. I mean... I've lost pretty much control of it anyway [laughs], so go ahead.

Francisco González Magaz:

Sorry. It's just that, I am in favor of Statehood, and I have been my whole life. And I've heard this argument many, many times before. Statehood is a nonissue, it's a nonstarter. There's no environment for it in Washington. There is no environment for it in the House, and there is no environment for it in the Senate. It is an age-old argument against Statehood that has been made by pretty much everybody who is against Statehood in Puerto Rico. But the problem is we have an opportunity here, now. And it cannot be wasted away just because it seems difficult to be in the Senate. If a year ago you had told me that we would be sitting here right now discussing a consensus bill reached by Representative Nydia Velázquez, who traditionally has supported the Commonwealth and agreed to by the Resident Commissioner Jennifer González, who is a lifelong supporter of Statehood, I would've said that's impossible. But it isn't. We are here now. And to listen to it again, to the argument that it's impossible in the Senate [applause]... It's... I//

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

//Thank you very much. Appreciate it.

Yvette Chardón:

May I?

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Could we invite the next panelist please? Thank you. Thank you.

Yvette Chardón:

Oh, they didn't let me finish my [trails off].

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Who does? Who does? [Background conversation] Please? Ivan? Let us... [Background conversation] Good to go, how long? Five minutes?

Staff:

5, 10.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

10-minute recess, thank you very much, and then we'll start with the next panel.

[Pause for recess 2:15:26-2:33:27]

[Background conversation]

Fourth Panel

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you for your patience, we are going to begin again, if you will please. Is it on? [Taps microphone].

Alba Iris Calderón Cestero:

To all the members of the Natural Resources Committee, good afternoon and welcome to Puerto Rico. My name is Alba Iris Calderón Cestero, and I am a professional woman born and raised in Puerto Rico. A mother of three, and I am here to make my comments for this draft for Title Three Statehood. I want to thank all of you for addressing this important issue and provide us with an alternative in consensus to finally end the colony, the status that prevents our Island to develop in every way possible. Now I present my comments for this draft. On page 4, line 22, it reads, "Majority vote required. Approval of a status option must be by a majority of the valid votes cast." I believe that the word majority needs to be defined clearly. For example, if one option receives one thousand votes and [sic] other option receives 998 votes, will the 1,000 votes be considered a majority? On page 5, line one through six, section 4, it reads, "Runoff plebiscite: if there is not a majority in favor of one of the three options defined in this Act, then a runoff plebiscite shall be held on March 3, 2024, which shall offer eligible voters a choice of the two options that received the most votes in the plebiscite held under paragraph one." The word majority has to be defined clearly. What constitutes a majority for this plebiscite? As the paragraph was written, the only way that a runoff plebiscite has to be held is if there is a tie? Otherwise, one of the choices will be... Will have the majority of the votes. On page 10, line 9, it reads, "Jurisdiction of district court: The United States District Court for the District of Puerto Rico shall have original and exclusive jurisdiction of any civil action alleging a dispute or controversy pertaining to electoral processes conducted under this section." There is a need to specify the extension of the court's jurisdiction, define what is an electoral process, and to what extension it's considered an electoral process. If a delay in submitting a certification, for example, is considered an issue to submit to the court and still be a part of the electoral process. Page 12, line 13 reads, "After the last word, general, there is a need to add this wording and make the changes and/or corrections given by the general if any." Page 42, line 22, subsection 4 reads, "Incorporation: Puerto Rico shall remain unincorporated until its admission as a state of the Union under paragraph three." I believe the best wording for this paragraph should be, "Puerto Rico shall remain with the same status that it has until its admission as a state of the Union under paragraph three. Once again, I thank you for making this happen. Please make this draft become a bill. Convince your colleagues in the Senate to do the same. This is about equal rights, equal citizenship, and equal responsibilities. Puerto Rico has been a territory for too long. We are US citizens and we treasure our Nation, our flag, our pledge. Before I finish, let me ask you to just think for a moment, if you had to stay in Puerto Rico for a period of time, are you aware that you lose a lot of rights that you have had for all your life? Are you willing to give them up? It doesn't matter if you just answer no in your head; just by being here, you have already lost them. Statehood for Puerto Rico, it is our best option. Thank you.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you very much... Thank you very much and thank you for the specificity of your comments [scattered applause], to the sections, thank you. Sir?

Salvador Vargas Ruiz:

My name is Salvador Vargas Ruiz. As a Puerto Rican American, Statehood is genocide. Statehood is genocide. [Clears throat] The Puerto Rican Status Act deprives 5 million Puerto Ricans living in the United States to cast their vote. The Natural Resources Committee is racist. Let's move on. The United States Congress doesn't need a Puerto Rican Status Act to emancipate the Puerto Rican People under so-called decolonization bill. The United States of America withdrew from the Philippine Islands and Cuba in the nineteen-thirties and nineteen-forties and emancipated the Filipino People and the Cuban People without enacting any plebiscite of any kind. Puerto Rico must be given the same treatment and be granted emancipation immediately. The eyes of the world and the United Nations will be focused on the so-called Puerto Rican Status Act bill. For those few Puerto Ricans who cry inside the PNP party, that I am... A United States citizen. And I have rights. Yes, you do have the right to enter into any of the 50 states of the United States without refusal under the accord signed between the People of the United States of America and the People of Puerto Rico, titled *Estado Libre Asociado*, 1952, that has given Puerto Rico five Miss Universe and two gold medals in the world Olympics as a sovereign nation, separate from the USA. The Puerto Rican PNP members have the right, as US citizens to live in the tent cities of California. You have a right to live under the bridges of Florida. And even fish for your food. You have a US citizen's right to live in the drug infected Philadelphia, Kingston, Chicago slums, Newark slums or you have the right, as a US citizen and PNP to live in New York City, the crime capital of the United States of America. My idea, US Congress, I can't be any clear, United States citizenship doesn't allow you, PNP from Puerto Rico and the United States Congress to mandate an act of self-genocide. Under the biased, contaminated Puerto Rico Status Act draft by the Natural Resource Committee that still holds the Puerto Rican People as an object of the United States of America. The Puerto Rican Status Act states that 51% outcome in the results will constitute a win for that option. That would be ridiculous. And very dangerous. Puerto Rico can erupt into a full-blown revolution. Has the United States of America forgotten the Puerto Rican attacks on Congress in 1950? Much before January 6, 2020 [sic]? Has the United States of America forgotten the Puerto Rican assassination attempt against United States President Truman? Or have we forgotten the seven F-16 United States jet fighters burned to the ground in San Juan airport? Luis Muñoz Marin? The United States citizenship of anyone doesn't give the rights to genocide the Puerto Rican people. Furthermore, listen! Only the Puerto Rican born and first generations can participate in all plebiscites. No other nationality found in Puerto Rico can cast a vote. Meaning Dominicans, Cubans, Mexicans, and Spaniards, Venezuelans, Colombians,

Americans, are expelled from the Puerto Rican [clears throat] Status Act. We must seek peace. We must seek peace. Between both of our countries. And not revolution. Thank you very much.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you. Sir?

José Rosselló:

Good afternoon. Ah. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Distinguished members of Congress. Resident Commissioner, Honorable Governor of Puerto Rico, Democratic Party, Young Democrats of Puerto Rico, local parties and my young colleagues, and US citizens of Puerto Rico. My name is José Rosselló. I am an active member of the Youth of the Progressive New Party, and the Young Democrats of Puerto Rico and I rise to discuss the political status of Puerto Rico, which is home to 3.2 million US citizens. As many of you may know, many attempts have been made in the past to proceed with federal legislation to try to move forward and resolve the Island's territorial, colonial status that has been imposed on our people for more than 500 years. First under Spain, and now under the United States. However, it is the first time the Federal Congress has not only taken into consideration but action to legitimately decolonize the Island in a fair and binding process. The options provided are non-territorial and full self-governing for the people of Puerto Rico to finally obtain a just and democratic government. I am pleased to have an objection on Title Two Sovereignty in Free Association with the United States. In the past, locals in Puerto Rico were impregnated [sic] with the fact that we were actually a Commonwealth, or in Spanish, the *Estado Libre Asociado*. Where a utopic fallacy status was believed to be witnessed before the Supreme Court of the United States had taken multiple, multiple decisions in the past 10 years where it was evident that the Island of Puerto Rico was and always has been an unincorporated territory since 1898 subject to the plenary powers of Congress, with no say, no vote, no consentment [sic] and... And no decisions taken in Congress that benefit or affect Puerto Rico negatively. With that said, Sovereignty in Free Association is a total, complete opposition status than territorial colonial status, obviously. As the draft bill states in Title Two and Title Three, Puerto Rico is a sovereign... And I quote, "Puerto Rico is a sovereign nation that has full authority and responsibility over its territory and population under a Constitution of its own adoption that should be the supreme law of the Nation." This clearly emphasizes that Puerto Rico would be totally separated from the United States as an independent republic or if not, an associated republic or, in Spanish, an Associated Republic. With a pact under the titles of Free Association with the Federal Constitution which establishes a termination and a due date that could be subject to a big risk and fully separating its ties with the United States. By that I mean, that the US Postal Service may be at risk, federal courts, FBI, social federal benefits for low-income and middle-income citizens on the Island, and numerous other federal programs and entities. As stated in the language of the project under Title II, this would be up to negotiation under the pact

