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I was born in Cayey, Puerto Rico on November 6, 1947.
After graduating from high school in May 1967, I volunteered to serve my country in the United States Army in June 1967. I served in the Vietnam War, participating in the 1968 Tet offensive as an U.S. Army Pathfinder 4th Infantry Division in Pleiku South Vietnam. I was honorably discharged from service in June 1970.

Married with 3 children and 2 granddaughters I have lived in Guaynabo, Puerto Rico since then.

In 1987 I joined the Vietnam Veterans of America Organization as President of Chapter 59, which held only 11 members. Today the membership counts 380 hundred.

By 1988, I started a protest movement on behalf of my fellowship veterans against the Department of Veterans Affairs that lasted 4 years. The conclusion was the Giusti Bravo lawsuit vs. US Department of Veterans Affairs. 1,000 compensations, which were taken away from our Vietnam veterans in Puerto Rico, were restored as a result by 1992. During that same period; 1993 to 1996, I was able to start new chapters around the island; Yauco, Ponce, and Arecibo. In 1993 I demanded the need for a State Council in Puerto Rico becoming it's president until 1996 and regaining the position unanimously again in May 2001 to present.

At the age of 59 I still have the strength and pride of being a contribution as a servicemen to the greatest country in the world, to all the veterans and to my brothers at war.

STATEMENT

Madame Chair and members of the Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Committee on Natural Resources of the U.S. House of Representatives.

My name is Jorge E. Pedroza, President of the Vietnam Veterans of America Puerto Rico State Council.

I appear before this Congressional Committee on behalf of my organization. I served in Vietnam from 1967 to 1968 with the U.S. Army Pathfinder Detachment, 4th Infantry Division.

Those of us who served in Vietnam performed our duty with honor and pride to defend and preserve our democratic values and way of life. Hundreds of my brothers in arms died in that conflict, and thousands were wounded. For those of us who came back there were no parades or celebrations. It took many years and the dedication of the Vietnam Memorial Monument in this Capital city and the Memorial Monument in San Juan and many cities around the nation, for the American people to at last extend to the Vietnam Veterans the recognition and remembrance justly deserved.

Today, I come before the U.S. Congress to request a similar recognition on behalf of over 200,000 thousand veterans who live in Puerto Rico and the thousands of brave young men and women from this island deployed in Iraq, Afghanistan, and through all the world who proudly wear the U.S. Armed Forces uniforms. Our request is simple: give us the opportunity to actively participate in the American Democracy. Veterans of Puerto Rico have so proudly fought in the past and continue to do so in the present. Approve Federal Legislation authorizing a plebiscite to provide the veterans and the people of Puerto Rico the opportunity to determine a non-colonial and non- territorial political status.

Puerto Rico is a non-incorporated territory of our nation. It has been such since 1898 when the island was invaded by the U.S. Forces under General Miles. U.S was entrusted with 2 obligations: Civil rights of the inhabitants will be determine by Congress, Political status will be determine by Congress.

It means that the obligation accepted by the US representatives in the Treaty of Paris to resolve the political status of the island of Puerto Rico rests in Congress.

The time has come to empower the Puerto Rican men and women to make a decision regarding the island's ultimate destiny. Let the people of Puerto Rico with your authorization decide if they want to become a State of the Union or an independent republic.

This request for self determination is supported by the National Organization of the Vietnam Veterans of America. A resolution entitled "Self- Determination for Puerto Rico" was unanimously approved at the National Convention held on August 3, 2003 in St. Louis, Missouri. It calls for the U.S. Congress to define the legal status options available for Puerto Rico and authorize a plebiscite regarding the island's future. I am including with my remarks a copy of said resolution.

I understand you have (2) two bills under consideration. The bill that represents the position adopted by the Vietnam Veterans of America is H.R. 900 introduced by Congressman Jose Serrano and 93 co-sponsors, including Chairman Nick Rahall and Puerto Rico Resident Commissioner Luis Fortuño. We believe this bill affords the people of Puerto Rico the opportunity to make an informed decision and directly vote on their status preference on constitutionally valid options as defined by Congress.

Until you my honorable ladies and gentleman of this committee act, Puerto Rico will continue suffering of being a second class territory of the union and we the US citizens who have served in the US Armed Services having paid our greatest tribute of all: Be willing to give our lives for our nation, lack the rights to vote for he who send us to the front lines in combat and the right to decide our political status.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity. God bless our veterans and our soldiers at home and around the world.