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## House of Representatives

The House met at 10:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore [Mr. YOUNG of Florida].

### DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,  
June 10, 1997.

I hereby designate the Honorable C.W. BILL YOUNG to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

NEWT GINGRICH,  
*Speaker of the House of Representatives.*

### MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 21, 1997, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to not to exceed 30 minutes, and each Member except the majority and minority leader limited to not to exceed 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Puerto Rico [Mr. ROMERO-BARCELÓ] for 5 minutes.

### COLONIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH PUERTO RICO IS UNSUSTAINABLE

Mr. ROMERO-BARCELÓ. Mr. Speaker, as Puerto Rico's sole Representative in the U.S. Congress, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 856, the United States Puerto Rico Status Act.

Already 856 is a truly historic piece of legislation that will allow the 3.8 million U.S. citizens' residing in Puerto Rico to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination and to resolve once and for all their 100-year-old colonial dilemma.

In order to understand the magnitude of this very important issue, we have

to put matters in historical perspective. Puerto Rico became a territory of the United States in 1898 pursuant to the Treaty of Paris following the Spanish-American War. U.S. citizenship was extended to Puerto Ricans in 1917 under the Jones Act.

Then, in 1950, the U.S. Congress passed the Puerto Rico Federal Relations Act which authorized Puerto Rico to establish a local self-government in the image of State governments. The intent was to create a provisional form of local self-rule until the status issue could be resolved. Puerto Rico would remain an unincorporated territory of the United States subject to the authority and plenary powers of Congress under the territorial clause of the Constitution.

Puerto Rico and the United States are immersed in a colonial relationship that clearly contradicts the most basic tenets of democracy. One in which Puerto Rico's economic, social and political affairs are, to a large degree, controlled and influenced by a government over which we exercise no control and in which we do not participate fully. A relationship that, ironic as it may seem, will not even allow me to vote in favor of this historic bill on final passage when it reaches the floor, although I represent 3.8 million citizens residing in Puerto Rico.

Fellow Members, this relationship is no longer in the best interests of the Nation and the constituents that we represent here in Congress, and it certainly and clearly is not in the best interests of the 3.8 million citizens of Puerto Rico.

Congress not only has the power but also the moral obligation to put an end to the disenfranchisement of the 3.8 million U.S. citizens residing in Puerto Rico. H.R. 856, with its broad bipartisan support of nearly 90 cosponsors, including the gentleman from Georgia, Speaker NEWT GINGRICH, and the gentleman from Missouri Mr. GEPHARDT,

clearly evidences that this is not a Republican or a Democratic issue. This is not a liberal or a conservative issue. This is not a majority or minority issue. The issue here is whether the United States, as a nation and as an example and inspiration of democracy throughout the world, can continue to deny equality and maintain 3.8 million of its own citizens disenfranchised.

After 100 years, our Nation has finally begun to recognize that its colonial relationship with Puerto Rico is unsustainable. On June 6, 1997, the Washington Post published an editorial entitled "An Obligation of Equality" that evidences the growing concern nationwide regarding the disenfranchisement of the U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico.

In addressing Congress' long overdue role in this issue, the editorial mentioned a referendum next year giving the territory's nearly 4 million residents a once and for all choice over its relationship with the United States. The key moment came a few weeks ago when the House Committee on Resources approved 44 to 1 a bill from the gentleman from Alaska, DON YOUNG, chairman of the committee, allowing Puerto Ricans to decide the future of their island. The old question is being brought to a new boil by the approach of the centennial of the Spanish-American War.

The gentleman from Alaska said in May when his bill was passed in the committee:

It is time for Congress to permit democracy to fully develop in Puerto Rico, either as a separate sovereign republic or as a State, if a majority of the people are no longer content to continue the existing commonwealth structure for local self-government.

Its supporters tried hard in committee to sweeten the defense of commonwealth that would be put to referendum. For now, anyway, the island's statehood party is on a roll.

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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