

United States as a result of the Spanish-American War.

In 1917 Puerto Ricans became U.S. citizens, a citizenship that we have cherished and valued ever since and defended with our blood. In 1952 the island became a so-called Commonwealth of the United States, a change that did not affect the island's status as an unincorporated territory of the United States subject to the jurisdiction of Congress.

But if the Chinese proverb that a journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step is true, then the actions to finally decolonize and end the disenfranchisement of the United States citizens of Puerto Rico is merely the first step.

H.R. 856 is undoubtedly the most important step that we have taken in this journey to resolve the issue of political and economic inequality that has infused the people of Puerto Rico for the last 100 years.

I have devoted most of my adult life to this struggle and to leading my people in this long and treacherous journey. As former mayor of San Juan, Puerto Rico's capital city, as former Governor and now a Member of Congress, I have heard my people's voices and have shared their dreams and aspirations. These voices, questions, and aspirations resonate loudly in the island, although to most Americans living in the continental United States they may seem as distant echoes reflecting the deep unease and disenchantment with our current relationship.

College students in Puerto Rico ask me if our present status will deny them equal treatment in Federal education programs that they desperately need to succeed in today's competitive world. Young couples ask me why they have to move to the States in order to search for opportunities that are not available in Puerto Rico. Puerto Rican veterans who have served the United States gallantly in all of the Nation's wars and conflicts in this century ask me why they cannot vote for the President that as Commander in Chief may also send their sons and daughters to fight and die in times of war. The elderly ask me why their health benefits and other support programs are less than if they resided in New York, Illinois, California, Florida, or any other State of the Union. I have heard the voice of a grandmother wondering why her son who died in Vietnam gave his life for a country that denies her and her grandchildren the right to participate on equal terms. The answer to this question is clear. We are unequals because we are not partners.

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We are unequals because we are submerged in a colonial relationship in which our economic, social, and political affairs are controlled to a large degree by a government in which we have no voting influence and in which we do not participate. We are unequals be-

cause we cannot vote for the President of the Nation of which we are citizens of and because we do not have a proportional and voting representation in the Congress that determines our rules of conduct and our future.

Mr. Speaker, this great Nation of ours, the example and inspiration of democracies throughout the world, the inspiration to the Chinese that revolted in Tiananmen, the inspiration of the revolt, the Hasidic Revolt in Poland, the inspiration of the unification of Germany, the inspiration of many other countries throughout the world, the inspiration of the peaceful revolt in Russia, cannot continue to uphold the policy that denies political participation and disenfranchises 3.8 million of its own citizens. We cannot continue to hide our heads in the sand like ostriches and pretend that nothing is happening. We are talking about the lives, the well-being, and the voting rights of 3.8 million U.S. citizens. We are not talking about illegal immigrants or legal residents. We are talking about U.S. citizens.

I am encouraged by the fact that we have been able to gather so much bipartisan support for this legislation in so little time. A similar version of this bill will be introduced in the Senate within the next weeks, and the support there seems to be as strong and as bipartisan as it is here in the House.

We are more than halfway through the 1990's, a decade that the United Nations General Assembly declared to be the international decade for the eradication of colonialism. Next year Puerto Rico will commemorate its 100th year as a United States colony. Should we celebrate or should we mourn? Will we see a silver lining in the sky by 1998 or will we see more of the same?

Our Nation cannot seek to promote and at times enforce democracy elsewhere in the world while it relegates 3.8 million of its own citizens to indefinite second class status, disenfranchised, discriminated against, and unable to exercise the most basic right in a democracy, the right to vote and participate in its government.

Mr. Speaker, to ignore the situation of Puerto Rico is to betray the spirit of our democratic values and traditions.

THE MILITARY VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF 1997

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 21, 1997 the gentleman from Texas, [Mr. SAM JOHNSON] is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. SAM JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, the voting rights of America's servicemen and servicewomen are being challenged. You know, in 1952, President Harry Truman said,

Many of those in uniform are serving overseas or in parts of the country distant from their homes. If they are unable to return to their States, they are unable either to register or to vote. Yet these men and women

who are serving their country and, in many cases risking their lives, deserve, above all others, the right to vote in an election year. At a time when these young people are defending our country and its free institutions, the least we can do at home is make sure they are able to enjoy the rights that they are being asked to fight to preserve.

Having been in the military, I can personally vouch for the importance of continuing the right of military personnel to vote in Federal, State, and local elections wherever they may be assigned in the world. During my 29 years in the Air Force, I often found myself thousands of miles away from my hometown of Plano, TX, but regardless of whether I was in Asia, Europe, or another far-off place, I was still a citizen of the United States and the State of Texas, and I shared the same interests and concerns as my fellow Texans.

Through my years in the military I saw countless acts of sacrifice by members of our Armed Forces to protect and ensure the rights of others less fortunate than us. I cannot imagine coming to a time in our history when someone would take action to deny the right of our servicemen and servicewomen to vote.

Unfortunately, that point was reached last November in Val Verde County in southern Texas when the votes of 800 military personnel were questioned in a general election. The margin in the sheriff's election was 257 votes, and for county commissioner it was 113. The Texas Rural Legal Aid has alleged that 800 military absentee ballots were improperly counted, and subsequently U.S. District Judge Fred Biery violated, in my view, the opinion and the will of the people and issued a preliminary injunction to prevent the sheriff and county commissioner from taking office. Texas Rural Legal Aid is a taxpayer funded group that is supposed to provide legal services for the poor. They receive about 80 percent of their funding from the Legal Services Corporation, an organization that is fully funded by U.S. taxpayers.

While the Legal Services Corporation's purpose is supposed to provide legal services to the poor, it is frequently embroiled in controversial cases which it works to advance liberal social policies. In fact, in this particular case the Legal Service Corporation efforts have been to the detriment of the poor, who are in need of legal help, but because they are so consumed with the Val Verde case, there is no one to offer legal services for those truly in need.

This raises a question: Does the taxpayer funded legal services agency have a political agenda? The lengths to which they are willing to go to make the case was illustrated in a 23-page questionnaire that was sent to all 800 military personnel whose ballots were rejected. They were instructed to return their notarized answers within 3 days.

The questionnaire is intrusive and totally out of line. It asked for personal information such as "What is the

address where your spouse sleeps at night?" and to top it all off, taxpayer money was used again to produce and mail this intrusive questionnaire.

The response on Capitol Hill has been overwhelming. On January 6, Senators GRAMM and HUTCHINSON and Representative BONILLA wrote to Attorney General Janet Reno and asked her to intervene on behalf of the military voters. The Department of Justice answered that they cannot act on this until a judgment is rendered. The Senators also received the Legal Service's chairman to investigate the lawsuit and cut off all Federal funds.

On February 5, Senators GRAMM and HUTCHINSON introduced the Military Voting Rights Act of 1997. This bill will guarantee the right of all active military personnel, Merchant Marine, and dependents to vote in Federal, State, and local elections. This same bill has been introduced in the House by HENRY BONILLA and myself. We are fighting the battle here in Washington, and others are on the frontlines in Texas. A united front will stop this kind of reckless activism from encroaching on the rights of all Americans.

I think this ridiculous lawsuit is a blatant challenge to the military's right to vote and sets a dangerous precedent for the denial of basic rights, the power of judges to interfere with valid election results. It used to be standard practice to impeach judges who nullify elections. Maybe it ought to be again.

VOTE AGAINST HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 58 TO DECERTIFY MEXICO

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 21, 1997, the gentleman from Texas [Mr. REYES] is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. REYES. Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning to urge my colleagues to support the President's decision to certify Mexico and vote against House Joint Resolution 58 to decertify Mexico.

Mr. Speaker, this is an issue that I know something about. Before being elected to Congress, I spent more than 26 years as a member of the U.S. Border Patrol enforcing this Nation's interdiction laws. I have personally observed Mexico's commitment to stem the tide of drug trafficking and have witnessed its strong cross-border drug interdiction efforts. I have been on the front lines in the so-called war on drugs, and I am here today to tell my colleagues that this resolution to decertify Mexico may be only symbolic to us, but it has with it some serious implications and consequences to those of us that live along the border, and I do not mean just people that live exclusively in Mexico.

