I’m keeping these for blackmail purposes,” she says. The three of them burst out laughing.

At 5:15 p.m., the INS manager who insists that “fair management and families” are the cornerstones of her personal and professional life, is walking in the side door of her house holding the leftover chicken enchiladas in her hand.

UNITED STATES-PUERTO RICO POLITICAL STATUS ACT

HON. DON YOUNG
OF ALASKA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 6, 1996

Mr. YOUNG of Alaska. Mr. Speaker, today, the introduction of the United States-Puerto Rico Political Status Act will, for the first time in nearly a century of U.S. administration, provide a congressionally recognized framework for the inhabitants of Puerto Rico to express their wishes regarding the options for full self-government. I want to acknowledge the insightful leadership of Speaker NEWT GINGRICH in working with the committee to formulate a process to advance the United States-Puerto Rico relationship toward a conclusive one of full self-government. A number of Members have been supportive and instrumental in the development of the legislation, including ELOY GALLEGLY, chairman of the Subcommittee on Native American and Insular Affairs of the Committee on Resources, BEN GILMAN, chairman of the Committee on International Relations, and DAN BURTON, chairman of the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere who cochaired with Mr. GALLEGY the October 17, 1995, joint hearing on the 1993 Puerto Rico status plebiscite. There also has been substantial input from Members on the other side of the aisle.

This matter of tremendous importance to the United States and the nearly 4 million United States citizens in Puerto Rico can only be resolved through a process that faithfully expresses the views of the people of Puerto Rico and our country.

In fact, to advance the United States-Puerto Rico relationship toward a conclusive one of full self-government, a number of Members have been supportive and instrumental in the development of the legislation, including ELOY GALLEGY, chairman of the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere who cochaired with Mr. GALLEGY the October 17, 1995, joint hearing on the 1993 Puerto Rico status plebiscite. There also has been substantial input from Members on the other side of the aisle.

This matter of tremendous importance to the United States and the nearly 4 million United States citizens in Puerto Rico can only be resolved through a process that faithfully expresses the views of the people of Puerto Rico and our country.

...
Puerto Rico's present status is that of an unincorporated territory subject in all respects to the authority of the United States Congress under the Territorial Clause of the U.S. Constitution. As such, the current status does not provide guaranteed permanent union or guaranteed citizenship to the inhabitants of the territory of Puerto Rico. nor does the current status provide the basis for recognition of a separate Puerto Rican sovereignty or a binding government-to-government status pact.

5. In light of the foregoing, the results of the November 14, 1993 vote indicates that it is the preference of those who cast ballots to change the present impermanent status in favor of a permanent political status based on full self-government. The only options for a permanent and fully self-governing status are (1) independence, (2) national-state status with national sovereignty and full national independence, (3) separate sovereignty in free association with the United States; (3) full integration into the United States political system ending unincorporated territory status and leading to statehood.

6. Because each ballot option in the 1993 plebiscite addressed citizenship, we want to clarify this issue. First, under separate sovereignty Puerto Ricans will have their own nationality and citizenship. The U.S. political status and citizenship provided by Congress under statutes implementing the Treaty of Paris during the unincorporated territory period will be replaced by the new Puerto Rican nationality and citizenship status that comes with separate sovereignty. To prevent hardship or unfairness in individual cases, the U.S. Congress may determine the requirements for eligible persons to continue U.S. nationality and citizenship, or be naturalized, and this will be governed by U.S. law, not Puerto Rican law.

If the voters freely choose separate sovereignty, only those born in Puerto Rico who have acquired U.S. citizenship on some other legal basis outside the scope of the Treaty of Paris citizenship statutes enacted by Congress during the territorial period will not be affected. Thus, the automatic combined Puerto Rican and U.S. citizenship described under the definition of independence on the 1993 plebiscite ballot was a proposal which is misleading and inconsistent with the fundamental principles of separate nationality and non-interference by two sovereign countries in each other's internal affairs, which includes regulation of citizenship. Under statehood, guaranteed equal U.S. citizenship status will become a permanent right. Under the present Commonwealth of Puerto Rico government structure, the current limited U.S. citizenship status and rights will be continued under Federal law enacted under the Territorial Clause and the Treaty of Paris, protected to the extent of partial application of the U.S. Constitution during the period in which Puerto Rico remains an unincorporated territory.

