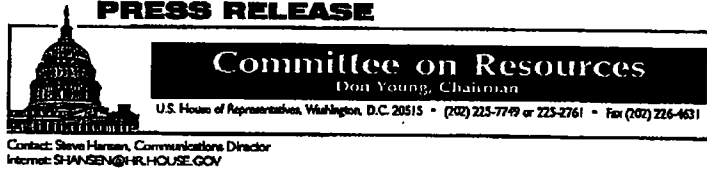


PRESS RELEASE

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**Puerto Rico Political Status Act Introduced In U.S. House;
Statehood, Commonwealth Or Separate Sovereignty Options To Be Determined**

Washington, D.C. - Bi-partisan legislation which will begin the process for a final decision on the political status of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives this afternoon.

"The United States-Puerto Rico Political Status Act" will allow the people of Puerto Rico to decide the future of their nation. The Puerto Rican people will decide upon 1) Statehood, 2) Commonwealth, or 3) Separate Sovereignty (see Page 3).

"This landmark legislation will end 100 years of uncertainty for the people of Puerto Rico and allow them to determine the political status for themselves and future generations," U.S. Rep. Don Young (R-Alaska) said at today's press conference announcing the introduction of the legislation.

"This legislation is the starting point in the process which is long overdue - and the people of Puerto Rico deserve," Young said.

Legislation Has Bipartisan Support

Young is the prime sponsor of the legislation and the Chairman of the U.S. House Committee on Resources, which has jurisdiction over U.S. territories.

Among the 60 co-sponsors of the legislation are:

- *House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-GA)*
- *Puerto Rico's Democrat Resident Commissioner Carlos Romero-Barceló*
- *Rep. Benjamin Gilman (R-NY), Chairman, International Relations Committee*
- *Rep. Elton Gallegly (R-CA), Chairman, Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere*
- *Rep. Dan Burton (R-IN), Chairman, Government Reform and Oversight*
- *Rep. José E. Serrano (D-NY)*
- *Rep. Patrick Kennedy (D-RI)*

Similar legislation was unanimously approved by Resources Committee last year.

Historic Process Begins For Puerto Rico & United States

"Today, we begin the historic process by which the people of Puerto Rico will finally be allowed to decide the political status of their island," Young said. "After 100 years of uncertainty and being treated as second-class people, the Congressional process has begun which will determine the political status of Puerto Rico.

"This legislation will create, for the first time in a century of U.S. administration, a Congressionally recognized framework for the people of Puerto Rico to freely express their wishes regarding the options for full self-government."

Puerto Rico Legislature Requested Congressional Action

Young noted that the Legislature of Puerto Rico has once again asked the Congress to take action to resolve Puerto Rico's political status. Two weeks ago, a bipartisan delegation from Puerto Rico personally delivered copies of the Resolution to Congressional leaders, asking the 105th Congress:

"to respond to the democratic aspirations of the American citizens of Puerto Rico in order to attain a process which will guarantee the prompt decolonization of Puerto Rico, through a plebiscite sponsored by the Federal Government, which shall be held no later than 1998."

Young said the new legislation answers the Legislature's request by providing for a vote on Puerto Rico's political status before December 31, 1998.

"As the only representative from Alaska - a state that made the transition from territorial status to full self-government - I know first hand that the process does work," Young said. "This bill provides the process by which Congress and the residents of Puerto Rico define and approve politically acceptable options through a multi-staged democratic process. This allows for the political will of the United States and Puerto Rico to be determined freely and democratically.

"The United States Congress and the President have a moral obligation to act so the people of Puerto Rico can finally resolve their status. Today marks the beginning of a historic effort by the Congress to actually solve Puerto Rico's political status."

*Quick Action Planned For Legislation . . .**Three Hearings Already Scheduled*

Young said Speaker Gingrich and the Republican House leadership was strongly supportive of the legislation.

"To demonstrate the commitment of this Congress to act quickly on this matter, three hearings have been scheduled on this legislation," Young said. "The first will be held in Washington, D.C., on Wednesday, March 19, 1997 to enable the leaders of the Government of Puerto Rico and the political parties to express their views regarding their preferred status. I will also ask the Clinton Administration to present their formal position regarding the legislation at this hearing.

"In addition, two hearings will be conducted in Puerto Rico, the first in San Juan on April 19th and the second in Mayaguez on April 21st. These hearings will be dedicated to allow Congress to hear directly from the widest possible spectrum of views of the people of Puerto Rico. No proposal or idea

will be excluded from the process, but we intend for Congress to work its will on this question in 1997.

"This is what the people of this nation, including our fellow citizens in Puerto Rico, deserve from the 105th Congress, and in my view that is what the national interest requires us to do."

The Process For Full Self-Government For Puerto Rico

Young said that under the U.S. Constitution and applicable principles of international law, the recognized options for full self-government are:

- 1) Independence;
- 2) Separate sovereignty in free association with the United States; and
- 3) Full integration into the United States leading to statehood.

"After 400 years of colonial rule by Spain, it should not have taken the United States almost 100 years to define the options for full and permanent self-government for Puerto Rico," Young said.

The legislation provides three stages which would lead to full self-government:

- 1) **The Initial Decision Stage** provides for a status referendum to be conducted in Puerto Rico before the end of 1998 in which voters choose:
 - a) Continued Commonwealth status as a U.S. territory or
 - b) Separate Puerto Rican sovereignty leading to independence or free association or, U.S. sovereignty leading to statehood.

If a majority votes to continue the current "Commonwealth" structure for local self-government, there is no further action until another referendum on the same question is held in four years.

- 2) If a majority votes for full self-government, the **Transition Stage** begins within 180 days after the referendum with the President submitting legislation to Congress for a Transition Plan of 10 years toward the option selected by Puerto Rican voters. In the event of a majority vote for separate sovereignty, the Puerto Rico constitutional convention will be held to determine the type of separate sovereignty, independence or free association sought by the Puerto Rican people.

After expedited procedures and enactment of the Transition Plan by Congress, another referendum is conducted in Puerto Rico for approval or disapproval of the Transition Plan. If the plan is defeated, the existing Commonwealth of Puerto Rico government structure will continue. The President is then directed to consult with the leaders of Puerto Rico and submit recommendations to Congress. If the plan is approved, the transition period begins through a Presidential Executive Order.

- 3) **The Implementation Stage** begins at least two years prior to the end of the Transition Plan, with the President submitting to Congress a legislative proposal to implement the full self-government option. After expedited procedures and enactment of the Implementation Plan by Congress, a third referendum is held in Puerto Rico to approve the plan. If the plan is defeated, the then existing Commonwealth of Puerto Rico government structure will continue. The President is then directed to consult with the leaders of Puerto Rico and submit recommendations to Congress. If the plan is approved, the full self-government option would be implemented based on a Presidential proclamation.