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House of Representatives

The House met at 12:30 p.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. SNOWBARGER).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

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

WASHINGTON, DC,
March 3, 1998.

I hereby designate the Honorable VINCE SNOWBARGER 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 30 minutes, and each Member, except the majority leader, the minority leader, or the minority whip, limited to 5 minutes.

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

SUPPORT H.R. 856, THE UNITED STATES-PUERTO RICO POLITICAL STATUS ACT

Mr. ROMERO-BARCELÓ. Mr. Speaker, yesterday, March 2, was a celebratory date for all Americans. The Jones Act, introduced by the gentleman from Virginia, was enacted on that date in the year 1917, and Puerto Ricans were granted statutory citizenship of the United States. For 81 years, the U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico have been denied the most fundamental rights of American citizenship, the

right to vote for the President and the right to voting representation in the House and in the Senate.

Since we began our work in Congress in 1993, everyone here has been aware of my struggle for political equality and my frustrations as a nonvoting Member of the U.S. House of Representatives in trying to achieve equal rights for the 3.8 million U.S. citizens of the Territory of Puerto Rico.

The Children's Health Care Initiative is a perfect example of this struggle. As finally passed, the children in Puerto Rico, all of whom are U.S. citizens, will receive one-seventh of what they would receive if they had been treated as children in a State. It is a matter of serious concern that the health of the American children of Puerto Rico was not considered of equal value within the Nation. Modifications are now being proposed, but we encounter similar struggles every day that confirm that Puerto Ricans are disenfranchised second-class U.S. citizens.

Yet, Puerto Ricans have been model U.S. citizens. Our men and women have valiantly and willingly served in every one of our Nation's armed conflicts since World War I to defend American democratic values.

It is now time for Congress to take action to bring to these 3.8 million citizens political, economic, and social equality. The mechanism to achieve this is within our reach. H.R. 856, also known as the United States-Puerto Rico Political Status Act, represents this mechanism to grant the people of Puerto Rico one of their basic rights, the right to self-determination.

This bill provides for the celebration of the first-ever congressionally sanctioned referendum in this century, allowing Puerto Ricans to choose between two decolonizing formulas, separate sovereignty and statehood, or to remain in the current territorial status. It is an opportunity to end the colonial status of 3.8 million of our U.S.

citizens through the democratic exercise of self-determination.

The right to self-determination has been earned by the U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico as a result of their faithful commitment to the Nation. Over 340,000 Puerto Ricans have served in the Armed Forces, many giving their lives in defense of American democracy wherever they were needed in the world.

If the Congress refuses to grant this right to their own disenfranchised citizens, our Nation's image as the symbol of liberty and democracy in the world would be severely tarnished.

There are some people, however, interested in derailing this bill by referring to it as a statehood bill and spreading fear on what they believe are the negative consequences of statehood. I want to set the record straight.

The bill provides the people of Puerto Rico the right to express their political choice by selecting between the three status options. H.R. 856 is not an enabling act that offers the territory instant admission as a State, as some are trying to portray.

These messengers of ignorance contend that statehood will be the fatal for the Federal budget due to the additional funding that would be required, yet fail to mention the positive effect that taxes paid by individuals and companies in Puerto Rico would have in that same budget.

If we were a State now, we would pay \$4.5 billion in taxes, and the additional benefits to Puerto Rico would be \$3.1 billion; in other words, a net revenue of \$1.4 billion to the U.S. Treasury.

In a similarly intimidating fashion they try to raise havoc with the linguistic issue by arguing that there is no room for a Spanish-speaking State, failing to mention, once again, that the official languages of the Government of Puerto Rico and the languages of instruction in school are both Spanish and English. You need to consider that

□ 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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