



June 10, 2021

The Honorable Raúl Grijalva
Chairman
Natural Resources Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Bruce Westerman
Ranking Member
Natural Resources Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman and Ranking Member,

We hereby list, and later debunk, all the arguments put forth on the letter dated June 10, 2021 from the “Frente Puertorriqueñista” (FP) with the intention to discredit and disavow Puerto Rico’s mandate for statehood and to promote the bill introduced by Representative Nydia Velázquez and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, HR 2070, under consideration by the Committee of Natural Resources:

1. FP’s members claim that Puerto Rico’s Congressional Delegation Special Election deriving from the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico’s Law 167 of 2020, calling for the election of two (2) delegates to the United States Senate and four (4) delegates to the United States House of Representatives, had low voter turnout with only 3.9% of registered voters.
2. FP’s members claim that former Governor Ricardo Rosselló, of the New Progressive Party (NPP), the only pro-statehood party in the island, was rejected by the majority of the population during the Summer 2019 manifestations in which protesters stationed themselves in front of La Fortaleza asking for his resignation due to the fact that details of a chain of private text messages were revealed to the public.
3. Finally, FP’s members also claim that former Governor Ricardo Rosselló is under investigation by Puerto Rico’s Department of Justice regarding a statement submitted to the State Elections Commission about his domicile. Their claim is that the pending case against the former governor should immediately and permanently disqualify him from becoming a delegate in the Special Delegation under the terms of Law 167 of 2020.

Here, we present our counterarguments in response to the claims in the letter submitted by the FP:

- 1) Law 167 of 2020 was rejected right from the onset by the parties opposing statehood for Puerto Rico. Furthermore, the anti-statehood parties hindered the ability of the State Elections Commission at every step, most importantly, rejecting agreements for an educational campaign



as demonstrated by Certification CEE-AC-21-066¹. This, along with many other actions reflected in the State Elections Commissions' records, demonstrate the partisan approach to the enacting of Law 167 seeking to undermine the special election at every step. Invariably, the only party left to make Puerto Rico's mandate for statehood effective through this election was the NPP.

It is important to note that anti-statehood parties, namely the Popular Democratic Party (PDP), the Citizen's Victory Movement (CVM), and the Puertorrican Independentist Party (PIP), all actively promoted a No vote in the plebiscite resulting in their defeat and, therefore, do not in any way represent the Will of the People as expressed in the November 3, 2020 vote for statehood.

Despite opposition from these minority political factions, Law 167 of 2020 was enacted, by the will of the people, and by the will of democracy evidenced through our voting power.

While the anti-statehood parties attempted to make a media farce of Law 167 of 2020, their attempted media hijacking and repeated attempts at blocking its implementation, proved unsuccessful. Voters, once again, honored our democracy and elected our delegates.

Five of the six elected delegates: Elizabeth Torres, María (Mayita) Meléndez, Roberto Lefranc, Zoraida Buxó, and Melinda Romero, completed a lengthy and rigorous process to achieve certification for their candidacy to be able to appear in the ballot. The requirements included: submitting endorsements signed by 3,000 citizens, providing tax records for the last ten (10) years, submit a sworn and notarized statement about their interest in the position, a negative drug test, a certification to attest absence of criminal records, certifications various about absence of debts in various governmental agencies, and certifications to attest completing trainings on ethics and government budget management. Candidates in this election completed all these requirements, which go way beyond the requirements the House or Senate have, in a matter of six (6) weeks. Dr. Rosselló's path to candidacy followed a different path because his nomination came up as a matter of popular acclaim. He accepted the offer to be part of the delegation three days before the electoral event and agreed that if elected via "direct nomination" he would comply with requirements to that effect.

Claiming a low voter turnout in the Congressional Delegation's Special Election is a weak, if not altogether invalid, argument since already, and even with the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, the majority of our people voted, unequivocally, not only for two representatives of the NPP, the only party seeking our admission into the Union, but voted in even higher numbers in the plebiscite to express their approval for an immediate admission of Puerto Rico as a state of the Union.

1,289,135 American Citizens in Puerto Rico voted yes or no to statehood in the 2020 Plebiscite. 52.52% unequivocally said yes to the question about the immediate admission of Puerto Rico into the Union as the 51st state of the United States.

