



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi
Statement As Prepared For Delivery
Service Academy Roundtable
San Juan District Office
November 5, 2013

Good evening. Welcome to the Service Academy Roundtable, which I have held every year since 2010 to educate students, parents and guidance counselors about the service academies. I want to begin by welcoming the representatives from the U.S. Military Academy in West Point, New York; the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland; the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado; the Coast Guard Academy in New London, Connecticut; the Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, New York; and the Reserve Officers' Training Corps, known as ROTC, located at many colleges and universities throughout the nation, including institutions here in Puerto Rico.

I would also like to extend a warm welcome to Major General Felix Santoni, Brigadier General Jose Burgos, and the Former Adjutant General of the Puerto Rico National Guard, Major General Antonio Vicens, as well as our other distinguished service members who are here tonight.

The purpose of this evening's event is for the representative from each academy to describe the admissions process, the academic and physical standards for acceptance, what daily life at the academy is like, and the opportunities and obligations for students after graduation. I also encourage the academy representatives to discuss their respective preparatory schools, which can

help students from Puerto Rico improve the skills, including the English-language skills, that they need to gain acceptance to their chosen service academy. For many talented young people, one year at prep school can serve as a stepping stone to success.

For those of you do not end up attending a service academy, I have also invited a representative from the ROTC program. ROTC is a college-based program that provides another path to become a commissioned officer in the Army, Air Force, Navy or Marine Corps, although not the Coast Guard. Indeed, ROTC graduates constitute nearly 40 percent of newly commissioned Army officers.

To the college guidance counselors who are in attendance, I want to thank you for taking the time to be here. Your interest in learning more about the service academies, so that you are able to provide accurate advice to your students, is very gratifying.

Finally, but most importantly, I want to thank the young men and women from around the island who have expressed interest in attending one of the service academies, and who are here with us tonight. To you and to your parents—welcome. The mere fact that you are contemplating this course of action says a lot about you. It shows that you are highly motivated, that you want to challenge yourself, and that you are brave. It also shows that you believe there are things in this world—principles and ideals—that are worth defending and, if necessary, fighting for. And so, each of you has already earned my admiration.

As all of you know, Puerto Rico has a rich tradition of military service. Residents of Puerto Rico have served with distinction in every U.S. military conflict since 1917, from World War I, to World War II, to Korea, to Vietnam, to the first and second conflicts in Iraq, to Afghanistan, and in numerous smaller conflicts in between. This tradition is—as it should be—a source of great pride for our people.

As we meet, thousands of Puerto Ricans are serving in Kabul, Kandahar, and at bases at home and abroad. Their specific missions—and their individual roles in those missions—vary widely. Some fly jets or helicopters, others are highly-trained mechanics who make sure these million-dollar machines remain airworthy. Some deliver troops and cargo into combat zones; others serve in the infantry, drive tanks, gather and analyze battlefield intelligence, perform search and rescue mission, or handle logistics. Some serve as military spokesmen, explaining operations to the press and to the public. Others serve in the shadows in elite special operations units like the Navy SEALs and the Army Special Forces—silent warriors who perform their jobs with neither the expectation nor the desire that accounts of their actions will ever appear in the media.

The point is this. If you make the decision to serve this nation in uniform, you will not walk alone. You will be following in the footsteps of a long line of Puerto Ricans who came before you—men and women devoted to their country and to their brothers and sisters in arms. You, in turn, will serve as a model for future generations of Puerto Ricans who dream of one day becoming an officer in the military, the merchant marine, or the U.S. Coast Guard.

It should go without saying that the decision to seek appointment to a service academy or to enroll in ROTC is not one you should take lightly. It is a life choice that promises great rewards, but also carries with it certain risks. Therefore, it is imperative that you make this decision with your eyes open, having carefully weighed all the pros and cons. I hope today's briefing will serve that educational purpose.

Let me speak briefly about my role in the process. As the sole Member of Congress from Puerto Rico, I am authorized by law to nominate candidates to all of the academies—with the exception of the Coast Guard Academy, which does not require a congressional nomination for appointment. What am I looking for in a candidate? Naturally, you should have a strong academic and extracurricular record. Those who write your letters of recommendation should speak highly of your character, your integrity, and your leadership abilities. Don't worry that you are not perfect; none of us are. The academies are not looking for robots; they are looking for human beings.

Now, I would like to turn to our presenters. I look forward to speaking to all of you afterwards to answer any questions you may have.