



March 6, 2018

Dear Colleague:

On March 2, 1917, on the eve of America's entry into World War I, the U.S. Congress granted American citizenship to the people of Puerto Rico through the Jones-Shafroth Act (P.L. 64-368). Since then, Puerto Ricans have proven their loyalty and contributed to the United States in countless ways. U.S. citizens from Puerto Rico have proudly served in the Armed Forces in every conflict since World War I. Along the way, Puerto Ricans have earned honors including one Congressional Gold Medal for the 65th Infantry Regiment "Borinqueneers", nine Medals of Honor, and thousands of Purple Hearts, all of which are a testament to the ultimate sacrifice Puerto Ricans have made to promote and protect American interests and values.

As this celebration of 100 years of American Citizenship comes to an end, we call on Congress to recognize that the U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico live at a disadvantage compared to our fellow citizens in the states. Puerto Ricans are subject to federal laws but do not have voting representation in the U.S. House of Representatives or any representation in the U.S. Senate. Our sons and daughters in uniform can be sent to war by the President of the United States, but even when they serve honorably, they cannot vote for the Commander-in-Chief. Congress can and does treat Puerto Rico unequally under federal laws, leading to incoherent and arbitrary policies that limit the Island's opportunities to maximize its economic potential. We are treated domestic for some purposes, yet foreign for others. And although we deeply cherish our American citizenship, our rights as citizens are not guaranteed by the 14th Amendment. Instead, we rely on a now 101-year-old statute Congress could repeal if it desired.

In 2012, voters in Puerto Rico soundly rejected the current undemocratic and unequal territorial status, and a majority favored statehood over all other non-territorial status options. In 2017, 97 percent of voters in Puerto Rico overwhelmingly re-confirmed that statehood is our preferred status option to end the inherently limiting territorial status. These votes demonstrate indisputably that Washington governs Puerto Rico without the consent of the governed. Moreover, the passage of the 2016 Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act or PROMESA (P.L. 114-187) effectively increased the democratic deficit that we are subjected to as a territory by superseding the local self-government that Congress had granted Puerto Rico in the 1950's. It is now evident to both the U.S. citizens in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Congress that the current territorial status is obsolete and unable to meet the challenges of our time, especially during this critical recovery and reconstruction process post-Hurricane Maria.

While efforts to re-establish fiscal sustainability, restructure debts and rebuild after the hurricanes are all necessary, these measures are simply insufficient to overcome Puerto Rico's challenges. The reality is that Puerto Rico's territorial status is an inherent structural limitation on the island's true and full potential. America's best interests are simply not served by

continuing a century old failed territorial regime that can never be fixed. Ultimately, the only way that the various federal and territorial efforts underway as a result of PROMESA and the post disaster reconstruction process will ever unleash the full potential of Puerto Rico and the U.S. citizens that live on the island, there needs to be a concurrent effort to end the unequal and undemocratic territorial status. Among non-territorial options only Puerto Rico's admission as a state, with equal rights and responsibilities, would bring significant economic progress to the island, decrease dependence and increase interstate commerce for the mutual benefit of Puerto Rico and the rest of the Nation.

At this critical juncture, Puerto Rico cannot stand by idly while Congress decides to act. Following the historic footsteps of Tennessee and multiple other former territories that once faced delays in their admission but through their bold actions became States of the Union, our territorial government has created the Puerto Rico Statehood Commission to serve as our island's shadow delegation to the U.S. Congress. As Puerto Rico's shadow delegation, our mandate is to execute the "Tennessee Plan" by coming to Congress to advocate for and demand Puerto Rico's admission as a State. The Commission consists of seven members, 3 Republicans, 3 Democrats, and 1 Independent, and, in close collaboration with Puerto Rico's Resident Commissioner, Hon. Jenniffer González-Colón, we look forward to engaging you to advance this righteous cause.

The time to end Puerto Rico's undemocratic colonial territory status has come. After decades of federal elected officials claiming support for Puerto Rico's "self-determination," it is imperative that Congress respect and act upon the results of the 2012 and 2017 votes. We ask for your leadership to help us finally and definitively transition to a fully democratic system of government through statehood.

Sincerely,




Zoraida Fonalledas (R)
United States Senator (Shadow)



Pedro Rosselló (D)
Member of Congress (Shadow)



Luis Fortuño (R)
Member of Congress (Shadow)



Charles Rodríguez (D)
Member of Congress (Shadow)



Alfonso Aguilar (R)
Member of Congress (Shadow)