

Veterans for Puerto Rico Statehood Task Force



"Defending Democracy Abroad... Demanding Democracy at Home"

**Remarks: Víctor Pérez, Brigadier General (Retired)
President, Veterans for Puerto Rico Statehood
as Prepared for Delivery
House Natural Resources Committee Public Input Forum
Consensus Project Puerto Rico Status Act
Puerto Rico Convention Center
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Honorable Raúl Grijalva, Honorable Nydia Velázquez, Honorable Alexandria Ocasio-Cortés and Honorable Jennifer González, fellow veterans present in this room and those outside the building,

Ladies and Gentlemen, Good Evening.

For the record, I am Brigadier General Retired Víctor Pérez, President of Veterans for Puerto Rico Statehood. Our group visited Congress this past 25-30 April and had audience with 35 Representatives and Senators, lobbying for Puerto Rico Statehood. We stand ready to do again.

We all agree: Thank God and Congress, finally Puerto Rico colonial status will come to an end, voted by Puerto Ricans, in Puerto Rico.

We thank Hon. Hoyer, Hon. Grijalva, Hon. Velázquez, Hon. Ocasio, our Resident Commissioner Honorable González, and our Governor Honorable Pierluisi, for coming together and making this historical presentation of 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, I repeat, non-colonial options of Independence, Free Association, and Statehood.

"That is the expressed will of the people and what we want!"

After 125 years of being a territory / colony of the United States, we finally see light at the end of the tunnel.

We have debated this subject throughout those 125 years, enough to conclude what we are hearing from Congress in this Puerto Rico Status Act: Puerto Rico is a colony, that we will not hide it 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 5 million, among them veterans, whom have moved to one of the 50 states looking for equality.

How ironic can it be for us Puerto Rican veterans living in Puerto Rico, that we do not have the same rights our fellow comrades in Arms have in the States.

And hear this; for all of us who 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 any hesitation.

More than 250,000 Puerto Ricans have honorably and bravely served our Nation throughout its history; all Wars, all contingencies. Per capital, more Puerto Ricans have served than many other states.

Nine Puerto Ricans have been recognized with the Medal of Honor; the highest distinction presented by the President of the United States to a 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, "My hand has more fingers than the amount of Congressional Gold Medal given by Congress."

Today, over 100,000 veterans live in the island and 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 to our home "Puerto Rico, and are denied full voting rights and *equality* which the U.S. Constitution guarantees to all U.S. citizens living in the states.

How can it be? We are sent to war, we have no choice, we fight, we scarify our selfless and our family, many of us do not return. But as 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!"

We do have a Resident Commissioner, Honorable Jennifer Gonzalez, who you know well; she is a great Congresswomen, very vocal, with a great voice, but has no vote.

The only income for many veterans, as well as many 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. Clear discrimination and a matter of human rights.

Puerto Rico, being a territory of the United States, is part of the border, part of the continent, but incredibly, for the matter of Tricare we are treated as a foreign country.

We do not receive the same Medicare or many other federal funds as in the states.

So, Why is this? Because we are a colony.

For all our veterans, for all our service members, for all 3.2 million Puerto Ricans living in Puerto Rico, this cannot continue, and Congress, is finally acting now.

Thank you, for this, Puerto Rico Status Act, a binding and non-colonial decision, by Puerto Ricans in Puerto Rico.

God Bless our Veterans and Service Members,
God Bless Puerto Rico,
God Bless our Nation, the United States of America.

Thank you for hearing us: Do you have any questions?

Respectfully.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MSBz' with a stylized flourish at the end.

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Cc.

Honorable Raúl Grijalva, Chair Natural Resources Committee
Honorable Jennifer Gonzalez, PR Resident Commissioner
Honorable Pedro Pierluisi, PR Governor