



# LUIS G. FORTUÑO

RESIDENT COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE NEWSLETTER



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## Historic Announcement from White House on Status

The White House released this past December the President's Task Force on Puerto Rico's Status Report. This historic announcement is the most forceful yet in the last 40 years wherein the White House provides a legal framework for the resolution of Puerto Rico's status problem. Dozens of executive branch and federal government officials worked ardously to steer and give direction to the discussion of the status issue on the Island.

The Presidential Task Force was co-chaired by Messrs. Ruben Barrales and



The Resident Commissioner and his wife Luce discuss with President Bush and First Lady Laura Bush the White House Report.

report was issued, Resident Commissioner Luis Fortuño

Kevin Marshall, officials from the White House and the Department of Justice, respectively. The co-chairs interviewed numerous Puerto Rico public officials as well as leaders representing all political ideologies during this process. The President and his working group, under the direction of the co-chairs, organized the Task Force and developed viable options regarding Puerto Rico's future and its relation with the United States.

Before the White House

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## Successful First Year in Congress

Luis Fortuño's first year as the representative of all Puerto Ricans in Congress, has been one of accomplishments and results for the benefit of our people. Firm in his commitment to be a full-time Resident Commissioner, he has served his constituents effectively and tirelessly as spokesman and advocate of our Island's needs.

During the recently concluded Congressional session, the Commissioner held an assistance record of over 90% in the three commissions committees and six subcommissions subcommittees in which he serves; he introduced 14 bills and cosponsored more than 140 legislative measures.

Among Fortuño's his accomplishments this year are the following:

- ★ Historic announcement from the White House on status. The White House issued its most powerful pronouncement on the real options for status in Puerto Rico.
- ★ \$835 million in Federal funds for transportation and infrastructure projects throughout the Island. The funds include \$45 million for new projects and \$10.2

million to conclude Phase I of the Tren Urbano.

- ★ A \$24 million increase in Federal funds to the cap on the Medicaid program in Puerto Rico, the first received by the Island since 1998.
- ★ Designation of 10,000 acres of El Yunque as part of the Wilderness Preservation System, protecting it from any future development.
- ★ An appropriation worth millions of dollars in Federal funds for recreation and sports projects, including \$2 million for the development and construction of the Toa Baja Recreational Trail; \$250,000 for the construction of a Little League baseball complex in Aguadilla, and \$150,000 for the construction of a Recreation and Youth Services Center in Isabela.
- ★ Tax incentives to manufacturers and extending the rum tax cover over, which will guarantee the permanence of more than 20,000 jobs on the island and an additional \$85 million for our economy, respectively.
- ★ An appropriation worth several million in Federal funds for flood control projects, including \$1.8 million to dredge the Bay of San Juan, \$4 million for channel improvement of the Río Grande de

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## From Washington

I write this note just a few hours after the end of my first congressional session and as I am about to commemorate my first year as the representative of all Puerto Ricans in Washington. As you know, it has been a very challenging year, with budget cuts at both the federal and state level. However, it's a pleasure to inform you that I have been able to get concrete results for the people of Puerto Rico, such as the historic announcement from the White House on the issue of status.

Besides our many achievements, some of which are highlighted in this newsletter, during this first year I have strived to make and develop personal relationships with my colleagues in Congress and members of the President's Administration, which will allow me to promote Puerto Rico's agenda here in Washington during the remaining three years of my term. I have been able to develop these relationships because I made good on my commitment to work full time for you, by moving my family to Washington.

I want to reaffirm my commitment to work on behalf of all Puerto Ricans. You allowed me to represent you here in Washington, and I feel proud to do so with dignity. I know that we are living difficult and very uncertain times, and with the God's help I will continue working to achieve more results for Puerto Rico.

## 2A HEALTH

### Increase of Millions in Medicaid Funds

#### Medicare Initiatives and a New Trauma Center for the Western Area on the Right Track

One of the Resident Commissioner's most important legislative priorities is for all Puerto Ricans to have access to quality health services. As part of his effort in Congress during this past year, Luis Fortuño obtained a \$24 million increase for the Medicaid program on the Island. This increase in the Medicaid cap – the first for Puerto Rico in



**Fortuño and Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (Florida) discuss health initiatives.**

the last seven years – is an important achievement at a time when Congress was cutting more than \$12 billion from the national Medicare and Medicaid programs to be able to fund the reconstruction plan for the areas impacted by hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

As part of his health agenda, he is also continuing his efforts to have Puerto Rico receive equal treatment in the Medicare program. He has introduced three bills, the first, H.R. 1729, provides for hospitals in Puerto Rico

low-income patients under the DSH program.

