

SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE,
RAFAEL HERNANDEZ COLON, BEFORE THE CONFERENCE
OF NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE LEADERS, HELD DECEMBER
1ST, 1970, AT THE SAN JUAN HOTEL, ISLA VERDE, P. R.
10:00 A. M.

FELLOW LEGISLATORS:

IT IS MY PLEASURE TO WELCOME YOU TODAY TO
OUR ISLAND ON BEHALF OF THE SENATE OF THE
COMMONWEALTH OF PUERTO RICO.

IT IS NOT OFTEN THAT PUERTO RICO HAS HAD SO
MANY LEGISLATORS OF NOT PRESENT ON ITS SHORES
AT THE SAME TIME. THROUGH YOU WE OPEN OUR
HEARTS IN WELCOME TO THE PEOPLE WHOM YOU
REPRESENT, THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES OF
AMERICA.

SOME OF THE MOST EXPERIENCED LEGISLATORS
IN THE WORLD THIS WEEK WILL TACKLE HEAD-ON
SUCH PROBLEMS AS DRUG ABUSE, OVER-POPULATION,
CONFLICTS OF INTEREST IN GOVERNMENT, BUDGETING
AND AUDITING PROCEDURES AS WELL AS MEANS AND

METHODS OF RAISING AND ALLOCATING REVENUES.

AS WE FACE AND STUDY THESE PROBLEMS, ONE DOUBT THAT MUST CONTINUALLY FILTER, GHOST-LIKE INTO THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF ALL OF US IS WHETHER OR NOT ENOUGH CAN BE DONE IN TIME TO STEM THE ILLS THAT SEEM ALMOST ALWAYS ON THE VERGE OF DESTROYING ALL OUR EFFORTS. THE PRESENT ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DISBALANCE IN THE WORLD CAN ONLY SHARPEN THIS DOUBT.

PUERTO RICO TODAY FACES ALL THE PROBLEMS THAT WE WILL DISCUSS, PROBABLY TO A MORE DISTRESSING DEGREE, THAN ANY STATE OF THE UNION, OUR PER CAPITA INCOME IS THE LOWEST, OUR UNEMPLOYMENT RATE IS THE HIGHEST, OUR DRUG PROBLEM IS OF MAJOR PROPORTIONS. AND OUR BUDGET THIS YEAR FACES THE PROSPECT OF A \$150 MILLION-DOLLAR DEFICIT.

BUT AS GLOOMY AS THIS PICTURE MAY BE, THERE IS SUNSHINE FILTERING THROUGH. BY FORMING A UNIQUE

STATUS WITHIN THE UNITED STATES SYSTEM, THE STATUS OF COMMONWEALTH, PUERTO RICO HAS BEEN ABLE TO ATTACK ITS PROBLEMS FRONTALLY, AND BETTER MANY OF THEM. OUR PER CAPITA INCOME IS NOW ONLY \$1,200, BUT THAT IS IMMENSELY BETTER THAN IT WAS IN 1940, WHEN IT WAS \$121.00. AND THE DEFICIT FORESEEN FOR PUERTO RICO THIS YEAR IS LARGER THAN THE ENTIRE GOVERNMENT BUDGET OF TWO DECADES AGO.

OUR UNIQUE STATUS MAY PUZZLE YOU. OUR PEOPLE OVERWHELMINGLY FAVORED THE COMMONWEALTH RELATIONSHIP WHICH WE PRESENTLY ENJOY OVER STATEHOOD IN A PLEBISCITE HELD IN 1967. WE CHERISH OUR PUERTO RICAN IDENTITY WHILE AT THE SAME TIME WE HONOR OUR AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP.

SUCH MATTERS AS WHETHER PUERTO RICO OUGHT TO BE A STATE, OR AN INDEPENDENT COUNTRY ARE DEEPLY CONTROVERSIAL AMONG OUR PEOPLE. EVEN THE QUESTION OF WHETHER PUERTO RICAN'S OUGHT TO VOTE

FOR THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES IS A
QUESTION WHICH HAS STIRRED A RUNNING CONTROVERSY
IN OUR ISLAND.

AS TO THESE MATTERS WE REQUEST YOUR
UNDERSTANDING AND YOUR RESPECT THAT THERE ARE
MATTERS WHICH WE MUST WORK OUT AMONGST OURSELVES.
SELF-DETERMINATION HAS BEEN THE TRADITIONAL
POLICY FOLLOWED BY THE UNITED STATES TOWARDS
PUERTO RICO. I AM SURE THAT YOU ALL ARE DEEPLY
COMMITTED TOWARDS THIS PRINCIPLE.

THE MAJOR LESSON PUERTO RICO HAS LEARNED
IS NEVER TO STAND STILL, NEVER TO GIVE IN TO ITS
PROBLEMS. USING THE COMMONWEALTH STATUS AS A
DEPARTURE POINT, EVER SINCE 1952 IT HAS CONTINUALLY
MOVED AHEAD, IN SPITE OF THE ODDS, IN SPITE OF THE
ENORMITY OF OUR PROBLEMS.

I BELIEVE THAT THIS VERITABLE MIRACLE THAT IS THE
COMMONWEALTH OF PUERTO RICO, MADE POSSIBLE BY THE FUSION OF
THE BEST ELEMENTS AND IDEALS OF BOTH THE UNITED STATES AND
PUERTO RICO, WITHOUT OVERPOWERING THE IDENTITY OF OUR ISLAND,
IS THE BEST INDEX OF HOPE POSSIBLE FOR THOSE OF US WHO WOULD
LOOK AROUND AND SEE WHAT CAN BE DONE, NO MATTER WHAT LITTLE
WE BEGIN WITH, WHEN THE WILL TO PRODUCE IS THERE.

