



Statement by
Elisa Muñoz

President, Young Democrats of America Puerto Rico Chapter
before a panel of members of the
United States House Natural Resources Committee
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My name is Elisa Muñoz, and I am the President of the Young Democrats of Puerto Rico (YDPR).

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 Jenniffer 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 our 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 25-65 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

Islands 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, U.S. Army, Purple Heart recipient, Vietnam veteran (may he rest in peace), and as a Type 1 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 availability of quality healthcare for and of the social well-being of all the Americans in Puerto Rico.

Puerto Rico has been a colony of the United States for 124 years; this is the longest any territory has gone without being admitted into the Union. This is not just morally wrong, it's 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.”**

That 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.