

people around this country to please sign this petition with their name and State, nothing else, who agree with us. We have people from both sides, but we need more Members, that 2013 is the time to start bringing our troops home, not waiting until 2014.

Mr. Speaker, beside me, again, I bring posters to the floor to show the Members of the House that we are still at war. The poster beside me, Mr. Speaker, is an Honor Guard bringing a flagged-draped transfer case off a plane.

Again, I join my friends and ask the Members of Congress to start debating the policy, and let's start bringing our troops home in 2013 and not wait until December of 2014. As a former commandant said, when our friends start killing us, then it's time to pull the plug.

I close by asking God to please bless our men and women in uniform, to bless the families of our men and women in uniform. I ask God in His loving arms to hold the families who've given a child dying for freedom in Afghanistan and Iraq.

God, please bless the House and Senate, that we will do what is right in Your eyes for Your people here in the United States of America.

God, please give strength, wisdom, and courage to President Obama, that he will do what is right in Your eyes for his people.

And I close by saying three times: God, please, God, please, God, please continue to bless America.

#### RESULTS OF PUERTO RICO POLITICAL STATUS PLEBISCITE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Puerto Rico (Mr. PIERLUISI) for 5 minutes.

Mr. PIERLUISI. Mr. Speaker, Puerto Rico recently held a plebiscite on its political status. I want to convey the results to the American public, describe their significance, and outline the next steps I will take.

As background, Puerto Rico has been a U.S. territory since 1898. The island is home to 3.7 million American citizens who cannot vote for President, are not represented in the Senate, and elect one nonvoting Member to the House. Federal law is supreme in Puerto Rico, but its residents are treated unequally under many Federal programs.

Plebiscite voters were first asked whether they want Puerto Rico to remain a territory. Over 1.7 million people answered, which is about 75 percent of registered voters on the island. Fifty-four percent said they did not want the current status to continue, while 46 percent said they did.

Voters were then asked to express their preference among the three viable alternatives to the current status: statehood, free association, and independence. Over 1.3 million people chose an option. Sixty-one percent voted for

statehood, 33 percent voted for free association, and 5.5 percent voted for independence. In addition, 472,000 voters did not provide an answer.

This plebiscite marked the first time voters were directly asked whether they want Puerto Rico to remain a territory. One of the two main political parties in Puerto Rico urged a "yes" vote. Nevertheless, the "no" vote won by eight points. Those voting "no" included statehood supporters, as well as advocates of independence and free association. These three groups are united in their opposition to the current status which is colonial in nature. It deprives Puerto Ricans of their right to choose their leaders who make their national laws and to equal treatment under those laws.

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Not one of my stateside colleagues in Congress would accept this response for their constituents. So they should respect that my constituents no longer accept it either.

The rejection of territory status fundamentally changes the terms of this debate. After this vote, the question is not whether but when Puerto Rico will cease to be a territory and will have a fully democratic status. Defenders of the status quo may obstruct change in the short term, but in a democracy, the will of the people ultimately prevails.

Let me turn to the second question in the plebiscite, asking voters which status should replace the current status. Of the 1.3 million people who voted for one of the three options, a supermajority chose statehood. Of critical importance, the 810,000 votes for statehood on the second question exceeded the 803,000 votes for the current status on the first question. For the first time, there are more people in Puerto Rico who want to become a State than who want to continue as a territory. This fact further undermines the democratic legitimacy of the current status.

Some wish to downplay the results of the plebiscite by citing the voters who left the second question blank, but this argument does not withstand scrutiny. In our democracy, outcomes are determined by ballots properly cast. Power rests with the citizen who votes, not the one who stays home or who refuses to choose from among the options provided.

Some voters may have left the second question blank simply because they prefer the current status to its alternatives. Those voters were able to vote for the current status in the first question. So their viewpoint was reflected in the plebiscite results. Others may have declined to answer because they were led to believe there was another option that should have been on the ballot, a best-of-all-worlds proposal called "enhanced commonwealth." But each of the last four Presidential administrations has rejected this proposal, as have all key congressional leaders. A blank vote to protest the exclusion of an impossible status proposal is entitled to no weight.

As Puerto Rico's representative in the U.S. Congress, I will work with my allies to ensure that the President and Congress take appropriate action in light of these results. The people of Puerto Rico have spoken, and I intend to make certain that their voice is heard loud and clear.

#### ACCELERATE THE TIMETABLE: BRING THE TROOPS HOME BEFORE 2014

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY) for 5 minutes.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, since the House last convened in late September, about 30 more Americans have given their lives in the war in Afghanistan. The total number of fatalities has now passed 2,000. And as of October 7, we've been at war in Afghanistan for a staggering 11 years. There are more than 2,000 families that will have an empty chair this Thanksgiving, more than 2,000 families with a void that can't possibly be filled—husbands and wives who will have to go on without their life partner, children missing a parent, parents who are suffering the terrible grief of losing a child.

The human cost has become too steep for our Nation to bear. We can't ask our troops and their families to endure any more sacrifice for a military occupation—now more than a decade old—which has not accomplished its goals and is undermining our national security as well.

And of course, the fiscal burden is one that rests on the shoulders of every single taxpaying American. The Afghanistan pricetag would be high even for a successful, well-executed policy that was actually making America stronger. But to waste the people's money to the tune of \$10 billion a month on this failure is a national scandal.

To every one of my colleagues who has spoken on this floor about excessive government spending, it's time to look at the cost of foreign wars before we start cutting domestic programs that our very own people need to survive.

It's not just progressives like me who believe we need a change in policy, Mr. Speaker. There is a clear consensus among the American people. They agree that this military occupation is bad for America, bad for Afghanistan, and bad for the cause of peace and stability around the world. I think it was pretty telling that, during the recent campaign, even the Republican candidate for President ended up supporting a withdrawal of troops by 2014. But in my opinion, that's not nearly soon enough.

Now that the Presidential campaign is over, we must accelerate that timetable and end this war as soon as is safely possible because every remaining day that we have troops on the ground is another day that gives