



U.S. HOUSE RESOLUTION WOULD PLACE PUERTO RICO STATUE IN U.S. CAPITOL

By Ashley Hawken

The Administration Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives recently approved a Resolution (H.R. 5493) authorizing the District of Columbia (DC) to install statues of two Washingtonians within the U.S. Capitol Building's iconic Statuary Hall. If the measure becomes law, it would overturn the present requirement that only States of the Union may designate statues to represent them in the Hall.

The bill is the brainchild of District of Columbia Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton (D), who has pressed to move the measure in Congress for several years. President Obama is reported to favor the resolution. Like Puerto Rico, although with a different title, the District delegate does not have full voting rights in the Congress.

In a companion Resolution (H.R. 5711), the Committee accorded the same option to Puerto Rico and the other U.S. territories. However, the number of statues for the territories would be limited to one, thereby giving DC, with its two, a higher status in the matter. This measure had been offered as a "poison pill" amendment by opponents, aware that the intent of Norton's effort was to equate DC with the 50 states and distinguish it from the Territories. The amendment was rejected but the Committee passed both measures as separate bills. Notably no voices from the territories were heard during the debate on the right to place statues.

Historically, most District of Columbia representatives in the U.S. House have lobbied for DC statehood or instead, full voting representation in the House of Representatives, arguing that DC residents are subjected to federal income taxes and already vote in Presidential elections. These efforts are routinely blocked by Congressional Members who consider Washington, DC to be a constitutionally established Federal enclave with no right to statehood. In 1982, a law providing for a Constitutional Amendment to make DC a state failed to achieve ratification by $\frac{3}{4}$ of state legislatures.

Capitol's Statuary Hall – An Institution in the Federal Legislature

Statuary Hall and its adjacent corridors offer a magnificent display of marble and bronze effigies of Americans who have contributed to their states and the nation in highly significant if different ways. Statues of such iconic Americans as the 19th Century statesman from New Hampshire, Daniel Webster and Oklahoma's legendary humorist of the early 20th Century, Will Rogers, both stand prominently on pedestals in the Hall.

Coincidentally, DC's candidates for the Hall fit perfectly into this lofty tradition. If the bill becomes law, the city will be represented by famed abolitionist Frederick Douglass, an African American, and Pierre L'Enfant, the French architect hired by President George Washington to lay out plans for the new federal capital that would ultimately bear his name. DC's statues are already cast and await installation in the U.S. Capitol.

A Brief History of Statuary Hall

Legislation authorizing Statuary Hall was adopted in 1864. Six years later the first statue was installed, a marble representation of Nathanael Greene, a Revolutionary War General, was gifted by the State of Rhode Island. By 1880, ten statues were in place, of such luminaries as the political philosopher Samuel Adams of Massachusetts, Jonathan

Trumbull, a signer of the Declaration of Independence from Connecticut and George Clinton, the first governor of New York State.

As existing states selected their honorees, representations of local heroes began to populate the Hall and by the end of the Nineteenth Century, eighteen statues were in place. In 1886 Ohio inaugurated a statue of the 20th President of the United States, James A. Garfield, in 1888 New Jersey installed Richard Stockton, a member of the Continental Congress and, a year later, Pennsylvania placed a seated marble image of Robert Fulton, holding a model of his invention, the first steamboat.

It was during the Twentieth Century, as five new states joined the Union, that the Hall filled to its authorized capacity of 100, featuring prominent Americans of many backgrounds and differing fields of endeavor. Among Hispanics are Franciscan Padre Junipero Serra, founder of the California mission chain and his Jesuit counterpart Father Eusebio Kino who established the first Spanish settlements in Arizona. Senator Dennis Chavez represented New Mexico in the U.S. Senate from 1936 until his death in 1962. Chavez was a champion of the rights of Native Americans and Puerto Ricans.

In 1969, the new State of Hawaii placed its two statues in the Hall. King Kamehameha I, a warrior leader of the late Eighteenth Century was noted for wise administration and opening up the archipelago to world trade. His companion statue is of Father Damien, a Belgian missionary whose ministry among the lepers on the island of Molokai resulted in his death of the disease. His memory is now honored in bronze in the U.S. Capitol.

Alaska, Hawaii's sister entrant into statehood in 1959, placed its first statue in 1971. It was of Edward Bartlett, one of the state's first U.S. Senators and a long-time champion of the former territory's entrance into the Union. Joining him in bronze was the somewhat rumpled representation of his fellow original Senator, Ernest Gruening. The journalist-turned-politician was President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Director of the Division of Territories and Island Possessions and Administrator of the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration.

Some States have Replaced Statues

Provisions are in place for a state to replace a statue earlier gifted, so long as the total number for a given state is no more than two. This has occurred three times.

The first was in 2003 when Kansas honored Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Nation's 34th President, casting him in his uniform as Commander of all U.S. forces in the European Theater during WWII. In 2009, our 40th President, Ronald Reagan became California's new entrant and Alabama replaced one of its original offerings with the subject of the play and movie, "The Miracle Worker," Helen Keller. Her bronze effigy depicts a seven-year-old at a water pump, beginning to feel the trickle of what her eyes cannot see and tongue cannot express.

A stroll by the statues of the U.S. Capitol's rotunda and adjoining corridors reveal the entire span of American History and an amazing variety of characters, some unknown to most Americans and not all popular among contemporaries in their lifetimes. For example, Jeanette Rankin of Montana, a feminist and peace activist, was the only member of Congress to vote against the United States' entry into the war against the Axis powers in 1941. The vote ended her long political career.

Po'pay a Seventeenth Century Pueblo Indian, living in what is now the state of New Mexico, resisted the Spanish conquest of his people, organizing an uprising that – for a time – drove the Cross and Crown out of Northern New Spain. His 2005 statue from New Mexico joins other Native Americans; Sakakawea a Shoshone woman of North Dakota, Sequoyah a Cherokee of Oklahoma, Washakie a Salish of Wyoming and Sarah Winnemucca, a Paiute of Nevada.

One wonders what choices the Puerto Rican legislature would make, should the opportunity arise to place a representative statue in the U.S. Capitol. Criteria for the selection would mean a candidate who would have died no less than ten years earlier and would remain in the Hall for ten years before being replaced.

Would Puerto Rico's representative be a figure from the Taino Culture or a Spanish colonizer? Would it be an individual key to the island's political development, or perhaps a figure in the arts or the world of sports? Would the most appropriate selection be a religious leader, a military hero, a humanitarian, a scholar or a scientist?

Which Puerto Rican in bronze would Puerto Ricans wish to see displayed before the millions of visitors to the U.S. Capitol? Which individual would best stand as an example of Puerto Rico's association with the broad development of what has become the Union States of America? If it was your choice, who would you pick?

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