of the Titles of Free Association with no pre-guarantee of [sic] whatsoever of all of them being implemented and secured in the Island or even renovated if so implemented under the articles of Free Association. With that said, I invite those local citizens in the Island who unquestionably support the permanent union with the Nation and having totally guaranteed of securing the most sacred rights under the Federal Constitution programs, medical benefits, and full priority towards a working class or middle class and low-income families in our beloved Island by voting for Statehood. In addition, when it comes to the political destiny of a place, the views of the minority cannot trump or take precedence over the views of the majority. That would turn the concept of democracy over its head. Votes matter. This is why I say this, because Statehood has won the past three local plebiscites held on the Island which clearly impacts the majority of the population in favor of Puerto Rico becoming the fifty-first state of the Union. I reject the notion that Statehood would weaken the cultural Puerto Rico or its proud traditions or affect the Islands of the People of Puerto Rico. Summing up my presentation, I have no doubt that we will become the fifty-first state of the Union. I will work tirelessly, tirelessly with the Young Democrats of Puerto Rico, with the President of our organization, Eliza Muñoz, and other members. Extended delegation of shadow elected congressional delegates, including Ricardo Rosselló and Roberto Lefranc Fortuño, and others elected in May 16, 2021 and the Youth Progressive, the Youth of the Progressive New Party to get this consensus moving forward and approved in both the House, the Senate, for it to be delivered to the President's desk and finally have a binding federal consensus plebiscite held on the Island as stated in the language of the project in November 5 of 2023. With all due respect, putting aside our preferences, ideologies, and opinions, I call for every Puerto Rican to vouch for this process of decolonization, because if some don't, they simply don't... Support the decades of colonial conundrum as said by Congresswoman//

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Okay, thank you.

José Rosselló:

Velázquez at her press conference//

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

//Thank you very much//

José Rosselló:

//In May 16, 2022, thank you.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Sir?

Edwin Francisco Rivera Otero:

Hi, hi. Hi. My name is Edwin Francisco Rivera Otero. I am a young professional who came here to address my support of the Puerto Rico Status Act in this honorable Committee. It is the first time that the US Congress is considering a binding process to solve Puerto Rico's political status, which has been a colony for 124 years. At the present time. It is important to note that on the Island live around 3 million of [sic] US citizens that do not have the same rights as the fellow citizens in the mainland. It is time that Congress makes [sic] an action to treat us equally. Why is it more important solving noncitizen issues than to solve the colonial issue of the American citizens living in Puerto Rico? Why? The importance of this binding process, is the message that Congress is sending: The US wants to solve this important issue for the Nation. It is important to mention that several fellow Puerto Ricans live in the mainland and some local politicians are denying us the right to be treated as equals and have the same rights as our fellow US citizens. But those Puerto Ricans enjoy the benefits of Statehood. Some fellow Puerto Ricans living in the mainland want to vote on this plebiscite. But the Puerto Rico Status Act states that a definition of eligible voters as a bona fide residence in Puerto Rico who are otherwise qualified to vote in the general elections in Puerto Rico. The Puerto Rican residents of the mainland don't comply with the definition expressed in the bill. Actually, Puerto Rico's political status is discriminatory [sic] with the Supreme Court decisions such as Vaello-Madero and with Congress passing PROMESA, it is evident that the colonial situation is detrimental to Puerto Rico [sic] well-being. It is important to mention that as a colony, the sovereignty of Puerto Rico lives in US Congress. Why can the 3.2 or 3 million US citizens living on the Island not vote for the President? Why can the 3.2 or 3 million of US citizens living on the Island not have representation with vote in Congress? That's unequal for the land of the freedom [sic]. I encourage US Congress to act on this draft bill and bring a complete definition of Puerto Rico's political status. It's time to act about this issue for our future generations of US citizens. Thank you for your time. I want to say in Spanish some words. I know. I know that there are congressmen in the United States that campaign in Spanish. I do not believe that language should be a stone in the path blocking this bill either in the Federal House of Representative or in the Senate. There are congressmen that represent Puerto Ricans that campaign in Spanish, what's more, both from Republicans and Democrats. I believe that should start resonating deeply with congresspersons. Additional to that, here in Puerto Rico, we have signed and presented projects in the House of Representatives, I mean in the Senate. The last one was in 2014. Senate project number 11-77, which was presented to discuss the language of Puerto Rico as Spanish only in order to once again hold back the concept of Statehood. I do

not believe that to be fair because... Those very same members that prefer telling people to only speak Spanish, many of them studied in expensive private schools in Puerto Rico, where they learned English, went to American universities, studied in the United States, in English, and they live in Puerto Rico or they live in the United States quite comfortably and enjoying the benefits of statehood. I believe that is the most elitist way to teach people that they cannot advance in life. And that should not be like that. I believe that should truly start to change. Because Puerto Rico deserves the best [applause].

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you.

Committee Deputy Director, Margarita Varela:

Call for order.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

What?

Committee Deputy Director, Margarita Varela:

Ask for order.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Please.

Keren Riquelme Cabrera:

Honorable Chairman and members of the Congress, thank you for being here. Thank you for your time, for being here. For the record, my name is Keren Riquelme Cabrera. I am Senator at large for the government of Puerto Rico. And on behalf of my constituents, and on my own behalf as an American citizen, resident of Puerto Rico, I express deep gratitude for promoting the proposed draft of the Puerto Rico Status Act. Puerto Rican lives matter. Yet after 123 years of political history under the plenary powers of Congress, American citizens residing in Puerto Rico continue to be subjected to a discriminatory and unjustifiable unequal political relationship that

denies us the full recognition of our constitutional rights. Our soldiers, many who are here today, have served, fought, and bled like any other American soldier in armed conflicts as members of the United States Armed Forces and have participated in more than 100 armed conflicts throughout history and remain serving actively today. Nevertheless, Puerto Rico remains the oldest existing colony [sic] the Western Hemisphere and a territory of the United States. Subjected to the territorial incorporation doctrine established by the “insular cases”, a doctrine developed by Justice Edward White, who expressed concerns over “the evils of admitting millions of inhabitants of unknown island people with an uncivilized race believed to be absolutely unfit for citizenship.” And by Justice Henry Billings, who considered that America’s territories were inhabited by “alien races different from us in religion, customs, and modes of thought.” And by, by this, this very doctrine which is still being used as a legal basis to perpetuate a treatment to American citizens living in Puerto Rico that includes denial of voting rights, denial of congressional representation, and denial of equality in federal programs. As American citizens, we have long paid our dues in the century past. I fully support the proposed draft for [sic] Puerto Rico Status Act. In the name of democracy, in the name of justice and civil rights but most of all in the name of decency to do what is known to be right. During the last three plebiscites on the political status of Puerto Rico, [sic] Puerto Rican electorate has consecutively expressed its unequivocal preference for Statehood. During the last plebiscite, the [sic] 53% of the electorate issued a clear mandate to the government of Puerto Rico to move legislation with the purpose of achieving Statehood as a permanent political status for the future of Puerto Rico. Regarding the substantive text of the legislative measure, I wish to express my support for Statehood. But I also say that I can say that I agree with the definition, just the definition of the other two status formula as proposed in the Puerto Rico Status Act Draft. Even though there have been requests for the inclusion of the current Commonwealth formula in the bill. Under the current Commonwealth formula, Puerto Rico cannot be considered a state since it lacks sovereignty, that being one of the essential elements of the state. Under such status, Puerto Rico is under the plenary powers of the United States Congress so that the fundamental government decisions are made by the Congress. The Puerto Rican Constitution and laws are also conditioned by the North American legal system. Finally, I wish to express my opposition to the celebration of a runoff plebiscite as required under the [sic] section 584 of the Puerto Rican Status Act draft. Under section 5C, the Puerto Rican Status Act draft clearly states that the plebiscites authorized by this section shall be implemented by the elections commission consistent with the laws of Puerto Rico and federal law. The concept of a runoff election is completely foreign to Puerto Rico’s electoral law, Law 58 2020. Also known as the Puerto Rico Electoral Code of 2020. And it does not provides [sic] for a runoff election of any kind. Thank you for being here again, and for your benefit I will be including [sic] as an attachment in the digital sent to the Committee a concrete resolution of Senate of Puerto Rico 36 in support of the present Puerto Rico Status Act draft. Thank you.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you very much. Sir?

