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# Self-Determination for Puerto Rico—The First and Only Federal Commitment, A Legislative History

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## About this Report

On August 2, 1979, Congress passed the *Self-Determination for the People of Puerto Rico* (S. Con. Res. 35), a resolution affirming Congress' commitment to the self-determination of Puerto Rico's status. The purpose of this resolution was to affirm the people of Puerto Rico's right to decide their own political future, a topic that has generated ongoing discussions within the federal policymaking of the period. The introduction of this measure represents an effort to reinforce Congress' support for the island's political decision-making autonomy. This report documents the legislative history of this resolution. This report part of the University of Puerto Rico's Department of Political Science course, *CIPO 4705: Legislative Histories*. This project is part of a collaboration between the University of Puerto Rico's Department of Political Science and the University of Connecticut Puerto Rican Studies Initiative. All reports will be hosted in the Puerto Rico Status Archives Project (<https://archive.puerto-rican-studies-initiative.clas.uconn.edu/>).

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On August 2, 1979, Congress passed the *Self-Determination for the People of Puerto Rico* (S. Con. Res. 35/93. Stat 1420), a resolution affirming Congress' commitment to the self-determination of Puerto Rico's status. The purpose of this resolution was to affirm the people of Puerto Rico's right to decide their own political future, a topic that has generated ongoing discussions within the federal policymaking of the period. The introduction of this measure represents an effort to reinforce Congress' support for the island's political decision-making autonomy. This resolution represents Congress' only formal commitment to affirming the right of Puerto Ricans to determine the future political status of Puerto Rico in more than a century. This report documents the legislative history of the *Self-Determination for the People of Puerto Rico* resolution.

## Legislative History

Title: *Self-Determination for the People of Puerto Rico*

Date: August 2, 1979

Enacted Bill: S. Con. Res. 35 – *Self-Determination for the People of Puerto Rico*

Statute at Large: 93. Stat 1420

Summary: To reaffirm the commitment of the Congress to the principle of self-determination for the people of Puerto Rico.

Subjects: U.S. Congress and Puerto Rico.

## Related Bills

During the 96th Congress, federal lawmakers introduced three measures concerning Puerto Rico right to self-determination, namely *S. Con. Res. 35*, *H. Con. Res. 165*, and *H.J. Res. 592*. Of these, *S. Con. Res. 35* was passed and became a formal resolution.

### Enacted Bill

#### **96 S. Con. Res. 35**

96 S. Con. Res. 35 - Introduced in Senate July 26, 1979.

96 S. Con. Res. 35 - Reported in Senate with an amendment August 1, 1979.

96 S. Con. Res. 35 - Agreed in Senate August 2, 1979.

### Related Bills

#### **96 H. Con. Res 165 (Related)**

96 H. Con. Res. 165 – Referred to Committee House July 24, 1979.

96 H. Con. Res. 165 – Reported with an amendment in House August 1, 1979.

96 H. Con. Res. 165 – Reported in Senate, August 2, 1979.

#### **96 H. J. Res. 592 (Related)**

96 H. J. Res. 592 – Introduced in House August 1, 1980.

## Congressional Record

A review of the Congressional Record (Friday, August 1, 1980) revealed no substantive debate or discussion regarding *S. Con. Res. 35* or *H. Con. Res. 165*. But Puerto Rico was mentioned for a procedural entry noting Representative Ron Dellums' (D-CA) introduction of *H.J. Res. 592*, a separate joint resolution proposing the transfer of certain powers to Puerto Rico, which was referred to the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs without further discussion.

## Related Reports

**96 S. Rep. No. 96-281 (Aug. 1, 1979)**, Senator Henry M. Jackson (D-WA), Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

**Summary:** Senate Report Number 96-281 accompanied *S. Con. Res. 35*. The Senate Committee states that *S. Con. Res. 35* reaffirms Congress's long-standing commitment to the principle of self-determination for the people of Puerto Rico. The report emphasizes that the resolution does not favor statehood, independence, or commonwealth, but recognizes that any change in status must originate with the people of Puerto Rico and be carried out through constitutional processes. Senator J. Bennett Johnston voted against this resolution because he believed it was overly simplistic and mischievous. The Committee recommends passage of the resolution, noting that it aligns with historical United States policy and previous commitments to Puerto Rico.

**96 H. Rep. No. 96-403 (Aug. 1, 1979)**, Representative Morris K. Udall (D-AZ), House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs

**Summary:** House Report Number 96-403 accompanied *H. Con. Res. 165*. The House Committee explains that *H. Con. Res. 165* reaffirms the United States Government's position supporting Puerto Rico's right to self-determination while expressing no preference for any status option. The report notes that an amendment was adopted to be consistent with the Senate's version and to clarify that the resolution does not bypass constitutional requirements for any future political status change. The Committee unanimously recommends approval of the resolution as amended.

## Hearings

The legislative record reflects that no public hearings were conducted on this measure in either chamber.

## Committee Prints

No committee prints were issued in connection with this legislation.

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## Where Did We Get This Information From?

The legislative documents cited in this report include *S. Con. Res. 35*, *H. Con. Res. 165* and *H.J. Res. 592*, Senate and House committee reports, and entries from the Congressional record, were obtained through official federal repositories, such as Congress.gov, and the U.S. Government Publishing Office. Contemporary press coverage was sourced from *El Mundo*, a Puerto Rico newspaper at the time, to capture how the 1979 congressional resolution was received by political actors and the public. Academic sources used in this report provide broader historical and analytical context regarding Puerto Rico’s political status and the principle of self-determination.

United Nations materials, including draft resolutions, meeting records, and reports from the Special Committee on Decolonization were identified through references provided in course materials and retrieved through the United Nations Digital Library. These documents offer a parallel international perspective on Puerto Rico’s political status during the same period addressed by the U.S. Congress.

## How To Cite This Report

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