

PUERTO RICO FEDERAL AFFAIRS ADMINISTRATION

STATEMENT OF JUAN E. HERNANDEZ
DIRECTOR

**“11TH NATIONAL SUMMIT OF HISPANIC STATE LEGISLATORS”
ORLANDO, FL**

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2013

GOOD MORNING. IT’S AN HONOR TO BE HERE TODAY ON BEHALF OF THE GOVERNOR OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF PUERTO RICO, ALEJANDRO GARCÍA PADILLA, PRECISELY, WHEN WE CELEBRATE 500 YEARS OF THE DISCOVERY OF THE BEAUTIFUL STATE OF FLORIDA, BY THE FIRST GOVERNOR OF PUERTO RICO, JUAN PONCE DE LEON.

THANKS TO ALL OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE “ELEVENTH NATIONAL SUMMIT OF THE NATIONAL HISPANIC CAUCUS OF STATE LEGISLATORS”, AND THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY YOU HAVE GIVEN ME OF ADDRESSING YOU.

AS THE WEIGHT OF THE HISPANIC VOTE AT BOTH THE STATE AND NATIONAL LEVEL INCREASES, SUMMITS LIKE THIS BECOME MORE IMPORTANT AS OPPORTUNITIES TO FORGE A PAN-HISPANIC POLICY EVOLVES.

SUCH A PAN-HISPANIC POLICY IS A REACHABLE GOAL. BECAUSE EVEN THOUGH HISPANICS ARE STILL ORGANIZED PRIMARILY AROUND THEIR NATIONAL ORIGINS –AS WELL AS AROUND THEIR CITY, COUNTY OR STATE OF RESIDENCE–, THEY DO HAVE SHARED INTERESTS; AMONG THEM: IMMIGRATION REFORM, HEALTHCARE, EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND HOUSING.

PUERTO RICANS, MEXICAN-AMERICAN, CUBAN-AMERICAN, DOMINICANS, SALVADORIANS, AMONG OTHER HISPANIC GROUPS, HAVE ALSO SHARED A COMMON HISTORY OF RACIAL AND ETHNIC DISCRIMINATION AND VOTE DISENFRANCHISEMENT AND THEY ALL DESERVE A FAIR SHOT AT THE AMERICAN DREAM.

GOVERNOR GARCÍA PADILLA BELIEVES THAT PUERTO RICANS IN THE U.S. MUST ENGAGE IN THIS EFFORT OF UNITY AMONG ALL HISPANIC GROUPS. FOR THIS REASON, OUR ADMINISTRATION ENCOURAGES PUERTO RICANS IN THE U.S. TO REGISTER AND VOTE IN MUNICIPAL, COUNTY, STATE AND FEDERAL ELECTIONS.

OUR EMIGRATION TO THE U.S. HAS INCREASED OVER THE PAST DECADE IN WAYS NOT SEEN SINCE THE 1950'S. AT LEAST HALF A

MILLION PUERTO RICANS EMIGRATED FROM THE ISLAND TO THE U.S. DURING THE PAST DECADE, ALONE.

PUERTO RICANS MAKE UP ALMOST 10 PER CENT OF ALL HISPANICS IN THE U.S., AND WE ARE THE SECOND LARGEST LATINO GROUP, AFTER MEXICAN AMERICANS.

THIS TIME, FLORIDA IS THE EPICENTER OF THE PUERTO RICAN EMIGRATION: A MAJOR SHIFT FROM THE NEW YORK-BASED PUERTO RICAN EMIGRATION OF THE MIDDLE OF THE 20TH CENTURY.

THE PUERTO RICAN POPULATION LIVING IN FLORIDA HAS DOUBLED DURING THE PAST DECADE AND IS APPROACHING ONE MILLION. WE ARE THE SECOND LARGEST HISPANIC GROUP IN FLORIDA AFTER CUBAN AMERICANS. AND IT IS ALREADY STATED AS A FACT THAT PUERTO RICANS IN FLORIDA WILL SOON SURPASS IN NUMBERS THOSE LIVING IN NEW YORK.

IN NO OTHER REGION OF THIS GREAT STATE, THE PUERTO RICAN EMIGRATION IS FELT STRONGER THAN HERE, IN CENTRAL-FLORIDA. PUERTO RICANS MAKE UP SLIGHTLY MORE THAN HALF THE HISPANIC POPULATION IN THE ORLANDO-KISSIMMEE

METROPOLITAN AREA , AND WE MAKE UP AROUND 10 PER CENT OF ALL CENTRAL FLORIDA RESIDENTS.

THAT'S WHY WE REOPENED A REGIONAL OFFICE OF THE PUERTO RICO FEDERAL AFFAIRS ADMINISTRATION IN CENTRAL-FLORIDA THREE MONTHS AGO, AN OFFICE THAT SHOULD HAVE NEVER BEEN CLOSED.

SO, IT IS NOT A COINCIDENCE THAT THIS ELEVENTH NATIONAL SUMMIT OF HISPANIC STATE LEGISLATORS IS TAKING PLACE IN ORLANDO.

HISPANIC AND PUERTO RICAN INFLUENCE IN THIS AREA IS GETTING STRONGER.

