

UNOFFICIAL TRANSLATION

GOVERNMENT OF PUERTO RICO

16th Legislative
Assembly

1st Session

SENATE OF PUERTO RICO

R. of S. 499

June 19, 2009

Introduced by *Mr. Rivera Schatz*

Referred to

RESOLUTION

Asking the President of the United States of America, Hon. Barack H. Obama, to recognize the sacrifices that the U.S. citizens of Vieques, Puerto Rico have done for the preservation of the United States national security and asking him to provide appropriate remedies for health conditions of the people of Vieques that could be related to the military activities conducted by the U.S. Navy.

STATEMENT OF MOTIVES

It is our duty to recognize the contributions and sacrifices that our brothers and sisters of Vieques, have made in the interests of the national security of the United States of America, as well as the lasting effects of more than sixty years of military exercises endured by the residents of Vieques. Likewise, we should remember that the United States of America has compensated both foreign nationals and U.S. citizens who have endured injuries and/or damages comparable to those suffered by the U.S. citizens of Vieques.

In 1941, the United States Navy took control of 23,000 acres of the island of Vieques, using it as the main Atlantic training site for air, sea and land maneuvers until its closure in 2003.

Thanks to the sacrifices made by the U.S. citizens of Vieques for over six decades, members of our Armed Forces were trained before combat at the site in Vieques, while the

economic and social needs, and safety concerns of the residents of the island were never satisfied by the Federal Government.

The U.S. Navy and guest foreign forces regularly conducted exercises on Vieques over a period of more than six decades, employing virtually every sort of ammunition and other ordnance available to Naval air, sea and land forces since World War II.

Subsequently, in February of 2005 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) placed Vieques on the Superfund National priorities List.

The EPA has publicly acknowledged that the land, sea, fresh water, plants, and animals of Vieques, the traditional staple sources of sustenance for the people of the island for generations, have been found to be contaminated with hazardous substances. Moreover, the U.S. citizens on Vieques have been found to suffer significantly greater frequency of illnesses than do similarly situated residents on the main island of Puerto Rico, including a 30% higher rate of cancer, 381% higher rate of hypertension, 95% higher rate of liver disease, 41% higher rate of diabetes, and 33% more low-birth and pre-term deliveries of infants.

It is undeniable that the U.S. citizens of Vieques have endured more than six decades of bombardment and exposure to toxic environmental and chemical hazards in the name of preserving our national security. In response, the U.S. citizens of Vieques have filed claims against the Navy in federal district court in San Juan, seeking compensation for illnesses arising from the toxic contamination of their island.

As a candidate, President Barack H. Obama made a commitment that his administration would "promote appropriate remedies to health conditions caused by military activities conducted by the U.S. Navy on Vieques."

The prompt resolution of the health claims of the U.S. citizens of Vieques against the Navy have been supported by a multitude of groups and faith-based organizations, including the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC), League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO), National Council of La Raza (NCLR), and the American Values Network.

There is a pending request before the House Committee on Science and Technology, Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight by Puerto Rico Resident Commissioner Pedro Pierluisi and U.S. Congressman Alan Grayson (FL) requesting congressional field hearings in Vieques as early as this Summer to further study the health crisis.

Last year then-Presidential Candidate Hon. Barack H. Obama advisors and surrogates - including Congresswoman Linda Sanchez (CA)- visited Vieques and met with civic and community leaders concerning the health crisis on the island, pledging that as President, the Hon. Barack H. Obama would address the situation.

THE SENATE OF PUERTO RICO RESOLVES:

1 Section 1.- The Senate of Puerto Rico recognizes the extraordinary contributions and
2 sacrifices made by the residents of Vieques to the preservation of our national security over a
3 period covering more than six decades.

4 Section 2. – The Senate of Puerto Rico acknowledges that it would be in the best
5 interests of the United States of America to address the losses and ongoing medical and
6 economic needs of the U.S. citizens on Vieques, which could be resulting from the U.S.
7 Navy’s long bombardment and contamination of the island.

8 Section 3.- The Senate of Puerto Rico acknowledges that the fastest, fairest, and most
9 efficient way to correct the injustice and health crisis is for the U.S. Government to resolve
10 the claims pending in the US District Court in San Juan as well as those pending for the
11 Municipality of Vieques before the Secretary of Navy.