

# ELA Busy in Puerto Rico

by Rosario Fajardo

SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO  
**I**f Puerto Rico wants to become the 51<sup>st</sup> state of the union, it must "embrace" English as the language of the local and federal governments, business and the education system, stateside members of English Language Advocates said.

"We want the people of Puerto Rico to express their feelings in the plebiscite, but as interested observers we see a campaign of deceit by the statehood movement regarding language," said Leo Sorensen, chairman of the organization. "If Puerto Ricans want to become a state, they must learn English."

The issue of whether Puerto Rico will have to step up the teaching of English if it were to become a state is one of the many under discussion in the campaign for the December 13 plebiscite.

Puerto Ricans should not lose their Spanish, but the reality of life is that English is the most dominant language in the world, Sorensen said. No matter what Puerto Rico decides, it will have to become bilingual, "with English

rapidly gaining prominence in their culture," he said.

Otherwise, he said Puerto Rico would be left behind in the race for economic development and progress.

At the same time, a predominantly Spanish-language state will be divisive to the nation and may lead to further linguistic and racial

but officials said it has helped pass the controversial laws making English the official language in 25 states, which advocates of multiculturalism view as ethnocentric and exclusionary.

The organization also has no formal position on Puerto Rico's status question, Sorensen said, other than the English-language



Associate Phillips Hinch and Chairman Leo Sorensen of English Language Advocates

lines, he said, adding that a scenario similar to the separatist movement in Quebec, Canada could occur.

English Language Advocates is a non-profit organization, based in Arlington, Virginia, which is dedicated to defending the English language. The organization has an estimated 50,000 "supporters."

The organization is not affiliated with either the English Only or the English First movements in the United States,

requirement for statehood.

Sorensen said he and two other members of his organization are currently in Puerto Rico "to learn what is going on" and have scheduled meetings with members of the New Progressive, Popular Democratic and Puerto Rican Independence parties.

Despite repeated phone calls, NPP Rep. Leonides Díaz Urbina, who heads the statehood plebiscite campaign, could not be reached for comment last week. 

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*Rosario Fajardo is a staff writer with The San Juan (PR) Star. This article is reprinted with permission from the edition of December 7, 1998. The photo is by Carlos Anguita.*

# Puerto Rico Not Suited For Statehood

by Don Feder

[Editor's note: We reprint Don Feder's column dated November 30, 1998 which relates to a referendum that has already taken place, however the issues remain. Likewise, Rep. Livingston has since declined to be Speaker of the House.]

On December 13 Puerto Ricans will cast their ballots for statehood, independence, or commonwealth status. The referendum implicitly acknowledges their right to self-determination.

But don't Americans have the same right — the right not to be saddled with an impoverished, crime-ridden island of non-English speakers as our 51<sup>st</sup> state?

An ad statehood proponents are running on television in San Juan assures voters that, with admission to the Union, "we will not become blue-eyed blondes. ...Nor will we change our language and culture. With statehood we will remain as we are."

True enough. With statehood, Puerto Rico will still have an annual per capita income of

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*Don Feder is a syndicated columnist. This item is © 1998 by Creators Syndicate and is reprinted with permission.*

\$8,509 — one-third the U.S. average and less than half that of Mississippi, our poorest state. The murder rate will remain at 25 per 100,000, more than twice that of New York City.

However, there will be some changes. Puerto Rico will send two senators and five or six representatives to Congress, to vote in lockstep with Ted Kennedy and Richard Gephardt on everything from affirmative action to taxes.

Current caps will come off federal welfare spending for the island. The average Puerto Rican family won't pay a penny in federal income taxes but could receive an Earned Income Tax Credit of \$2,713 annually. Statehood will cost us an additional \$3 billion a year in welfare payments alone.

Carlos Romero-Barcelo, Puerto Rico's non-voting (God be praised) delegate in the House of Representatives, candidly titled his pro-statehood book, *Statehood Is for the Poor*.

With Puerto Rico incorporated, America would be well on its way to becoming a bilingual nation. Ask the Canadians how splendidly that works.

According to a *New York Times* story of May 19, 1997, "Fully 90 percent of the island's 650,000 public school students

lack basic English skills by the time they graduate."

When the commonwealth's government proposed increasing the amount of English instruction, Puerto Rican teachers rioted. Romero-Barcelo doesn't pull his punches, "Yes, we want statehood (*for purely pecuniary reasons*), but neither our language nor our culture are negotiable."

Apparently, America's language and culture *are* negotiable. With Puerto Rican statehood, to the problem of unassimilable immigrants we would add an unassimilable state.

Earlier this year, by a single vote, the House passed a bill fast-tracking Puerto Rican statehood. The legislation provided that if a plurality of the island's voters ever opt for statehood, Congress must vote on its admission to the Union every two years, for a decade, until it passes.

Passage came after a perfunctory debate. In the Senate, the bill died in committee.

Hot for Hispanic support, the GOP leadership, including its neutered speaker, pushed the plan — as if Mexicans in California and Cubans in Florida really give a hill of frioles for Puerto Rican statehood.

Despite their leadership's position, better than three-quarters of House Republicans opposed