Antonio Faz Alzamora:

My name is Antonio Faz Alzamora, past President of the Puerto Rican Senate at the beginning of this century. Greetings. As the legislator I was for 40 consecutive years, having held different leadership positions and as ex-President of the Puerto Rican Senate, let it be known that my appearance here is in a personal capacity and also representing thousands of Puerto Ricans that for over 30 years ago, have been voting for development, growth, evolution, and transformation of a non-colonial and non-territorial *Estado Libre Asociado* as has been presented by the Popular Party in its government programs in all general elections. I begin by pointing that this draft bill excludes a fourth option based on Resolution 2625 of the United Nations General Assembly of October 1970, still valid and backed by the United States. In it, and on the principles of equality of rights and the free self-determination of the People, it establishes a fourth option that mentions about the acquisition of any other political condition freely chosen by People constitutes an exercise of the right to the free self-determination of those People. I believe including this fourth option is something just and adapted to the actual reality of international law. I must then take advantage of this opportunity to inform you that in accordance with the fourth option of the previously mentioned UN resolution, I have prepared a Pact of Association between the governments of the *Estado Libre Asociado* of Puerto Rico and the United States of America. It is of a non-colonial and non-territorial nature sustained and based upon the sovereignty of the People of Puerto Rico and fully complying with international law. It also recognizes the capacity of our People to agree upon a dignified Association within the framework of the Constitution of the United States, reaffirming our unique national, cultural, Caribbean, and Latin American identity. The Pact of Association that I propose ends the undignified territorial and colonial relationship and will provide the tools so we may substitute a culture of dependence into a culture of self-sufficiency and achieve a full economic growth. This pact consists of a preamble and four Titles. It transfers Puerto Rican sovereignty, which is in the hands of Congress, into the hands of the People of Puerto Rico while simultaneously, on the same document, and on the same act that the bilateral pact is established. Puerto Rico reserves certain jurisdictions, it delegates others to the United States, and shares the rest. Therefore, in the same act, we stop being a colony and a territory without having to go through separation or Independence. Congress holds before its consideration, in a legal format and detailed manner, a specific and inclusive instrument on which we can establish a dignified and democratic relationship based on respect, cooperation, and equality between two very distinct nations. None of the other options concerning status has a detailed and legally formatted proposal to present before the People and Congress at this moment. The only one is mine, and you have it there. I believe your staffers will provide it for you. I also submit for the record a copy of the Pact of Association, version 2020, so it may be part of the legislative dossier of this congressional draft bill, and you may access it at pactodeasociacion.com, both in English and Spanish. I respectfully submit that the draft be

amended and that it includes the fourth option mentioned of a non-territorial and non-colonial ELA as defined in its totality in the Pact of Association as an additional option and that way, the ELA may be present with dignity in the coming consultations. Not including the fourth nonterritorial option of the ELA as defined in the Pact of Association then, as a second option and only as a second option, I submit it as the definition of Free Association included in the draft of the Pact. The Pact of Association I present is bilateral and may only be altered by mutual agreement. In case it must be renewed, the duration may not be less than 50 years with an option to renew it again for the same amount of time, and citizenship must remain... It must be through blood or birth from Puerto Rican parents. The definitions of the different options detailed must be on the ballot or at least an accurate summary of each, same as in the campaigns leading up to it to avoid demagoguery. To end, I wish to emphasize on an unequivocal reality where Puerto Rico, being a Caribbean, Latin American nation for more than 400 years of existence, with its own identity and culture, Statehood has the effect of disappearing it into another nation, eliminating us from the international map as a nation forever. The same would have negative effects on the self-esteem of Puerto Ricans by losing their international presence in so many areas of individual and collective life such as sports, arts, culture, and others. Therefore, the change to Statehood must be through a majority mandate and different from the other options where Puerto Rican nationality remains. In order to protect that irrefutable and irreversible fact, Statehood must demand a super majority of votes as it has happened in other territories in the past. Thank you very much.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you, sir, thank you. Any questions? Anybody has questions? No? Many thanks to... I will now invite the next group, please. [Background conversation] Okay [pause 03:03:20-3:04:01].

Fifth panel

Representative Nydia Velázquez:

Gentlemen [someone else clears throat in the background], you'll be heard for five minutes.

Alejandro Torres Rivera:

Good afternoon, Miss Pro Tempore Chairman of the Natural Resources Committee of the House of Representatives of the United States and distinguished members of this Committee. My

name is Alejandro Torres Rivera. I used to be President of the illustrious *Colegio de Abogados y Abogadas de Puerto Rico* for the biennium 2016-2018. And I am the President of the Commission for the Study of Constitutional Development of Puerto Rico for this institution. I appear before you in representation of our President, Attorney Daisy Calcaño López, and our bar association. Since its assembly on September 1st of 1944, we have categorically and clearly denounced the colonial nature of Puerto Rico's relationship with the United States, demanding of its President and of its Congress an end to these unjust political relationships. Our People has never exercised its right to free determination. The political subjugation of Puerto Rico before the United States is a problem that presents the validity of the human rights of our People. In conformity to the expressions by the United Nations in Resolution 15-14, XV of December 14, 1960, "the subjecting of its People to foreign subjugation and exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights." Something that has already been ratified on the International Pact of Human, Civil, and Political Rights. For the Bar Association the ideal procedural mechanism to attend our claims of decolonization and the recognition of our right to express free self-determination, free of interference and obstacles, and at the same time negotiate with the United States a final formula of political relationship between both People is the Constitutional Assembly for Status. But this, which we can see is more clearly defined on the content of the Puerto Rico Self-Determination Act Bill of 2021 does not impede us from expressing ourselves in regard to the draft bill concerning the Status of Puerto Rico Act. As positive elements, we point out in this draft the creation of a bilateral commission for negotiation, the attention given to each of the options to the aspects related to citizenship, nationality, and immigration; the powers and prerogatives of our People under each one of these options, acquired economic rights earned by the inhabitants of Puerto Rico, personal guarantees of citizens, aspects of self-government including the issues we must consider during transition towards each distinct option; the content of the options of Free Association and Independence as decolonizing options that are separate and distinct from each other, to be approved on a Constitutional Convention for the scenarios of Independence or Free Association such as due process of law, equal protection under laws, freedom of speech, press, meeting, association, and religion; right of the accused, and other economic, social, and cultural rights, and the guarantee that no person born in the Nation of Puerto Rico will have no State at the moment of birth. There are other important aspects that are considered in the project and that once more we point out that we positively value the expressions contained therein. Among them, those that are tangent to the elements of transmission of citizenship, immigration, free transit, and the guarantees of maintenance of what are federal transfers earned by Puerto Rican men and women through Social Security, Veterans, Disability, Survivors, and the elderly. We also point out that we value each and every one of the comments made as positive aspects concerning the draft bill. We also point out that it would not be inconsistent to replace the mechanism of two plebiscites for the call to a Constitutional Assembly on Status so that it is a negotiating commission of the Assembly who would then negotiate with the federal counterparts the content of the status options and their transitions. We consider most important the accuracy of the terms of a pact of Free Association in which we define, among other aspects, the competitions that each part would retain, its terms and mechanisms to end the pact. In the

case of Statehood, greater accuracy in regard to the enabling act as well as in the case of Independence, the elements of transition to be included in a treaty between the United States and the Republic of Puerto Rico. In both cases, we must consider the creation of a special tribunal to discuss issues and controversies that may arise in the implementation of these treaties. Our Bar Association puts at the disposal of this Committee its judicial resources, expertise, and assistance. Thank you very much.

Representative Nydia Velázquez:

Many thanks to you. Next? You are recognized for five minutes.

Héctor Del Valle:

Good afternoon, my name is Héctor Del Valle from Las Piedras, Puerto Rico. Dear Mr. Chairman, and members of the Committee on Natural Resources. I am a citizen who advocates for the integration of Puerto Rico as the fifty-first state of the Union. Unfortunately, a lot of US citizens do not like the idea of Puerto Rico entering the Federation because they think that the Island will become, quote, a paradise for welfare, end quote. I will analyze the myth that people believe about Puerto Rico's integration as a state as well as the solution. A quote, unquote welfare paradise. They claim Puerto Rico is [sic] that 60% of the population is below the poverty level. Everybody knows about that. Caused in part because the unemployment rate is more than 10%. If Puerto Rico becomes a state, the problem can be solved by applying the Enterprise Zones concept based on Jack Kemp's model. In Spanish, *Zonas Empresariales Federales*. This will attract more industries into the Island's economy and secure the United States supply chain, a matter of national security, as we need a measure that will give industries in Puerto Rico a wage credit, for example, as an incentive to stay in the Island and create more employment opportunities. That is why right now, I support the legislation on medical devices by Resident Commissioner Jennifer González Colón. I am not for a welfare paradise concept, as some people say. And think about this, but when a state enters the union, it receives what it needs, and gives to the USA Treasury what it can give. The economic parity concept. It's obvious, however, that Puerto Rico will get more federal funds than nowadays as part of a taxation redefinition process. But it will go to the People that nowadays really needs [sic] it: The elderly and the handicapped by means of the Supplemental Social Security Income, the Veterans, and more Medicaid funds for the poor who needs [sic] it. The legislation that was approved in the past welfare reform, that was some years ago, has had the objective of stopping welfare dependency as a destructive lifestyle and is requiring able people to look for a [sic] decent work while giving appropriate daycare for single mothers. Puerto Ricans are American citizens since 1917. But second-class citizens. We do not vote for the selection of the President, and we don't vote a... We do not have vote in our congressmen. We only have a Resident Commissioner, Jennifer González Colón, who does not have a vote in Congress. Fellow congressmen, with my due respect, I think time has come for

Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans to choose their final destination. Not to stay in political limbo any longer. I think this bill this, bill has definite... Has to definitely resolve the status problem once and for all. I support this initiative to solve this problem. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi should support this initiative, too. I hope that after reading this statement, you will also continue to support the Puerto Rican Status Act as well as the sole choice for Statehood for the Island. May God bless you. I also hope that you request the statement be admitted for the record. Thank you.

