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Honorable Barack H. Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

I commend you for the leadership and progressive agenda you have brought to America and the world. Your message of hope convinced me to become the first Puerto Rican political leader to endorse you back in February of 2008. Your actions in the initial months of your Administration move me to address you today, because in Puerto Rico we must follow your lead and establish an agenda of real change. Your leadership is essential in promoting economic development and creating a genuine and transparent process of self-determination for the Island.

Even though Puerto Rico was fairly treated in your economic stimulus package, the current economic conditions in the Island and the difficult times Puerto Ricans are facing require specific attention from your Administration. Our unemployment rate went from 9.7% in April of 2008 to 14.7% last April. Governor Luis Fortuño has announced the layoff of more than thirty-thousand public employees in the immediate future, an action that would raise our already high level of unemployment and exacerbate the current economic conditions.

In your letter to me on February 12, 2008 you made the following commitment:

*I will also work closely with the government of Puerto Rico, its private sector and labor leaders to advance an aggressive agenda of job creation, economic development and new prosperity. The levels of unemployment on the Island over the last three decades are unacceptable, which is why I will propose the creation a federal-Puerto Rico joint task force to study and report not later than August 31, 2009 on specific ways to maximize the use of existing federal initiatives to generate jobs in Puerto Rico or on new federal initiatives to achieve that goal.*

Since there is already a Presidential Task Force on Puerto Rico, created by Executive Order 13183, I would suggest using that order to create a mechanism to fulfill your promise to the people of Puerto Rico. I would also propose some specific actions to make valid your pledge, also contained in that letter, regarding the status of Puerto Rico, when you said:

*As President, I will work closely with the Puerto Rican government, its civil society, and with Congress to create a genuine and transparent process of self-determination that will be true to the best traditions of*

*democracy. As President, I will actively engage Congress and the Puerto Rican people in promoting this deliberative, open and unbiased process, that may include a constitutional convention or a plebiscite, and my administration will adhere to a policy of strict neutrality on Puerto Rico status matters. My Administration will recognize all valid options to resolve the question of Puerto Rico's status, including commonwealth, statehood, and independence.*

As you know, the Presidential Task Force issued two reports on December 22, 2005 and December 21, 2007, which were lately adopted as the official position of the Bush Administration. Executive Order 13183 requires that a new Presidential Task Force file a follow up report by the end of this year. You have in your hands a unique opportunity to sponsor and support a “genuine and transparent process of self-determination”, and to make specific recommendations to “advance an aggressive agenda of job creation, economic development and new prosperity” for Puerto Rico.

In order to accomplish this, a first step must be taken: the rejection and revision of the conclusions in the Bush Reports. In your February 12, 2008 letter, in fact, you reject some of the assertions in those reports. I would like to bring to your attention some of the most fundamental flaws in those reports.

These reports not only rescind the past commitments of the United States with the international community and Puerto Rico regarding the creation of Commonwealth, but also, and more importantly, they are designed to deny any future development of the Commonwealth. The Bush Reports adopt the legal conclusion that the U.S. Constitution somehow prohibits a relationship with Puerto Rico based on mutual consent, which is anchored in the sovereignty of the people of Puerto Rico, along with U.S. citizenship. The real effect of the reports is to eliminate the development of the Commonwealth as an option in any future self-determination process.

In recent years there have been new and impressive work of legal and political science scholars rejecting the conclusions of the Bush Reports and concluding that the legal underpinnings of these reports are clearly flawed. I am including as an attachment some quotes and references from the work of these scholars, among them, Dean Alexander Aleinikoff, from Georgetown Law School, Professor Richard Pildes from New York University School of Law, Professor Professors W. Michael Reisman, from Yale University, and Robert Sloan, from the Boston University School of Law, among others. They all have one element in common: there is nothing illegal or unconstitutional in our aspiration to enhance the current status of Commonwealth to achieve more autonomy under a relationship with the U.S, based on mutual consent, anchored in the sovereignty of the people of Puerto Rico, with U. S. citizenship.

Mr. President, whenever the people of Puerto Rico have been consulted about their political status, the majority has expressed a willingness to improve, not destroy the Commonwealth. The Bush Reports, and any proposed legislation based on them, are not a “genuine and transparent process of self-determination.” In effect, they disfranchise the majority of Puerto Ricans who believe in our Commonwealth.

As with many people around the world, I believe that you represent a beacon of hope and real change. Not only with regard to the status issue, but also to the rapidly deteriorating economic situation of the Island and its pervasive effect to our people, you may be able to help us. I invite you to use your leadership on behalf of my people.

As I expressed to you at the beginning of this letter, there is in existence a Presidential Task Force that has yet to be re-appointed by you. Regardless of the conclusions reached by the prior Task Force, one of the limitations of that group is that it includes no representation whatsoever from the people of Puerto Rico. The other is that it is only focused on the status issue, ignoring the pressing issue of economic development.

In order to move forward, fulfill your commitments and bring back hope to the people of Puerto Rico I respectfully recommend to you the following:

1. That the composition of the Puerto Rico Presidential Task Force be revised to include Puerto Rican representation of the three traditional status options, as well as the labor and private sectors. It should also include some American and Puerto Rican legal scholars that have studied the issue of the status relationship between Puerto Rico and the U. S.
2. That the agenda of the Task Force be amended to include ways to maximize the use of existing federal incentives or new incentives to generate jobs and improve the economic conditions of the Island.
3. That a statement be made that the Task Force Reports issued in 2005 and 2007 do not represent the status position of your Administration. That will be part of the agenda of the new Task Force.
4. Specifically, that the new Task Force will consider the work of the different scholars that recognize the viability of an enhanced Commonwealth based on mutual consent and anchored in the sovereignty of the people of Puerto Rico, with U.S. citizenship.
5. That the new Task Force will consider the mechanism of a Constitutional Convention or a plebiscite as alternatives for a valid self-determination process.
6. That Puerto Rico is considered and promoted as a bridge to Latin America in trade negotiations to help foster regional economic growth.

Mr. President, the people of Puerto Rico need your leadership in order to accomplish real and positive change in our current economic, social and political situation. We trust you.

Sincerely,

Aníbal Acevedo Vilá  
Governor 2001-2005

Attachment