

Timetable of the establishment of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

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Background: The events prior to the creation of Commonwealth in the period from 1950-52 are characterized by an ever-present lack of unanimity among the Puerto Rican people and a consequently ambiguous response by Congress to Puerto Rican demands and desires.

The first major step in the evolution of the U.S./Puerto Rico political relationship was the enactment of the Jones Act in 1917 giving Puerto Ricans U.S. citizenship and the right to elect a legislative body with substantial powers.

Despite continuous agitation on the island after 1917 for statehood, independence, or a greater measure of self-government, the relationship remained fundamentally unaltered until 1947.

In 1947 Congress for the first time in a U.S. territory provided for an elected governor for Puerto Rico. In the 1948 Puerto Rican election (as in most P.R. elections since the beginning of the century) the issue of political status was much discussed. Although the concept of "associated free state" or "commonwealth" was first suggested as far back as 1922, it was not until this first gubernatorial election on the island that commonwealth status was actively supported by a political party.

The results of the 1948 election indicated significant popular support for the idea of commonwealth as the Popular Democrat party was swept into power (with 63% of the vote) on a "commonwealth platform."

In 1949 and 1950 the newly elected governor came to Washington to seek legislation consistent with his campaign pledges of 1948. In March of 1950 the resident commissioner of Puerto Rico introduced H.R. 7674 to the House, and two weeks later two senators sponsored a companion bill, S.3336. These bills later became P.L. 600.

July 3, 1950, P.L. 600: In addition to continuing some provisions of the Jones Act and repealing others (relating primarily to internal governmental structure) this act stipulated that the following procedure was to be followed for adoption of a Puerto Rican constitution:

- P.L. 600 to be approved by a majority of voters voting in a referendum.
- upon approval legislature authorized to call a constitutional convention.
- upon adoption of the constitution by people of Puerto Rico the U.S. president is to transmit it to Congress if he finds it consistent with P.L. 600 (i.e. republican form of government and including a bill of rights).
- upon approval by Congress the constitution becomes effective according to its terms.

Aug. 1950: Puerto Rican legislature sets the date for the referendum on P.L. 600 for June 4, 1951.

June 4, 1951: Referendum held on P.L. 600; a majority of those voting approved. Subsequent to the referendum the Puerto Rican legislature set up the machinery for the election of delegates to the constitutional convention.

Aug. 27, 1951: Election of delegates to the constitutional convention; candidates submitted by existing political parties; 92 delegates elected representing 3 parties.

Sept. 17, 1951: Constitutional convention convenes.

Feb. 6, 1952: Constitutional convention's deliberations concluded, convention approves the document (88 in favor, 3 opposed, 1 absent)

March 3, 1952: Constitution overwhelmingly approved in a referendum; it had been printed in English and

Spanish in the four daily newspapers and over 1,300,000 copies distributed throughout the island.

April 22, 1952: President Truman finds the constitution to conform with P.L. 600 and transmits it to Congress.

July 3, 1952, P.L. 447: Congress approves the constitution in a joint resolution submitted by the resident commissioner. The following provisos were part of the approval:

- Art. II, § 5 (right to education) to have "no force and effect" until amended by the Puerto Rican people according to the procedure in art. VII of the constitution (Amendments proposed by legislature and approved by majority of those voting in referendum) to allow attendance in private school to satisfy the requirement of compulsory attendance in elementary schools.
- Except for adopting amendments to art. II, § 5 and to art. VII, § 3, art. VII shall have no force and effect until amended to provide that amendments must be consistent with P.L. 447, P.L. 600, the "applicable provisions" of the U.S. Constitution, and the Puerto Rican Federal Relations Act.
- Constitution to become effective when constitutional convention formally resolves to accept "in the name of the people of Puerto Rico" the conditions of P.L. 447 and when the governor so proclaims.

Congress did not approve art. 2, § 20 (provision concerning basic human rights) and it did not become part of the constitution.

July 10, 1952: Constitutional convention approves Resolution 34, formally accepting the conditions of congressional approval of the constitution.

July 25, 1952: By proclamation of the Puerto Rican governor the constitution becomes effective.

Nov. 27, 1953: Resolution of the U.N. General Assembly recognizing Puerto Rican exercise of right to self-determination and terminating the requirement that the U.S. transmit information to the U.N. concerning Puerto Rico.

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