Representative Nydia Velázquez:

Thank you. The gentleman is recognized for five minutes.

José Pérez:

Good afternoon [clears throat]. Good afternoon, Congresswoman and all the people who are here, my name is Representative José Perez, Representative At-large. I am here in substitution of one of my colleagues, Angel Morey, who is at home with Covid. So, excuse him... As a strongly believer [sic] that we don't let [sic] spaces empty, I am here, and it is a great honor to have you in our beautiful Island [clears throat]. I would like to recognize that [sic] the tremendous work that you have accomplished putting together the Puerto Rico Status Act draft and it has been an effort on which all sides put their difference [sic] aside and find the common ground and work together to solve once and for [stutters] our interior [sic] condition. It is not a small achievement, it is not... Another [clears throat] consequence [sic] bill. It is a bill that will change our history forever and we will be remembered as the brave men and women [sic] that end the colonial status of the United States citizens of Puerto Rico. It is really hard for me as an official elected [sic] try to make public policy when I know that we are under the plenary power of the Congress, that we don't have that equal representation. That we are now under the power and the decisions of a group of people, the Fiscal Oversight Board Management [sic] that don't let us make that policy [sic] and now they want to impose everything regarding our economical [sic] issues. It's really hard to do it and it's really hard to think that now, right here in twenty-one [sic] century, we remain as the... Some cases said, um, we Puerto Ricans, we are belongs to [sic], but we are not part of. What a shameful words [sic] for People, 3.2 million People who live on an Island that deserve the same equal treatment. As a Statehood supporter, I support this bill and I know that all of you have worked together putting aside... Like I said... Like I said at the beginning, many difference [sic] but it is now the moment. It is the now the moment to solve this. It is now the moment to let we, the Puerto Ricans, vote for the commander-in-chief who sends our soldiers to the war [sic]. We have many soldiers, brave soldiers that fight for the democracy that we don't have right here on the Island. This is unfair, and that's why we raise our voice to end this shameful situation of the status of Puerto Rico. And have the same obligations, the same rights and privileges from [sic] the United States citizens who are living on the mainland. It's unfair, and let me put [sic] another example, how unfair is have [sic] a Fiscal Oversight Board Management [sic].

Everybody is talking about climate change. Right here on the Island, we are facing a lot of this problem regarding our coastal protections and now, the government are [sic] trying to have the budget to have [sic] more than 200 people to make [sic] inspectors of [sic] the Department of Natural Resources, to apply and to enforce our environmental law. But now, the Fiscal Oversight Management Board, they don't let to use that [sic] the budget for that. This is another example of how unfair is our situation [sic]. We the Puerto Ricans have choose [sic] three times to favor Statehood. But now we are here again, asking, and thank you for your commitment to end the colonial status. Before me, there were a few panelists that were talking about unicorns. Let me say that that... This audience, this Committee, this will that you [sic] have present [sic] to the People, a few months ago was a unicorn. Now is [sic] a reality. Our father of the Constitution says [sic] that, "all men are created equal." But decades ago, a woman, a black person, it was not considered under that statement. And now it's [sic] reality. So, let's change this. Let's make [sic] together, and work together to end colonialism in Puerto Rico. Thank you.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you, thank you. Sir?

Speaker:

Where's my mic? Thank you for all, having us all here, it's a pleasure for me to be here. I recognize especially our Commissioner Resident [sic] Jennifer González, and all the members of the [sic] Congress here. Um, I want speak some in English and some in Spanish... Puerto Rico was besieged and occupied militarily by Caribes, pirates, and European powers. Since the time of colonizations [sic] from [sic] Christopher Columbus and Juan Ponce de León. And it has been... 400 years of economic instability [sic] and little participation of the People until Foraker Act in 1900. Such was the case that in 1874, an American paper published that Spain talked to cede the island of Puerto Rico to Germany as a payment for its help during a Civil War. That is an example of how was the [sic] history of Puerto Rico under the Spanish flag. Let's talk about Puerto Rico and the United States. It's important to know that hundreds of Puerto Rican creoles in 1779 joined the Spanish army under General Bernardo Galves and fought against the British in the American War of Independence. John Quincy Adams said, "We would not be ashamed to recognize that our Independence owes... What are Independence owes to the molasses of the Caribbean." This coalition of rights and equality that won in 1789 the Independence of the United States lit the flame of democracy in Puerto Rican fighters who had to return to a monarchy regime in its [sic] own land. Something similar that is happening right now in Puerto Rico. We fight in other countries for the democracy of others and return to our land to be less under our, our own democracy. My father is a Korean War veteran. He was injured by a grenade defending the right of Koreans to be free. And he yet doesn't have the real democracy under the flag that he defended in that foreign country. But let's say something very important. The trip of Puerto Rico

to the [sic] Statehood, it didn't commence in 1898. The Foraker Law [sic] said that Puerto Ricans, Puerto Ricans became as [sic] a Republican government 52 years before the *Estado Libre Asociado*. It was a Chamber, it was an executive branch and the judicial branch, too. The Jones Act, in its second article, state [sic] that the rights and privileges and immunities of citizens of the United States shall be respected in Puerto Rico to the same degree as if Puerto Rico were a state of the Union. That is stated in the Jones Act of 1917. I have some final words now. I have two sons, my father is a veteran, my hometown is the city of *El Yunque* in Rio Grande, Puerto Rico. A full third of it is under the jurisdiction of the federal government of the United States. I have heard many things here about culture and about the language, but before me, I see a distinguished Nuyorican, two distinguished Puerto Rican women, and a man of Mexican American descent directing a Committee of the United States Congress while some say that Puerto Rico must care for its culture if we were a state. Thank you very much for listening [applause].

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you. Sir?

Mario Jesús Toro Suriz:

I would like to thank Chairman Grijalva, distinguished members of Congress, Velázquez, González, and Ocasio-Cortez for the opportunity to be before this Committee. My name is Mario Jesús Toro Suriz, General Coordinator for the Autonomous Statehood Network of the *Movimiento Victoria Ciudadana*, a recently created progressive, people-powered, and community-centered political party in Puerto Rico. The Autonomous Statehood Network proudly represents the Statehooders that have found a political home in the most progressive political party in Puerto Rico. We recognize that the most important development about the Puerto Rico Status Act, consistent with the proposals made by *Victoria Ciudadana* is summarized in the following. That Congress offers a binding and self-executing process to decolonize that only includes the three plausibly [sic] non-colonial, non-territorial options under the United States Constitution and International law. That it provides for an informed process where the people will know what each option entails and that it will be the majority of the people freely choosing a winning option, an objective that is guaranteed with the runoff mechanism. In the Autonomous Statehood Network, we are satisfied with this consensus bill and wish to respond to some of the criticisms that have been raised. The consensus bill resolves the two main objectives of a Constitutional Status Assembly. First, to commit Congress to act on the self-determination mandate emanating from Puerto Rican democracy by providing a binding and self-executing process that includes a formal offer of the options outside the territorial clause. And secondly, to bring together the anti-colonial forces in a procedural consensus with only non-colonial, non-territorial options on the ballot, with their corresponding transitions in a federally endorsed

process. The consensus bill contemplates a thorough, publicly financed educational campaign that is sufficient to combat any disinformation on the process and the status alternatives. We need there to be open, ample and public deliberation with accurate information about the process, so everyone can make a fully informed decision in the most transcendental election for Puerto Rico to date. But that is not to say that Puerto Ricans are not educated enough to make an informed decision, as some argue in bad faith. We have been discussing the future political status of Puerto Rico since the United States first acquired the islands. And before even, as a colony of Spain. The time for talk should be concluding soon. The time for action is now. I want to make my final statement in Spanish if it's permitted.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Absolutely.

