



**FUNDACION
PUERTORRIQUENA**

**REMARKS BY THE GOVERNOR
OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF PUERTO RICO
HONORABLE RAFAEL HERNANDEZ COLON
AT THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
HISPANIC JOURNALISTS**

APRIL 20, 1989

On behalf of all Puerto Ricans, I wish to welcome you, the members of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, to this our island, and to thank you for this opportunity to speak to you about what is going on here, in Puerto Rico, and about our future.

We are indeed honored that you chose Puerto Rico as the place to have this conference. We are very happy to have you amongst us and we do hope that you have a good time, as well as a successful conference.

Let me take the opportunity to talk to you about some of the things that are going on here, in Puerto Rico.

In my inaugural speech this year, beginning my third term as governor, I addressed the ever present issue of this island's political status and proposed that the people of Puerto Rico be

consulted regarding their preference between the three alternatives of status: that is, what we have now, Commonwealth, which is a special relationship in permanent union with the United States, but unique; statehood, which is the same statehood as the 50 states have; or independence, such as any independent republic.

The leaders of the statehood and independence parties agreed with my proposal and we jointly petitioned the Government of the United States to adopt legislation guaranteeing, not only the referendum but that the results would be accepted by the U.S. Congress.

Subsequently, in his Budget Message, President Bush took a stand for the plebiscite and for the right of the Puerto Rican people to self-determination. He also made some personal comments with which I don't personally agree. That is, he came out for statehood, on a personal basis.

But basically, he called for a referendum, he called for the people to decide, and that's what's important.

In later conversations with congressional leaders, a bipartisan group of bills has been introduced by Senators Johnston and McClure which define different procedures for the referendum to be held sometime in 1991.

The vast majority of Puerto Ricans, I am happy to tell you today, want permanent union with the United States. They cherish their American citizenship, they have defended the United States, Puerto Rico, and democracy, in all the wars in which the United States has been engaged, since the First World War.

In 1952, a Constitution was established by the people of Puerto Rico and a Commonwealth relationship, more attuned to our cultural realities and to our economic necessities, was established for Puerto Rico. It is, in a way, a model for societies culturally different to relate to each

other in ways in which the dignity of a people -- in this case, the Puerto Rican people -- is fully respected by another people, the people of the United States of America.

In 1967, the proponents of statehood and independence promoted that the people be given the opportunity to choose between their alternatives and the Commonwealth, which had been established in 1952. Commonwealth won handsomely with 60 per cent. Statehood obtained 39 per cent of the vote and independence got one per cent of the vote.

It may be striking to some people from the United States to think, what is the problem with statehood, and why don't the people of Puerto Rico want statehood. Statehood doesn't make sense for the island of Puerto Rico. However, it makes perfect sense for the 50 states. We find that our needs require a special relationship. We are a lot of people, culturally different, in a very small island. Statehood would provoke the loss of Puerto Rico's tax autonomy, which allows Section 936 of

the Internal Revenue Code to function. What this means is that, through this special section of the tax code, we have been able to establish in Puerto Rico some 300,000 jobs. That is one third of our labor force. This special relationship which allows us to give special tax benefits to U.S. companies, to come here and establish themselves in Puerto Rico, this special mechanism is responsible for one third of our labor force. This could not exist under statehood.

Puerto Rico has a per capita income which is lower than that of the poorest state of the union, Mississippi. However, it is higher than any country of Latin American, although back in 1940, we were in the same economic levels of Latin American countries. Back then, our per capita income was around \$157. Today, it is over \$5,000. No Latin American country enjoys that high a per capita income.

We have come a long way because of the special relationship which we have with the United States.

However, due to the constraints that statehood would put upon Puerto Rico, because of the uniformity clause of the Constitution of the United States, which demands that taxes be uniform throughout the land, Puerto Rico could not enjoy the benefits that have permitted the industrial development of the island.

In fact, statehood would make Puerto Rico dependent on federal welfare programs, because the basis of our economic development, which are the industrial tax incentives, would be lost. We would become a welfare state, totally dependent on the programs stemming out of Washington.

This is, unfortunately, the desire of the leadership of the statehood movement in Puerto Rico. They have published a book whose title is "Statehood is for the Poor". The author of this book is Mr. Carlos Romero Barceló, the leader of the statehood party. Essentially, what that book says is "let us become a state and let us enjoy the benefits of the federal assistance programs." Well,

let me say that the Puerto Rican people want the dignity of work, that their struggle is to have the same opportunities to get a decent job and to get ahead, as their fellow citizens on the mainland. When we look at Puerto Rico, 1,600 miles from New York, or 1,200 miles from Miami, a small island in the center of the Caribbean region, we must look for special incentives so that economic development which creates jobs can be induced in our island. Thus, the need for this special Commonwealth relationship which is a relationship in permanent union with the United States, but which affords us the means to provide for an adequate, decent and respectful livelihood for all Puerto Ricans.

We are also very proud of our Spanish culture. We are very proud to be Puerto Ricans, which does not affect the way we cherish our American citizenship. We hold both the Puerto Rican flag and the American flags just as high in our hearts.

When those bills calling for English Only are introduced in the Congress of the United States, an

exception is made as to Puerto Rico. It is logical that that exception should be made. The Congressmen and Senators tell us English Only, is for the 50 states but not for Puerto Rico. Well, we are against English Only both in the 50 states and also in Puerto Rico. Nevertheless, we appreciate the fact that national policy can be flexible as to the Commonwealth and thereby recognize our uniqueness, our cultural distinctiveness.

When the Amateur Sports Act was approved, which provided for one olympic team for the United States and established the rules governing the international participation of American athletes in olympic games, Puerto Rico -- as a Commonwealth -- was exempted because of our cultural identity and because the Constitution of the United States has ample room for diversity. Therefore, we as Puerto Ricans, are very proud to see our olympic team competing in the International Olympic Games, even against the United States (we almost beat the United States in basketball, but not quite).

Commonwealth is a relationship which is tailor-made for the Puerto Rican people, in their relationship with the United States. It is a relationship which allows us to prosper. It allows us to keep our culture, our heritage and our identity, and with the legal structures to strengthen them, so that we, as Puerto Ricans, can face the future, hand in hand with our fellow citizens of the United States of America.

This cause, the cause of Commonwealth, is what my administration will be defending in the plebiscite of 1991. The cause of statehood will be defended by the New Progressive Party and the Puerto Rican Independence Party will be defending independence.

I hope that during your visit here, you get to know Puerto Rico, you get to know about the aspirations of all Puerto Ricans, and that you carry with you a warm remembrance of our people, and that on that day in 1991, you may be listening to what is going on in this little island, and that

you may hear the voice of the people of Puerto Rico, speak out loudly for Commonwealth.

Thank you.