Other health projects that he is actively promoting include the establishment of a trauma center in the Medical Center at Mayagüez, a new center for children with special needs in the municipality of Cabo Rojo, the renovation of the Quebrada Health Center in the municipality of Camuy, and the establishment of a breast cancer research center in the municipality of Cayey.

to receive the same reimbursements for services to Medicare patients as hospitals in the 50 states. The second, H.R. 4206, allows health care providers in Puerto Rico to receive payment for medical services to illegal immigrants. The third, H.R. 4207, increases the reimbursements received by hospitals on the island for services to

## 2B EDUCATION

### Resident Commissioner Promotes Reading

#### Special Education and Teaching of the English Language are Also Priorities

Over the past year, Luis Fortuño has developed and implemented an ambitious legislative agenda focused on improving the quality of education in Puerto Rico, particularly in the areas of reading, English-language instruction and special education.

As part of his effort to promote the importance of reading, he hosted, last August 15th, a book fair called "Leer para Crecer" ("Read to Grow").. The book fair was



**Luis Fortuño meets with and discusses the importance of education with Senator Lornna Soto and Vilma Valentín, director of the Children Learning & Development Center for autistic children**

also an instrument to alert constituents about the importance of encouraging reading among children from early on. "Learning how to read is the most powerful skill our children can acquire; it impacts not only their scholastic achievement but also their quality of life," said the Com-

missioner.

Moreover, as member of the Committee on Education and the Workforce, he accomplished the approval of several amendments to bills under consideration by the committee that will greatly benefit not only Puerto Rican children, but also boys and girls throughout the nation.

For example, he obtained the approval of an amendment to the Higher Education Reauthorization Act, that

creates a \$56-million fund to promote graduate education among Hispanic students. In addition, he was able to include language in the Head Start Reauthorization Act to promote English-language instruction at an early age.

## 3A INFRASTRUCTURE



Luis Fortuño and Representative Liza Fernández meet after placing the first stone for the Puerto Nuevo River flood control project, for which \$20 million in Federal funds were obtained.

## Multimillion-dollar Boost to Infrastructure

### Fortuño Obtains \$40 Million Appropriation for Water Projects

In an effort to improve the quality of life of Puerto Ricans, during his first term in Congress, the Resident Commissioner secured an appropriation totaling nearly \$40 million for flood control projects and dredging under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. These projects will have an important impact on the development of the island's infrastructure so that it will meet the needs for Puerto Rico in the 21st century.

Among the projects that will be funded are \$1.6 million to dredge the Bay of San Juan, \$4 million for channel improvements of the Rio Grande in Arecibo; \$14 million for channel improvements and dam construction for the Portugués and Bucaná rivers in Ponce; and \$20 million for Rio Puerto Nuevo flood control project. Fortuño also discussed the need to include additional projects in the next appropriations cycle. These include flood control projects for the Fajardo, La Plata, Ojo de Agua, Guanajibo and Guayanés rivers.

Another significant achievement by him during this past Congressional session was the authori-

zation of \$35 million for the development of water and sewer infrastructure projects throughout the island.

In addition to this authorization of funds, he also obtained the approval of \$130 million for the dredging project at the Martín Peña Canal, which is of vital importance to the comprehensive development of the eight communities adjacent to the channel and their 30,000 residents.

Fortuño also succeeded in including language ordering a study to reevaluate the viability of the Valenciano River reservoir project in Juncos. Once it is completed, this reservoir will supply water to the municipalities of Juncos, Caguas, San Lorenzo, Gurabo, Bayamón, San Juan, Carolina, Guaynabo and Trujillo Alto. "The production, distribution and access to safe drinking water and water treatment, are essential services that not all of Puerto Rico enjoy. The amount and quality of the drinking water available for consumption is a determining factor for the quality of life and the economic development of our Island, and that is where the importance of these projects lies," said the Commissioner.

## 3B VETERANS

## Striving to Obtain Better Services for Veterans on the Island

### Veteran's Committee Expected to Hold Meetings in Puerto Rico During February

Assuring that Puerto Rican veterans receive the same treatment as veterans in the rest of the country has been one of the most important legislative priorities for Luis Fortuño during this past session of Congress.

