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Puerto Rico

File:
Puerto
Rico

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

February 28, 1997

Memorandum To: Elena Kagan

From: Jeffrey Farrow, Co-Chair
Interagency Working Group on Puerto Rico

Subject: House Puerto Rico Self-Government Bill and Hearing

Resources Committee Chairman Don Young has reintroduced the bill to develop Puerto Rico into a fully self-governing status that almost passed the House last year and has scheduled a hearing in which the Administration is to be asked to testify for March 19th. He is now joined in sponsoring the bill by 70 other Members, including Puerto Rico Resident Commissioner Romero-Barcelo, Committee Senior Democrat George Miller, Speaker Gingrich, and Representative Serrano.

Miller, a strong critic of the bill last year, agreed to co-sponsor after Young agreed to give Puerto Rico's status-based political parties 30 days to propose alternatives to the bill's status options.

Senator Craig may reintroduce a somewhat similar bill next week. It was not considered in the Senate last year but Energy and Natural Resources Chairman Murkowski has scheduled a Committee trip to Puerto Rico in preparation for consideration of the issue for March 13th-16th.

H.R. 856 would call for:

- Puerto Ricans to choose among options of the current 'Commonwealth' arrangement, nationhood, and statehood prior to 1999 and every four years thereafter until a majority choose nationhood or statehood;
- if a status change is chosen, the President to submit legislation for a transition of at least 10 years to be effective if also approved by Puerto Ricans; and,
- at the end of the transition, implementation legislation also to be effective if approved by Puerto Ricans.

The bill would also provide for expeditious votes in each house of Congress on the transition plan and implementation bill and funding for the Puerto Rico referenda, including voter education, from now unrestricted grants to the islands. It, further, proposes statements and policies regarding Puerto Rico's status and the use of the English language that have been or may be factious.

I will be scheduling an interagency meeting on this matter soon. A copy of the bill and the President's message to Governor Rossello's Inauguration, which addressed the issue, follow for your ready reference.