



Image courtesy of the Member

## *Pedro Pierluisi*

1959–

RESIDENT COMMISSIONER 2009–  
NEW PROGRESSIVE FROM PUERTO RICO

According to Pedro Pierluisi, Puerto Rico's Resident Commissioner in the U.S. House of Representatives, "Puerto Rico's relationship with the United States is as close as it is complex." "But like so many American stories, this is a chronicle of progress and a determined march towards a more perfect union," he said early in the 111th Congress (2009–2011). "For me, as for millions of my constituents, the pride we feel in being Puerto Rican is matched by the pride we feel in being American citizens."<sup>1</sup>

Pedro R. Pierluisi was born in San Juan, Puerto Rico, on April 26, 1959, to Jorge Pierluisi, a former Puerto Rican housing secretary, and Doris Urrutia.<sup>2</sup> After completing his early studies, Pierluisi attended Tulane University in New Orleans, Louisiana, graduating with a bachelor's degree in U.S. history in 1981. He moved to the nation's capital to attend law school at George Washington University, earning a J.D. in 1984. He remained in Washington, D.C., and worked as an aide to former Puerto Rican Resident Commissioner Baltasar Corrada-del Río before joining a law firm in the city. He is married to Maria Elena Carrión and has four children.<sup>3</sup>

After six years as a litigator in an internationally recognized law firm, Pierluisi moved back to Puerto Rico, and in 1993 he was appointed the island's Secretary of Justice (otherwise known as the Attorney General).<sup>4</sup> In his three years as Puerto Rico's top lawyer, Pierluisi worked to uncover and end corruption in the insular government and earned a reputation for his tireless efforts to fight crime. (His younger brother was murdered during a carjacking near their parents' San Juan home in 1994.) Later, he worked with officials in Congress to strengthen national crime prevention policies, and returned to private law practice in 1996.<sup>5</sup>

In 2008, Pierluisi was nominated for the Office of Resident Commissioner after incumbent Republican Luis G. Fortuño decided to run for governor of Puerto Rico. The Resident Commissioner is the sole representative for the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the interests of its nearly four million residents. Unemployment and poverty have long plagued the Caribbean island, and since the mid-20th century, its relationship with the federal government has been the driving force behind political debates there. As a member of the Partido Nuevo Progresista (New Progressive Party, or PNP), Pierluisi campaigned behind calls for statehood and full participation in federal aid programs and defeated his opponent from the Partido Popular Democrático (Popular Democratic Party, or PPD) in the general election.<sup>6</sup> Neither of Puerto

Rico's two major political parties has an official affiliation on the mainland, and Pierluisi has caucused with the Democratic Party in the House.

Resident Commissioners serve four-year terms (two Congresses). During his time on Capitol Hill, Pierluisi has sat on powerful committees indicative of his earlier legal career: Education and Labor (111th Congress, 2009–2011); Ethics (112th Congress, 2011–2013); and the Judiciary and Natural Resources Committees (both from the 111th through the 112th Congresses).<sup>7</sup> He has also made inroads into the Democratic Party's national leadership, serving as the community mobilization chairman for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee.

In the House, Pierluisi has made Puerto Rican statehood a priority. In the spring of 2009, he submitted the Puerto Rico Democracy Act—which passed the House in late April 2010 with bipartisan support—calling for an island-wide plebiscite in the hopes of settling the status question, and he has worked to increase federal funding for health care and economic stimulus programs in Puerto Rico. From his post on the Natural Resources Committee, Pierluisi has championed the protection of America's marine environments and introduced legislation to protect El Yunque National Forest near the northeastern coast of Puerto Rico.<sup>8</sup> In both the 111th and the 112th Congresses, he has worked to create teacher exchange programs to serve high-need areas of the country.

In addition to his official legislative assignments, Pierluisi has been actively involved in several caucuses, including the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, the Congressional Caribbean Caucus, the Congressional Friends of Spain Caucus, the House Nursing Caucus, the Art Caucus, and the Friends of Job Corps Congressional Caucus.<sup>9</sup>

## FOR FURTHER READING

*Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, "Pedro Pierluisi," <http://bioguide.congress.gov>.

## NOTES

1 *Congressional Record*, House, 111th Cong., 1st sess. (3 March 2009): H2891.

2 "Official Biography of Resident Commissioner Pedro R. Pierluisi," <http://pierluisi.house.gov/english/biography.html> (accessed 5 May 2012).

3 *Politics in America, 2012* (Washington, D.C.: CQ-Roll Call, Inc., 2011): 1091.

4 *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, "Pedro Pierluisi," <http://bioguide.congress.gov>; "Official Biography of Resident Commissioner Pedro R. Pierluisi," <http://pierluisi.house.gov/english/biography.html> (accessed 5 May 2012).

5 "Deaths Last Week," 12 June 1994, *Chicago Tribune*: C6; "Killings Break Puerto Rico's Record for Violent Deaths," 26 December 1994, *Sun-Sentinel* (Fort Lauderdale, FL): A19.

6 Sarah Weaton, "Democrats' Campaign in Puerto Rico Becomes Entangled in Statehood Issue," 3 April 2008, *New York Times*: A22; *Politics in America, 2012*: 1091; "Election Statistics, 1920 to Present," <http://history.house.gov/institution/election-statistics/election-statistics>.

7 Garrison Nelson and Charles Stewart III, *Committees in the U.S. Congress, 1993–2010* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2011): 891.

8 *Politics in America, 2012*: 1091; Jeannette Rivera-Lyles, "Obama Vows to Solve Puerto Rico's Status," 13 January 2009, *Orlando Sentinel*: A5; Frances Robles, "Congress Considers Referendum on Puerto Rico's Political Status," 23 June 2009, *Miami Herald*.

9 "Official Biography of Resident Commissioner Pedro R. Pierluisi," <http://pierluisi.house.gov/english/biography.html> (accessed 5 May 2012).