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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC

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FRIENDS OF SPAIN CAUCUS

May 21, 2008

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi:

I write to respectfully request that H.R. 900, the Puerto Rico Democracy Act of 2007, reported by the Committee on Natural Resources on October 23, 2007, be scheduled for consideration by the full House as soon as possible. Passage of this bill during the current session will be recognized as an historic achievement for the 110th Congress, and will constitute an unprecedented step forward on an issue of profound national importance.

H.R. 900 is a tightly worded compromise bill with strong bipartisan support that would admirably fulfill Congress's constitutionally-conferred responsibility to sponsor a fair and orderly self-determination process in Puerto Rico. The legislative record on H.R. 900 includes House Report 110-597, dated April 22, 2008. The Report documents the extensive hearings held on the bill, during which all interested parties in Puerto Rico were afforded the chance to articulate their views on the underlying legislation. Indeed, the amendments made to the bill during markup accommodate the principal recommendations offered by leaders on the Island (and in Congress) who had expressed reservations about the legislation. The most notable of these amendments was the addition of language explicitly recognizing that, if a majority of voters cast ballots in favor of pursuing a permanent non-territorial status, both a second plebiscite *and* a constitutional convention will be among the procedural mechanisms available to the people of Puerto Rico to propose a permanent status option, which will then be presented to Congress. In light of the compromise nature of H.R. 900, it is fair to question whether those who continue to oppose this bill would be likely to support any effort by Congress to address the question of Puerto Rico's status.

House consideration of H.R. 900 is not one of those matters that can prudently be deferred until the next Congress. Any reasonable observer—particularly those who believe the aphorism that justice deferred is justice denied—must concede that resolution

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of the issue has already been postponed for too long. It has been nearly 110 years since the United States acquired sovereignty over Puerto Rico, and more than 90 years since Congress conferred U.S. citizenship on all persons born in Puerto Rico. And yet, Congress has never before sponsored a self-determination process that would provide the people of the territory with the opportunity to express their wishes regarding the most fundamental of issues—their political status and relationship vis-à-vis the United States. The need for immediate action is perhaps best demonstrated by the poignant fact that the first generation of Puerto Ricans born as U.S. citizens after 1917 are in or nearing the final stages of their lives. It would be tragic if the surviving members of that generation—many of whom have fought and bled for this country—were to pass from this earth without having had a chance to vote in a legitimate and informed democratic process to resolve the status of their beloved homeland. To defer action yet again would detract from the legacy of the 110th Congress, which has otherwise acquitted itself in admirable fashion under your leadership.

The time for ambivalence and ambiguity has passed and the time for resolute action has arrived. The British Special Air Services has a motto that is apropos to the present situation: "Who dares, wins." I urge you, on behalf of millions of U.S. citizens in Puerto Rico, not to leave the hard work that this body must dare to undertake for a later day or a subsequent Congress.

Sincerely,

Luis G. Fortuño
Member of Congress

cc: Steny H. Hoyer, Majority Leader, U.S. House of Representatives
John A. Boehner, Minority Leader, U.S. House of Representatives
Nick J. Rahall II, Chairman, Committee on Natural Resources
Don Young, Ranking Member, Committee on Natural Resources
José E. Serrano, Member of Congress