

## STATEMENT OF ANA IRMA SELJO-MARKS

Ms. SELJO-MARKS. Good morning.

The CHAIRMAN. Good morning.

Ms. SELJO-MARKS. This statement is based on the findings of a recent survey of research on the political culture of Puerto Ricans. One of the most striking and upsetting findings concerns the high degree of ignorance among our population regarding the meaning of the traditional status formulas.

The problem of the relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States has supposedly been the central issue of our political life for the past 90 years. Yet, when asked about the main characteristics, or implications of each of the alternatives, commonwealth, statehood and independence, about 55 percent of the respondents could mention only one characteristic, 29 percent were able to mention two, and only 13 percent could offer three. About 45 percent could not answer at all.

These percentages become even lower, if we take into account only valid, cognitive answers. Furthermore, approximately 4 percent of our voting age population mistakes one formula for another. Although many of our fellow citizens do not possess sufficient knowledge on status options, they do choose, frequently, with high emotional involvement.

Fifty-two percent of those admitted no knowledge of the status options, did state a judgment concerning their desirability.

The situation can be explained by examining the performance and functioning of our political party system. Puerto Rican parties are strong and ideologically polarized regarding the status issue. A fairly strong party status identification has been utilized by the three parties as a means of maximizing their electoral strength.

Therefore, it has not been in the party's interest to clarify either the distinction between party and status, nor the meaning of the different options. They just want their people to adhere to their favorite formula, and discriminately rejecting the other two.

These two facts—party status identification, and the unwillingness of a party to educate the electorate, present serious threats to the outcome of the status debate under the valid exercise of free-determination.

The problematic implications of party status identification are more evident when we consider the fact that our main parties are, to a great extent, clientelistic, or clientele-oriented parties.

Party adherence are frequently seen as a means of obtaining advantages when the party gets to power, particularly in the case of the two major parties. There is, furthermore, an overwhelming tendency to identify party and government.

Hence, we are greatly concerned with the possibility that a significant proportion of the voters would favor a status formula as a way of supporting their parties, anticipating the 1992 election.

In acknowledging the problem of lack of knowledge about the status formulas, and the fact that we have no guarantee that parties will effectively perform their education function, we urge Congress to give paramount attention to this issue.

We recommend that the plebiscite be preceded by an extended period of systematic, profound, responsible, political education. This ||

task should be performed by a board or commission composed of Puerto Rican representatives of the different formulas, under the auspices and coordination of Congress, or of an agency appointed by it.

Although we are aware of the fact that Congress is already committed to endow the party with funds for the plebiscite campaign, we suggest that the funds should not be assigned to parties, but to formulas.

We further propose that a substantial percentage of the share allotted to each status option, be set aside for financing non-partisan, this non-partisan board or commission.

One of the most outstanding findings of our study was that as much as 64 percent of our respondents admit to have serious doubt of the purity of the electoral process in Puerto Rico, although we have no data regarding the actual purity of our elections.

The above data demonstrate that a substantial portion of our people is concerned about the possibility of fraud in the elections. A plebiscite to decide our future would be marred by any doubt as to its purity or legitimacy.

We, therefore, consider that Congress has a responsibility to ensure such legitimacy, either through some form of congressional supervision, through a panel composed of highly reputed members of both the United States and the Puerto Rican judiciary, or through inviting observations by an international body that would attest to the legitimacy of this outcome.

One final point. We believe that a simple majority does not constitute an adequate basis for the implementation of a political status formula. Given the particular conditions extant in Puerto Rico, we would suggest that a necessary margin be at least 60 percent. If no option obtains the required majority, a runoff plebiscite would be held.

Our research produced abundant data on several aspects pertaining to the political status issue, which have been limited here due to time limitations. We are making available to this Congress a summary of our findings, and will be more than willing to respond to any requests for further information which you may wish to make. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Seijo-Marks follows:]