

Puerto Rico to hold statehood referendum amid disillusion



San Juan, May 18 (RHC)-- Puerto Rico's Governor Wanda Vazquez has announced that she will hold a non-binding referendum in November to decide whether Puerto Rico should become a U.S. state, a move that comes amid growing disillusion with the island's U.S. territorial status.

For the first time in the island's history, the referendum will ask a single, simple question: Should Puerto Rico be immediately admitted as a U.S. state?

It is an answer that requires approval from the U.S. Congress and a question that outraged the island's independence supporters and members of the main opposition Popular Democratic Party, which supports the status quo. ?????

However, it is a gamble that members of the governor's pro-statehood party are confident will pay off given that Puerto Rico has struggled to obtain federal funds for Hurricanes Irma and Maria, a string of recent strong earthquakes and the COVID-19 pandemic amid growing complaints that the island does not receive fair and equal treatment.

"Everything important in life carries some risk," said former Puerto Rico Governor Carlos Romero Barcelo, a member of the Progressive New Party. Previous referendums have presented voters with more than one question or various options, including independence or upholding the current territorial status, but none have been so direct as the one scheduled to be held during the November 3rd general elections.

"Our people will have the opportunity once and for all to define our future," Vazquez said. "It is never too late to be treated as equals."

Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens but cannot vote in U.S. presidential elections. And while the island is exempt from the U.S. federal income tax, it still pays Social Security and Medicare and local taxes and receives less federal funding than U.S. states.

Many believe the island's territorial status has contributed to its struggle to recover from the hurricanes and earthquakes, as well as worsened its economic crisis, largely caused by decades of heavy borrowing and the elimination of federal tax incentives.

U.S. Congress would have to accept the referendum results for it to move forward, but it has always acted aloof on the island's previous five referendums. The last one, held in 2017, was hit by a boycott and low turnout that raised doubts about the legitimacy of the vote and provoked massive protests.

Meanwhile, if statehood were possible, it would award Puerto Rico two senators and five representatives, but it's unlikely a Republican-controlled Congress would acknowledge the referendum because Puerto Rico tends to favor Democrats.

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