We have developed a spirit of cooperation with Mexico in many areas: trade, environment, immigration, as well as drug interdiction. Our economies are interdependent along the bor-

der. In fact, more than 280 million people passed back and forth between Mexico and the United States during fiscal year 1996.

A vote to decertify Mexico would greatly jeopardize the spirit of cooperation we have developed with Mexico. In addition, the threat of decertification causes the peso to plunge, as we saw late last month, which not only has an adverse effect on the Mexican economy, but can also increase the pressures on our border communities and has the potential to increase illegal immigration.

Drug trafficking is not just a Mexican problem or issue. We on the northern side of the border must do more to stem the demand for illicit drugs. The good news is that the number of people using drugs last month declined. The bad news is an estimated 12.8 million Americans, or about 6 percent of the household population aged 12 and older, have used illicit drugs within the past 30 days.

Illegal drugs are readily available almost anywhere in the United States. We have not done enough to deter drug use among our Nation's children and in our Nation's neighborhoods. Illegal drug trafficking is not just a Mexican problem, it is our problem, and we must do more to reduce drug use and not just point fingers at our neighbor to the south.

Mexico has taken a number of steps in the last year to strengthen its efforts to fight the spread of illegal drugs, and they have done so by aggressively fighting corruption, they have done so by overhauling Federal agencies and recruiting qualified personnel. They have done so by strengthening counter-drug cooperation with the United States, and they have done so by improving their extradition policy. All of these things produce positive results in Mexico's fight on drugs.

The Republic of Mexico has been certified since 1986, and, moreover, the historical relationship between Mexico and the United States has been one of increasing cooperation and furtherance of mutual interests. Over the past 10 years our southern neighbor has cooperated with our efforts to stem drug trafficking while at the same time dealing with severe economic, political, and serious trade developments.

Mr. Speaker, if we want to address the basic problems surrounding the certification process, then let us do that. If we are serious about our efforts to combat drug abuse, then we need to do better on our side of the border. But this resolution does not resolve anything. It does not do anything to take drug dealers off the street, it does not do anything to help law enforcement agencies on our border, and it does not do anything to promote good will and understanding with our neighbors in Mexico. It only strains our relationship with our neighbor, and it is very counterproductive.

When all is said and done, Mr. Speaker, more is said than actually done. I

urge all of my colleagues to refrain from political posturing in the name of fighting drug trafficking and to oppose this resolution.

OPPOSE HASTY ACTION ON REVISING THE CONSUMER PRICE INDEX

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 21, 1997, the gentleman from New Jersey [Mr. SAXTON] is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning to express my strong opposition to hasty action on the issue of revising the Consumer Price Index to adjust Federal income tax and benefit programs. Congress should closely examine the technical issues involving the Consumer Price Index until it has all the information needed to make policy changes in this area. A trillion dollars in tax increases and benefit restraints in programs like Social Security would affect too many millions of people to make decisions on the basis of incomplete information.

After all, it took a panel of five professional economists 2 years to sort out these issues in producing a report, which is known as the Boskin report, which came out last December. Members of Congress need to carefully consider the main issues in this report and judge for themselves whether its recommendations for congressional action are warranted or not.

The Consumer Price Index is produced by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the same agency that generates employment and unemployment figures. The CPI is a fairly old statistic, and a committee headed by George Stigler reported to the JEC in 1961 its finding on issues related to this index involving product substitution, product quality changes, updating market baskets, treatment of new products, and a number of other issues. More recently, the Boskin Commission report reviewed many of these same issues, and this report has sparked considerable controversy.

I think it is fair to say that although there is consensus that the CPI may be overstating inflation, the extent of the overstatement is very debatable and questionable. It is also worthwhile to note that Congress, rightly or wrongly, choose to index a variety of Federal benefits and tax provisions after the Stigler committee issued its report in 1961. There would seem to be ample reason for Congress to examine these issues carefully before making hasty policy decisions.

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Now, as I have pointed out, the policy decisions made regarding the CPI would affect millions of Americans. According to a recent Joint Economic Committee analysis, about 40 percent of the direct effects of legislative reductions to the CPI would comprise tax