



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi  
Five-Minute Floor Statement as Prepared for Delivery  
*An Update on the Puerto Rico Statehood Admission Process Act*  
April 22, 2015

Mr. Speaker:

For the sixth time this year, I rise to discuss Puerto Rico's political status.

I am an optimist about Puerto Rico's future. The island is blessed with natural beauty, a rich history, a vibrant culture, a sophisticated and diverse private sector, and talented and hard-working students and professionals who can compete with anyone anywhere.

But my optimism is tempered by realism. Because to change the world for the better, you must first see the world as it is. And the reality is that Puerto Rico's potential is being squandered. Puerto Rico should be a blooming flower, but instead it is withering on the vine.

Puerto Rico is ensnared in the worst economic crisis in its history, the island's health care system is in a precarious state, the territory's homicide rate—despite recent improvements—still far exceeds that of any U.S. state, and residents of Puerto Rico are relocating to the states in record numbers.

I have heard it argued that leaders in Puerto Rico should concentrate solely on the immediate problems at hand, and set aside the issue of political status until those problems are resolved or their severity is reduced.

This argument has superficial appeal, but it is completely wrong. All of Puerto Rico's major problems are directly linked to our status. They are rooted in the unequal treatment that Puerto Rico receives because it is a territory.

If you want to understand why Puerto Rico has always had higher unemployment and poverty than any state, you must recognize that the territory is excluded from the Earned Income Tax Credit program, partially excluded from the Child Tax Credit program, excluded from the Supplemental Security Income program, and treated unequally under the federal nutrition assistance program.

If you want to understand why Puerto Rico has high debt, you must realize that the territory government has borrowed so heavily in the bond market in order to compensate for its disparate treatment under federal programs.

If you want to understand why patients in Puerto Rico receive inadequate care, why physicians and hospitals are not fairly compensated, and why the cost of providing health care is disproportionately borne by the Puerto Rico government, rather than shared equitably with the federal government, you must grasp that Puerto Rico is treated in discriminatory fashion under Medicaid, traditional Medicare, Medicare Advantage, and the *Affordable Care Act*.

If you want to understand why drug-related violence is pervasive in Puerto Rico, then you must come to terms with the fact that federal law enforcement agencies have dedicated insufficient personnel and equipment to Puerto Rico because states invariably take priority over territories when it comes to the allocation of finite resources.

To solve its deeply entrenched problems, and to reach its enormous potential, Puerto Rico must receive equal treatment. And to receive equal treatment, Puerto Rico must become a state. To pretend otherwise is just that—to pretend.

That is why, less than three months ago, I introduced H.R. 727, the most forceful statehood admission bill for Puerto Rico in history.

I am proud to report that the bill is likely to obtain its 100<sup>th</sup> cosponsor as early as today. Cosponsors come from 31 states, the District of Columbia, and the four other territories. They are both Democrats and Republicans. Indeed, about 1,900 bills have been introduced so far this Congress, and H.R. 727 has more bipartisan support than over 99 percent of them.

Every Member who cosponsors this bill is standing up for a powerful principle, which is this: The people of Puerto Rico are American citizens who have enriched the life of this nation for generations. My constituents have fought—and many have died—for a flag that contains 50 stars, but no star that represents them. If they reaffirm their desire in a federally-sponsored vote to become a full and equal member of the American family, they have earned the right to be first-class citizens.