

Puerto Rico Not Suited For Statehood

by Don Feder

[Editor's note: We reprint Don Feder's column dated November 30, 1998 which relates to a referendum that has already taken place, however the issues remain.. Likewise, Rep. Livingston has since declined to be Speaker of the House.]

On December 13 Puerto Ricans will cast their ballots for statehood, independence, or commonwealth status. The referendum implicitly acknowledges their right to self-determination.

But don't Americans have the same right — the right not to be saddled with an impoverished, crime-ridden island of non-English speakers as our 51st state?

An ad statehood proponents are running on television in San Juan assures voters that, with admission to the Union, "we will not become blue-eyed blondes. ...Nor will we change our language and culture. With statehood we will remain as we are."

True enough. With statehood, Puerto Rico will still have an annual per capita income of \$8,509 — one-third the U.S. average and less than

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half that of Mississippi, our poorest state. The murder rate will remain at 25 per 100,000, more than twice that of New York City.

However, there will be some changes. Puerto Rico will send two senators and five or six representatives to Congress, to vote in lockstep with Ted Kennedy and Richard Gephardt on everything from affirmative action to taxes.

Current caps will come off federal welfare spending for the island. The average Puerto Rican family won't pay a penny in federal income taxes but could receive and Earned Income Tax Credit of \$2,713 annually. Statehood will cost us an additional \$3 billion a year in welfare payments alone.

Carlos Romero-Barcelo, Puerto Rico's non-voting (God be praised) delegate in the House of Representatives, candidly titled his pro-statehood book, *Statehood Is for the Poor*.

With Puerto Rico incorporated, America would be well on its way to becoming a bilingual nation. Ask the Canadians how splendidly that works.

According to a *New York Times* story of May 19, 1997, "Fully 90 percent of the island's 650,000 public school students lack basic English skills by the time they graduate."

When the commonwealth's government proposed increasing the amount of English instruction,

Puerto Rican teachers rioted. Romero-Barcelo doesn't pull his punches, "Yes, we want statehood (for purely pecuniary reasons), but neither our language nor our culture are negotiable."

Apparently, America's language and culture are negotiable. With Puerto Rican statehood, to the problem of unassimilable immigrants we would add an unassimilable state.

Earlier this year, by a single vote, the House passed a bill fast-tracking Puerto Rican statehood. The legislation provided that if a plurality of the island's voters ever opt for statehood, Congress must vote on its admission to the Union every two years, for a decade, until it passes.

Passage came after a perfunctory debate. In the Senate, the bill died in committee.

Hot for Hispanic support, the GOP leadership, including its neutered speaker, pushed the plan — as if Mexicans in California and Cubans in Florida really give a hill of frioles for Puerto Rican statehood.

Despite their leadership's position, better than three-quarters of House Republicans opposed the measure. Unlike his predecessor, incoming Speaker Bob Livingston is an energetic opponent of statehood.

Whatever the outcome of the referendum, Americans have a right to insist that their

representatives act exclusively in the interests of the United States.

We need more non-English speakers in this country like we need more welfare recipients, higher crime rates and an alien culture — all of which we'll get with Puerto Rican statehood.

The issue is a no-brainer that only a multiculturalist, a welfare-state Democrat or a pandering Republican could possibly support Puerto Rican statehood. That's why the island's government had to

spend \$200 million this year lobbying for same.

English First, a 150,000-member organization that promotes official English, is leading the opposition to this multicultural madness. Executive Director Jim Boulet, Jr. sardonically notes, "Puerto Rico is as proud of its language and culture as the United States used to be of ours."

In June, Puerto Ricans in New York City staged impassioned protests when a character on the

sitcom *Seinfeld* accidentally burned a Puerto Rican flag. They had every right to be outraged.

But, let me ask you a question: If someone signed your state's flag, would you be bent out of shape? However they vote in the referendum, Puerto Ricans have a national consciousness that is incompatible with statehood.

It's hard to imagine a worse candidate for admission to the Union.