Mario Jesús Toro Suriz:

Having said this, the search for the decolonization of Puerto Rico has lasted several centuries. And it has had multiple chapters, multiple points of view, multiple characters. But there are always two important questions in mind. What is the best for our People, and for our Country, and secondly, when will we have a wide front of the different anti-colonial forces independently of the side of the political discussion that they normally take in order to do good for the People of Puerto Rico; leave all differences behind and finally carry out the promise of making our own decision and figuring out which direction we will take in the world. I can say with plenty of satisfaction that this day has arrived, and we are here to witness it. There are people for Statehood here, there are people in favor of Independence here, but we all have a single message. The tragedy that Puerto Rico has suffered for more than five centuries, which we know as the colony, has to end and that today, 70 years after its founding, is the *Estado Libre Asociado*. No more. Those are my words, Mr. President.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Many thanks. Sir.

Francisco Amundaray:

Good afternoon to the Honorable committee, and everybody present in the audience, including members of the press. My name is Francisco Amundaray. I was born in San Juan, where I also currently live. I work in the tourism sector as a tour guide, and tourism consultant. I am one

of various collaborators in Puerto Rico of the NGO, *Boricuas Unidos En La Diáspora*. We see this project as a positive step towards a true decolonization process for my country, Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico is an intervened nation which has never been assimilated by the US. We are a Latin American and Caribbean country, not just an island that happens to be inhabited by US citizens. The process considered here should be slow and careful and always looking to have a broad participation of all civil society in Puerto Rico. Historically, Puerto Rico status discussion has been kidnapped by the pro-annexation party and the pro-colonial Commonwealth party, severely affecting the perception of the people towards Independence and towards Free Association. To make matters worse, the Independence movement has been historically persecuted by the FBI, the CIA, and the Puerto Rican police. To be truly democratic and fair, the Puerto Rican People need to have all true facts at hand. Not only the classic political parties should participate, but also community, environmental, the LGBTTQI community, NGOs, small businesses, the scientific community, feminist groups, labor unions, sports, and nonpartisan political organizations and very important, the two island municipalities of Vieques and Culebra. The people who compose the Puerto Rican Nation have very different circumstances in their lives depending on where they live. The necessities of a teacher... Of a teacher that is also a single mother living in the suburbs of Bayamón are not the same of a coffee farmer in the mountainside town of Maricao or of a fisherman in the island municipality of Vieques. On this draft, once this draft becomes a law project, it needs to have numerous public[sic] hearings both in Washington DC and in Puerto Rico. Important point: The definition of Statehood has to be more deeply discussed, especially in its economic consequences. What is going to happen with language in the courts and in schools? What will happen to our Olympic national team and the participation of Puerto Rico in regional meetings? The proposed transition plan for Statehood is not realistic and is not supported by historical events of States of the Union before their final admission as a formal part of your country. On the other hand, a bill that will compromise a future Congress by admitting the colony of Puerto Rico as a state is doomed to fail. So language in that sense should be eliminated. Also, Puerto Ricans should be clarified[sic] in the sense that Statehood is a concession, not a right. On the other hand, Independence is an international... Internationally inalienable right. It is our opinion that if 51% Puerto Ricans want any of the two forms of sovereignty, a transition process should be immediately started following international law. Nonetheless, the Statehood admission should require an 80% or more super majority since Statehood is irreversible and Puerto Rico as a nation will stop existing. Concerning the diaspora, there are 5 million Puerto Ricans living[sic] in the United States. They should also be part, at least of the discussion of a binding plebiscite. A committee should be created to explore how to include them. Concerning this particular event that takes place today, I respectfully ask that in the future more time should have been given to the Puerto Rican society to prepare to then participate. In the website, the speaking option was never opened. The Independence movement has many organizations that were not invited and in a future occasion they should be here to truly have an inclusive process. I also respectfully ask you to please communicate to your fellow congressmen and congresswomen that not all Puerto Ricans want to be part of your country. Thank you for your time and attention [applause].

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you. Thank you. Are there any questions for the panelists? Thank you very much, appreciated. Before, as I invite... As I invite the next group up, let me say that... That anyone can submit comments to the committee. Our website is naturalresources.house.gov. And there are comment cards and information at the back of the room and we welcome all of them, thank you. [Under breath] Hey, at the end, when we are all wrapping up, I'm going to turn to you to provide closing comments for the last panel.

Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez:

Yes. Okay.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

And then we will [trails off]. We will start with you and then [trails off]. [Sigh] [background conversation] No, I'm ready to leave [laughter]. This is the last panel, so I'm going to go, Alexandra, Jenna, you close... Do you want to... What? I think... Wait, wait. Let's go to the hotel first [background conversation]. So, what would I do? Nothing? Okay.

Staff:

We will call him, that's it. I don't want to [trails off].

Sixth Panel

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you very much. Thank you. Please? Sir? Sir?

Speaker:

Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Congresswoman Velázquez, Congresswoman Ocasio, it's nice to see you again [chuckles]. Well, I thank you all as I thanked you yesterday. Thank you for this opportunity. I would like to elaborate on a point that I... That in my view is critical to this discussion. The issue of democracy and democratic values and the historical

repercussions of the process that this committee has set in motion. We live in a democratic society in a country that prides itself to be the beacon of freedom and democracy. Democracy for all. This point is so important to understand because... Every day we watch people, from all over the world, trying to get across... To get access to the liberties that we all take for granted. Democracy is not perfect. And from time to time, and from time to time, it may be threatened by forces who make a living from inequality and discrimination. That's [sic] the people that we are fighting against. That's... The same people that will move mountains to try to shake this Committee down to try to stop this agreement from becoming the law of the land. Believe me when I say, that there are forces, here on [sic] this room, within this room that hopefully... They are trying to stop these proceedings. You have seen them. And you will hear from them. Not only in Puerto Rico, but also in Washington. That's what this Committee, ah, will face... And from what I've seen, they will not succeed. You know, the historical ramifications of this agreement are unprecedented. As I'm sure that its results will also be unprecedented. This process is being designed in such a way that it would set an example for the world to follow. That's why the territorial or colonial options cannot be part of the solution. You now, in order to//

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

//Sir, if you would make your point//

Speaker:

//Have a process that actually makes sense... You know? That process cannot include the problem. Because, if there's no problem, why are we here? Why are we having this discussion at this time? Why [sic] this Committee, has, ah, you know, invested so much time and effort and have had the opportunity to get the input, to take the input of so many people? Why are they interested? Why are they interested, if there's not a problem? The fact of the matter is that the status that we have is a problem. The fact of the matter is that it was rejected by the People of Puerto Rico, and it should not be on the ballot. And whatever this Committee finally adopts and passes, I'm sure that this agreement... It will, you know, it's been... It's going to be something that, that... It will be a model for the world to follow. Because this... That's who we are. That's what this Committee is all about. So, finally, I would argue, and I would challenge this Committee to rise up to the challenge, rise up to the moment, I know that you're doing [stutters], the fact of the matter that we are here discussing this... You know, a few months ago no one would have expected that. And, I know because I talked to you yesterday, Congressman. You do understand the historical repercussions of this... Actually, of this moment because this is history in the making. And thank you, thank you for being here, thank you Mr. Chairman, and hopefully, we can actually pass a bill that, you know, let the Puerto Rican People finally choose in a binding referendum what we actually decide to be. Thank you.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you. Sir?

Pedro Aniel Rodríguez Mercado:

Greetings.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Greetings.

Pedro Aniel Rodríguez Mercado:

My name is Pedro Aniel Rodríguez Mercado. Thanks to all the audience watching and thanks to you for being here. I am the Executive Director of the Young Professionals for Puerto Rico Statehood and it's very evident that I'm not Albert Einstein or Abraham Lincoln [laughs]. Or any other brilliant person you have listened to today. There's nothing I may say today that has not been mentioned before. So, I'll be as brief as possible. There's only one statement I want to make clear on behalf of the youth I represent. But first, I want to say thank you. Thank you for listening to the 3.2 million of [sic] American citizens living in Puerto Rico. Bridging the divide... Is almost impossible in this era of rapid information transit, where sometimes opinions move faster than logic. The fact that the Committee is here today, in Puerto Rico, presenting this draft consensus bill is an achievement of civility. Your consensus shows progress in humanity's ability to not only challenge the status quo but to also reach a middle ground with people we profoundly disagree with on multiple subjects. And in the words of our previous governor, Dr. Pedro Rosselló, this issue is complex, the historical baggage is heavy, opinions on the subject are many, varied, and passionately held. Bridging the divide is how we bring forward positive change to this world. And for this, we thank you. This act, to finally end 124 years of colonialism under US sovereignty shall serve as an example of what Republicans and Democrats can do when working together for the greater good. With that said, the Young Professionals for Puerto Rico Statehood favor this bill as is written, with the binding plebiscite. We encourage the congressmen and congresswomen in the Committee to submit the bill as soon as possible to end the most prolonged dilemma in our Island's history. In 1952, P.R. adopted a constitution that gave us a local government without federal representation. Since then, we have debated the following steps to become an autonomous Island, the *Estado Libre Asociado* did not change our colonial status, which has been the root cause of most of our problems for half a millennium. And as long as Puerto Rico's status is not solved, we won't be able to focus on other important matters to advance society and drive

positive change in this world. I grew up in a house divided against itself. With my mom's side being pro-Statehood and my dad's side being pro-Independence. My dad used to repeat [clears throat] some words of similar to [sic] Pedro Albizu Campos: The youth must defend our country with weapons of knowledge and that is precisely why we are here today. The youth is clear. And their country and that the opposition will prolong this debate forever if they could because their intention is not to move forward with the majority's desire, but to maintain the failing status quo. This consensus bill is meant to end the longest colony in the history of the world and the only way decolonization via self-determination can be achieved is by not including the current colonial status in the plebiscite and by making the result a binding one. It is time to move this bill as is, to conclude America's unfinished business of democracy. I guarantee... And guarantee that future generations live to see 51 stars United as one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. And I also want to say some words right away... Being bilingual, being able to speak English and Spanish doesn't make me less Boricua. I am in favor of Statehood, and I would be Borincano even if I was born on the moon. Thank you [scattered applause].

