



LUIS G. FORTUÑO

RESIDENT COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE NEWSLETTER



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Clean and Safe Environment for Students and Teachers Fortuño Announces \$235 Million for Improvements to Public Schools

As part of the efforts to guarantee a first-rate education in adequate facilities to the 575,000 public school students in Puerto Rico, the Resident Commissioner, in a bipartisan effort voted to approve a bill in the Education and Labor Committee that would authorize federal funds to construct, improve, remodel and maintain public schools at a national level.



The legislation –approved by the House last April– authorizes \$6.4 billion in federal funds for fiscal year 2009 to be distributed to schools nationwide. Of the total amount, Puerto Rico would receive \$235 million to remodel, clean and repair the schools, many of which have had to close due to the critical state of deterioration.

This would be the first time the federal government assigns funds to states and territories for the construction and maintenance of public schools. The legislation would

make funds available for new construction, as well as for improvements to the existing infrastructures, including plumbing, installation of telephone lines, internet connections, air conditioning, as well as for other purposes.

For the Resident Commissioner this is an extremely important bill, as it will provide the funds to modernize and remodel the educational facilities where our students spend most of their time and learn the concepts that will help them become successful adults. For years, parents, teachers and students of the public school system in Puerto Rico have complained about the poor state of schools, where issues such as the lack of potable water, adequate maintenance and cleanliness have made these facilities unsafe for our students.

Fortuño believes that the academic performance of students does not only depend on having basic tools

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Historic Progress for Puerto Rico Self-Determination Congressional Committee Issues a Favorable Report for HR 900

Self-determination for Puerto Rico took another step forward in April, when the House Natural Resources Committee issued a favorable report regarding HR 900, better known as the Serrano-Fortuño bill. The legislation would allow for the first time a federally approved and sponsored referendum so that Puerto Ricans can decide their future in an educated, fair and representative process.

In the report, the members of the Natural Resources Committee state that after 110 years as a U.S.

territory, the 3.9 million U.S. citizens living on the Island do not enjoy a democratic government at a national level. The Committee also recognizes that although Congress has the authority to manage the self-determination process for Puerto Rico based on constitutionally-viable options, a Congressionally-sponsored vote in Puerto Rico has never taken place.

HR 900 – as submitted by the Resident Commissioner and Congressman José Serrano in October 2007– enjoys great bi-partisan support with the

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FROM WASHINGTON

As your Resident Commissioner, I am publishing this newsletter as a way to talk to you about a part of my job that fills me with immense joy and satisfaction, but that few of you know. As your Representative, one of my responsibilities is to represent and support all of you in issues relating to the federal government.

During the past three and a half years I have had the privilege to directly help more than 2,000 Puerto Ricans in a variety of issues, including veterans, Social Security or Medicare beneficiaries, among others. With our help, more than 250 people have obtained their U.S. citizenship, enriching our diversity and democracy.

We have been able to extend postal service to communities in Naguabo and have assisted –through our book fairs “Read to Grow”- non-profit organizations helping children with special education needs.

Simply put, my success in this job is all about you. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity you have given me to serve you during the past four years and I look forward to working together to build a better Puerto Rico for all of us.

Thank You,

2B ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Support for the Integrated Development of the North Region

The Resident Commissioner met in April with mayors from municipalities in the North Coast to discuss economic and infrastructure development opportunities in the area. During the meeting, Fortuño supported the mayors' initiative, known as INTENOR, a public-private consortium consisting of 15 municipalities in the north region of Puerto Rico looking to



Resident Commissioner Luis Fortuño during a working session with Mayors from the Northern Region of the Island to discuss economic development opportunities for the entire region.

promote efforts for the area's integrated development. INTENOR has the support of the private sector and of the Ana G. Mendez University System.

Initiatives like INTENOR are the most adequate tools to promote the integrated development of specific areas as they aim for regional benefits by working together in a cooperative manner. For example, the development of a light rail transportation system between Bayamón and Hatillo is a key goal of this initiative. Through INTENOR, mayors have obtained nearly \$3 million in federal funds for a feasibility study. The project has the endorsement and the support of the Resident Commissioner, who believes that such a transportation system would greatly lessen traffic congestion in the region. In addition, the project could extend and promote the use

of the Urban Train, which serves part of the metropolitan San Juan area.

INTENOR also promotes the creation of an Industrial Development and Support Center (CREDIS), which is designed to support industries in the area. As requested by the mayors, the Resident Commissioner has asked for an appropriation of \$1 million for Fiscal Year 2009 for CREDIS.

Finally, federal funds will also be requested to develop a Science Park in Barceloneta to support the efforts of the pharmaceutical and manufacturing industries in the area.

As part of the efforts to promote sustainable development in the area, the Office of the Resident Commissioner obtained \$4 million for a flood control project in the Arecibo River; \$47,000 to acquire equipment for the Manatí Municipal Police; and \$121,000 to buy medical equipment for the Quebrada Health Center in Camuy. For Fiscal Year 2009, the Resident Commissioner was able to include in the proposed budget of the U.S. Corps of Engineering dredging of the Arecibo Bay, which is very important as it will facilitate the transportation of materials and equipment to manufacturing industries in the area, thus lowering current transportation costs.

INFONOTES



Constituent Services Workshops by the Office of the Resident Commissioner

AUGUST 23: CITIZENSHIP WORKSHOP

With the collaboration of the Municipality of San Juan, the workshop will assist legal and permanent residents of the United States applying for U.S. Citizenship. Information 1-866-266-6678

JUNE 23: “OUR ENVIRONMENTAL FUTURE: FEDERAL FUNDING PROGRAMS AND OPPORTUNITIES”

Held at the Science Park in Bayamón and with the cooperation of the EPA, the workshop offered an orientation on federal funding opportunities for recycling and environmental protection programs.

JUNE 9: EDUCATION WORKSHOP

Held at the Inter-American University in San Juan, the workshop offered technical assistance on federal proposals, with emphasis on the TRIO Program.

Farm Bill Full of Benefits

Of great importance to the people of Puerto Rico is the recent approval of the 2008 Farm Bill in the United States Congress. The legislation reauthorizes, extends and restructures for 5 years agricultural and nutritional programs nationwide, including the Nutritional Assistance Program (PAN, for its acronym in Spanish), which impacts 460,000 families in Puerto Rico and injects \$1.6 billion to the local economy.

Fortuño called the approval of the Farm Bill a huge achievement for farmers, dairy farmers and mayors, with whom he met regularly in the Central Region to ensure that their concerns were addressed in the measure.

Of great impact for farmers in Puerto Rico is the increase in funds for specialty crops to \$466 million. Under the specialty crops program, funds can be used for research, marketing, production or food safety initiatives for tropical fruits and vegetables, such as mango, coffee, plantain and pineapple among others. The legislation provides \$377 million for a 10-year period to control and detect plagues such as the Coffee Berry Borer, the Black Sigatoka in plantains, and Red Palm Mites, among others.

The new law addressed the Resident Commissioner's petition and reiterated a prohibition to close the field offices of the Farm Service Agency in Barranquitas, Adjuntas and Lares. These federal offices support farmers through federal programs and financing.

The approval of an exemption for Puerto Rico that increases the number of communities on the Island that can access funds for infrastructure, economic development and housing projects through the Rural Development Administration is considered a great achievement by the Resident Commissioner.

The Farm Bill also creates a new rebate program for farmers and dairy farmers with geographical disadvantages, which includes Puerto Rico. Under the program, which has a budget of \$15 million, farmers and dairy farmers on the Island will be eligible to receive a direct rebate for transportation expenses of materials and final products, so that they can compete globally.



HIGHLIGHTS OF THE 2008 FARM BILL

- ✓ Reauthorization until 2012 of the Nutritional Assistance Program (PAN, for its acronym in Spanish) – It benefits 460,000 families in Puerto Rico and will inject \$1.6 billion to the economy.
- ✓ A feasibility study to include the PAN in the national food stamp program.
- ✓ Funds for special crop programs - \$466 million for 10 years to plan, research and market special crops including tropical fruits and vegetables.
- ✓ Control and detection of plagues - \$377 million for 10 years to control and detect plagues such as the Coffee Berry Borer, Black Sigatoka in plantains and Red Palm Mites, among others.
- ✓ Prohibits for two years the closing Farm Service Agency field offices.
- ✓ Rural Development Programs - extends benefits of socio-economic, water infrastructure and housing programs to more municipalities and community and faith-based organizations.
- ✓ Extends until 2012 the Milk Income Loss Program (MILC) – dairy farmers in Puerto Rico have received \$19 million under this program in four years.
- ✓ Program for farmers and dairy farmers with a geographical disadvantage - \$15 million in direct rebates that will benefit farmers and dairy farmers in Puerto Rico.
- ✓ Program to improve farm and food science facilities and equipment in universities - \$8 million for 4 years to buy and improve equipment and facilities dedicated to farm research in universities, including Puerto Rico.
- ✓ Renewable energy - \$1 billion to promote investments in new renewable energy technologies and reduce the tax credit to produce corn-based ethanol redirecting the funds to cellulosic ethanol.



\$232.2 Million for VA Hospital and Outpatient Clinic in Mayaguez

Addressing the needs of the veteran community in Puerto Rico, the U.S. Congress approved in May \$232.2 million to improve the VA Hospital in San Juan and a new outpatient clinic in Mayaguez. The authorization is part of the Veteran Affairs Department Medical Facilities, Authorization and Leasing Act of 2008, which was supported and co-sponsored by the Resident Commissioner.

Congress approved the multi-million dollar authorization because it recognizes the urgent need to correct the serious deficiencies in the VA Hospital in San Juan and to modernize the outpatient clinic in Mayaguez. The VA Hospital in San Juan is over 40 years old and is one of the most utilized facilities in the VA hospital system, servicing more than 150,000 veterans from Puerto Rico and the Caribbean annually.

The VA Hospital in San Juan will receive \$225.9 million to start the second phase of an improvement plan that is currently being built in the medical complex which includes construction of a new six-floor tower that will add 314 new beds. Projects that will take place during the second-phase include:

- asbestos abatement;
- expansion of the parking lot, and;
- remodeling of Building I.

In Mayaguez, the Resident Commissioner announced the authorization of \$6.3 million to lease a new building for the outpatient clinic. The clinic will feature the latest technology and state of the art facilities to be able to offer veterans on the West Coast the medical attention they deserve. The existing clinic will remain open through 2011.

Fortuño Promotes Environmental Conservation in Vieques and Culebra

With the purpose of obtaining federal funds to protect and preserve the Puerto Mosquito Bioluminescent Bay in Vieques, the Resident Commissioner filed H.R. 5864 in the U.S. House of Representatives to designate the body of water as a National Marine Sanctuary.

The Puerto Mosquito Bay has great ecological, cultural and scientific value for the people of Puerto Rico, as it is one of three bioluminescent bodies of water in Puerto Rico and one of seven in the World. The light is produced by the dinoflagellate *Pyrodium bahamense*, a tiny organism that could disappear if the ecosystem is not properly protected.

As part of the National Program of Marine Sanctuaries, the federal and Commonwealth governments would jointly develop a management plan that would look to:

- protect the marine and land areas that make up the Bay;
- maintain the quality of the water and the ecosystem that promotes the growth of bioluminescent organisms;
- create public information campaigns to educate the



public on the ecological and cultural values of the Bay, and;

- develop commercial and recreational facilities for the enjoyment of the thousands of Puerto Ricans and tourists that visit the area.

Under the Resident Commissioner's proposal, the Commonwealth and the federal government would work as a team to develop and implement the conservation and protection plan, which could not be executed without final approval from the Government of Puerto Rico.

The National Program of Marine Sanctuaries is comprised of 14 protected areas, or 150,000 miles of marine and lake waters in the United States. The designation of Puerto Mosquito would constitute a step forward in the protection of the bioluminescent bay.

FEDERAL FUNDS TO CLEAN BEACHES IN CULEBRA APPROVED BY CONGRESS

The U.S. House of Representatives approved in May legislative language proposed by the Resident Commissioner to allow the U.S. Corps of Engineers to use federal fund to clean the Northwest Peninsula and Flamenco Beach in Culebra.

Fortuño's initiative is part of the 2009 Defense Authorization Act, which would repeal a 1974 Act that prohibits the use of federal funds to remove the ammunition that still remains on the beaches, where U.S. Navy trained before leaving Culebra more than 30 years ago.

Fortuño Defends Our Non-Profit Organizations

Firm in his commitment and support of non-profit organizations, the Resident Commissioner visited the Cupey facilities of the Sor Isolina Ferré Center and Iniciativa Comunitaria in Hato Rey to discuss the critical fiscal situation affecting these organizations, which are not being paid by the Commonwealth government for services they have rendered.

In most cases, the money owed to these organizations comes from federal funds that are transferred to different state agencies. These funds are destined to offer a variety of much-needed services to the communities, including drug prevention and rehabilitation programs, and medical services to HIV/AIDS patients, among others.

Joined by his wife Lucé Vela, Fortuño met with the management of the Sor Isolina Ferré Center, a faith based organization, to discuss the development of an education program aimed at preventing school desertion. As of



Dr. Jose Vargas Vidot shares with Resident Commissioner Luis Fortuño the needs of HIV/AIDS patients and homeless population serviced by *Iniciativa Comunitaria*, a non-profit organization, in the San Juan metro area.

May, the state government owed \$1.7 million to the Sor Isolina Ferré Center, an organization recognized island-wide for its outstanding social work.

During his visit to *Iniciativa Comunitaria*, the Resident Commissioner had the opportunity to visit with homeless individuals who are receiving benefits from the program. With the help of municipal governments and the private sector, *Iniciativa Comunitaria* has been successful at rehabilitating drugs users, treating HIV/AIDS patients, and penetrating high risk communities. As a result, the organization has received more than \$700,000 in federal funds for the operation of its programs.

