

# NEWS FROM

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## Congressman HERMAN BADILLO

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WASHINGTON --

### THE UNITED STATES AND PUERTO RICO

Speech of  
CONGRESSMAN HERMAN BADILLO OF NEW YORK  
in the House of Representatives  
Tuesday, May 4, 1971

Mr. Speaker, the 2.7 million Puerto Ricans on the island of Puerto Rico and the 1.5 million in the United States represent one, cohesive social and cultural body and community. Solutions to the many and varied problems with which this community is confronted cannot be left to the Governor of Puerto Rico, the Mayor of New York City or other state and local officials alone. We, in the Congress, have a responsibility to help meet the needs of all these -- both on the mainland and on the island -- and we must develop a coordinated and meaningful policy to deal with this community. I propose, therefore, the implementation of a four point program to begin to cope with the problems facing Puerto Ricans today:

1. In every legislative act that is submitted to this Congress that has to do with providing services to the American citizen in housing, welfare, health, education, job training, or in any other manner, I will request and, if necessary, submit amendments to insure that American citizens living on the island of Puerto Rico receive the benefits of such legislation to the same extent as American citizens living on the United States mainland;

2. I propose and urge the Federal and Commonwealth administrations to immediately undertake a thorough study of the island's economic status with a view toward developing and presenting to the Congress an economic program which will insure that the standard of living of American citizens living on the island of Puerto Rico can be comparable to the standard of living of American citizens living on the mainland;

3. I will propose legislation to authorize community and economic development programs in New York City and other parts of the country to serve American citizens of Puerto Rican origin and, specifically, to authorize programs for education, manpower training and community development to be carried out in English and Spanish and with the needs of the Puerto Rican community built into the programs; and,

4. I urge the establishment of a national employment bank under which Puerto Ricans who must seek jobs on the mainland could be trained in Puerto Rico to work in identifiable existing jobs in different parts of the mainland and at the same time receive such training, including in writing and speaking the English language, as would make it possible for them to be full participants in mainland life.

1. Including American citizens from Puerto Rico in legislation designed to benefit other American citizens.

Much discussion has been devoted to Puerto Rico's political future -- whether it should maintain its present Commonwealth status, whether it should be admitted as the 51st State or whether it should be an independent country. This is a question which only the people of Puerto Rico should decide, free of any outside influence or pressure. However, until such time as a final decision is made by the people of Puerto Rico, the U.S. and the Congress have an obligation to recognize that Puerto Ricans are American citizens and to make certain that Puerto Rico receives its fair share of Federal aid and assistance.

Not only is Puerto Rico specifically excluded by statute from nine Federal programs, including the school milk program, the food stamp program and a portion of the Social Security program, but it is also continually discriminated against through unrealistic and arbitrary ceilings or discriminatory formulas based on the low per capita income. Puerto Rico is presently being short-changed in such areas as school lunches, health and welfare programs and educational assistance.

There is no logical reason in my mind why Puerto Rico should not be treated the same as one of the states. Some of my colleagues will immediately cry that why should Puerto Rico receive equal treatment when it does not contribute to the general revenues through income tax? Mr. Speaker, if most Puerto Ricans are earning less -- far less -- than the Federal poverty level, they are not going to pay taxes even if the Internal Revenue Act was applicable to the island. The fact that Puerto Rico does not pay income tax should not be a Controlling factor in public welfare and medical assistance policy decisions. It would be a strange system that determined welfare eligibility by the amount of Federal taxes the prospective recipients were fortunate enough to be paying. Furthermore, Puerto Rico contributes to the general welfare in many equally important ways.

Puerto Ricans have been subject to the draft since 1917 and have served in all wars since World War I. In the current war in Indochina, for example, some 22,000 island youths have been inducted into the Armed Forces since the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was passed. This represents a higher proportion per population than in any of the fifty states, and almost 300 island youths have been killed in action.

Puerto Ricans from Puerto Rico are required to serve in the Armed Forces of the United States to the same extent as other Americans in all fifty states based upon the fact that Puerto Ricans are American citizens; then the same basis of American citizenship should be used to provide the Puerto Ricans in Puerto Rico with the same assistance that other Americans in all fifty states receive.

This is not the case at the present time. Last year the Family Assistance Bill, pending in Congress and approved by this House, provided welfare assistance to the extent of \$1,600 per family of four if they lived in any of the fifty states. The same American family, if they lived in Puerto Rico under this legislation, however, would benefit only to the extent of 55 per cent. This is as absurd as saying that a Puerto Rican should only serve in Vietnam to the extent of 55 per cent. If the Puerto Rican who lives in Puerto Rico is entitled to the disabilities of being an American citizen to the extent of 100 per cent, then he should receive the benefits of being an American citizen to the extent of 100 per cent as well.

