



CONGRESSWOMAN JENNIFFER GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN

PUERTO RICO - AT LARGE

**Opening Statement
Full Committee Hearing
Insular Affairs Legislative Hearing on Puerto Rico Political Status
Wednesday, April 14, 2021 - 1:00 PM**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to first offer my deepest condolences on the recent passing of Alex Lofgren from your staff. My sympathies are with you, your office and Alex's loved ones.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for calling on this important hearing that addresses the results of the November 3rd election in favor of statehood for Puerto Rico.

Today, we will hear testimony on two House bills, H.R. 1522, the Puerto Rico Statehood Admission Act, and H.R. 2070.

H.R. 1522, introduced by Mr. Soto and I, would **end** Puerto Rico's centennial territorial status, while the other bill is another tactic to delay the decolonization process and thus perpetuate the unequal treatment of the 3.2 million Americans on the Island.

Let me be clear, there is nothing that this other legislation will offer to Puerto Rico that has not already been discussed in 123 years.

A status convention, as proposed by this bill, creates a cumbersome process without any kind of timeline to completion, and which problematically does not recognize that the only two non-territorial and constitutional status options are statehood and independence.

Not only that – the bill shamelessly ignores the will of voters in Puerto Rico, ignores a legitimate democratic process, and ignores self-determination, despite the bill’s misleading title.

Letting the losing minority deny the clear choice of the majority in a free and fair vote isn’t democracy, and the United States must not take part in such an egregious act!

That bill is truly a slap in the face to Puerto Rican voters!

On the other hand, H.R. 1522, respects and upholds Puerto Rico’s vote for statehood with the **true and only** self-determination method, the ballot box. Puerto Ricans have voted for statehood three times in elections that the courts upheld.

The March 24th certified results of the Puerto Rico State Elections Commission on voter participation, showcases that voter turnout was 73.15%. That is a higher voter turnout than what we have seen here in the United States in decades.

The bipartisan H.R. 1522 would constitute Congress’s response to our fellow citizens in Puerto Rico and provide a formal offer of statehood. The legislation outlines a clear process to enable the Island’s admission into the Union, should it be ratified by Puerto Rico voters in a federally sponsored, yes-or-no referendum. This is the exact same procedure established for Alaska and Hawaii prior to their admission as States.

Statehood is going to happen. It is the logical next step in our political future as Americans.

Congress has the chance to make clear that when American citizens ask for equality and justice, they will get equality and justice as American Citizens. Not that we will welcome a proposal to make them be “separate but equal”.

The status quo is unsustainable and until it is addressed, Puerto Rico’s economy and social development will continue to lag behind that of the 50 states, driving Puerto Ricans to leave the Island in search of better opportunities. An example of this is how today, 44% of Island residents live under the poverty level.

For 104 years, the people of Puerto Rico have been proud American citizens, with over 235,000 having honorably served our Nation in the U.S. Armed Forces. All while being denied equal participation in the federal decision-making process.

Only statehood provides that equal participation, guarantees U.S. citizenship, and represents a permanent and constitutional solution to Puerto Rico’s status issue.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and I yield back.