

**UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL
RESOURCES**

Thursday, May 6, 1999

9:30 a.m. - SH-216

**Transcript of Hearing To Consider The
Results Of The December 1998 Puerto Rico
Political Status Plebiscite**

SENATOR BAYH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Governor, I'd like to ask you a question. As you know, our nation is currently involved in hostilities in the Balkans and Puerto Ricans have a long and honorable tradition of military service. In fact, Puerto Ricans can be compelled through the draft to serve in our military.

I'd like to ask you how do the young men and women of Puerto Rico feel about a system in which a government can compel them to possibly give their lives defending a country and yet they have no right to vote for that government or the representatives that might possibly send them to war.

(Applause.)

GOVERNOR ROSSELLÓ: Senator Bayh, I think the spontaneous response reiterates what our people feel about that. Certainly it's a grave inconsistency that the commander-in-chief of the United States can order, recruit and send to war Puerto Ricans who have no say in either the decisions that are made by this Congress or in the election of the President of the United States.

I think Puerto Rico has responded in a very generous manner to those calls for sacrifice in defending democracy. Puerto Rico has a higher per capita casualties, deaths, in wars or participation than most of the States, and I dare say all of the States. So I would say that this is one of the things that, when we look at in the workings of democracy and we look at merely four million U.S. citizens that are compelled by our commander-in-chief to go to war, and have no say in the decisions of this nation, that that's the major inconsistency. That's the unfinished business of democracy that we're talking about.

SENATOR BAYH: Thank you, Governor. I recall from my own days being governor economic growth, job creation are very important, and I know it's important to expanding the welfare of the people of Puerto Rico, just as it is the citizens of my State of Indiana.

One of the things that I get to do as a member of the Banking Committee, another committee on which I serve, is to spend time with Alan Greenspan and Bob Rubin and the architects of the strong economy we have today, and it's their feeling that investment is critically important to job creation, to increase competitiveness, to rising wages and a better standard of living.

I'm wondering, as Governor, certainty is very important for investment. This uncertainty surrounding the status of the territory, does that have an impact on economic growth, investment, job creation, for your citizens?

GOVERNOR ROSSELLÓ: Absolutely, Senator. I think this is evident not only in what you have stated but also historically. We have seen how every territory of the Union that became a state, its economy, once it became a State, flourished compared to the territorial economy. The most recent case is Hawaii. Hawaii was growing at a pace of four percent per year increase in the gross product as a territory. Once it became a State, for the next decade it grew at seven percent, nearly doubling its growth in its economy.

It's a historical certainty that this will happen. I think one big factor is that uncertainty in terms of investment in a territory where you don't know what the final option is going to be. But also a territory has limitations in terms of its instruments compared to States. It is no mystery that when you look over the past fifty years at the growth of the economy of Puerto Rico compared to the States, the difference that exists between the economy of Puerto Rico, in any parameter that you want to follow, be it jobs, employment, gross product, whatever, if you look at the difference, it has remained the same.

Puerto Rico has gotten better, yes, but the difference, the deficit has remained the same. It is a structural problem. Unless you eliminate that structural problem, you will always have a dependent territory that cannot be a full partner with the rest of the States.

SENATOR BAYH: I'd like to ask a question about the results of the plebiscite. Mr. Chairman, I'd like to say also that, at least speaking for myself, I am glad that one of our Courts can't order the placement of "none of the above" on the ballot, or I might not be sitting here questioning you today. Perhaps that applies to some other members of this body as well.

But putting that aside, I'm pleased to see that you're here asking for certainty, and I did look at the way the questions were put. Is it your analysis that really the only thing we can determine from these results is that the status quo, the current situation, was rejected? Is that your interpretation?

GOVERNOR ROSSELLÓ: I think it's the strongest message. We've been hearing here from Congress that we have to get our act together, and I assume that responsibility. So if you look at the results, there's one overwhelming factor. Less than .1 percent, less than one-tenth of a percent is in favor of the current status, as has been defined by this Congress through the House bill.

That means that all options that we should have for the future are options of change, different options from the current territorial status. All -- and I think I speak for all Puerto Ricans -- all

Puerto Ricans would not accept a territorial status that maintains Puerto Rico under the territorial clause.

So yes, I think that the most powerful, the most eloquent message of this plebiscite is that we have to look for other change options, not the current status. The current status has been limited in its scope.

SENATOR BAYH: My final question, Governor, then one point of personal privilege, and we can get on with the rest of the hearing here.

My colleague, Senator Craig, spoke about our mutual responsibilities under the Constitutional system and surely we all bear responsibilities for resolving this situation and bringing some clarity to the future status of Puerto Rico, of the territory.

Is it true that under the Constitution the ultimate responsibility lies with the Federal Government for determining the admission to the Union as a State, for setting the qualifications, establishing the procedure, that sort of thing?

GOVERNOR ROSSELLÓ: Absolutely. I think it's very clear that the Constitution provides for this Congress, for Congress to have the basically absolute determination, absolute power over U.S. territories. This is very clear. I don't think that anybody would argue on that point.

It has been that way throughout history. It has been that way every time a territory has become a State. And so that responsibility does not lie anywhere than in this Congress.

SENATOR BAYH: I recall from my years as Governor dealing with my own State legislature, and they're good people and we all did the best we could to try and resolve the issues that faced my State, but sometimes there was division, sometimes there was difference of opinion. My understanding under our Constitutional system is that for issues of this importance, explicitly in this case in the Constitution, while we do have a Federal system and there is allocation of responsibilities between the Federal and the State level, the ultimate responsibility, with your help and cooperation, the ultimate responsibility does rest with the Federal Government in this case.

Governor, I would like thank you for being here. I had the privilege of serving with you for many years in the Governors Association. I appreciate your leadership of the territory, and, along with our Chairman, want to acknowledge the presence of your lovely First Lady, Maga, in the audience. As is the case with me, my citizens frequently tell me they voted for the First Lady's husband. So I thank you for your presence today and appreciate your testimony.

(Applause.)

GOVERNOR ROSSELLÓ: Thank you, Senator.