Thus, Mr. Speaker, I call upon my colleagues in the House and the Senate -- particularly those who are committee and subcommittee chairmen -- to see to it that Puerto Rico is included and equitably treated in every piece of legislation coming before the Congress. If, however, I must undertake this task alone, I am fully prepared to offer amendments, where necessary and appropriate, to all pending and future measures to place Puerto Rico on a basis equal with the states. It must be clearly understood that I by no means intend to ask that American

citizens in Puerto Rico receive anything more but that they simply receive the same as American citizens in the fifty states.

## 2. Establishment of an economic development plan for Puerto Rico.

Puerto Rico is standing at a dangerous precipice and its future direction and goals will be decided within the next few years. The current recession in the United States is felt as a depression in Puerto Rico. Hotels are closing, as we all know from the newspapers. But what is not generally known is that migration to New York City and other parts of the country has increased again.

The basic problem is that the number of jobs created each year in Puerto Rico is far less than the number of people that join the labor force annually. There is no program in effect now or in planning which would reconcile this disparity. Only when this is done can Puerto Ricans be said to have a choice of whether to stay or migrate. At the present they are compelled to migrate by economic reality regardless of policy pronouncements by the Commonwealth government disclaiming the encouragement of migration.

I propose and urge that the national and Commonwealth administrations immediately undertake a thorough study of the island's current and future economic status with a view toward developing and presenting to the Congress a comprehensive economic development program which will close the current gap between the labor force and the labor market. I envision such a program to be developed along the lines of the Appalachian Regional Development Act, designed to assist in resolving the severe economic problems of the island; to assist the Commonwealth in meeting its special problems, particularly in preventing another mass exodus to the mainland; in promoting and encouraging the island's economic development; and in establishing a framework for joint Federal and Commonwealth efforts in the area. The Congress should not be responsible for developing such an economic redevelopment program but the initiatives must be taken, and taken immediately, by the Nixon and [Governor Luis A.] Ferre administrations. It should be made clear that I do not intend that the Congress would impose a program for economic development upon the people of Puerto Rico but merely that it would provide such assistance as might be needed and requested to achieve a higher level of development.

## 3. Legislation for mainland authorization of bilingual community and economic development programs.

At the same time, we must not forget or ignore the Puerto Ricans in the United States. We must recognize their important and vital role in our country. They must be afforded every opportunity to fully participate in the society and in the U.S.'s future. Puerto Ricans have special needs and problems, as well as separate identities, and our Federal, state and municipal agencies must realize this fact of life.

The Puerto Rican community in the United States has made specific proposals to lift itself out of poverty. For example, groups such as the Puerto Rican Community Development Project, Aspira of America, the Puerto Rican forum and others have made specific proposals to various agencies of the Federal, state and local governments. However, these proposals consistently run into funding difficulties and this is one of the reasons why specific authorizing legislation as I have proposed is essential.

As the third prong of my overall formula, therefore, I propose that Puerto Rican economic development programs -- those developed and formulated by Puerto Ricans to meet the particular needs of Puerto Ricans -- be separately and directly funded by the Federal Government. Included in such efforts would be the whole range of economic opportunity programs, assistance for small businesses, bilingual education and economic development.

Puerto Ricans are not concentrated in one specific area, as are many other ethnic or minority groups. Thus, they often do not benefit from various programs aimed at assisting one neighborhood or geo-

graphic area. For example, there are a large number of Puerto Ricans who do not live in one of the 26 poverty areas of New York City and, accordingly, they are not benefitting from urgently needed assistance in housing, education, welfare and other critical areas. Because of this situation, a comprehensive program for Puerto Ricans wherever situated, is required.

#### 4. Establishment of a National Employment Program.

Finally, as the fourth phase of my proposal, I urge the establishment of a national employment program or bank, designed to provide job training for unskilled and semi-skilled Puerto Ricans who are forced to seek employment on the mainland. This job bank would also assist them in locating suitable and meaningful employment -- where available and clearly required -- in various locations throughout the United States. These pre-determined employment opportunity areas would not be in sections where there are currently substantial concentrations of employed and underemployed Puerto Ricans.

The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico has done pioneer work in this area through its Migrant Division which has a number of offices on the mainland. Under this program for migrant workers, developed by the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico at its own expense, Puerto Ricans enter into a contract in Puerto Rico to work on farms in New Jersey, Long Island, Pennsylvania and Connecticut. They are brought to the farms in the United States and return to Puerto Rico at the end of the season. This program clearly indicates that Puerto Ricans are willing to go to any area of the continental United States if jobs are available. Unfortunately, the program itself is a disaster because the pay that the Puerto Rican receives for such work is well below the minimum wage and the conditions under which he must live are disgraceful. What is needed is a program which would identify jobs in manufacturing and the service trades, jobs with a future which would provide a decent living wage. There is no doubt in my mind that even more Puerto Ricans would be willing to apply for such jobs than already apply for seasonal migrant farm labor.