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you. The floor is yours.

Lucy Arce:

Chairman Grijalva, Representatives Velázquez, and Ocasio and distinguished guests participating in this forum. I am honored to be here today to share my views on the discussion draft of the Puerto Rico Status Act. My name is former Senator Lucy Arce, and I'm here to... In representation of *Puerto Rico Escogió Estadidad*, a nonpartisan grassroots nonprofit organization that advocates for the recognition that [sic] majority of Puerto Rican voters have already chosen Statehood for Puerto Rico. I want to start by expressing my sincere gratitude for all of the effort that you have made to develop this compromise deal. Although, I continue to support HR 1522, I am also proud to state my support for the Puerto Rico Status Act. As a lifelong advocate of Statehood, I support this compromise bill because it respects the will of the majority of Puerto Rico voters who have chosen Statehood in 2012, 2017, and 2020. This bill does this by making a formal offer of Statehood for Puerto Rico and then providing the mechanism for its implementation if the majority of voters choose it once again. The bill also offers voters the non-territorial option [sic] of Independence and Free Association. This is critical because the People of Puerto Rico have repeatedly expressed their desire to end the current territorial status and Congress must provide us clear and constitutionally viable choices. The compromise bill does it. And for the first time, ever, would represent a commitment for... By Congress to implement it, the choice made by voters in Puerto Rico. I also commend the compromise bill for offering all voters only the non-territorial options. The problem cannot be part of the solution. So please, hold strong on this aspect of the compromise bill. Anyone who knows me know [sic] of my

commitment to Puerto Rico veterans. This bill offers our veterans and their families the opportunity to vote for full equality and voting rights as US citizens which our veterans have earned through their service and sacrifice. As a former member of [sic] Puerto Rico Senate, I know how hard reaching a legislative compromise can be. And I know that once an agreement is reached, making any changes to it could cause the agreement to fall apart. So even though I would offer suggestions for the bill's improvement, I am more than willing to accept the compromise bill as current [sic] draft [sic] if that will allow the bill to have a chance to pass Congress and become law. That been said, I would urge the Committee to consider amending the option of Sovereignty in Free Association into Independence in Free Association. I offer this suggestion because it is critical that voter [sic] understand that the choice they would make with Free Association means they would exit the protection of the US Constitution and that Puerto Rico's relationship with the United States under that option will only be based on a treaty that can be terminated by either size [sic] in favor of Independence. Using the word Independence before Free Association would make the implication of this monumental change more clear [sic] to voters that [sic] the use of the word Sovereignty, whose meaning is less clear and more ambiguous. This is necessary to ensure that Puerto Rico voters provide in full concern and are not misled into voting for a status option that omits Puerto Rico from the protection of the United States Constitution without them being fully aware of what it is, what they have chosen. I also want to say that after 124 years under the US flag with this bill, Congress has finally recognized that the current territorial status represents an inherent limitation for Puerto Rico [sic] development. Now, we need your leadership to get this bill going through [sic] legislative process before the current window of opportunity draws to a close. We will continue our citizen advocacy efforts but look to you to do everything in your power to make this bill become a law so Puerto Rico can finally bloom into its potential of democracy, equality, and prosperity. Thank you.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you. Sir?

Josué Rivera:

Good evening, Mr. Chairman, and members of this distinguished Committee and my fellow Americans. I am Josué Rivera, a public servant, former State Director for Puerto Rico at the US Department of Agriculture Rural Development. Former Policy Advisor of the Office of the Governor in Washington, former National President of the Board for Statehood Association, and current Ideas Fellow of the Aspen Institute. But for the record, I am not here in any of these official capacities but rather, as a private citizen concerned about Puerto Rico [sic] political, and economic future. There is a saying that goes as follow [sic], "It's better late than never." Therefore, please accept my sincere appreciation to all the parties involved in reaching this historic agreement. Your leadership and detachment in finding common ground is, without a

doubt, key to resolving [sic] long-overdue colonial relationships between the United States and Puerto Rico. We all know that the common ground here in Puerto Rico is that we, *Puertorriqueños*, treasure our American citizenship. The Constitution, our love for freedom, the pursue [sic] of happiness, our belief that all mens [sic] are created equal, and we cherish our multicultural, multilingual link between mainstream America and our Puerto Rican culture. Therefore, I am Boricua and American, just so you know. Statehood does not change that. But the two other options of Independence will. I come here in support of HR 1522, the Puerto Rico Statehood Admission Act and the draft bill, the Puerto Rico Status Act which provide the American citizens residing in Puerto Rico a process to exercise our right to self-determination. This time through a binding, self-executing process initiated by federally sponsored legislation. The American flag has flown over Puerto Rico since 1898. In 1900, Congress established a civilian government on the Island through the Foraker Act. In 1901, the Supreme Court struck this act with Downes versus Bidwell decision. And its progeny held for the Constitution an informative clause, "Puerto Rico was not part of the United States but subject to the plenary powers of Congress. Which turned into a colonial relationship ever since. Congress need [sic] to act with a sense of urgency. Then in 1950, Congress passed Public Law 81-600; The Puerto Rico Federal Relations Act. And still, with the passage of [sic] Puerto Rico Oversight Management Economic Stability Act of 2016, better known as PROMESA, and [sic] recent Supreme Court determination, such as United States versus Vaello-Madero, once again, Congress and the Supreme Court remind us all that the centennial colonial relationship is still present and pending resolution. I strongly support the admission of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico as a State of the Union. It is the best path forward given that we have had a relationship for over 120 years, a relationship that binds the US and Puerto Rico by sharing and benefiting from the economic, cultural, political, and societal aspirations of our People. I am concerned about the educational campaign for the other two options of Independence included in this draft bill. As a clear reminder, Independence has never been an option favored by most of the People in Puerto Rico as evidenced by all local plebiscites held about this point, this Congress needs to address many important questions about the two forms of Independence, and instruct the executive branch of the US government on how we will effectively transition the over 10,000 federal civilian employees and thousands of military service members, including their families. Second, estimate the cost of transition. Are we going to fire them? Third, there's need [sic] to be an estimate of impact and cost for the residents of the Republic of Puerto Rico and the implications of ending federal programs that currently benefit our most vulnerable and low-income communities, our women, our children, our elders, veterans, and socially disadvantaged small businesses in Puerto Rico. Fourth, what is the cost of the new nation [sic] defense? What is the cost of admission to the United Nations? The international monetary fund, and many other institutions and regulating bodies. What are the process [sic] and implications establishing currency? Federal insurance for natural resources? Taxation? Managing current and future debt obligations? How many embassies will Puerto Rico have? And what will be the cost to the People of Puerto Rico? What happens to in, investment certainty? And the economic market rates? What will be the US citizens current benefits and responsibility and laws within the two Independence options? I am also concerned that the two

options of Independence will continue to sponsor citizenship for the residents: That's against United States Constitution and our national interests. Citizens living in the Nation under COFA are regarded as national, therefore, I am proposing an immediate transition to US nationals established as residents of Puerto Rico in these two types of Independence. Concerning the legislative process, I urge you to advance this proposal, the Puerto Rico Status Act. And in my opinion, the best path forward for the People of Puerto Rico is Statehood, but I invite all the parties to join us in support//

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

//Thank you//

Josué Rivera:

//Thank you, Mr. Chairman, thank you.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you. Sir?

Humberto Marchán:

Hi, good evening. Many thanks. Chairman Grijalva. And my regards to the beautiful people of Tucson//

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

//Thank you//

Humberto Marchán:

//Nogales, and the Sonora desert. It is a very beautiful area, I have been//

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

//Thank you.

