

**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**

***STATEMENT OF ZORAIDA FONALLEDAS, NEW PROGRESSIVE PARTY***

MS. FONALLEDAS: Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, my name is Zoraida Fonalledas. I am the Republican National Committeewoman from Puerto Rico. At the invitation of Governor Rosselló, I appear today on behalf of the New Progressive Party.

I would like your permission to submit additional information for the record.

SENATOR CRAIG: Without objection.

MS. FONALLEDAS: As noted already, 46.5 percent of the voters have now told Congress we are ready for statehood. Yet 50.3 percent of the voters, including many statehood and independence supporters, chose the none of the above option to address issues in addition to status. Still, one message is very clear: 99.9 percent of the governed do not consent to continuation of territorial commonwealth.

Popular Democratic Party leaders found none of the above very convenient, because they did not have to defend their ideology that commonwealth is not territorial. But the PDP cannot run away from its past. In 1993 the commonwealth party wrote its own ballot option. That commonwealth definition, which received 48 percent in that plebiscite, borrowed the core elements of statehood: permanent union and irrevocable U.S. citizenship.

At the same time, the 1993 definition of commonwealth also borrowed from the core elements of independence -- including a mythical bilateral nation-to-nation compact Congress supposedly cannot alter without Puerto Rico's consent.

Congress has not approved the 1993 commonwealth party proposal. This is because it is an obviously misleading option, based on a false premise of the benefits of both statehood and independence, without the full responsibilities of either.

However, the 95 percent combined vote for statehood and commonwealth in 1993 must be viewed as an overwhelming mandate for permanent union and irrevocable U.S. citizenship. Our very real differences with the commonwealth party are over how such a permanent status can be achieved.

Local party differences aside, when the 1993 vote is considered alongside 99 percent voter rejection of territorial commonwealth in 1998, Congress is presented with two very fundamental questions: Are you willing to offer permanent union and irrevocable U.S. citizenship to Puerto Rico? If so, how can that be achieved in accordance with the U.S. Constitution? Historically, permanent union and guaranteed citizenship meant statehood, as in the case of Hawaii and Alaska. Separate sovereignty and nationality meant independence, like the Philippines and Cuba.

But for decades now the commonwealth party has told our people that Puerto Rico has entered the Union permanently like a state, while also being a nation with a zone of sovereignty beyond the reach of Congress. Do you agree that Congress has divested the territorial clause power to alter federal laws granting limited autonomy to Puerto Rico? Is there a nation-to-nation confederacy?

We are calling on Congress to end its silence on these questions, because Puerto Rico cannot send a clear signal to Congress until Congress sends a clear signal to Puerto Rico.

That is why we urge Congress to approve legislation defining the full range of permanent status alternatives that are valid under the U.S. Constitution. That will eliminate all invalid alternatives.

Only then can the American principle of self-determination be redeemed for Puerto Rico, leading ultimately to equal rights, political stability, and economic prosperity for Puerto Rico. This represents a cause so just and so urgent that it soon will produce bipartisan consensus throughout America.

As the mother of four children, I know that all the children of Puerto Rico, as Americans, deserve better than to grow up with uncertainty about the future status or ambiguity about their rights. Our highest duty as Americans is to pass to the next generation a better life. Those who say commonwealth is the best we can do, or the status quo is the most we deserve, are wrong.

Americans have never accepted permanent inequality, and we are Americans. We are ready to do the hard work of democracy to achieve full dignity. May God bless us all in completing this quest for equality and justice in America.

Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman.