

## A fair and balanced Task Force Report



BY RAFAEL HERNÁNDEZ COLÓN

The White House Task Force Report on the status and economy of Puerto Rico is a fair and balanced report that must be taken with utmost seriousness, although one may take exception with some of its conclusions. It provides a roadmap for us

to overcome the gridlock in which we find ourselves as to the exercise of our right to self-determination.

The second half of the 20th century witnessed our repeated and frustrating efforts to conclude the exercise of self-determination that began in 1952 with the establishment of the commonwealth. The plebiscites held in 1967, 1993 and 1998 didn't meet their objectives due to the strong differences among ourselves and the complexities and innate resistance in the U.S. Congress.

The differences between us became stronger after the 1993 plebiscite. The New Progressive Party adopted the position that commonwealth should be disqualified as an alternative to appear on the plebiscite ballot. Deepening our differences, the Popular Democratic Party proposed a constitutional convention as the mechanism for self-determination while the New Progressive Party insisted on a plebiscite as the proper mechanism.

These profound differences led to political battles by our main parties before Congress, blocking legislation to enable us to complete our process of self-determination. At the end of the 20th century, we arrived at gridlock on this matter, and it has endured until today.

The Task Force report provides us the foundations that will allow us to overcome gridlock and move ahead in our process for self-determination. It does so substantively as to the status

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options that should be included and also as to the process to be followed. If we follow the roadmap provided, we have a real opportunity to achieve our goal. The report is fair and balanced and contains a political will stemming from the U.S. president intended to move the self-determination process forward.

This is a game changer. Up to now, the initiatives seeking a process for self-determination have been in our hands. Now, the U.S. president is taking the initiative to outline a process whereby we may freely choose our political future. This is made clear in the following paragraphs of the presentation letter that the president writes accompanying the report and of the report itself:

There is a sense of urgency in the White House as to the resolution of Puerto Rico's status. The report is cognizant of our dire economic situation. It makes clear that the most effective measures to deal with our economy can't be taken until we make our decision on status.

President Barack Obama: "I am pleased to receive the Task Force's Report and its recommendations because they provide an important road map to address the concerns and aspirations of the people of Puerto Rico.

"[A]t the heart of this report and central to the lives of many Puerto Ricans, is the issue of the political status of Puerto Rico. I am firmly committed to the principle that the question of political status is a matter of self-determination for the people of Puerto Rico. I am pleased that the Task Force has outlined recommendations to enable the people of Puerto Rico to determine their political future. Both the President and Congress have roles to play to help Puerto Rico settle on its future status; I am committed to working with Congress to ensure that a fair, clearly defined, and transparent process is available for the people of Puerto Rico to decide on their future for themselves."

The Task Force: "The Task Force believes the time to act is now, and recommends that, if there is no decisive result by a plebiscite this summer, the Administration, Congress, and stakeholders in Puerto Rico work as rapidly as possible to develop the legislation contemplated by the Task Force. The Task Force therefore recommends that, by the end of 2012, the Administration develop, draft, and work with Congress to enact the proposed legislation."

So, it becomes clear that the White House expects that we proceed with the plebiscite

process as early as next summer. If this doesn't happen or the process doesn't yield a clear result, then the Task Force will take the initiative in consultation with us to present legislation before Congress to resolve the matter.

The process suggested by the Task Force to elicit the will of the people of Puerto Rico is the following:

There should be two plebiscites. In the first plebiscite, we would choose between: being a part of the U.S. as a commonwealth or as a state of the Union; or be independent of the U.S. If we choose to be a part of the U.S., in the second plebiscite, we would choose between being a part of the U.S. as a commonwealth or being a part of the U.S. as a state of the Union. If we

choose to be independent, then, in the second plebiscite, we would choose between independence or free association.

There is a sense of urgency in the White House as to the resolution of Puerto Rico's status. The report is cognizant of our dire economic situation. It makes clear that the most effective measures to deal with our economy can't be taken until we make our decision on status. To move forward, we must follow the roadmap outlined in the report and initiate the two-plebiscite process it recommends. Relying on the president's commitment, the Popular Democratic Party has taken the first step by accepting the proposed plebiscites instead of the constitutional convention that it prefers.

Let us move forward with the process and, when the will of the people of Puerto Rico is made clear, as to is its political future, then, with the U.S. president, we can seek from Congress the terms and conditions of whatever status we do prefer. ■

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