

Committee on Natural Resources

U. S. House of Representatives
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Testimony of Honorable Héctor Ferrer Ríos, Minority Leader of the House of Representatives of Puerto Rico, on April 24th, 2007, regarding House Bill 900, "Puerto Rico Democracy Act of 2007", and House Bill 1230, "The Puerto Rico Self Determination Act of 2007".

Madam Chairwoman and Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Héctor Ferrer Ríos, I am the Minority Leader of the House of Representatives of Puerto Rico for the Popular Democratic Party.

I welcome the opportunity to present and share my views on behalf of almost one million of Puerto Ricans, which believe, not only in the Commonwealth, but also, on a process of true self-determination through a Puerto Rican Constitutional Convention.

I appreciate the interest that the Subcommittee has shown in dealing with this important matter in the lives of all Puerto Ricans.

The status of Puerto Rico brings passion in the daily discussion of our collective lives. I believe the current status, Commonwealth, has fulfilled its purpose. What started in 1952 between the U.S. and Puerto Rico, el Estado Libre Asociado, has been good for both nations.

But the circumstances have changed. We don't live in the Cold War of the 50's, or in the underdeveloped nation that was Puerto Rico. It is time to develop a

New Commonwealth Status, which responds to the new global economy and political trends.

House Bill 900, provides “for a federally sanctioned self-determination process for the people of Puerto Rico”. This proposed bill, is based entirely on the report issued by the President’s Task Force on December 22nd, 2005, which has not been, as a matter of fact, adopted by the President.

The “report”, summarizes its findings by concluding that Congress can directly legislate and change the island’s governmental structure unilaterally; that the Federal Government may relinquish U.S. sovereignty by ceding Puerto Rico to another nation; that U.S. citizens born in Puerto Rico may be deprived of their citizenship at any time because of the statutory nature of it, and that the Federal Constitution, somehow, prohibits the U.S. Government from entering into a relationship with Puerto Rico base on mutual consent.

These outrageous, disturbing and disrespectful conclusions are the roots of a bill, which by itself, also violates, the principles of American Democracy and Republicanism. Let me explain myself.

House Bill 900 proposes a two stage process for a plebiscite in where Commonwealth, the option that has won every single plebiscite held in Puerto Rico, will be faced against Statehood and Independence, not in equal terms. The first stage will automatically unite statehooders and independence defenders in one option, against Commonwealth, creating an artificial majority, with the sole purpose of eliminating the only option that, like I said before, has won every plebiscite, Commonwealth.

Moreover, stage two faces off statehood, that as a matter of fact, for the purpose of this bill or any other bill, has never been fully explained of its definition, limitations and consequences to the people of Puerto Rico, against

independence and free-association. In fact, these two options, in the last plebiscite, only summed seven percent of the votes casted.

Are these the principles of Democracy and Republicanism the United States was founded? I don't think so. Neither should anyone.

However, House Bill 1230, presented by Ms. Velázquez, which "recognizes the right of the People of Puerto Rico to call a Constitutional Convention through which the people would exercise their natural right to self-determination, and to establish a mechanism for congressional consideration of such decision.", truly embraces the principles under which the United States was conceived.

The process of the Constitutional Convention has been used, since the times of the Founding Fathers, for example; Annapolis Convention (1786); Philadelphia Convention (1787), which drafted the United States Constitution; and by individual states to create, replace, or revise their own constitutions. As we can see, it is a proven mechanism within the United States history.

It is a process of full representation by elected delegates, delegates of the people just like you and me. It is after all the process through which this government was created.

But, there is a much important issue that should be addressed in these hearings. An issue that surpasses my support to the Constitutional Convention and that only is recognized on House Bill 1230.

The bill is not presented on the basis of four pages of immoral or illegal conclusions, like House Bill 900. It is presented on the principles of self-determination and sovereignty of the people of Puerto Rico. It is the universal and natural right of the people of Puerto Rico to exercise its supreme authority of sovereignty over ourselves, by way of defending our moral and legal rights, the

same as every nation is entitled to, to decide our destiny. In other words, to exercise our natural right to self-determination.

The United States was founded under a political values system, that stresses liberty and rights as their central values. Where its people have natural rights and government has the responsibility of protecting these rights and liberties.

These are the same principles and values adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in various resolutions about the peoples' right "of self-determination by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development."

House Bill 1230 is without a doubt, the right way of attending the political status of Puerto Rico. This bill represents the best of the United States and Puerto Rico.

The people of Puerto Rico have the right to pursue its political, economic and social development.

These are my peoples rights, that I defend before you.

It is your responsibility, members of Congress, to embrace our will.

Thanks for your time, and the opportunity to address the subcommittee.