Humberto Marchán:

I have been there in the past. And warmest regards to our three *Boricuas* representing us in Congress. Two of them are here. And as a Progressive Democrat, I am proud of what you're doing in Congress. And, just so you know, I've been observing the way you, Alexandra [sic], pay attention to what the People are saying. We, the common people, appreciate that. Thank you. I am... I'm Humberto Marchán. I'm a retired federal probation officer, career federal probation officer, and a correctional psychologist. So, as a Progressive Democrat, I will address you from that framework. Puerto Rico is a Nation. Culturally, sociologically, and anthropologically. Sovereignty is an inherent, inalienable right of any nation. Regardless of how people vote. Saying that, after almost 125 years as a US colony, and 400 years as a colony of Spain, I believe that the best path for Puerto Rico to transition to a sovereign nation is *Libre Asociación*, Free Association. I commend the Committee for taking the morally righteous decision to include this path as a logical step to decolonize Puerto Rico. The transition mechanisms, agreements toward national sovereignty via Free Association or full Independence is a recognition that the colonial oppression to us, Puerto Ricans, whether it be in the Island, in the mainland, or anywhere else in the world deserves a responsible and restorative, restorative process by the colonial power. The most recent example of this responsible and peaceful transitional process is England and Barbados. Please, take the time to study this example as a way to improve the bill. US citizenship in this transition process is the most significant component from the perspective of this restorative and moral obligation. It is a great step by this Committee to put US citizenship as a central aspect of this transition. Our colonial history has deep-rooted myths and disinformation with regards to US citizenship. Therefore, the bill needs as most detailed clarification in this matter of US citizenship to eliminate ambiguity and misinterpretation. From my view, now in the 21st century, common citizenship agreement [sic], double, triple citizenship is the norm, and the bill should reflect that. That is the way we live now in the world. We have to have a 360° vision of the world. Now, to the Statehood option. Hawaii is the only Island archipelago state. We all know that. This bring [sic] me... This brings me to our closest neighbors, fellow US citizens of the US non-incorporated territory of the Virgin Islands, which is actually the most southern US hold in the world. It is not Puerto Rico. Again, 360 vision. As a good friend and colleague from the US Virgin Islands once told me. We have more US citizens living in these two Caribbean colonies than about 30 states. Figure that out. Than 30 states. If Statehood is to be seriously considered by US Congress, the moral path is to have these two Caribbean colonies joined as the second archipelago state. It is the right and moral path to Statehood for the almost 3 and a half million US citizens that call the Caribbean their homeland. Together, they would have two US senators, about five or six congressional districts, hopefully Democrat, because I'm a Democrat. Now, this would be a serious and consequential commitment to finally end US colonialism in the Caribbean. And last [sic], I just want to thank the Committee for moving forward in a serious and courageous effort to end our current colonial condition. And last, I want to highlight the fact that we have three Puerto Rican women as part of this commitment in this Committee and they have taken up a

leading role in this process and have shown to us the capacity to sit down and dialogue to achieve compromise, no... No offense to you Mr. Grijalva, but I wish to recognize them.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

No offense taken.

Humberto Marchán:

Okay [laughs]. This is a great example to our people. But as a parent of a daughter, you serve as a great role model to our daughters. That's all I have to say.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you.

Humberto Marchán:

And I do, once again say that I know the binding clause is the right thing on principle. But I think that with the political environment right now, especially on the Republican side, it is going to have problems because//

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

//Okay, thank you very much//

Humberto Marchán:

//They don't want... Okay. I'm done//

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

//Sir?

Speaker:

Thank you, Mr. Grijalva. Someone said some time ago, in these panels that Puerto Rico is Hispanic and that that's going to bring a lot of trouble and I just recall the history of New Mexico and Arizona being part of California and then being part of Mexico, and now being both different states, so, I wanted to bring the point that, being Hispanic, is part of the multiculturalism that the United States is enhancing, ah, in all venues. Ah, let me say to start that I believe in the character and the work being done by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. I follow her in Twitter. Also, Nydia Velázquez, which I met many years ago with Alvaro Cifuentes in his chief of staff office and... Obviously, Jennifer, our friend. Mr. Grijalva is a newcomer, and you are welcome because you have demonstrated that you are more bilingual than many of us. And that's a true example of what the Puerto Rico could do in the United States as part of the... Of the coalition of different people and that way, some people won't lose their pensions for working in other places. So... I am going to say a few words and I don't think to consume all the time on the specifics, because so many people are talking about the legalities of this and that and there's so many experts that I get confused. I don't represent any group other than the young guys from my age and... I tend to look for, for taxes and things like that, because I am a CPA on my own. So... Also, on accounting. On accounting of the votes in section 3, section 5A 3, it says that you have to... The valid votes are cast and on item B1, it talks about the valid votes. If you exclude the blank votes and the... Nullified votes, somehow, you come out with a number. So, you are making the accounting anyway. So... That's for you to know that there's an accounting that people are going to use as an argument after the votes are cast. I wanted you to become aware that the Puerto Rico Electoral Commission is in a financial crisis, an administrative crisis, and that I personally don't think it will run the process unless the whole thing is being overhauled. The Electoral Commission has... A projected deficit for the past few years. They have a mess inside. I know it because I worked there for a year. So I can tell you, they're going to burn me, but I have to tell you that you have to devote some time to put their act together so they can do the job... I think another panelist brought this topic ah, this morning. And...

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

I agree with you.

Speaker:

And there's no mention for FEMA or CDBG extraordinary funds for... As a consequence of Maria. The law doesn't... The project of the draft doesn't say what's going to happen on Independence. What's going to happen under Statehood. I think you have usual... You should look for that. On Statehood, there's no adjustment for SSI for the people who are not making the payment while they have been claimed for many years. Same thing happens with the pension of the veterans that are being calculated based on... On a non-continental residence and that has to be taken for... There's no phase-in of the tax liability. You are proposing some incentives for

Independence and giving some extra funds on a huge amount, as a block grant, but you are not proposing any incentives for the People of Puerto Rico if we could become, as I expect, a state, to facing the tax liability and also to promote economic development using zones or something like that. And... And then..... Why, for me, in my personal basis, this is important? Because I have a grandson living in the Panhandle and their fathers [sic] cannot come to Puerto Rico because he is a six-times Afghanistan active-duty veteran, and he needs some special health treatments and Puerto Rico Hospital, Veterans' Hospital does not provide those so//

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

//Thank you.

Speaker:

Respectfully submitted, I will include a paper later on in the night, thank you.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

We appreciate that sir, and your point is something that is... Our collective mind having to do with the importance of... If we get to the point of an election, the integrity and the sanctity of that election is going to be vital... To the confidence and trust that we have, that that election will have among the Puerto Rican People, and we are aware of that, and dealing with that. Sir?

Nixon Rosado Vélez:

Cordial greetings to all. My name is Nixon Rosado Vélez. I reside in the town of Vega Baja. At the age of 10, my parents came from Brooklyn and... I love this Island. I met my wife; we've been married 39 years. I see... The young congresswoman and I see my daughter. And, to, to Ms. Congresswoman Velázquez, we are related. Distantly, but we are. Maybe someday I will let you know. Oh [some laughter].

Representative Nydia Velázquez:

Maybe later.

Nixon Rosado Vélez:

In a bit.

Representative Nydia Velázquez:

Now.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Now [scattered laughter].

Nixon Rosado Vélez:

For the record, again, my name is Nixon Rosado Vélez. I served 23 years, active military. In the United States Army. I retired as a CW4. I understand that federal taxes and Puerto Rico taxes will have changes if we become a state. It has to happen. All these IRS codes and Internal Revenue Codes in *Hacienda* would have to be... Make [sic] changes. I pay federal taxes. I pay local taxes. But I cannot vote for the President of the United States, and I do not have proper representation in Congress with the exception of Jennifer González, who I have met. We currently have 350,000 Puerto Ricans as veterans. On this Island, 10 years ago, we had 145,000. Today, that number is at 83,000. They are all moving up North. We have 35,000 active-duty military members, 10,000 National Guard and Reservists. What will happen to our VA Hospital and our VA services if this is not a state? And we have a different option of, ah, Free Association or Independence? That is a great concern. As a federal taxpayer, and as I've stated before, I cannot overemphasize this, we are second-class citizens. We have to move up North in order to have those full rights. The People of Puerto Rico on this Island pay \$5 billion in different types of federal taxes; Social Security, Medicare, unemployment, and customs, just to name a few. Yet we don't receive the fair amount that other states do. The other thing that we have as a problem is with paying taxes. We pay more taxes than six other states in the Union. My father came from Las Piedras, Puerto Rico. At the age of 15, he moved to the States to pick tomatoes and lettuce. He had a saying, he would tell me, "living off of pride is how you starve to death." And he would tell me, "What happens is you don't know the pain of hunger." I went on a 51-hour hunger strike in Washington, DC in favor of Statehood and I know what that pain is. Because I have hunger for Statehood. The draft... Is a historical one. It comes from Congress, no more excuses. We have always been told that we don't... The they don't want us. But we don't know who "they" are. With this bill, we will know on the no votes who "they" are. I ask for one thing: Take it to the floor. Even if we do lose, we have won . Because this has never happened before. I ask the Senate to do the same thing. Because even if we lose in the Senate, we still win. We win even when we lose. Because this is a historical event. And this type of bill, we only need a simple majority. Not a super majority, like others think. The Constitution has a term for new states. It's called equal

footing. So, to treat us differently than any other state which didn't require a super majority to become state would be wrong. It would be undemocratic not to treat Puerto Rico in the same manner as other states. I say it would be unpatriotic for anyone voting "no" on American citizens that want to be part of this great Nation and Union. Just wanted to state, thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak to you all and to Congresswoman Velázquez, my grandfather and your father were cousins.

