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Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives

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May 26, 2008

The Honorable Kenneth McClintock  
President, Puerto Rico Senate  
The Capitol  
P.O. Box 9023431  
San Juan, Puerto Rico 00902-3431

Dear Mr. President:

I commend you and all those who have gathered in San Juan this afternoon to honor the sons and daughters of Puerto Rico who wore the uniform of the United States armed forces and who gave their lives in defense of this great nation. I join you in expressing my reverence for these fallen heroes and my sympathy for the grief-stricken but immensely proud families they have left behind. I want to convey my gratitude and my admiration to all the soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines from Puerto Rico who have served—and who serve as we speak—in the United States military. It is poignant, to say the least, that the men and women of Puerto Rico volunteer in such numbers and serve with such pride and skill, despite the fact that they cannot vote for their commander-in-chief or for those in Congress who decide when, where and how they are asked to defend our freedom and our way of life.

Mr. President, I am pleased that you and our Speaker are joined at today's service honoring our brave troops by Senator Hillary Clinton, who has done so much to help the people of Puerto Rico in their longstanding quest to obtain, as Lincoln put it, "equality of opportunity in the race of life." I hope that Senator Clinton understands that her many acts of kindness and generosity have not gone unnoticed by the residents of Puerto Rico and by all those who care deeply about the Island's fate. I am also thrilled that Senator Clinton is joined by her husband, the 42nd President of the United States, William Jefferson Clinton, whose remarkable commitment to Puerto Rico matches that of his wife. Mrs. Clinton and Mr. Clinton: thank you so much for being here today.

Mr. President: Residents of Puerto Rico have served in every military conflict in which the United States has been involved since 1917, when Congress granted U.S. citizenship to those born on the Island. It is estimated that 18,000 Puerto Ricans served in World War I, 65,000 in World War II, 61,000 in Korea, 48,000 in Vietnam and 2,600 in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Thousands of Puerto Ricans have served—and serve today—in Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom, as part of the Global War on

Terrorism. The number of Puerto Ricans killed in action is in the thousands and the number of wounded in action is in the tens of thousands. In all, hundreds of thousands of the Island's residents have served honorably in the U.S. military. Indeed, over the years, Puerto Rico has consistently sent a greater percentage of its men and women into combat than nearly any other jurisdiction in the country and, today, Puerto Rico has the second-highest rate of military service of any state or territory in the nation, trailing only Nevada. These are remarkable statistics and they are rightfully the source of considerable pride for the people of Puerto Rico.

In light of their tremendous record of service to this country, it is nothing short of heartbreaking that, after a century, Puerto Rico is still not a permanent part of the United States and that its nearly 4 million residents, including thousands in uniform, cannot vote for President, are not represented in the Senate, and send only a single non-voting delegate to the House of Representatives. The U.S. Constitution and federal law are supreme in Puerto Rico and yet, beyond the position I now inhabit, Puerto Rico has no voice in the government that enacts and enforces its laws. I am certain that no right-thinking person believes this state of affairs is acceptable.

For this reason, along with so many others who have been given the privilege to occupy public office, I have devoted myself to ensuring that the people of Puerto Rico finally be granted the opportunity to choose, in a Congressionally-approved process, between obtaining fully equal rights as residents of the 51st state or becoming citizens of a sovereign nation. In partnership with others, I have also worked to make certain that veterans from Puerto Rico receive the best medical care possible once they return from the field and that they are otherwise treated with the respect that they deserve. Resolving the issue of Puerto Rico's political status through a fair and orderly democratic process and ensuring the best treatment for our veterans are two of the most important ways in which we can honor the service and the sacrifice of those who have helped preserve freedom and spread democracy around the world.

Mr. President, I am also pleased that you are honoring former Marine Antonio Santiago, who has devoted himself to preserving the history and accomplishments of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. military.

In closing, I want to again convey my appreciation to Senator Clinton and President Clinton, my profound thanks and respect to all those present who have served honorably in the United States military, and my heartfelt condolences to those who have lost loved ones in the struggle.

Sincerely,



Luis G. Fortuño  
Member of Congress