

Democratic Presidents Support Puerto Rican Self-Determination

- “I am firmly committed to the principle that the question of political status is a matter of self-determination for the people of Puerto Rico. I am pleased that the Task Force has outlined recommendations to enable the people of Puerto Rico to determine their political future. Both the President and Congress have roles to play to help Puerto Rico settle on its future status; I am committed to working with Congress to ensure that a fair, clearly defined, and transparent process is available for the people of Puerto Rico to decide on their future for themselves”. ***Report by the President’s Task Force on Puerto Rico’s Status, March 2011 (President Barack Obama)***
- “We also pledged during my campaign to work with Congress and all groups in Puerto Rico to enable the question of Puerto Rico’s status to be resolved during the next four years. I am fully aware of the difficulties that Puerto Rico has faced in the past when dealing with this issue, but self-determination is a basic right to be addressed no matter how difficult. Your right to self-determination is deepened even further by the brave service that Puerto Ricans have provided to the nation’s armed forces, protecting all our people from foreign dangers throughout the past century. We will work to give a voice to the people of Puerto Rico to enable them to determine their political future.” ***President Barack Obama, Letter to Governor-elect Luis Fortuño, January 2, 2009***
- “I think the root of the problem [includes] the unwillingness of the Congress to give a legislatively sanctioned vote to the people to let them determine the status of Puerto Rico....I want the people of Puerto Rico to decide this....I wish they could decide their status. If it were just up to me, if I could sign an Executive order and let them have a sanctioned election, I would do it today”. ***President Bill Clinton, News Conference on Vieques Island, Puerto Rico, February 16, 2000***
- “It is the policy of the executive branch of the Government of the United States of America to help answer the questions that the people of Puerto Rico have asked for years regarding the options for the islands’ future status and the process for realizing an option. Further, it is our policy to consider and develop positions on proposals, without preference among the options, for the Commonwealth’s future status; to discuss such proposals with representatives of the people of Puerto Rico and the Congress; to work with leaders of the Commonwealth and the Congress to clarify the options to enable Puerto Ricans to determine their preference among options for the islands’ future status that are not incompatible with the Constitution and basic laws and policies of the United States; and to implement such an option if chosen by a majority, including helping Puerto Ricans obtain a governing arrangement under which they would vote for national government officials, if they choose such a status”. ***President Bill Clinton, Executive Order 13183, Establishment of the President’s Task Force on Puerto Rico’s Status, December 23, 2000***
- “This is the centennial year of Puerto Rico’s affiliation with the United States. And I think that it is time that we responded to the aspirations of the 4 million U.S. citizens who live there and allow them to determine their ultimate political status. There is now a bipartisan bill making its way through the Congress to establish a process for resolving this issue that gives Puerto Ricans the powers to vote on the long-discussed options of statehood, commonwealth or national sovereignty, independent or linked with the United States. Some people question the option of statehood because of the Hispanic culture of Puerto Rico. And with all respect, I disagree with them. After all, this is an issue for the 21st century for America. Consider the history: We have made Puerto Rico citizens. We have drafted them into the Armed Forces. We extend most laws to them, especially those that are convenient to us—the rest of us. To use their culture, to bar them from voting rights or responsibilities in our country if they so choose to seek them majority vote is wrong. And this is not primarily about Puerto Rico, but about the rest of us. What are our values? What is our culture? How can we make one America in a world and a nation ever more diverse? We have to begin by saying, ‘It doesn’t matter what your

ethnic or racial or religious heritage is; it matters only if you embrace the ideas of the Founders as embodied in the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and the Bill of Rights””. ***President Bill Clinton’s Remarks on H.R. 856 United States-Puerto Rico Political Status Act, at the Democratic Governors’ Association Dinner, February 23, 1998***

- “I have been firmly committed to self-determination for Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa and the Northern Mariana Islands, and have vigorously supported the realization of whatever political status aspirations are democratically chosen by their peoples. This principle was the keystone of the comprehensive territorial policy I sent the Congress last year. I am pleased that most of the legislative elements of that policy were endorsed by the 96th Congress”. ***President Jimmy Carter, State of the Union Address, 1981***
- “I am especially pleased that the initial meeting of the United States-Puerto Rico Commission on the Status of Puerto Rico is being held in the White House. I welcome this opportunity to express my own deep personal interest in the work you are undertaking. Warmth and mutual understanding have characterized the relationship between the people of Puerto Rico and the people of the United States. I am confident this will continue. We on the Mainland have watched with admiration and pride the remarkable economic growth that has taken place in Puerto Rico in recent years. That growth will undoubtedly continue and we hope it may accelerate in the years ahead. The United States has a traditional and deep-seated national commitment to the principle of self-determination. That is why the administration and the Congress responded promptly and affirmatively to the resolution of the Puerto Rican Legislature requesting a review of the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico”. ***President Lyndon B. Johnson’s Remarks at the First Meeting of the United States-Puerto Rico Commission on the Status of Puerto Rico, June 9, 1964***
- “Questions have been raised in the Puerto Rican press about the administration's position on the legislation proposed to establish a procedure for dealing with the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico. The administration strongly supports such a procedure and reiterates its commitment to the concept of self-determination as expressed in the exchange of correspondence between the President and Governor Munoz of last July. With regard to the question of the permanence of the proposed perfected Commonwealth, should it be enacted by the Congress and approved by the people of Puerto Rico, the administration's view, also expressed by Governor Munoz in his testimony, is that any such arrangement would continue in effect unless and until it were amended by mutual consent”. ***President John F. Kennedy, White House Statement on Proposed Legislation on the Relationship Between the United States and Puerto Rico, May 20, 1963***