

Padilla

Padilla comes out against primary cross-voting

Mayor Hernan Padilla "clarified" Friday that voters can — but should not — vote in both the Republican and Democratic presidential primaries to be held Feb. 17 and March 16, respectively.

Padilla unleashed a storm of criticism Thursday when, in a speech before the Overseas Press Club, joint news conference with Senate President Luis A. Ferre, he said the Republicans will make no effort to bar anyone — including Democrats — from taking part in the GOP primary.

"The Puerto Rico primary law permits cross balloting and anyone who is registered in

Puerto Rico will be free to cast his vote," he said at the time.

On Friday, the mayor, who is vice president of the GOP on the island, said voters should not take part in both primaries.

"My invitation to vote in both primaries was directed at having any Puerto Rican who thinks a Republican should be the next president vote in the Feb. 17 primary, and have followers of the Democratic Party do the same in the March 16 primary," Padilla told United Press International in a telephone interview.

The fact that the law allows cross-voting —

voting in the Democratic party even if you are a Republican, and vice-versa — does not imply voting in both primaries. What it means, he said, is that "they have the right to vote in whichever primary they want."

The position Padilla voiced Thursday was criticized, among others, by former Gov. Rafael Hernandez Colon, a Democrat:

"These statements form part of a conspiracy to carry out fraud in the primaries," he said.

"As far as I can see Padilla's call is immoral...His statements are evidence of a preconceived plan to mobilize New Progressive

Party voters from one primary to the other one," Hernandez Colon added. "This is the best evidence of the political opportunism that characterizes the NPP."

Popular Democratic Party President Miguel Hernandez Agosto Benitez, PDP-at large, made "a call to the people to reject the climate of political immorality manifested in the relations between the NPP and the Republican and Democratic Parties."

Sen. Celeste Benitez, PDP-at large, the PDP candidate for mayor of San Juan, also lashed out at Padilla, saying he was calling for "electoral fraud."