AWARE AS IT IS OF THE INCREASE OF THE EMIGRATION OF PUERTO RICANS, PARTICULARLY TO CENTRAL FLORIDA, THE GARCÍA PADILLA ADMINISTRATION ENCOURAGES OUR PEOPLE TO GET INVOLVED IN U.S. CIVIC AND POLITICAL LIFE.

SPEAKING OF MIGRATION, PUERTO RICO HAS TAKEN THE LEAD IN TREATING OUR IMMIGRANT BROTHERS AND SISTERS WITH THE DIGNITY THEY DESERVE. THAT IS WHY GOVERNOR GARCÍA

PADILLA RECENTLY SIGNED A LAW ALLOWING UNDOCUMENTED INDIVIDUALS TO OBTAIN A DRIVERS LICENSE. HE ALSO SIGNED TWO EXECUTIVE ORDERS BANNING HOSPITALS AND SCHOOLS FROM INQUIRING ABOUT IMMIGRATION STATUS. THE GOVERNOR BELIEVES THAT NOW IS THE TIME FOR CONGRESS TO DO ITS PART AND APPROVE A COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM BILL WITH A PATH TO CITIZEN SHIP THAT SECURES OUR BORDERS – INCLUDING THE CARIBBEAN BORDER– AND FINALLY BRINGS ELEVEN MILLION INDIVIDUALS FROM THE SHADOWS INTO THE LIGHT.

THIS SUMMIT IS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT BECAUSE DURING IT, YOU WILL HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF CHOOSING YOUR NEW BOARD OF DIRECTORS. THEREFORE, IT IS NECESSARY THAT NEW LEADERS ARE COMMITTED TO THE PURPOSES OF THE HISPANIC CAUCUS AND THE NEEDS OF OUR GROWING LATINO POPULATION.

AS A MEMBER AND ACTIVE PARTICIPANT OF THE CAUCUS DURING MY EIGHT YEARS SERVING AS SENATOR OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF PUERTO RICO, I AM AWARE OF THE VALUABLE WORK THIS

ORGANIZATION DOES FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE GROWING HISPANIC COMMUNITY IN THE UNITED STATES.

AMONG THE MANY ISSUES CONSIDERED BY THE CAUCUS, AND OF PARTICULAR CONCERN TO HISPANICS ARE IMMIGRATION, HEALTHCARE, EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND HOUSING.

BUT NOT ONLY THAT, IT ALSO PROVIDES A FORUM TO EXCHANGE INFORMATION, MEMBER NETWORKING AND LEADERSHIP TRAINING.

AND OF THE LATTER, I CAN SAY THAT WHEN I PARTICIPATED IN THE ACTIVITIES OF THE CAUCUS, I RECEIVED A HUGE AMOUNT OF NEW INFORMATION THAT EVENTUALLY WAS USED IN DRAFTING LEGISLATION THAT I INTRODUCED AS A SENATOR.

ALTHOUGH I AM NO LONGER A MEMBER , I AM NOT COMPLETELY DETACHED FROM ITS ACTIVITIES, NOT ONLY BECAUSE I BELIEVE IN ITS PURPOSES BUT BECAUSE AS DIRECTOR OF THE PUERTO RICO FEDERAL AFFAIRS ADMINISTRATION SINCE JANUARY, I DEAL WITH THE FEDERAL ISSUES THAT IMPACT THE DAILY LIVES OF OUR CONSTITUENTS.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO POINT OUT THAT THE CHALLENGES FACED BY HISPANICS TODAY ARE SIMILAR TO THOSE IN PUERTO RICO. THE ECONOMIC DIFICULTIES EXPERIENCED BY MANY JURISDICTIONS OF THE UNITED STATES HAS ALSO BEEN LIVED BY OUR ISLAND.

IN THE SAME WAY THAT MANY OF YOU HAVE PROVIDED THE TOOLS TO SOLVE THE PROBLEMS FACED BY YOUR CONSTITUENTS, THE GOVERNMENT OF PUERTO RICO HAS TAKEN DIFFICULT DECISIONS TO ADDRESS MANY OF THE ISLAND'S HISTORICAL FISCAL CHALLENGES.

THUS, NEW JOBS HAVE BEEN CREATED, THE PENSION SYSTEM HAS BEEN REFORMED AND SIGNIFICANT STEPS HAVE BEEN TAKEN TO BALANCE OUR BUDGET AND TO TURN OUR PUBLIC CORPORATIONS INTO SELF-SUFFICIENT ENTITIES.

HOWEVER, THERE IS A LONG WAY AHEAD. AS A HISPANIC COMMONWEALTH, WE STAND BEFORE THIS CONFERENCE TO SHARE OUR EXPERIENCE, THE ACHIEVEMENTS WE HAVE REACHED, AND TO PROMOTE THE EXCHANGE OF IDEAS THAT WILL ALLOW US TO REACH THE SUSTAINED ECONOMIC GROWTH WE ALL DESERVE.

FINALLY, ON BEHALF OF THE GOVERNOR OF PUERTO RICO AND MYSELF, THANK YOU FOR ALLOWING ME EXPRESS OUR THOUGHTS AND KEEP “STRENGTHENING THE VOICE OF HISPANIC AMERICA”.

MUCHAS GRACIAS