To achieve this, he was able to include language in the Veterans' Affairs Appropriations Act requiring the Department of Veterans Affairs to implement necessary improvements to the VA Hospital while the feasibility study of building a new facility is considered.

In addition, as part of his effort to increase awareness in the federal government concerning the needs of Puerto Rican veterans, he invited Senators Ken Salazar (Colorado) and Mel Martínez (Florida) to accompany him on his most recent visit to the VA Hospital. Senator Salazar, a member of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and Martínez, both, had the opportunity to talk with many of our veterans and to see first hand some of their needs.

Other accomplishments that will have a positive impact on our veterans include, pursuing the construction of a new VA outpatient clinic on the site of the former Roosevelt Roads base to serve the veterans of Eastern part of Puerto Rico, and securing the permanence of Fort Buchanan and lifting the moratorium over new construction there.

"There cannot be any reason whatsoever to justify unequal treatment of our veterans. If Puerto Rican veterans have been equal in times of war, they also should be equal in their hour of need," indicated the Commissioner.



## FORTUÑO DISCUSSES AGENDA WITH LEGISLATORS

During the past year, the Resident Commissioner held numerous meetings with legislators from both the House and the Senate of Puerto Rico, to ensure that work on Puerto Rico's agenda is carried out in a coordinated manner with Congress and the local Legislature.

In the photo, he discusses issues of importance for

the island in his office with the Speaker of the Puerto Rico House of Representatives, José Aponte, and with Representatives Gabriel Rodríguez Aguiló, Chairman of the Health Committee; Javier Rivera Aquino, Chairman of the Agriculture Committee; and Lourdes Ramos Rivera, Chairwoman of the Ethics Committee.

## 4A ENVIRONMENT

# President Signs Bill for the Conservation of El Yunque Introduced by Fortuño

## Important National Organizations Recognize Environmental Agenda

As part of his ambitious environmental agenda, the Resident Commissioner managed in record time a bill he penned (HR 539) to become law, designating 10,000 acres of the National Caribbean Forest as a wildlife refuge. The bill, signed by the President last Dec. 1, will allow the federal government to give special protection to close to 10,000 acres of land located in the El Toro refuge of El Yunque. This designation will guarantee that land is protected in its natural state for the enjoyment of future generations.

Since he joined Congress, Luis Fortuño has become one of the main advocates of the conservation of El Yunque and the environment in general. In addition to the El Toro project, the commissioner introduced during the past congressional session legislation on behalf of the conservation of the Karst region (HR 1644), to protect the buffer zone around El Yunque (HR 3365), and officially designate the Caribbean National Forest as the National El Yunque Forrest (HR 4111).



**The Resident Commissioner next to senator Mel Martínez (Florida) and Pablo Cruz, El Yunque forestry supervisor, during a recent visit to the forest to mark the opening of the National Conference on Land Management. Fortuño and Martínez have introduced legislation to protect the buffer zone around El Yunque.**

The Commissioner's leadership and his ambitious agenda on behalf of the environment have been worthy of recognition by important environmental organizations nationwide, such as the Wilderness Society, the National Hispanic Environmental Council and the American Bird Conservancy. In fact, a newspaper of wide circulation in Washington, Roll Call, in its Oct. 18 edition featured a letter signed by Mike Matz, director of the Campaign for America's Wilderness, highlighting the approval by Congress of HR 539 introduced by Fortuño and used it as an example of the type of legislation that Congress must adopt to protect the environment.

Other environmental initiatives that have had Fortuño's support include the Natural Reserve project in the municipality of Culebra, the appropriation of funds to restore the habitat that shelters 12 listed or at-risk species along two miles of riparian habitat along the Pellejas River in Adjuntas, and the authorization of \$130 million to restore the Caño Martín Peña.

## 4B ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

# House of Representatives Approves Fortuño Initiative Focused on Stimulating Economic Development on the Island

## Legislation Will Positively Impact More Than 20,000 Jobs on the Island

The Resident Commissioner managed to get the House of Representatives to approve his most important economic development initiative for Puerto Rico in this session. This measure, included in HR 2181 filed in May, amends Section 199 of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, cutting 3 percentage points off the tax rate for companies with manufacturing operations in Puerto Rico, which brings it to the same level paid by these companies in the 50 states.