Representative Nydia Velázquez:

Hm. Okay. Don't go anywhere. So I can say hello.

Nixon Rosado Vélez:

Thank you very much.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you very much, sir.

Cristobal Berríos:

Thank you Mr. Raúl Grijalva, Nydia, good afternoon.

Representative Nydia Velázquez and Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Good afternoon. Good afternoon.

Cristobal Berríos:

And you as well, good afternoon, Alexandra [sic] Ocasio. I'm missing Jennifer. I would've liked her to be here... I know you are all tired, me too. Because I got here early. But... Let's move forward to see if we can finish this with much pleasure. Good afternoon, my name is Cristobal Berríos Dávila, President of CENA, *Congreso Estadista Nacional Americano*. This organization was created out of the celebration of the hearings of the House Resources Committee concerning project 47-51 from representative John T. Doolittle from October 4, of the year 2000, where the project of Free Association of the Popular Democratic Party was presented which was declared unconstitutional. I am happy to inform that I have been involved in Puerto Rican politics since

1954. I participated as creative director, composer, publicist, producer, despite the fact that my main job was always as a comedian, like my dear friend Zelensky. With no desire to compare myself to someone whom I admire so much. We are thankful for the opportunity to be allowed to express ourselves concerning this situation that is so important for all the residents of this beautiful island, especially those that have not been able to reach a life of full enjoyment due to the precarious economic situation that is the result of an economic system based on consumption and slavery which holds a system of government created by Congress that has not worked, keeping Puerto Rico at the precipice of bankruptcy and which forces the Puerto Rican to depend on assistance that doesn't even arrive most of the time. Today we represent that, the greater sector of Puerto Rican citizens, including a great number of brothers and sisters from other countries that decided to accompany us on our journey to the future and reside in this island, possession of the United States but of which we are not part of yet, with the hope that one day our colonial status may finally be resolved. I... I want to say that there is a famous saying that goes like, "If men will not fix the world, women will fix it." And I see a large group of women here, so I really hope that happens [scattered laughter]. Puerto Rico can be sovereign in two ways. It may be sovereign as an Independent Republic, as it can be sovereign as a State. Like the sovereign state of Hawaii. Or the sovereign state of New York. The sovereign state of Puerto Rico. Almost at the end of the Spanish-American War, with the arrival of General Miles and the American troops to Puerto Rico, some Puerto Ricans thought that the United States Congress would do to Puerto Rico the same thing that it has done with other territories that were incorporated and converted into states. Yet unfortunately, we were very far, very far from that. The signing of the Treaty of Paris, article 9, placed us as slaves to Congress. Slaves. The article again states that the political condition and the rights of those who live in this territory are determined by Congress. We do not have any power. We are slaves to Congress. That's why, it doesn't matter what we suggest. Because Congress will do whatever it wishes. However, I think the effort is worth it. I believe you are doing a great job. A great job, for the first time I see a possibility for Puerto Rico to change its status. Whichever it may be, whichever it may be. Puerto Rico today is the reflection of a People that in its moment did not know how to choose or how to claim what it was owed to them by right and respect, their non-colonial and non-territorial status as a fifty-first state of the great American nation in the year 2012. The personal ambitions of a few prevented it.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

I know.

Cristobal Berríos:

The three political parties have simply become an employment agency instead of being civil servants. Some career politicians just coast by election after election simply to avoid

unemployment. An example of this was a legislator who spent about 40 years living off of his People//

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

//Well, sir. If you would allow me//

Cristobal Berríos:

//I will not mention it, done//

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

//Many thanks, many thanks to all of you and to him. Do my colleagues have any questions? If not, many thanks, it was lovely... Before, uh, we... Thank you very much, we are... Before we end up, we close the session... Let me ask my colleagues on the dais if... If they have any comments they would like to make before we conclude... Gavel the meeting.

Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez:

Thank you.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Congresswoman?

Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez:

Of course. Many thanks to Congresspersons Velázquez, Grijalva, and González-Colón for your collaboration on this project. I wish to thank all of you here for your participation and for expressing your thoughts and worries concerning this draft. Your comments are essential to assure that this proposal reflects the will of the people. And it is very important for Congress that we hold more public hearings once we arrive back at Washington DC. For over 100 years, the United States territory of Puerto Rico has been subject to policies imposed by a frequently disinterested Congress in the wellbeing of the people who live here. This reality affects all aspects of Puerto Rican life. Puerto Rico receives an unequal treatment for the reimbursement of Medicaid, nutritional support, and a series of other social welfare safety net programs. Despite

being poorer than the poorest state of the Union, Mississippi. Additionally, our people are still feeling the devastation of Hurricane Maria. These problems, among others, derive from the unique and long-lasting colonial status of Puerto Rico that has resulted in residents of the Island being treated like second-class citizens. Without a doubt, we believe that Puerto Rico must have the freedom to design its own future. In this proposal, there are three options which the people Puerto Rico can vote for. The first is Independence. The second is Sovereignty with Free Association with the United States, and the third is the category of State. Congress imposing any given status on Puerto Rico would be the culmination of colonization. This legislation must be objective to the result. Community organizations have defended a process of democratic decolonization for Puerto Rico and have survived against powerful interests. It is the responsibility of the federal government to allow the population of the territory to freely express their desires concerning their political status. This proposal brings us a step closer to ending 520 years of colonization. Concerning the status of Puerto Rico, more than 535 members of the United States Congress, it is now clearer than ever that the Island must have the freedom to determine its own future. That is why I support a transparent, just, and inclusive process for the people to decide. It is imperative that any election be free... It is imperative for any election to be free of corruption, private money interests, and misinformation. Every voter must have all the information necessary to emit an informed vote concerning the three options and what each option implies in terms of legal, economic, and social repercussions. The most important thing is that the people of Puerto Rico recognize this election as legitimate and fair in order to respect the result. That is what all of us, as members of Congress, must ensure. Our role is to guarantee that this legislation is fair and balanced. Thank you very much.

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you very much. Ms. Velázquez?

Representative Nydia Velázquez:

Well. Many thanks. It has been a long day, it has been a week of many meetings, we have wanted to give ample participation to all Puerto Ricans that wish to express themselves, as you know, the draft is on the website for the Natural Resources Committee and obviously any comment, suggestion, will go on record, so we continue to invite all Puerto Ricans to express themselves. This is a very emotional moment for all of us. This is not... This is not just another business. This is the future of the people. This is the recognition of the moral responsibility of Puerto Rican members who are in Congress and that it falls on us to basically take the flag and bring up and push the discussion about Puerto Rico in Congress. This has not been easy. The lack of clarity and the lack of education. The empire that has maintained a colony for 122 years... You cannot imagine the exercise of trying to capture the attention of Congresspersons that were elected by their respective districts, and that for them the most important thing is to simply

represent their districts. Puerto Rico has always been an asterisk, and we have reminded them every day of the moral responsibility that they have. We cannot be giving speeches on democracy to other parts of the world and then fail almost 9 million Puerto Ricans. Therefore, we are committed not only to push this debate forward, but for us it is incredibly important to provide the right information and to have clear definitions. Because this is for you and your children, the future generations. Additionally, something very important that Alexandria has mentioned, and we have discussed throughout these negotiations: The lack of faith in Puerto Rican institutions. I mean, we must guarantee to Puerto Ricans that when you go to exercise a vote, that your vote will be counted. We must ensure and guarantee that there is transparency in the process. We must provide the resources to each of the factions that will participate so you may carry out a campaign that is effective where nobody has any advantage over anybody else or any other political party or whatever. That is our commitment with you. Help us to get to the final moment and to once and for all, solve a fact, a problem, an issue that separates and divides the Puerto Rican family. God bless you [applause].

Chairman Raúl Grijalva:

Thank you. Well, many thanks to everybody who participated, to those who will participate, in terms of giving us information or recommendations, etc. But I also wish to thank to my three colleagues, the leadership and courage of you three have been... The push, the key point in all of these discussions. And that is why we are here today. I wish to thank you all. Listen, I can't claim to share the experience of Puerto Ricans on this island in terms of our shared citizenship... My ancestors, in a war that they lost against the United States, they lost their lands. My native ancestors lost almost everything. And that experience... what we have in common is that hatred towards inequality. The lack of equality. It's a shared fight. And it's a shared fight for all Americans. And, so, those are colonial legacies that we can't change. But, from what I've seen here in Puerto Rico with this so very important and historical document, is the opportunity to change, to change that legacy. That's my commitment, that's my commitment to my colleagues and, and we'll go forward with hard work ahead, but with the expectation that we will...we will move this forward. Thank you very much [applause]. Thank you. A lot. Thank you a lot.

[Forum Ends].