



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi
Remarks as Prepared for Delivery
Hispanic Heritage Month Event
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Buenos días.

Thank you very much for that warm welcome. I am honored to be here in the wake of Hispanic Heritage Month to recognize the important contributions that Latinos have made to this country through their work in federal agencies like the USPTO. I spoke last month at two Hispanic Heritage Month events, both held at Fort Belvoir in Virginia, where I recognized the many contributions that Latino service members and civilians have made to our national defense, and I am glad that I now have the opportunity to speak with all of you. I want to thank Deputy Undersecretary Theresa Rea for her kind introduction. I also want to thank the Commissioner of Patents, Peggy Focarino. And, finally, I want to thank the PTO's chapter of the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers for their generous invitation to speak here today.

This is my first visit to PTO's state-of-the-art facility, where hard-working professionals grant patents and register trademarks. Your constitutionally-mandated mission is critical to our economy. You give legal protection to new ideas, thereby enabling America's inventors and entrepreneurs to unleash their full productive power. A recent PTO study noted that IP-intensive

industries accounted for 40 million jobs, which is nearly 30 percent of all jobs in the U.S. economy, in 2010. That same study also observed that IP-intensive industries added \$5 trillion dollars in value to U.S. GDP. This means that the work you perform has a profound impact on the strength of America's economy and on our global competitiveness.

As you know, I represent the 3.6 million American citizens of Puerto Rico in the U.S. Congress. Prior to my coming here today, my office asked the PTO legislative liaison for some statistics about the number of Hispanics that work here. Between 1999 and 2010, I am told, 328 Latinos were hired to serve as patent examiners. And I was pleased to hear that many of them hailed from universities in Puerto Rico. Indeed, more recently, in 2012 and 2013, 47 students from the island were hired as PTO examiners, with the majority coming from the University of Puerto Rico in Mayaguez, and others hailing from the Polytechnic University, the Inter-American University, and the University of Puerto Rico in Cayey. The PTO has already held two career fairs so far this year in Puerto Rico, which demonstrates the agency's commitment to building a diverse and high-quality workforce.

I am certain, however, that there is still room for improvement. Therefore, it is critical that PTO work to build upon this initial success, and undertake all feasible steps to recruit and retain talented, hard-working and public service-oriented Latinos of all backgrounds, whether they live in San Juan or San Antonio, Mayaguez or Miami, Los Angeles or New York.

Likewise, it is important that government at all levels support efforts to ensure that federal agencies who perform highly technical and highly demanding work have a large and diverse pool

of well-prepared candidates to choose from when they are making hiring decisions. To achieve this objective, we as a nation must do a better job when it comes to STEM education, which refers to teaching and learning in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics from the pre-school to the post-doctorate level.

The conventional wisdom is that the United States performs poorly with respect to STEM education. There is indeed data to support the argument that the U.S. is underperforming relative to certain other countries, and that there are persistent achievement gaps between various demographic groups within our own country. For example, according to the National Science Foundation, only 6 percent of all Americans who held engineering jobs in 2010 were Hispanic, which is well below our proportion of the U.S. population or our participation in the civilian labor force. On the other hand, there is some reason for optimism. According to the NSF, the number of Hispanic graduate students enrolled in science and engineering fields grew by 65 percent in the last decade. Clearly, there is more work to be done, but it would be a mistake to assume that no progress has been made.

At present, Congress appropriates between \$2.8 billion dollars and \$3.4 billion dollars to support STEM education each year, with the Department of Education, the NSF, and the Department of Health and Human Services taking the leading role in this effort. Over half of federal STEM education funding is intended to serve the needs of college or graduate students, usually in the form of financial aid. The balance is aimed at the kindergarten-through-Grade 12 level.

Given the importance of this issue, I am a cosponsor of a bill pending in Congress that would authorize the Secretary of Education to award grants to institutions that operate STEM programs for middle school or high school students, especially minorities, who have traditionally been underrepresented in STEM fields. Creating the next generation of STEM professionals does not happen overnight. It requires time, sustained effort and commitment at the national level—and the U.S. must be prepared to put in the hard work if we are to address our current shortcomings in this area.

A final issue I would like to raise, one that is unique to Puerto Rico, is the low level of patent activity on the island. The territory has a history of low patent activity compared to other states. According to the data, Puerto Rico has produced a total of 988 patents. The state with the lowest number of patents is Alaska, with over 1,400. Meanwhile, states with population sizes that are comparable to Puerto Rico, like Iowa and Oklahoma, have produced 23,000 and 30,000 patents respectively. Nationwide, patent activity has been increasing since the early 1980s. By contrast, patent activity in Puerto Rico has generally remained stagnant. The reality is that these alarming statistics owe in large part to the fact that opportunities for advancement in Puerto Rico are much more limited because of the island's territory status and, therefore, many of our best and brightest residents have felt compelled to relocate to the states in order to realize their full potential.

While many of Puerto Rico's problems are structural and—in my view—can only be comprehensively addressed by a change in political status, there are steps that PTO can take right now to alleviate the problem I have just outlined. Specifically, PTO can work with the two

existing Patent Resource Centers in Puerto Rico to help increase their visibility on the island. The agency can also establish partnerships with private sector companies in Puerto Rico to host conferences and otherwise highlight the benefits of patent protection. Likewise, PTO can work with the University of Puerto Rico system to help the various campuses consolidate and streamline their patent efforts as part of a broader strategy to encourage patent filings from research projects conducted by faculty and student researchers. All of these steps, taken together, can help spur innovation, job growth, and economic development in Puerto Rico.

In closing, I want to thank you for inviting me here to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month. I very much admire what the PTO does and marvel at the skills of you, its employees. I urge you to keep up the great work.

Thank you. *Gracias.*