In that way, he managed to correct the exclusion of Puerto Rico from the Job Creation Act of 2004, which benefits economic development and manufacturing job creation by granting a tax cut from 35% to 32% to manufacturing companies that already applied to the 50 states but not the Island. The exclusion of Puerto Rico from that law resulted in companies with manufacturing operations on the Island that are subsidiaries of mainland companies being at a disadvantage in relation to manufacturing plants located in the 50 states. This disadvantageous position for companies located on the



**The Resident Commissioner with the Secretary of Commerce, Carlos Gutierrez, the Speaker of the House, Dennis Hastert, and the President of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Michael Barrera, participate in a news conference to promote the approval of CAFTA-DR.**

Island gave way to the possibility that they would relocate to other jurisdictions, with a potential loss of 20,000 jobs in Puerto Rico.

On the other hand, he was also able to get the House to extend for a year the reimbursement received by Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands of rum taxes collected in the continental United States. The extension obtained by him will represent a boost of at least \$85 million to our Island's economy.

Another project actively promoted by him as Vice Chairman of the Congressional Hispanic Conference that will result in great economic benefits for Puerto Rico was the Central America and Dominican Republican Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR) approved by Congress

and signed by the President. This agreement represents a crucial step for U.S. trade in Central America and the Caribbean, and in the case of Puerto Rico, it creates many business opportunities and opens the doors to markets previously closed to the Island.

## Historic Announcement from White House on Status (continued from cover)...

obtained important endorsements from national and local leaders. Featured among them were New York City mayor, Michael Bloomberg, the governors of New York and Alaska, George Pataki and Frank Murkowski, former senate majority leader, Bob Dole and Senator Mel Martínez (Florida), the Congressional Hispanic Conference, and members of the Puerto Federation of Mayors.

In addition, he gathered over thirty endorsements from key congressional members who expressed their support in a letter to the President. Among the members who signed the letter were: Deborah Pryce (Ohio), chair of the Republican Conference, Eric Cantor (Virginia), Jerry Weller (Illinois), Tom Feeney (Florida), Mark Foley (Florida) and Michael Conaway (Texas), all speakers pro tempore. It was also signed by powerful heads of Congressional committees such as Don Young (Alaska), chairman of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure; Henry Hyde (Illinois), chairman of the Committee on International Relations; Tom Davis (Virginia), chairman of the Governmental Reform Committee, and Richard Pombo (California), chairman of the Committee on Resources, which has jurisdiction over all Puerto Rican affairs.

The report offers a legal analysis of the viable status options available to Puerto Rico under the Constitution of the United States, if Puerto Rico wishes to resolve the status problem permanently. It concludes that Puerto Rico has essentially two routes to choose from:



**Luis Fortuño held a discussion with a group of mayors who visited Federal Capital to participate in meetings and seminars with federal officials organized by his office.**

independence or statehood. The report further concludes that the existing Commonwealth formula created fundamentally a territory under the plenary powers of Congress. It also dismisses the possibility of granting the Commonwealth additional sovereign powers because Congress can always revoke such powers, and therefore, they cannot be constitutionally guaranteed prospectively.

The report also raises legal doubts as to the permanent status of the United States citizenship for residents of Puerto Rico under an Associated Republic scenario.

The report emphasizes that it is Congress' responsibility to determine which status formula, permanent and non-territorial, is available to Puerto Rico under the legal parameters which establish that there are only two possible options, statehood or independence. The report also recommends that Congress should provide a mechanism, within the next year to conduct a federally sponsored plebiscite giving Puerto Ricans the opportunity to choose among the continuity of the current territorial status, or a permanent, non-territorial option. Should the people of Puerto Rico vote in favor of resolving this issue permanently, Congress should provide the two constitutionally viable alternatives: statehood or independence. Finally, the Task Force report recommends that should Puerto Ricans vote in favor of the current territorial status, then future period plebiscites should be held until a final determination is reached by the people of Puerto Rico.

## Fortuño Introduces Bill To Honor the Memory of Barbosa and Garcia Mendez

### U.S. Post Office Buildings in Bayamón and Mayagüez to be Named After Them

The Resident Commissioner has introduced two bills in Congress (H.R. 3440 and H.R. 4368) to name the U.S. Post Office buildings in the municipalities of Bayamón and Mayagüez "Dr. José Celso Barbosa Post Office Building" and "Miguel Angel García Méndez Post Office Building," respectively. These bills are yet another way to honor the memory of two great Puerto Ricans who dedicated their lives to the struggle for political equality of our people, with great commitment, public spirit and respect, worthy of being emulated by our generation and future ones.

