



**LULAC Convention
July 9, 2008**

**Remarks
Speaker of the
Puerto Rico House of Representatives**

Hon. José F. Aponte-Hernández

Good afternoon.

I am honored to be here today along such distinguished guests and fellow Latinos from all corners of this great nation.

Most of all, I am thrilled and inspired to be an active member of LULAC working with ***all of you*** to improve the lives of Hispanics in the United States and its territories.

Today, more than ever, we must strive to reinforce our resolve. We must never waver in our struggle for the equal rights of Latinos, especially those of us, disenfranchised and considered by some to be second class citizens.

We aspire to emulate the example of Ben Garza and others who organized the First LULAC General Convention on May 18, 1929.

They always believed that US citizens have a God-Given right to pursue the "American Dream", in this, the land of opportunity.

79 years later, it is fitting that we, Latinos, may well be the key to deciding the upcoming national elections.

As a disenfranchised American citizen from Puerto Rico, I am ever more envious of the political participation of Stateside Puerto Ricans. As an example, Puerto Ricans who live in the I-5 Corridor between Tampa and Orlando, Florida were the decisive votes for George Bush in 2000 and for Senator Mel Martinez in 2004. This year, the I-5 corridor and the Puerto Rican vote will once again be crucial to victory in Florida.

This story resonates in other states such as New Mexico, Colorado, Ohio and even in Michigan where Latinos will play the decisive role in what looks like an increasingly close election.

With such a scenario before us...We must ask ourselves, "How are the two national parties catering to the Hispanic vote?" "What issues should they address in order to best respond to the needs of **our** people and **our** communities?" and "What do we expect of the next President of the United States and of the 111th Congress?"

As Latinos, we hold sacred the principles of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness"... therefore, never forsaking our quest for equal rights under the Constitution, we must seek ways to achieve socio-economic stability under our flag, and return hope and prosperity back to **our** communities.

Our Nation is experiencing a severe economic recession and we must state our case to all candidates in order to achieve a new and dynamic policy to confront these challenges. We must integrate, nationally and globally. We must stand by our commitment. We are ready and capable. We can do it And We Will!

Puerto Rico, Our people, Our place in history, the bridge we represent to the Americas and our loyal military service to this nation, clamor for equal rights and justice.

The economic recession in Puerto Rico is far more critical, mostly due to our territorial condition. We are perceived as lacking resources, stability, warranties, assurance and tools of a federated state, to spur our economy.

We have the talent, the desire and the perseverance. Much of our professional community is bilingual and able to communicate globally. With the proper tools, We can do it!

Many years of unhealthy dependency on federal tax incentives to promote investment and spur employment resulted in Puerto Rico's per capita income falling behind, to less than half that of Mississippi, the poorest state in the union.

To make things worse, our grossly inefficient state industrial incentives act had a sunset clause for December 31st, 2007.

I was firmly convinced that a far more ample and comprehensive legislation could be crafted to form a solid foundation for a dynamic and robust socio-economic development in Puerto Rico. Partisan

differences had to be put aside, and a serious, non-political dialogue had to take place.

Pondering on what we could offer to make Puerto Rico a desirable and vibrant destination for investment, particularly one that could offset our chronic unemployment, I realized the new law had to be broad-based with terms and conditions that placed us in a competitive position with other jurisdictions.

One year later, Puerto Rico became witness of what can be achieved if all sides of an equation join forces and share the same will and determination to bring back hope and opportunity to the people.

On July 1st, Puerto Rico was proud to begin anew with the new “Act of Economic Incentives for the Development of Puerto Rico.”

In many ways, this legislation is more than just another mere act... it is truly the basic instrument for a comprehensive policy of **socio-economic** development.

As such, Puerto Rico had already been bypassed by many jurisdictions --both in the mainland, as well as internationally—as an attractive place for investment.

This new law provides terms and conditions that put us in a very competitive position with regards to other jurisdictions, while incorporating other economic sectors not contemplated by the previous law.

We have provided more opportunities for already existing businesses to continue developing and expanding their operations in the Island; including, for example, further incentives in the development of patents, so that we encourage research and development in a much broader manner than ever before. We provide incentives for local capital and entrepreneurship, as well as credits for the acquisition of goods produced in Puerto Rico. Many innovative incentives were designed to reduce the cost of operations in our Island; particularly, those associated with energy costs.

I encourage you to learn more about our new "Economic Incentives for the Development of Puerto Rico" on our website: www.camaraderepresentantes.org.

I assure you that by sheer will, commitment and determination, Puerto Rico has entered a new dynamic era of local and foreign investment, energized economic activity, a stable and permanent workforce and increased socio-economic development for each and every citizen on our beautiful island.

What we are determined to achieve could easily be used as a model for others, what we achieved in our Island could easily be done by you in a manner that is in tune with your needs and aspirations. Allow us to help the Latino community, as... Your wellbeing is our wellbeing. Your cause is our cause.

Let us join together for the long voyage ahead.

May God bless you all... And may God bless the United States of America!

Thank you