AS LEGISLATORS, ALL OF US FACE PROBLEMS THAT NEVER VARY:

LACK OF TIME CAUSED BY TOO-SHORT TERMS AND TOO MANY ELECTIONS:

LACK OF SUFFICIENT WORKING BUDGETS AND TRAINED AIDES; MAN-KILLING

SCHEDULES AND OFTEN A LACK OF UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT IS OUR PROPER

ROLE AS LEGISLATORS.

IN THIS LAST RESPECT, I WOULD LIKE TO QUOTE TO YOU A LETTER

WRITTEN BY CONGRESSMAN JOHN STEVEN MCGROARTY OF CALIFORNIA IN 1934

TO A FELLOW CONSTITUENT :

"ONE OF THE COUNTLESS DRAWBACKS OF BEING IN CONGRESS IS THAT I AM COMPELLED TO RECEIVE IMPERTINENT LETTERS FROM A JACKAS LIKE YOU IN WHICH YOU SAY I PROMISED TO HAVE THE SIERRA MADRE MOUNTAINS REFORESTED AND I HAVE BEEN IN CONGRESS TWO MONTHS AND HAVEN'T DONE IT. WILL YOU PLEASE TAKE TWO RUNNING JUMPS AND GO TO HELL".

TODAY, A QUICKLY CHANGING WORLD CHALLENGES US A NEW TO COME UP WITH NEW SOLUTIONS TO AGE-OLD PROBLEMS. OUR CHANGING POPULATION PATTERNS -- THE ENTERING INTO OUR SOCIETY OF THE BABY BOOM OF THE LATE FORTIES AND FIFTIES AND THE CHANGING SOCIAL TRADITIONS THIS IMPLIES GIVES US VEBY LITTLE TIME IN WHICH TO WORK.

RESPECT FOR LAW, OF WHICH WE ARE THE FOUNTAINHEAD, IS QUICKLY
DIMINISHING AS WE BECOME BOGGED DOWN BY TOO MANY PROBLEMS AND
TOO FEW SOLUTIONS'

BUT STILL WE MUST TRY, AND OFTEN PUT OUR CAREERS AND
COURAGE TO THE TEST IN ORDER TO DO SO. THE LATE PRESIDENTÉ
KENNEDY, WHEN HE WROTE HIS GREAT BOOK ON THE LIVES OF FAMOUS
SENATORS, PUT MUCH STOCK ON THIS NECESSITY OF THE LEGISLATOR TO
OFTEN RISK HIS ALL IN ORDER TO CARRY OUT HIS DUTIES. AND HE SAW
CORRECTLY, THAT IT IS AT THIS TIME, WHEN A LEGISLATOR PUTS HIS ALL
ON THE LINE FOR WHAT HE BELIEVES IN, THAT HE REACHES HIS PEAK, AS
A LEGISLATOR AND AS A MAN.

IT IS FOR THIS REASON THAT HE BEGINS HIS BOOK BY THE
FOLLOWING QUOTE FROM EDMUND BURKE'S EULOGY OF CHARLES JAMES FOX

FOR HIS ATTACK UPON THE TYRANNY OF THE EAST INDIA COMPANY :

“HE WELL KNOWS WHAT SNARES ARE SPREAD ABOUT HIS PATH
FROM PERSONAL ANIMOSITY, . . . AND POSSIBLY FROM POPULAR DELUSION.
BUT HE HAS PUT TO HAZARD HIS EASE, HIS SECURITY, HIS INTEREST, HIS
POWER, EVEN HIS POPULARITY. . . HE IS TRADUCED AND ABUSED
FOR HIS SUPPOSED MOTIVES. HE WILL REMEMBER THAT OBLOQUY IS A
NECESSARY INGREDIENT IN THE COMPOSITION OF ALL TRUE GLORY: HE WILL
REMEMBER THAT CALUMNY AND ABUSE ARE ESSENTIAL PARTS OF
TRIUMPH. . . . HE MAY LIVE LONG, HE MAY DO MUCH. BUT HERE IS THE
SUMMIT. HE NEVER CAN EXCEED WHAT HE DOES THIS DAY.”

ALL OF US HAVE FACED OR WILL FACE THE DAY WHEN OUR COURAGE
WILL BE TESTED TO THE UTMOST WHEN OUR BELIEFS AND EXPERIENCE
MUST STAND US IN GOOD STEAD. BY DISCUSSING OUR PROBLEMS MUTUALLY
AS WE ARE DOING HERE THIS WEEK, MAYBE WE CAN GATHER A LITTLE MORE

KNOWLEDGE. A LITTLE MORE FAITH TO STRENGTHEN US IN THE INEVITABLE
TEST LIE AHEAD.

AGAIN, I WISH TO THANK YOU FOR SELECTING PUERTO RICO AS
THE SITE FOR THIS MEETING AND FOR HONORING US WITH YOUR VISIT.
MUCH IS EXPECTED FROM YOU, AND I AM SURE THAT MUCH WILL BE
PRODUCED HERE. AND WHENEVER YOU CAN GET AWAY FROM YOUR CHORES,
DO NOT FORGET THAT WHILE YOU ARE HERE THIS IS YOUR HOME.
ENJOY IT TO THE FULLEST.

THANK YOU.