

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



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January 19, 2018

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The Honorable Marco Rubio
Senator-Florida
United States Senate
284 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Rubio:

I want to acknowledge your relentless support for our beloved Island in all fronts and at all times. Also, I want to express my appreciation in your effort and commitment in helping the 3.5 millions U.S. citizens that live in Puerto Rico to obtain full equality through statehood.

Today a local newspaper ran an interview you gave related to U.S. Territory of Puerto Rico and the aspiration of the U.S. citizens living here to achieve equality through statehood. In the article titled "Statehood does not have the votes" (1), a copy of which is attached to this letter, you stated that "we do not have the votes in the Senate" for the admission of Puerto Rico into the Union.

We understand the legislative process in Congress and that it's a slow and sometimes cumbersome process. When drafting a bill it is imperative to take into consideration several factors, including what is to be gained from said legislation. The gain from Puerto Rico Statehood greatly outweighs the assumed negatives.

You have been an avid supporter of statehood for the people of Puerto Rico. When you ran for President of the United States, you visited our Island as part of the campaign for the White House. On one occasion, September 4, 2015 while making a stop in a restaurant in San Juan, you said, "the time has come for Puerto Rico to join the United States"(2). We applauded that announcement. The time has come to join forces once again for the betterment of the US citizens of Puerto Rico.

Never in our political history has Washington been so keen on matters related to Puerto Rico. Every time I have visited the Capitol for the past twelve months, the message I received from nearly every congressmen, on both side of the isle, was the same: the matter of Puerto Rico must be resolved soon.

The people of Puerto Rico have requested Congress to admit Puerto Rico as a state in the last two status plebiscites held in the Territory (2012 and 2017). You acknowledged the first result in your trip of 2015 and stated that another vote on the matter would be enough for Congress to act.

Government of Puerto Rico

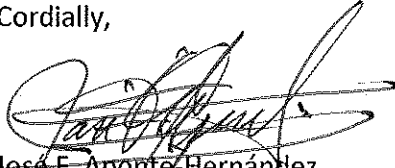
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I urge you to retake the promise made to the people of Puerto Rico and push the issue of statehood in the U.S. Senate. As in the foreword of the book titled "Citizens without a State", Former U.S. Attorney General under President Ronald Reagan, Dick Thornburgh, in regards to Puerto Rico stated and I quote: "If we are not willing to honor the choice of our fellow citizens to seek out Statehood, then we need to face the reality that national citizenship conferred by Congress no longer necessarily carries with it the promise or even the hope of equal rights." We, the U.S. citizens in the Island, deserve admission. We will not settle for anything less.

Cordially,



Handwritten signature of José F. Aponte-Hernández in black ink, featuring a large, stylized initial 'J' and 'A'.

José F. Aponte-Hernández

Enclosure

ENGLISH VERSION

Statehood does not have the votes

Marco Rubio warns that a bill to admit the Island as a the 51st state would not progress

Friday, January 19, 2018 - 9:33 AM

By José A. Delgado



Resident Commissioner in Washington, Jenniffer González and Republican Senator Marco Rubio. (GFR Media)

Washington - There is no atmosphere in the US Senate to move legislation seeking statehood for Puerto Rico, warned Republican Senator Marco Rubio (Florida).

Senator Rubio pointed out that "I have always said that Puerto Rico deserves to have a vote" on statehood, "to be respected and considered," but "right now, to be honest, we do not have the votes in the Senate."

"What I would like is to avoid a defeat. That would be regrettable because then people are going to say, 'that was already voted in the Senate' and unfortunately many of the people who would vote against still do not understand the issue," Rubio said in an interview on Wednesday with *El Nuevo Día*, when asked if he will submit a bill in favor of Puerto Rico becoming state 51.

Resident Commissioner in Washington, Jenniffer González -who participated in the interview focused on announcing the joint agenda to be defended in the face of the next resolution of additional allocations to mitigate disasters-, plans to submit a bill at the end of the month that calls for a referendum to admit Puerto Rico as US state 51

"It's not that I do not want to do it," Rubio added, but he stressed that in the Senate, not only there are not 60 votes out of the 100 required for a final vote, but at times when assistance to address the catastrophe caused by Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico is being requested, it would not be possible to get the attention of his colleagues on statehood.

In order to speak to a senator about Puerto Rico, "I have to choose the subject, and right now I have to tell them about the hurricane. I cannot talk to them about two things at once. I understand what Jenniffer is submitting and I share that idea, what I'm saying is that in the Senate right now we do not have 60 votes," Rubio said.

With an educational campaign, Rubio believes that 12 or 15 Republican senators - out of a total of 51 - "may eventually be convinced" to support the proposal for Puerto Rico to become state 51, but "at the moment they do not understand the issue".

"I do not want people to be forced to make a decision until they know what they are voting for ... Even after the hurricane I have colleagues who do not understand, it is not that they think that Puerto Rico is not part of the US, but in some cases until recently did not understand that the Puerto Ricans are citizens of the United States. That's unbelievable, but it is like that. I would never want an unnecessary defeat," he said.

As a presidential pre-candidate, Rubio - the main ally of the Republican pro statehood in the Senate - favored in 2016 that Puerto Rico held a statehood referendum.

The government of Ricardo Rossello decided to call a "statehood or independence" plebiscite, which then - before the refusal of the US Department of Justice to validate it for excluding the continuation of the (colonial) territorial relationship - it became a consultation between statehood, independence and current status.

Rosselló, however, did not wait for the official endorsement of the federal Justice, as proposed by a federal law of 2014 still in force. Amid the boycott of opposition parties and with only 23 percent participation, statehood got 97 percent of the votes in the plebiscite on June 11.

Rubio said he was against the decision of the US Department of Justice of not validating a plebiscite that excluded the territorial status, commonly called 'Commonwealth'.

Meanwhile, Commissioner González believes that the educational pro-statehood campaign could be carried out by the Equality Commission created by Governor Ricardo Rosselló. "The Equality Commission that was appointed and that technically began activities last week will help in this educational process, precisely here in the Senate, which has always been the great obstacle," Gonzalez said.

In referring to the educational campaign, Rubio gave the example of a recent meeting of the conservative caucus of the Senate to which he invited Republican delegate Zoraida Fonalledas, whom Governor Rossello named as "federal senator in the shadow."

Rubio said that Fonalledas spoke to the senators of status and the contributions that Puerto Rico has made to the United States. "The next time we call (a senator) for a meeting with her, they will know who she is," he said.

The senator pointed out that he has told his colleagues that Puerto Rico is "the ideal place" to verify that the ideas of free enterprise "work, obviously within the traditions and culture and ideas" of the Island. For Rubio, the statehood cause can benefit if Puerto Rico demonstrates "economic growth".