



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi
League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
85th Annual National Convention and Exposition
Presidential Reception
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New York, NY
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Thank you.

Buenas noches a todos. I am honored to be here with you tonight, and I am pleased to celebrate LULAC's accomplishments on behalf of the Latino community in the United States.

I would like to briefly discuss two issues.

The first one is the need to create a reasonable path to U.S. citizenship for millions of undocumented immigrants in the United States by enacting comprehensive immigration reform. The other is the imperative to create a path to full and equal U.S. citizenship for the 3.6 million American citizens residing in Puerto Rico by enacting federal legislation to facilitate the territory's transition to a democratic and dignified political status.

LULAC is to be commended for its moral clarity on both subjects, which raise fundamental questions about the nature of our democracy and the meaning of American citizenship.

As a member of the House Judiciary Committee, I strongly support comprehensive immigration reform that includes a path to citizenship. I also support enhanced border security, not only along our nation's Southwest and Northern borders, but also in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, which together constitute our nation's Caribbean border.

America has always been—and remains today—a work in progress. And since the country's founding, the hard work of perfecting our Union has often been carried out by courageous men and women born outside of America, immigrants from other shores who chose to leave behind everything and everyone they know, who came here in search of economic opportunity or to escape poverty or persecution, and whose character, passion and talent have enriched the life of this nation and replenished its spirit. These men and women are the lifeblood of our economy. Without them, this country could not function. They deserve a chance to become citizens of the nation that their labor has helped build and sustain. And so it is vital for political leaders to give them that chance by enacting sensible legislation.

I am a Puerto Rican and, as such, a natural-born American citizen. But I can relate to the experience of the undocumented immigrant in this country. Those of us who are from Puerto Rico know how it feels to be treated differently because of our place of birth. Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens, but our citizenship is second class.

Like our immigrant brothers and sisters, we, too, aspire to be treated equally by the country to which we have given so much. And we are making our aspirations heard loud and clear.

In November 2012, Puerto Rico exercised its right to self-determination by holding a free and fair vote on our political status. The results demonstrate that a clear majority of my constituents do not wish to maintain the current status, which deprives us of the most fundamental political and civil rights, and which is the root cause of the island's serious economic problems. The results further demonstrate that, for the first time in Puerto Rico's history, there are more people who want Puerto Rico to become a state than who want to continue the status quo.

When I addressed the LULAC convention last summer in Las Vegas, I said that it was essential for the federal government to respond to this vote in appropriate fashion. I am now pleased to report that the federal government has taken unprecedented action.

Last year, at my urging, President Obama asked Congress to provide \$2.5 million dollars to enable Puerto Rico to conduct the first federally-sponsored plebiscite in its history in order to "resolve" the territory's status. And earlier this year, Congress approved that funding with bipartisan support.

Although the federal law does not prescribe how the ballot should be structured, it does require the U.S. Department of Justice to ensure that any option on the ballot is compatible with U.S. laws and policy.

Now that the federal government has discharged its duty, I have proposed that the available funding be used to conduct a vote on Puerto Rico's admission as a state. This approach is straightforward, would yield a definitive result, and is fair—since those who support admission

can vote “Yes” and those who oppose it can vote “No.” It is the same approach that was followed by Alaska and Hawaii, the last territories to become states.

And I know that LULAC will continue to be a leading voice in the fight to deliver justice to the U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico, just as it will continue to take a principled stand in support of reforming our nation’s immigration laws in a smart and humane fashion.

Thank you.