7. The alternative to full integration into the United States or a status based on separate sovereignty is continuation of the current unincorporated territory status. In that event, the present status quo, including the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico structure for local self-government, presumably could continue for some period of time, until Congress, in its discretion otherwise determines the permanent disposition of the territory of Puerto Rico and the status of its inhabitants through the exercise of its authority under the Territorial Clause and the provisions of the Treaty of Paris. Congress may consider proposals regarding changes in the current local government structure, including those set forth in the "Definition of Commonwealth" on the 1993 plebiscite ballot. However, in our view serious consideration of proposals for equal treatment for residents of Puerto Rico under Federal programs will not be provided unless there is an end to certain exemptions from federal tax laws and other non-taxation in Puerto Rico, so that individuals and corporations in Puerto Rico have the same responsibilities and obligations in this regard as the states. Since the "commonwealth" option on the 1993 plebiscite ballot was called for "local autonomy," which is understood to mean, among other things, continuation of the current exemptions from federal taxation for the territory, this constitutes another major political, legal and economic obstacle to implementing the changes in Federal law and policy required to fulfill the terms of the "Definition of Commonwealth."

8. In addition, it is important to recognize that the existing Commonwealth of Puerto Rico structure for local self-government, and any other measures which Congress may approve while Puerto Rico remains an unincorporated territory, are not unalterable in a sense that is constitutionally binding upon a future Congress. Any provision, agreement or pact to the contrary is legally unenforceable. Thus, the current Federal laws and policies applicable to Puerto Rico are not unalterable, nor can they be made unalterable, and the current status of the inhabitants is not irrevocable, as proposed under the "commonwealth" option on the 1993 plebiscite ballot. Congress will continue to respect the principle of self-determination in its exercise of Territorial Clause powers, but that authority must be exercised within the framework of the U.S. Constitution and in a manner deemed by Congress to best serve the U.S. national interest. In our view, promotion of the goal of full self-government for the people of Puerto Rico, rather than remaining in a separate and unequal status, is in the best interests of the United States. This is particularly true due to the large population of Puerto Rico, the approach of a new century in which a protracted status debate will interfere with Puerto Rico's economic and social development, and the domestic and international interest in determining a path to full self-government for all territories with a colonial history before the end of this century.

9. The record of the October 17, 1995 hearing referred to above makes it clear that the realities regarding constitutional, legal and political obstacles to implementing the changes required to fulfill the core elements of the "commonwealth" option on the ballot were not made clear and understandable in the public discussion and political debate leading up to the vote. Consequently, Congress must determine what steps the Federal government should take in order to help move the self-determination process to the next stage, so that the political status aspirations of the people can be ascertained through a truly informed vote in which the wishes of the people are freely expressed within a framework approved by Congress. Only through such a process will Congress then have a clear basis for determining and resolving the question of Puerto Rico's future political status in a manner consistent with the national interest.

Ultimately, Congress alone can determine Federal policy with respect to self-government and self-determination for the residents of Puerto Rico. It will not be possible for the local government or the people to advance further in the self-determination process until the U.S. Congress meets its moral and governmental responsibility to clarify Federal requirements regarding termination of the present unincorporated territory status of Puerto Rico in favor of one of the options for full self-government. The results of the locally administered 1993 vote are useful in this regard, but in our view are not definitive beyond what has been stated above. The question of Puerto Rico's political status remains open and unresolved.

Sincerely,

DON YOUNG, Chairman, Committee on Resources.
ELTON GALLEGLY, Chairman, Subcommittee on Native American and Insular Affairs.
BEN GILMAN, Chairman, Committee on International Relations.
DAN BURTON, Chairman, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere.