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• **Gerald R. Ford**

Letter to the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate Submitting Proposed Puerto Rico Statehood Legislation.

January 14th, 1977

I SUBMIT herewith to the Congress the Puerto Rico Statehood Act of 1977.

The purpose of the Act is to extend to the people of Puerto Rico the opportunity to achieve the status of statehood if they should so desire.

Since 1900, Presidents and Congresses have debated the question of statehood for Puerto Rico.

Some progress has been made in providing the people of Puerto Rico with greater autonomy and a greater measure of self-government. But these great people are still not represented with a vote in either the House or Senate. They are still not represented in the election of a President.

Full equality for the people of Puerto Rico cannot come without full representation.

The social and economic progress to which they aspire cannot come without the political equality of statehood.

Any change in the status of the Commonwealth must be accomplished by the mutual consent of the people of Puerto Rico and the United States.

As Congress considers the appropriate course of action relating to the permanent status of Puerto Rico, it is essential that the dignity and self-respect of the great people of Puerto Rico be a matter of the highest consideration.

Accordingly, the legislation I propose would establish, within the framework of the United States Constitution and the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, a sequence of steps reflecting the historic procedures by which present states entered the Union, while recognizing the special circumstances of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the aspirations of the citizens of the Commonwealth.

First, in recognition of the fact that statehood for Puerto Rico would require the resolution of many complex issues, Congress would establish a joint U.S.-Puerto Rico Commission to enable the people of Puerto Rico to participate effectively in determining the terms and conditions for Puerto Rico's proposed admission to statehood. By providing a forum for the reaching of a broad understanding of the issues and implications involved in admission to the Union, this Act would ensure that the advantages and disadvantages and the rights and responsibilities of statehood are fully presented to the people of Puerto Rico-before deciding whether their Commonwealth should become a state.

Second, Congress, after receiving the Commission Report, would set the terms and conditions of statehood.

Third, the Act provides for an island-wide referendum among the people of Puerto Rico on whether the Commonwealth should become a state.

Fourth, the Act proposes that if the referendum passes, delegates to a Constitutional Convention will meet to frame a Constitution for the proposed state.

Fifth, the new constitution would be presented to the people of Puerto Rico for ratification.

Sixth, the proposed State constitution, if ratified, would be submitted to the President of the United States and to Congress for approval.

Seventh, upon approval of the proposed Constitution, the voters of Puerto Rico would elect two Senators and five Members of the House of Representatives.

Eighth, the Governor of Puerto Rico would certify the results of the election to the President, and the President would

proclaim Puerto Rico a state.

After more than three-quarters of a Century of discussion about Puerto Rico, it is time to act and act positively. By passage of this Act the representatives of the people of the 50 States will say to the people of Puerto Rico: Join us as equals.

I urge the Congress to act.

Sincerely,

GERALD R. FORD

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