

# The U.S. Council for Puerto Rico Statehood

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December 21, 2006

## STATEMENT

### ***REJECT RACISM, ETHNIC BIAS AS REASONS TO DENY EQUAL RIGHTS***

Recent public pronouncements by the English-First organization attacking a distinguished public servant, Florida Senator Mel Martinez, for being bilingual and urging his political party to reject the Senator's nomination by the President to chair the party, bear the mantle of racism. It is fundamentally exclusionary to hold the position that a bilingual person, that supports equal rights for all citizens, is unqualified to occupy a position of this significance. It flies in the face of the promise of America and what the United States represents to oppressed peoples of all races and ethnicities, throughout the hemisphere and the world. It may be an indication of how far from mainstream American society and thinking the English-First position is. We think it would be a national tragedy and shame for America if ethnic bias were to scuttle the candidacy of Senator Mel Martinez to lead his peers in the GOP.

The non-partisan United States Council for Puerto Rico Statehood unequivocally rejects the ideas, perpetrated by English First, that because a Hispanic United States' citizen is bilingual that they are less American or less able to be leaders in their chosen fields and careers. We believe that such ideas are rooted in racism and xenophobia. As evidenced by Senator Martinez' election to the U.S. Senate, the people of Florida clearly reject racism and xenophobia. The people of the United States reject racism and xenophobia. We know that the people of Puerto Rico appreciate the rejection of racism and xenophobia.

Senator Martinez is on record as favoring a real congressional reexamination of the status of Puerto Rico. We applaud the leadership he has shown in introducing legislation in the Senate that would start to address the unresolved issue of Puerto Rico's status. It corresponds to legislation in the House that is well-supported by both parties with 110 sponsors. Puerto Rico now has the dubious distinction of being the longest-held territory in U.S. history having now surpassed the one-time Oklahoma territory of 104 years, some 4 years ago.

We would note that this legislation is equally supported by other Senate Republicans such as Bill Craig of Idaho, Wayne Allard of Colorado, Orrin Hatch of Utah, Lindsay Graham of South Carolina and Chuck Hagel of Indiana; all from English-speaking states. None are being attacked by English First. Senate Democrats such as Hillary Rodham Clinton of New York, Ken Salazar of Colorado, Bill Nelson of Florida and Tom Carper of Delaware, amongst others, also support this Senate legislation. None are being overtly attacked for doing so by English First. Senators Burr of North Carolina and Lott of Mississippi are co-sponsors of related legislation on the subject of Puerto Rico self-determination in the Senate. Senator Lott is not being attacked by English First, nor is Senator Burr. It is reasonable to conclude that a distinct bias exists.

The web pages of the 'Stop Martinez' project of English-First are false and misleading on the issue of language and Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico is officially bilingual. Knowledgeable persons know that there are prominent examples of states that are officially bilingual, in particular New Mexico and Hawaii. Other states choose not to have official languages, such as Louisiana which "recognizes" English and French. Other states have adopted legislation where English is the official language. Choice of official language, or not, is an established right of states. Language use was never a pre-requisite for the integration of the western states or Florida and there is no legal precedent for such a requirement for statehood, for Puerto Rico or anywhere else. Beyond this, languages other than English are widely spoken throughout the country. This is a reality and particularly evident throughout large parts of the border states of California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas as well as in Florida where Spanish is widely spoken. It is not unique to Spanish; French is the second most widely spoken language in Vermont, New

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Hampshire and Maine. New York and many great American cities have long histories of neighborhoods where languages other than English have been widely spoken.

On the issue of Statehood for Puerto Rico, the information disseminated by English First is also misleading and even derogatory. The documented reality is that the people of Puerto Rico have never had an opportunity to respond to an unequivocal and clear choice from the Congress that maintains unrepresentative, undemocratic control of Puerto Rico's future, as to sovereign, non-territorial status choices. The commentary on the Stop Martinez web pages suggests that Puerto Rico should not enjoy political rights equal to their mainland brothers. Congressional politics and mechanics aside, it appears that English-First suggests that the United States citizens of Puerto Rico should not have sovereignty or equal treatment. We wonder would they prefer the continued subjugation of 4 million citizens of Hispanic ethnicity in what is in effect a disenfranchised colony? Using this as a yardstick, what will opponents of equal rights for Puerto Rico use for their next argument? Skin color? The age of child-bearing mothers?

Knowledgeable persons on the subject of Puerto Rico's status know that Puerto Rico is a politically disadvantaged and disenfranchised territory of the United States and that Puerto Ricans resident in Puerto Rico are United States citizens and have been since 1917, although it is not constitutionally-guaranteed citizenship. To favor a continuation of second-class citizenship in America today can only be described as reprehensible. It is akin to saying that America should revert to the dark days of 'Jim Crow', which is in our view indefensible.

Similarly, we dispute the idea that Hispanics or anyone else in the United States cannot or should not be affiliated with the political party of their choice. As a non-partisan organization we can say that the strong and vibrant Republican affiliates and party in Puerto Rico are proof enough of the contestability of any political campaigns there. The inference that a full complement of Puerto Rican congressional representatives, of one party, the other, or both would be nothing more than leeches siphoning a disproportionate share of federal resources due to poverty is a foul demonstration that reeks of obscene, discriminatory ethnic bias.

We believe that English First has misjudged the party it seeks to carve constituency from, and further believe that the organization does not have its finger on the pulse of our inclusive country. In contrast it appears that their positions are rife with a desire to exclude those with different ethnic backgrounds from sharing equally in the promise of America. The United States Council for Puerto Rico Statehood rejects racism and ethnic bias as a reason to deny equal rights for all citizens. Good luck Senator Martinez.

*Signed*

*Antonio Monroig Malatrasi*  
*Chairman*

*Justin O'Brien*  
*Executive Director*

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