

July 24, 1962

Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

EXCHANGE OF LETTERS BETWEEN
THE PRESIDENT AND THE HONOR-
ABLE LUIS MUNOZ-MARIN, GOVERNOR
OF PUERTO RICO

July 24, 1962

Dear Governor Munoz:

I have your letter advising me of the celebration on July 25 of the tenth anniversary of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. This is indeed a great occasion. The achievements of the Puerto Rican people in this short period have been remarkable. Puerto Rico has furnished an example to the world of the benefits that can be achieved by close collaboration between a larger and a smaller community within the framework of freedom and mutual agreement. I am confident that I speak for the people of the United States as well as their government in expressing my pride and pleasure at Puerto Rico's achievements.

I am aware, however, as you point out, that the Commonwealth relationship is not perfected and that it has not yet realized its full potential, and I welcome your statement that the people of Puerto Rico are about to begin the consideration of this with the purpose of moving towards its maximum development. I am in full sympathy with this aspiration. I see no reason why the Commonwealth concept, if that is the desire of the people of Puerto Rico, should not be fully developed as a permanent institution in its association with the United States. I agree that this is a proper time to recognize the need for growth and, both as a matter of fairness to all concerned and of establishing an unequivocal record, to consult the people of Puerto Rico, as you propose to do, so that they may express any other preference, including independence, if that should be their wish.

Sincerely,

(s)

John F. Kennedy

Honorable Luis Munoz-Marin
Governor of the Commonwealth
of Puerto Rico
San Juan, Puerto Rico

July 10, 1962

The President
The White House
Washington, D. C.

My dear Mr. President:

On July 25 of this year, the people of Puerto Rico will celebrate the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth relationship was a creation of which both the United States and the people of Puerto Rico may well be proud. It was a new type of arrangement in the constitutional system of the United States; at that time ten years ago, it was a pioneering effort in the world to terminate colonialism by substituting for it,

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not nationalism or independence, but freedom within the framework of a close and mutually beneficial association between a smaller and a larger community.

It took account of the basic democratic values involved, by incorporating the principles of self-determination and the right of people to be governed by their own consent, and did so in a realistic manner adapted to the political and economic practicalities of Puerto Rico's situation. We were aware then, and have become increasingly, and now acutely, aware that the arrangement was not perfect. The Constitutional Convention itself recognized from the beginning that there was room for growth and that this growth could and should be not towards independence or federal statehood but within the genius of the creative Commonwealth idea itself.

I believe that it is now time for that growth to occur. An undue delay in this cannot but be hurtful to Puerto Rico and to the significance of Puerto Rico as a showcase and example of the attitude of the United States in a world where colonialism is obsolete and extreme nationalism is obsolescent.

In planning the growth of the Commonwealth, we should, I believe, proceed along the following lines:

(1) The indispensable principle of the Commonwealth is self-government for Puerto Rico in permanent association with the United States on the basis of common loyalty, common citizenship, mutual dedication to democracy and mutual commitment to freedom.

(2) The moral and juridical basis of the Commonwealth should be further clarified so as to eliminate any possible basis for the accusation, which is made by enemies and misguided friends of the United States and Puerto Rico, that the Commonwealth was not the free choice of the people of Puerto Rico acting in their sovereign capacity, but was merely a different kind of colonial arrangement to which they consented.

(3) The governmental power and authority of the Commonwealth should be complete and any reservations or exceptions which are not an indispensable part of the arrangements for permanent association with the United States should be eliminated. Methods should be devised for forms of participation, appropriate to the Commonwealth concept, by the people of Puerto Rico on federal functions that affect them.

Certainly, the interests of the United States and of Puerto Rico would be greatly served by reaffirmation of our compact -- including the guarantees of permanent association and common citizenship which practically all Puerto Ricans prize deeply -- in a form which will leave no room for doubt as to the sovereign capacity of the people of Puerto Rico to give and receive these commitments.

Accordingly, it seems clear that the people of Puerto Rico should be consulted anew on governmental arrangements. The time has now come when the people, in the basis of their own experience, should consider how to perfect the Commonwealth concept within their permanent association with the Federal Union. This represents my conviction, and I believe that of the vast majority of Puerto Ricans, on what should be done. However, so that no doubt may exist anywhere in the world as to the deep validity of the relationship, I believe that the Puerto Rican people should have an opportunity to indicate their preference clearly and directly for any other form of governmental relationship if they should prefer any such other form.

It is my intention to request the Commonwealth legislature to enact a law pursuant to which proposals to perfect the Commonwealth within its association with the United States would be submitted to the people of Puerto Rico.

It is my purpose also to recommend that advocates of both independence and of federated statehood for Puerto Rico should be afforded the opportunity in the legislation to present these alternatives to the electorate, so that no doubt whatever may be entertained either in Puerto Rico, in the United States or elsewhere that the basic United States principle of self-determination has been thoroughly carried out.

This will be a forceful, practical and opportune reminder of a fundamental American doctrine, and it will provide a basis for another great symbolic and practical forward movement in the relations of the United States and Puerto Rico. I am confident that we may rely upon your support.

Sincerely yours,

(s)

Luis Munoz-Marin

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