Accompanied by Dr. José Vargas Vidot, Fortuño urged the public sector to support the non-profit sector with financial and human resources. He also urged the state government to accelerate payments to these organizations for the services they provide to communities with needs on the Island.

such as notebooks and pencils, but on being able to enjoy a pleasant and safe school environment. An adequate infrastructure would greatly improve working conditions for our teachers and the environment where our students learn. With this multi-million injection of funds, the Resident Commissioner would ensure that the Puerto Rico Department of Education has the necessary resources to give our students a top-rate education, which is a constitutional right.

Following the approval of the bill by the House Education and Labor Committee, the Resident Commissioner urged leaders in Puerto Rico to use the federal funds assigned to Puerto Rico for our social and economic development responsibly and in accordance with the law. Federal funds granted to the Puerto Rico Department of Education aim to promote the well-being of our children and should be invested in projects that will ensure a safe and healthy environment for our teachers and students

The academic performance of students does not only depend on having basic tools such as notebooks and pencils, but on being able to enjoy a pleasant and safe school environment.



endorsement of more than 100 Members of Congress, who understand that the time has come to provide Puerto Rico with a self-determination process in which it can express its opinion about the future of the Island. During the past three years, Congress has demonstrated its interest in providing the people of Puerto Rico the necessary tools to solve the status issue by holding four Congressional hearings on the subject, and approving HR 900 in the Natural Resources Committee.

According to the report by the Congressional Committee, HR 900 would let Puerto Ricans choose among two options:

- stay under the current territorial status, or;
- develop a permanent non-territorial status viable under the U.S. Constitution.

With this legislation, Fortuño aims to provide the people of Puerto Rico a fair and constitutionally viable process to end the situation under which we have lived for more than a century once and for all. According to the report, there are three constitutionally

feasible status options, including statehood, independence and free association. Previous processes lacking Congressional approval, which included status definitions that were not possible or real under the U.S. Constitution, have helped mislead the people of Puerto Rico. As a result, a real process of self-determination for Puerto Rico must have the endorsement of Congress.

The report categorically rejects "Enhanced Commonwealth" as a constitutionally-viable option and calls efforts in favor of this alternative as a strategy to confuse the people and prevents them from carrying out a genuine and meaningful self-determination process.

For Fortuño, this important and historical step of HR 900 renews interest in the legislation which could be voted on by the House of Representatives before the end of the 110th Congress. The Resident Commissioner is convinced that now, while Hispanics are growing as a powerful force nationwide, is the ideal moment for Congress to act on HR 900 and allow the people of Puerto Rico to finally decide their political future.

6A COMMUNITY AND FAITH BASED ORGANIZATIONS



COMMUNITY AND FAITH BASED ORGANIZATIONS OFFICES

Aguada	Lares
Aguadilla	Las Marías
Aguas Buenas	Las Piedras
Adjuntas	Loíza
Añasco	Manatí
Arecibo	Maricao
Arroyo	Mayagüez
Barceloneta	Moca
Barranquitas	Morovis
Bayamón	Naranjito
Cabo Rojo	Orocovis
Caguas	Patillas
Camuy	Ponce
Canóvanas	San Sebastián
Carolina	San Juan
Cataño	San Lorenzo
Cidra	Santa Isabel
Corozal	Salinas
Culebra	Toa Alta
Fajardo	Toa Baja
Florida	Utuado
Guaynabo	Vega Alta
Gurabo	Vega Baja
Humacao	Villalba
Juana Díaz	Yauco

Resident Commissioner Promotes Community Partnerships through 50 Municipal Offices

Under the slogan, "together we can do more", the Resident Commissioner inaugurated Puerto Rico's 50th municipal Community and Faith Based Office, located in Vega Baja in May. These offices empowering community and faith-based organizations with the necessary resources to greatly improve our community.

The Resident Commissioner is convinced that community and faith-based organizations are better prepared to address the needs of our communities, especially in lieu of the social deterioration affecting our Island. With this in mind, Fortuño is committed to the promotion of strategic partnerships aimed at lifting and empowering our communities. As a result, over 400 members of the non-profit sector participated in the first Community and Faith Based Initiatives Workshop, which is a White House initiative. . At the workshop, Community and Faith Based Initiatives Director Jay Hein, and representatives from several

federal agencies, offered information on federal funding opportunities.

The accomplishments of these municipal offices are evident throughout Puerto Rico. In Arecibo, the municipal office – in cooperation with Sister Roberta Center – is offering workshops at El Cotto residential project to address drug use, contributing to the health and well-being of the entire municipality. In Vega Alta, the Community and Faith Based Initiatives Office obtained federal funds through AmeriCorps/Vista to hire and train personnel. In Ponce, the Community and Faith Based Initiatives Office has offered various technical assistance workshops to faith-based communities on seeking (501) (c) (3) federal tax exemption, which is required to compete for federal funds.

New offices in Camuy and Santa Isabel will be opening soon.

WE ARE AT YOUR SERVICE TEL: 1-866-266-6678 (Toll free) e-mail: luis.fortuno@mail.house.gov

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