The proposed program would be jointly carried out by the Federal government and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and would include not only job training in Puerto Rico but, also, intensive instruction in written and spoken English and Spanish, where necessary, perhaps leading to a high-school diploma or its equivalent to insure that once in the continental United States, the individual would be at a level which would enable him to more fully participate in mainland life and to compete successfully for other employment, when necessary.

It should be clearly recognized that the migration of Puerto Ricans from the island arises almost exclusively out of a search for expanded economic opportunity and security. The migration of Puerto Ricans from the island to the mainland is not for political or religious reasons, but purely for economic reasons. Moreover, it is not the migration of people in search of welfare. If it were, we would find that the Puerto Rican aged would be leaving Puerto Rico. The fact is that it is only the poor and the young who leave Puerto Rico for the United States. For this reason, the median age of the Puerto Rican in New York City is slightly over 19, and Puerto Ricans constitute the youngest ethnic group in New York City and in the nation.

As people are seeking economic opportunity, we should have a program to provide for it. The job bank I have proposed would assist Puerto Ricans in being more productive members of society and full participants in the economy and the nation's riches. This program becomes particularly critical in light of a possible renewal of mass migration from the island to the mainland.

One may well ask, Mr. Speaker, how such a situation developed and why a program such as I have just proposed is necessary. In order to fully understand and appreciate the current plight of Puerto Ricans, it would be well to briefly review some of the background and developments over the past several decades and to examine some of the factors contributing to the current crisis.

Puerto Ricans were by no means a new phenomena on the mainland or in New York. During the early years of the 20th century Puerto Rican cigarmakers settled on the Lower East Side. They were soon followed by merchant seamen on the island-to-New York run, who congregated near the waterfront in Brooklyn, and by women garment workers who were brought to sew in local factories.

However, massive migration began to play a significant role in the demographic changes in the island in 1940. Puerto Rico had a typically backward, traditional agrarian economy. Its economy was dependent on sugar and was a one-crop, export oriented island with a small land area, a large and rapidly growing population and very low per capita income. The small land area and large population resulted in a population density of 546 persons per square mile -- one of the highest in the world. The island lacked any form of large or medium-scale industry; it was plagued by the scarcity of fertile productive land and the per capita average annual income was \$125.

Because of the greater economic opportunities which most Puerto Ricans thought would be available on the mainland, there began a steady rise in migration from the island to urban areas in the United States, particularly New York. From 1945 to 1962 nearly 578,000 Puerto Ricans emigrated to the United States, constituting 85 per cent of the total emigration during the 20th century. The largest number -- some 446,800 -- emigrated during the period 1950-1960 which comprised 65.6 per cent of the total emigration.

We must not lose sight of the fact, Mr. Speaker, that we are not talking about aliens from some foreign land but American citizens -- subject to the U.S. Constitution and to all federal laws of general application (with the exception of the tax laws), participants in a common market and in an economy integrated into that of the United States by various means.

At about the time that the flow of people from Puerto Rico to the mainland was beginning to peak, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico began its massive and highly publicized economic development program which came to be known as "Operation Bootstraps". This was a program developed entirely by Puerto Rico without any aid from the United States. It brought a number of diversified industries into the island through such devices as a number of tax benefits including "tax holidays" and tax-free investment to U.S. firms and a number of other attractive incentives. As a consequence, Puerto Rico has moved from an island whose main product was agriculture to manufacturing. Nevertheless, jobs were not created in sufficient number to meet the demands of the growing labor force. The sheer force of numbers worked against Operation Bootstraps as the number of people joining the labor force was vastly larger than the number of jobs which were available. Thus, while conditions in Puerto Rico improved, the number of Puerto Ricans leaving the island increased at the same time. Without the massive migration to the United States, there would have been no dramatic rise in per capita income, in better housing, in expanded employment opportunities or other benefits which have been credited as the achievement of Operation Bootstraps. Had there been no emigration it is obvious that the Puerto Rican economy would have had to supply a great many more jobs than it has generated in the last two decades. In fact, the peak net migration rate, which occurred in 1953, was sufficiently large to exceed the rate of natural increase and cause a reduction in the absolute population. From a percentage increase of 18.3 per cent in the 10-year period of 1940-1950, the population of Puerto Rico increased by only 6.3 per cent during the following decade. Although a portion of this decline can be attributed to reduced fertility levels, the major factor was the emigration from the island to the mainland. As George C. Myers has stated "without these migration losses Puerto Rico's population would have increased by 27.5 per cent in the ten-year period [1950-1960], and this figure excludes births that would have occurred to persons if they had not moved, but remained in Puerto Rico". Total net migration losses were experienced by nearly all of the island's municipios, particularly rural municipios and those containing small urban areas. The economic reality is the fact that the economy of Puerto Rico could not -- and still cannot -- absorb the large, growing

population. The labor market is simply unable to effectively cope with the burgeoning, and largely unskilled, labor force. I believe that Puerto Ricans should be able to migrate -- but not because they are compelled to do so!

