

Sally Devin

To the Honorable Congressional P.R. Task Force:

I am a retired Department of the Army civilian from Fort Buchanan, Puerto Rico. I took a lateral transfer from the N.Y.C. Recruiting Battalion, Fort Hamilton, N.Y. in Oct 2002 and bought my home in Bayamon, P.R. in May 2003, which I still own. I am writing from a Seattle IP address, because I am here for a few weeks before I return to Bayamon.

My input to your Task Force from my initial impression in Oct 2002 through my growing observations, experiences and awareness to the present is as follows:

- 1) While I knew many Puerto Ricans in the military while assigned to various locations in Germany for many years, the Puerto Ricans on the island were different due to language differences. While I read Spanish, I have never been able to understand them, because they speak their own dialect to me. Even the *bi-lingual* Puerto Ricans *outside* of the military installation insist on speaking Spanish to me until I reply in German which causes them to switch to English. This is a matter of attitude, as they are fiercely loyal to Spanish. When I first arrived in 2002, everyone over the age of 50 spoke perfect English, because their school instruction was taught in English. Many of the younger children do not know any English, because they are not taught the language in school. I discovered this in 2003 on a trip to Camp Ramey, stopping in Arecibo on a trip. The children we met did not know a word of English. So the first problem which is a barrier to economic growth is a language barrier. Interestingly, many of the English teachers have left the island to teach English elsewhere. So the Task Force should consider providing incentives to non-Puerto Ricans to come to Puerto Rico to teach English, such as Peace Corps assignments, or Americorps.
- 2) The Puerto Ricans have voted against Statehood many times, so that is not a solution. They would prefer to be an *independent* Commonwealth with a special relationship including U.S. Citizenship and financial aid. During the last plebiscite, the reason they voted for #1, a changed relationship, is because they wanted an independent Commonwealth as described above. Therefore, those who wanted a "changed Commonwealth" did not vote for either Statehood or independence. Rather they left the second question blank.

The lack of public transportation is the most significant problem I have personally experienced in Puerto Rico. I have stood at bus stops for more than two hours while the sign states "every 20 minutes." I am certain that no politician has ever experienced standing at a bus stop for even one and a half hours, which is more common. While I had a car while employed at Fort Buchanan, I have lived without a car during my

retirement. I would have found it to be impossible to live here without the train system, which was funded by the federal government. It is time to extend the train system from Rio Piedras to the San Juan airport as a minimum in order to attract investors who are arriving at the airport.

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5) It was my understanding that the Commonwealth bond debt load was started with

6) a \$20 B bond issued in 1994 to upgrade the electrical power source from *oil* to

7) to natural gas. When they received the bond funds, however, the Commonwealth government used the \$20 B to buy *more oil* for the electrical company, because gas prices were higher. Ever since 2003 I have looked up at the sun above and realized that the Commonwealth politicians simply did not realize that the sun produces solar energy. Even recently, shortly before the bankruptcy, the Commonwealth politicians talked about converting the electrical power source to natural gas by building pipelines under the ocean. Such an expansive project when solar power is readily available when financing becomes available!

5) Lastly, the Commonwealth has not had the governmental administrative capability to collect the sales taxes we have paid for the last several years. Apparently, the government has a Treasury Department but not a Department of Revenue (like the I.R.S.) to collect the sales taxes from the businesses. It was estimated at one point a couple of years ago that only about 40% of businesses were turning in the sales taxes they were collecting. The Commonwealth tried to use two brothers who had scuba diving classes in San Juan as an example by arresting them and trying to send them to jail as a warning to other businesses. This did not happen when they realized that 60% of the businessmen might have to go to jail *and* the businessmen were then afraid to turn in their taxes late for fear of calling attention to themselves and be the next to be named in the

media.

Voluntary compliance in sales tax submissions has not been a viable option.

These are my five main points in providing input to the Task Force., although many of my friends have focused on the widespread corruption instead.

Thank you very much for this opportunity! I had thought often about writing to Congress, but I had always procrastinated in sitting down alone to write.

Sincerely,

Sally Devin