

Sen. Lisa Murkowski
Opening Statement
Puerto Rico Political Status
August 1, 2013

Mr. Chairman, as you noted this hearing is a direct result of the November 2012 plebiscite held in Puerto Rico on their political status. It is an issue that I feel a particular kinship to as I am the only sitting United States Senator who was born in a territory.

It has long been my position that the process for determining Puerto Rico's preferred political status should come from Puerto Rico – not Washington, D.C. – just as the residents of Alaska and Hawaii did as the last two states admitted to the Union.

Now that the plebiscite has been held, it is clear to me that the majority of Puerto Ricans do not favor the current territorial status as evidenced by the first question on the ballot. The result of the second question, however, is not as clear to me, nor is it certain that any of the valid status options would receive a majority vote.

And when I say “valid status options” I am referring to:

- The continuation of the current Commonwealth status;
- Statehood;
- Independence; and
- Free Association, similar to what the United States has with the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, and Palau.

In 2010, I joined with the former Chairman, Senator Bingaman, in outlining these options to the President as the only four status options available for Puerto Rico's future relations with the United States.

It was my preference leading up to the November 2012 plebiscite that the ballot have one question with each of the four options listed. Puerto Rico's Government, however, chose to go with the two-question ballot and as a supporter of the process being driven by Puerto Rico, I respect that decision. What we learned is that current status does not have majority support. Beyond that, however, I do not believe we can draw any definitive conclusions about the plebiscite results.

The President's FY14 budget request included \$2.5 million for another plebiscite in Puerto Rico. Even if a new plebiscite is held, it is the Puerto Rican legislature that will determine how that ballot will appear. If that is the path chosen, I encourage a format that is fair to all valid options.

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