

Puerto Ricans debate future political status with the United States



Hundreds of Puerto Ricans packed a convention center over the weekend where federal lawmakers held a public hearing to decide the future of the island's political status. | Photo: Twitter @EddieCharbonier

San Juan, June 6 (RHC)-- Puerto Rico's citizenry debated at a public forum in San Juan on the future of the island's political status vis-à-vis the United States ahead of a potential independence plebiscite.

For the second time in three years, the U.S. House Natural Resources Committee held a public session in Puerto Rico on Saturday, this time on draft legislation proposing a plebiscite between statehood, independence and free association.

Congressman Raúl Grijalva, a Democrat, said he was confident of approving the measure in June, both in committee and in the full House. The main authors of the legislation would be Puerto Rican Democratic Congresswoman Nydia Velázquez and the resident commissioner in Washington, Jenniffer González, who is a Republican.

The chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee, Democrat Raúl Grijalva, acknowledged that the hill is steep in the Senate for the status bill, but insisted that approval in the House would at least push the issue forward.

Hundreds of Puerto Ricans packed a convention center Saturday where federal lawmakers held a public hearing to decide the future of the island's political status. At the public session, dozens of people, from politicians to retirees to young people, took the microphone to speak out against the island's current territorial status, which recognizes its inhabitants as U.S. citizens.

Puerto Ricans are not allowed to participate in presidential elections, are denied certain federal benefits and are allowed only one representative in the U.S. Congress with limited voting powers.

Last May 19, Puerto Rico submitted to the federal Congress a new status or plebiscite bill to be held on November 5, 2023 between independence, free association and "statehood" or full annexation of the island to the U.S. The bill presented a consensus bill with options for Puerto Rico's status or plebiscite.

The presentation of the consensus draft with non-colonial options to resolve Puerto Rico's status was presented by the island's governor, Pedro Pierluisi, before the chairman of the U.S. House Natural Resources Committee, Raúl Grijalva.

After the presentation, Pierluisi urged Grijalva to approve this measure and bring it to the floor as soon as possible so that it can be considered by the federal Senate, according to a press release from La Fortaleza, the seat of the Puerto Rican executive branch.

Congress would have to accept Puerto Rico as the 51st state of the United States if voters so decide, but the proposal is not expected to survive in the Senate, where Republicans have long opposed statehood. The discussion draft of the Puerto Rico Status Act includes several items, including authorizing a federally sponsored plebiscite to resolve the island's political status.

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