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# Congress of the United States

House of Representatives  
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May 13, 2014

Dr. Miriam J. Ramírez  
2305 Laurel Street, Suite 603  
San Juan, PR 00913

Dear Dr. Ramírez:

I want to thank you for your letter, dated May 5, 2014, requesting that I submit a definition of “statehood” to the U.S. Attorney General that could appear on the ballot in the federally-sponsored status vote recently authorized by Congress and the President in the *Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014* (P.L. 113-76). As you are aware, last week I sent a letter to the members of the State Elections Commission of Puerto Rico, copied to Attorney General Eric Holder and the co-chairs of the President’s Task Force on Puerto Rico’s Status. Based on my subsequent correspondence with you, I understand that you are pleased with this step, and I want to express my gratitude to you for working with me in such a constructive manner.

My letter urges the Elections Commission to exercise the authority expressly granted to the Commission by P.L. 113-76 by submitting a proposal to the Attorney General to utilize the \$2.5 million in available funding to conduct a federally-sponsored vote on Puerto Rico’s admission as a state. Specifically, I asked the Elections Commission to propose to the Attorney General that the plebiscite ballot be structured as follows:

## Proposed Ballot

### **As a State:**

- (A) Puerto Rico would be permanently united to the other States of the Union.**
- (B) All provisions of the Constitution of the United States that apply to the States would apply to Puerto Rico.**
- (C) Individuals born in Puerto Rico would be United States citizens by virtue of the Constitution of the United States, instead of by virtue of laws of the United States.**
- (D) Puerto Rico would be treated equally with the other States in all Federal laws of general application.**
- (E) There would be a period of transition to statehood, during which equal treatment of Puerto Rico in program and tax laws would be phased in.**
- (F) Puerto Rico would be represented in the United States Senate by two Senators, in the United States House of Representatives by a number of Representatives in proportion to its share of the national population (and the**

**number of Members of the House of Representatives would be increased by the same number), and for the election of the President and the Vice President of the United States by a number of votes in the Electoral College equal to the number of its Senators and Representatives.**

**(G) The Government of Puerto Rico, like the governments of the other States, would have permanent authority over all matters not delegated to the Federal Government or the people by the Constitution of the United States.**

**Do you want Puerto Rico to be admitted as a State of the United States?**

**Yes\_\_ No\_\_.**

In short, the ballot I have proposed contains a clear and constitutionally-sound definition of statehood and then asks voters whether they support Puerto Rico's admission as a state based on that definition. If a majority of voters answer in the affirmative, as I strongly believe they will, there is no doubt that the federal government—having sponsored the vote—will take action to place Puerto Rico on the path to statehood.

As I explained in my letter to the Elections Commission, I believe this is the optimal way to proceed for many reasons, including:

- This approach enjoys broad congressional support, as evidenced by the fact that H.R. 2000, which embodies this approach, has 130 bipartisan cosponsors and an identical bill, S. 2020, has been introduced in the Senate.
- This approach is appropriate in light of the results of the November 2012 plebiscite, because a majority of voters rejected the current territory status and more voters expressed a preference for statehood than for any other status option. Statehood is now the predominant force in Puerto Rico, and so it is logical to hold a vote on the territory's admission as a state.
- This approach is simple, straightforward, free of confusion or ambiguity, and would yield a definitive result. It is also fair, since those who support statehood can vote "Yes" and those who oppose statehood can vote "No."
- This approach would certainly be approved by the U.S. Department of Justice because holding a vote on Puerto Rico's admission as a state is consistent with the requirements of P.L. 113-76 and because the definition of statehood we have provided is consistent with U.S. law and policy.
- This approach is consistent with the federally-sanctioned procedures that were employed in Alaska and Hawaii. In August 1958, a vote was held in Alaska on the yes-or-no question: "Shall Alaska immediately be admitted into the Union as a State?" Similarly, in June 1959, a vote was held in Hawaii on the yes-or-no question: "Shall Hawaii

immediately be admitted into the Union as a State?" In both cases, of course, the outcome of the vote led to prompt federal action resulting in statehood.

I want to close by noting that you are right to feel a sense of urgency. Every day Puerto Rico remains a territory is a day we endure second-class citizenship in the most democratic nation in history. Every day we remain a territory is a day we lack equality and voting rights. Every day we remain a territory is a day we are denied justice under law. And every day we remain a territory is a day we are unable to enjoy the same economic opportunities as our fellow American citizens in the states. Statehood is the solution—the *only* solution—to this profound injustice.

At the same time, make no mistake: the statehood movement is *winning* this fight. Through the tireless efforts of elected leaders, grass roots organizations, and regular citizens, more has been done to advance the cause of statehood in the last two years than ever before in our history. The record is clear. First, we held a plebiscite that statehood indisputably won. Second, in response to that plebiscite, and despite the opposition of pro-status quo forces in Puerto Rico, we enacted into law a provision that authorizes the first federally-sponsored status vote in Puerto Rico's history expressly designed to "resolve" the status issue; allocates \$2.5 million in federal funding for voter education and the vote itself; and explicitly prohibits the inclusion of impossible status options like "enhanced commonwealth" on the ballot. Third, I introduced H.R. 2000, which endorses structuring the federally-sponsored vote as a vote on Puerto Rico's admission as a state and requires federal action if a majority of voters favor admission. Fourth, an identical companion to H.R. 2000 was introduced in the Senate. Finally, the Government Accountability Office recently released a report that confirms that, from an economic perspective, statehood is in the mutual interest of both Puerto Rico and the U.S. as a whole. This is tremendous progress, and it is important that it be recognized as such.

I do not need to tell you to keep fighting, because few people have fought for statehood with as much passion as you. Have no doubt: together we will prevail.

Sincerely,



Pedro R. Pierluisi  
Member of Congress