If we were to address the inadmissible claim that low voter turnout constitutes in any way an argument for questioning election results, we must put this into fair perspective. The Center

¹ <https://ww2.ceepur.org/sites/ComisionEE/es-pr/Secretaria/Acuerdos/Campa%C3%B1a%20educativa%20elecci%C3%B3n%20especial%20Ley%20para%20crear%20la%20Delegaci%C3%B3n%20Congresional%20de%20Puerto%20Rico.pdf>



for American Progress states, in an article calling on ways to increase voter participation in the United States, that “[a]lmost 92 million eligible Americans did not vote in the 2016 presidential elections. In the 2014 midterm elections, an estimated 143 million eligible Americans failed to vote, marking the lowest voter participation in 72 years.²”

Furthermore, despite the low voter turnouts in previous elections within the United States, the same democratic institutions which we resemble in our own model of democracy, the will of the majority of those who exercise their right to vote is not disregarded, or their votes made void. Democracy owes its stability to the continuation of government based on the votes that are cast, not those that are not.

- 2) As to the argument that former Governor Ricardo Rosselló should be placed in controversy sequestering the Will of the People, we only wish to present the facts. Roughly 70,000 Puerto Rican voters wrote-in Dr. Ricardo Rosselló’s name on the ballot to elect him as a delegate to the House, so that he, along with the other delegates, lobbies in Congress for our status to change from that of a territory to that of a State. Must those, or any of the votes for the delegates or any other elected official, be rendered void and null using any sort of questionable reasoning. But, what type of government shall we become if we were to ignore and deny the expressed Will of the People?

As to the events that transpired in the summer of 2019, these are easy to misjudge. A supposed “*majority of people*” in our Island rose to take down what they deemed untenable leadership. We must then bring to bear as evidence the necessary parallels between these and the events occurred in Capitol Hill on January 6, 2021. The entire world watched on their screens the scenes in which a group of American Citizens protested violently to undermine the nature of elections and, with it, the nature of democracy. Protesters revolted in loud proclamations and violent acts against the decision of the majority of American Citizens who voted to, as statutorily set forth by the Federal Government, complete the mandate by *which the very foundation of the United States of America is sustained*.

The majority of American Voters were nowhere near a representation of the insurrectionists who attempted to manifest through sheer brute force their claims over justice and democracy at the doorsteps of Capitol Hill. No matter how loud they screamed, no matter what force of violence they utilized, those American Citizens who participated in the January 6th insurrection, disregarding the democratic voices of the rest of the American people, stand as a seditious mob akin to that on Calle Fortaleza in the Summer of 2019. A loud minority of individuals, incited by seditious groups benefitting from the unrest, used the discontent ripped from many struggles at once to not only protest, but to vandalize businesses, homes, and churches, and instigate and commit acts of violence against the police. Former Governor Ricardo Rossello resigned in good part due to the amount of violence these minorities used. He decided to step aside to avoid a tumultuous and violent rising of these groups who were keen to overtake La Fortaleza, the Governor’s residence, which stands as an emblem of our Constitution, and Democracy, and Freedom.

² <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/democracy/reports/2018/07/11/453319/increasing-voter-participation-america/>



The questionable origins of the events immediately preceding Dr. Rosselló's resignation seem to have been forgotten by voters who have actively sought out his return to office as one of the delegates who are to further statehood in the House of the United States Congress.

- 3) The investigation of the claims against Dr. Ricardo Rossello is currently underway at the Department of Justice headed by General Attorney Domingo Emmanuelli. Should the investigation find that Dr. Rosselló committed a negligible act or acts in pursuit of a position in the Delegation under the terms of Law 167 of 2020 or any other law, the appropriate authority will advise and enact the due course of action. Only fate will decide. As we stand, the matter is in the hands of the Puerto Rico Department of Justice and the two attorneys spearheading the case. In any case, there are five (5) more delegates that will ensure the continuation of efforts to bring about statehood for Puerto Rico. They were all elected. They will go on to do their job. Their jobs and their role, our mandate and our future, must not be hijacked by unsubstantiated accusations nor will it be.

