

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

November 26, 2018

The Honorable Ricardo Rosselló
Governor of Puerto Rico

The Honorable Thomas Rivera-Schatz
President of the Puerto Rico Senate

The Honorable Carlos “Johnny” Méndez
Speaker of the Puerto Rico House of Representatives

Dear Governor Rosselló, President Rivera-Schatz, and Speaker Méndez:

After much bipartisan discussion with our colleagues in Congress, we are writing to suggest a next step that can be taken to resolve, once and for all, the century-old issue of Puerto Rico’s political status.

As you know, together with nearly 60 other Members of Congress, we cosponsored the bipartisan bill authored by Resident Commissioner González-Colón to enable the admission of the territory as a State of the Union, H.R. 6246. This bill is the natural progression following the two most recent plebiscites conducted in Puerto Rico in 2012 and 2017, in which the voters overwhelmingly supported statehood. In this regard, the 2017 plebiscite was especially significant since its draft ballot was amended by the Puerto Rico government to faithfully incorporate all the changes suggested by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) pursuant to the *Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014*, Pub. L. 113-76, 128 Stat. 5-6.

Despite both the Obama and Trump Administrations and many in Congress having recognized the validity and decisions of the 2012 and 2017 votes, the inability of the DOJ to provide a timely blessing of the 2017 vote has allowed opponents to contest its results.

Given the overwhelming, pro-statehood results of the past two votes, we propose the following solution: legislate a new plebiscite that simply asks: “Statehood: Yes or No?” This would allow for all opponents of statehood – whether they support independence, continued Commonwealth status, Free Association, or even “none of the above” – to vote “No,” thus defeating the exclusion argument that some have advanced in the past. Furthermore, the results of such a plebiscite would constitute an indisputable expression of the will of the people of Puerto Rico, with their decision being made by those who vote. Lastly, this approach would be

consistent with the process that allowed for Alaska and Hawaii, and other states, to transition from territory status to statehood and would fully comply with the Congressional intent in enacting Pub. L. 113-76, as it would finally resolve Puerto Rico's future political status in a manner that is consistent with the Constitution, laws and policies of the United States.

We hope that you will seriously consider this recommendation. As you well know, Puerto Rico's territorial and unequal status has been a substantial factor in many of the island's economic and budgetary challenges, and as such we should do everything needed to prevent its continuation and to enable the territory – and our fellow 3.25 million American citizens there -- to finally be put on the path to equality and a fully democratic status.

Sincerely,



Rob Bishop
Chairman



Don Young
Chairman Emeritus



Doug LaMalfa
Chairman
Subcommittee on Indian,
Insular and Alaska Native
Affairs



Jenniffer González-Colón
Vice-Chair
Subcommittee on Indian,
Insular and Alaska Native
Affairs