

Dear Member of Congress,

On behalf of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), I am writing to urge you to oppose the proposed sale of thousands of acres of the Vieques National Wildlife Refuge in Puerto Rico.

With over 135,000 members nationwide and over 4,000 in Puerto Rico, LULAC asks for your leadership to ensure that the House Natural Resources Committee removes section 405 in H.R. 4900, the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA).

Section 405, Land Conveyance Authority, Vieques National Wildlife Refuge, Vieques Island, exploits an opportunity to help Puerto Rico by inserting language to siphon away land from the Puerto Rican people and is unacceptable.

America's public lands provide tremendous economic benefits, and developing them or selling them off is a short-sighted and counterproductive way to attempt to reduce Puerto Rico's debt. In this specific case, selling the Vieques Refuge is fiscally irresponsible. The money raised by selling the refuge will barely have an impact on resolving Puerto Rico's economic crisis.

However, the loss of Vieques will put an immediate end to all of the economic benefits the refuge provides to Puerto Rico through more than a quarter million annual visitors, quality of life improvements for nearby communities, and the ecological services provided by the refuge. Vieques was voted as the fourth best refuge in the entire National Wildlife Refuge System in a 2015 poll. That may have something to do with the fact that it provides rare unspoiled Caribbean beaches and coastal landscapes within 40 miles of well over a million people. It is also rich with wildlife, and is helping to recover fourteen threatened and endangered species.

Vieques is an important contributor to the economic, cultural, ecological and public health of Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico is a territory in need of the economic drivers that public lands are proven to provide. The Puerto Rico economic crisis should not be taken advantage of to advance an anti-public lands agenda at the expense of the people of Puerto Rico. Vieques National Wildlife Refuge was established so that more than 17,000 Caribbean acres "shall be managed to protect and preserve the natural resources of the lands in perpetuity." Section 1508 (d), Public Law 106-398 (October 30, 2000).

I urge you to honor this important commitment to the American people by working to strike section 405 from this bill.

If you have any questions about this issue, don't hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully,

Luis A. Torres, MA.T.
Director of Policy and Legislation
League of United Latin American Citizens
1133 19th Street, NW, Suite 1000
Washington, D.C. 20036
(p) 202-833-6130
(f) 202-833-6135
LATorres@lulac.org
www.LULAC.org