But what of those who left the island to seek their fortune and a better way of life on the mainland? Most experts agree that the migration I previously discussed was motivated primarily by the quest for economic opportunity. This is certainly the reason, for example, why my aunt left Caguas for New York as she believed that she could earn a better living on the mainland than on the island.

Unfortunately, for most of the migrants, their aspirations have not been realized and immigration to the mainland has not provided the salvation many of them imagined. Migrating Puerto Ricans had on the average less than 5 years of education; their knowledge of English ranged from none to bad; and many came from rural areas of extreme poverty. With their poor English and lack of education and any usable industrial skills, job opportunities were generally limited to menial, low-paying jobs in factories and restaurants. The employment problem is increasingly complicated by the fact that many unskilled jobs are gradually being automated and the Puerto Rican is being squeezed out of the job market because the work he did is being turned over to the machines.

While exact figures are unavailable it is well known that Puerto Ricans have a higher unemployment rate than Blacks; a lower median income; and a greater percentage of school dropouts -- more than 60 per cent of Puerto Rican students never finish high school.

Puerto Ricans who are employed are more than any other group concentrated in occupations with the lowest pay and status. In 1960, for example, 70.6 per cent of employed Puerto Rican males were in low-income occupations. Four times as many Puerto Ricans as Blacks get public aid to supplement these low earnings.

Mr. Speaker, I could easily spend the remainder of this afternoon citing various figures and statistics to demonstrate the plight of the mainland Puerto Ricans. It should be obvious, however, that since the migration of Puerto Ricans is the migration almost exclusively of poor people, the statistics would logically indicate the existence of the worst possible conditions and the greatest and most urgent need for a positive program.

Even where Puerto Ricans do return to the island, however, there is no escape from the vicious cycle of poverty. The current per capita income in Puerto Rico is only \$1,426 annually -- substantially below that of any state and almost half that of Mississippi, the poorest of the 50 states. A recent New York Times article compared this figure with Venezuela's annual per capita income of \$902, the highest in South America, and with Mexico's \$600. However, Mr. Speaker, Puerto Rico is not a Latin American nation; it is an integral part of the United States and is, as I have mentioned, interrelated in the U.S. economy. Comparing Puerto Rico's economic status with Latin America makes about as much sense as comparing Hawaii's with the Far East's.

Puerto Rico does not benefit from the mainland's minimum wage laws, a particularly controversial issue now being considered by Mr. Dent's labor subcommittee.

Although personal income has reportedly experienced an increase of 12 per cent over the previous year -- reaching \$3.8 billion according to a Journal of Commerce article -- the average pay for industrial workers in Puerto Rico is approximately \$1.60 per hour, less than one-half the U.S. average.

Four out of every five Puerto Rican families on the island earn less than \$3,000 annually, with one-half receiving less than \$1,000 per annum. Unemployment, according to the U.S. Labor Department, is at 12.2 per cent -- a rise of almost 2 per cent over the last year. However, in realistic terms, unemployment approaches 25 to 30 per cent when you consider those who have been discouraged and rejected and

are no longer seeking work. This is compounded by the fact that Puerto Rico's 2.7 million population will double in less than 30 years and we are now on the brink of another movement of massive migration to the mainland. In 1968, migration from Puerto Rico to the U.S. was over 77,000 from a near-zero figure in 1960. What is particularly tragic is the fact that many of the new migrants and potential migrants are now young people with some skills, a commodity the island can ill-afford to lose.

In addition, to wages being a fraction of those on the mainland, the cost of living in Puerto Rico is much higher. While exact figures are unavailable, some statistics place island costs at as high as 25 per cent more than in New York, Chicago or Boston.

Mr. Speaker, because of my place of birth and background I feel a special responsibility for Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans, whether they be in the South Bronx; in Lorain, Ohio; or in Caguas, where I was born. If we are going to meaningfully and effectively cope with our urban crisis and the impending influx of Puerto Rican migrants, we must make certain that Puerto Rico receives its full and fair share and that the island's economic development and progress is encouraged and aided to the fullest extent possible. I urge our colleagues to actively participate in this vital undertaking and to work with me in ending the current discrimination against Puerto Rico and in bringing equity to the treatment of "La Isla Verde" as well as to the more than one million Puerto Ricans now on the mainland.

Thank you.