The U.S. House Committee on Government Reform has already approved the bill naming the Bayamón post office after Dr. Barbosa, and it is expected to approve the one naming the Mayagüez post office after Mr. García Méndez soon after the start of the upcoming Congressional session.

When he introduced the measure honoring Dr. Barbosa, he highlighted on the House floor the lasting legacy of this great Puerto Rican hero. "Dr. Barbosa is, without a doubt, the father of Puerto Rico's statehood movement, but just like so many other heroes, his work and his demeanor transcends the political arena and must be an example to us all," the Resident Commissioner said.



## MAYORS VISIT WASHIGTON

Luis Fortuño with a group of mayors who visited Federal Capital to participate in meetings and seminars with federal officials organized by the office of the Commissioner.

# Close to 1000 Cases Handled Over the Year

In addition to his legislative work in Washington, Luis Fortuño is committed to offering high-quality and excellent service to his constituents. His office in Old San Juan handles on daily basis people's pending matters or issues before the different federal agencies. The services provided by his office include offering orientation to constituents, identifying resources and information regarding federal issues, and when appropriate, intervening before these agencies.

The majority of the 1000 cases dealt with over the past year were in the areas of immigration, veterans' affairs and Social Security, although other types of issues have been handled with federal agencies. Over 91% of the cases handled to date have been solved, and the remaining cases are awaiting a response or resolution by the agencies involved.

Given the current demand for immigration services, he sponsored his first Citizenship Workshop last Sept. 15th at the Universidad Metropolitana in Cupey. The workshop, which was done in conjunction with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service, (USCIS), was attended by more than 100 people who were provided orientation and technical assistance services in the preparation of applications to become U.S. citizens.

His office also offers orientation workshops on federal



**Fortuño speaks about the many issues facing residents in the city of Bayamón during one of several "town-hall meetings" held throughout the island.**

funding to community and faith-based organizations. Over the past year the office held 30 workshops, which focused on offering general orientation on the Faith-Based and Community Initiatives Program promoted by the Federal Administration, and the federal agencies involved. In addition, he inaugurated, with the support of mayors, liaison offices with these organizations in 25 municipalities. The establishment of these offices is a result of the realization that together, government and community faith-based organizations, can more effectively combat social problems.

In addition, with the purpose of offering better services and having closer contact with his constituents, he created a program called "Office of the Resident Commissioner in Your Town". Through this program, staff from the office is assigned to the municipalities to provide services to constituents there. This year, the program was offered successfully in the municipalities of Orocovis, Camuy, Gurabo, Corozal and Arroyo.

Another initiative that has proven to be very successful is that of hosting "Town-hall Meetings" throughout municipalities. These allow the Commissioner to be in contact with his constituents and directly address their needs.

# INFONEWS



The Resident Commissioner talks to the Boy Scouts who represented Puerto Rico in the National Jamboree held in Fort A.P. Hill, Virginia, last July about his efforts on education for Puerto Rico. The Jamboree is held every four years. The Boy Scouts met with the Resident Commissioner in his office and toured the Capitol.

## Successful First Year (continued from cover)...

Arecibo, \$14 million for the Portugués and Bucaná flood control project in Ponce, and \$20 million for the Rio Puerto Nuevo flood control project.

- ★ \$35 million in Federal funds authorized for water and sewage infrastructure projects throughout the island, \$4 million for drinking water plant improvements and nearly \$130 million in Federal funds for the Caño Martín Peña dredging project.
- ★ Millions in Federal funds for education, including \$56 million to promote post-graduate education among Hispanic students and \$7 million

for Island colleges under the federal student assistance program. In addition, Fortuño he was also able to amend the Head Start Reauthorization bill to promote the teaching of the English language to pre-school children.

- ★ Permanence of Fort Buchanan, in addition to getting Congress to lift the moratorium on all new construction at the Fort, in effect for the past four years.
- ★ Pursuing better medical services for veterans on the Island, including the implementation of improvements to the VA Hospital, a Congressional mandate to the Department of Veteran

Affairs to do a feasibility study on a new hospital and the construction of a new outpatient clinic for veterans on the Eastern region on the Island.

- ★ Unprecedented appropriations in other areas, including more than \$500,000 in Federal funds for electronic monitoring issues in several municipalities, \$1 million in Federal funds for maintenance and repairs of historic structures at the San Felipe del Morro and San Cristóbal forts, and language promoting the establishment of a Tsunami Warning Center as part of the Puerto Rico Seismic Network.

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