In conclusion, while the written statements submitted to Congress by the FP and co-signed by Carmen Yulín Cruz, Aníbal Acevedo Vilá and Luis Gutiérrez among others, seem reasonable, not everything is as it appears. At least two of the proponents of FP's arguments, Cruz and Acevedo-Vilá, belong to the PDP party. The PDP seeks to maintain our territorial status adding more benefits brought about by the United States. A fallacy. Furthermore, both ran for office in the 2020 elections and both lost. As you may gather, Cruz and Acevedo-Vilá in no way represent the will of the majority that rules democracy. Cruz ran for Mayor of our Capital city of San Juan, only to lose to Miguel Romero from the NPP, again, the candidate from the only pro-statehood party. We must further bring forth the evidence that points to Cruz's mismanagements during her eight years as Mayor of San Juan which is starting to come out as Romero audits the city's vaults. Acevedo-Vilá, on the other hand, a former governor from the PDP from 2005-2009 who also held the office of Resident Commissioner from 2001-2005 had to deal with 13 corruption charges brought against him by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The charges were cleared through scapegoating as many under his purview took the fall. All accused but Acevedo were found guilty. Additionally, the People of Puerto Rico have not forgotten the impeding weight of the taxation he imposed upon us, in the form of "el IVU," otherwise referred as to the Sales and Use Tax, the amount of 11% of any purchase that a person in Puerto Rico must pay when buying an item as well as the irresponsible and outrageous debt issued during his incumbency, amongst many other failures. Acevedo carries the stigma of being the ultimate statehood blocker. In 1998, Acevedo sabotaged a plebiscite to solve the status question by promoting a vote for "None of the above." In 2016, he called a boycott of another plebiscite to decide on the status question. In 2020, he asked to burn the statehood yes/no plebiscite ballots. Acevedo has wreaked havoc to effectively sabotage efforts that would forever do away with his own political agenda and stance for Puerto Rico, independence. Knowing well that support for statehood has grown with the passage of time and will continue to grow, Acevedo insists on turning a blind eye to the People's mandate.

Both, Cruz and Acevedo, oppose statehood and have sought to overturn their own political party's historical stance on status to have it embrace the ideology of independence. Both lack



objectivity in their claims and have claimed in FP's own mission statement that they are against Statehood and they will fight to deter it.

As to former U.S. Representative of Illinois' 4th District Luis Gutiérrez, in an article written in the Chicago Sun on April 7th of this year by columnist Mark Brown, Gutiérrez openly stated, "*What got me into politics was the fight for the independence of Puerto Rico.*" Further, the Committee should also be reminded that, during his time in the House, Gutiérrez was investigated in 2017 after having been arrested during a protest outside of the White House. After paying a fine for his misconduct, the House Committee on Ethics recommended no further action. In 2013, Gutiérrez was investigated for using funds from his Member's Representational Allowance from 2003-2013 for an unauthorized purpose - to retain an individual to provide services to his congressional office that more closely resembled those provided by an employee or consultant, rather than a contractor. In March 2018, the House Committee on Ethics reprimanded Gutiérrez for using his Member Representational Allowance inappropriately, albeit possibly unwittingly, and ordered him to reimburse the US Treasury for that use. On November 28, 2017, Representative Gutiérrez announced he would not seek reelection. He moved to Puerto Rico to campaign for the No in the plebiscite and push to pro-independence propaganda for a year. This year he moved back to Chicago.

"Do not cast a stone if you yourself are not free of sin," warned Jesus to the mob. These FP members have casted big stones they themselves should not, in good faith, even hold in their hands.

We must finalize by addressing the matter of HR2070's alleged benevolence in seeking Puerto Rico's self-determination while, in fact, doing the complete opposite: standing as pure election denialism. The arguments in defense of HR2070, the legislation introduced by Representatives Velázquez and Ocasio-Cortez, are corrupted in their efforts to sound democratic. While the arguments claim to pursue inclusion of all the political factions now represented throughout our Island, it denies the fact that all political factions participated and even campaigned during the time prior to the statehood plebiscite. The result is clear. The No was defeated. And HR2070 is none other than an attempt at ignoring the People's Will and blocking the passage of HR1522 and the process of democracy. No doubt, HR2070's authors have devised a form of procedural filibuster, in the sense that they seek to prolong a never-ending rhetoric of manipulative political inclusion in order to obstruct progress and justice for the People of Puerto Rico.

Democracy is clear, when the majority votes, such is the rule of law that it requires that the minority of any political faction or any minority political opinions, no matter how desirous they are for power, should concede and abide by the Will of the People, and even assist that majority in drawing the plans for a shared future. All, in good faith, for the well-being, freedom, safety, and security of the People.



We voted. We decided. More than 600,000 US citizens in Puerto Rico expressed their unequivocal will by answering Yes to the question of statehood. Our mandate must not only be heard, it must be respected and it must be swiftly acted on. Such is the rule of the law. Such is the basis of our democracy. Where the majority elects and sits leaders and determines the direction of our future. Our democracy protects our votes. Our votes protect our democracy. We rest our case.

Respectfully,

Zayira Jordán-Conde
Founder