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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TAKING EXCEPTION

Puerto Rico's problems stem from its territorial status

The Nov. 7 editorial "Puerto Rico, awash in debt" recognized that the U.S. territory's economic problems are "structural — traceable, ultimately, to its muddled political status." But The Post then asserted that "there will be time enough to debate" that status later and that Puerto Rico should focus exclusively on fixing its finances. This is akin to a doctor recommending medicine to ease a patient's symptoms but not treating the underlying disease.

As long as Puerto Rico remains a territory — deprived of equal treatment under federal programs, forced to borrow heavily to make up the difference and without the ability to vote for the national leaders who make the laws that regulate our economy — the island will be in a position only to manage, rather than surmount, its economic problems.

A majority of Puerto Ricans grasp this; they voted to reject territory status in a November 2012 referendum. The Obama administration understands this; it proposed the first federally sponsored status vote in Puerto Rico's history. Members of Congress from both parties comprehend this; 125 of them have co-sponsored my bill to hold an up-or-down vote in Puerto Rico on the territory's admission as a state and to prescribe the steps the federal government will take if a majority of voters favor admission.

After 115 years as second-class citizens in the world's greatest democracy, my constituents may not see the wisdom in The Post's counsel to postpone resolution of the real problem.

PEDRO R. PIERRUISI, Washington

The writer, a Democrat, is resident commissioner of Puerto Rico to the U.S. Congress.