



Message at the Opening of the District Office of the Resident Commissioner

Pablo José Hernández Rivera

Caguas, PR

March 21, 2025

Good day, Puerto Rico.

They kicked us out of the [state] Capitol, but brought us closer to the people.

We left the capital, where the head of Puerto Rico's government is, and we came to Caguas, where the center and heart of Puerto Rico's people lie.

It's fitting that this office is located in Caguas, where Luis Muñoz Rivera, our distinguished Resident Commissioner, took refuge with his family during the persecution of Republican mobs supported by the U.S. military government in the early 20th century. Since then, there's been a historical current and a political line that brings us back to Caguas.

The autonomist political line, which defends Puerto Rican identity in union or association with a larger and more prosperous country—formerly Spain, today the United States.

The unionist political line, which brought Puerto Ricans of all ideologies together under one party in pursuit of the common good.

The political line that values dignity over money, that stood up for the Puerto Rican jíbaro, the sugarcane cutter, in the face of powerful sugar corporations.

The political line of socially responsible conscience, that believes in “uplifting the downtrodden,” without bringing down those who are already up.

The political line of those who believe that what is unjust for some is unjust for all.

The political line that understands it doesn't matter where you come from, but what you do with your life—like Franklin Delano Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, and Luis Muñoz Marín did.

The political line that, upon its resurgence with the people's favor—electing a Democratic and autonomist Resident Commissioner for the first time in 24 years—caused today's Republicans to expel us from San Juan and sent us back to Caguas. And for us, Caguas is not a refuge, but a center of action and struggle.

From Caguas, we fight for a fairer Puerto Rico, we fight for a fairer United States, we fight for every single one of you—we fight for you.

We fight for workers and veterans when we denounce the firing of federal employees—especially at the VA hospital—and support legislation to reinstate them.

We fight for immigrants when their communities are raided and their legal and human rights violated, and we support legislation to protect them.

We fight for seniors when we urge the Department of Health to give us fair treatment with Medicare Advantage funds.

We fight for youth when we denounce cuts to the NIH that affect universities and present legislation to expand affordable housing.

We fight for the manufacturing industry when we promote new incentives like those in HR 1328, to grant a 40% tax credit to companies relocating to Puerto Rico.

We fight for children when we introduce legislation to expand the Child Tax Credit—because children don't choose where they're born, they don't have the agency to escape poverty, and if they grow up in it, they lose opportunities for the rest of their lives. They shouldn't have to live with that disadvantage imposed by the lottery of birth.

We Fight to Eradicate Petty Politics

Jesús T. Piñero, the first Resident Commissioner from the Popular Democratic Party, once said that “politics should never be about small-mindedness.”

Petty politics is closing an office that provides services to citizens, to veterans who defended democracy, to seniors who rely on Social Security—just because we belong to different parties.

Petty politics is the refusal to work together in areas of shared interest—just because we’re from different parties.

Petty politics is sabotaging or defeating good initiatives for the country—simply because they come from someone in a different party.

Neither I nor this office will play along with that kind of petty politics—neither here in Puerto Rico nor in Washington.

I’ve said it—and I’ve done it.

In Puerto Rico, we’ve shown a willingness to work with a state government from a different party like never before.

- On November 5, I congratulated the Governor-elect.
- On November 13, I visited her at her office in Washington.
- On January 2, I attended her swearing-in.
- On February 8, I wrote to her as soon as I received the tsunami warning, offering my help with federal agencies.
- On February 10, I spoke in the floor in favor of her request for a federal emergency declaration to address our energy crisis, and I sent a letter to the administration signed by several Democratic members of Congress.
- On February 28, I attended her protocol greeting.
- I have introduced bills that she had previously introduced and that I believe are good for Puerto Rico.

- I've sought to build on what she started—on issues like Medicare Advantage, where last year she got six signatures for a letter urging fair treatment for Puerto Rico, and this year we got fourteen.

At all times, I have reiterated—and will continue to reiterate—my willingness to work together for Puerto Rico's wellbeing. Today, I reaffirm it: let's work together—reds, blues, greens, and turquoises—to save Puerto Rico.

In Washington, I've also shown, even in a historically hostile and polarized environment, the will and readiness to work with Republican leaders. For example:

- I co-sponsored two Republican bills for reconstruction, both already passed in the House.

- I co-lead H.R. 1328, introduced by Republican Nicole Malliotakis, to create a new incentive for Puerto Rico.

- I sought and obtained Republican support to advance our Medicare Advantage agenda and to improve oversight of the Fiscal Oversight Board.

That said, this spirit of bipartisan and patriotic collaboration cannot mean absolute submission to abuse of power or poor public administration.

I will not bow my head, stay silent, or stand by while our people suffer cuts to healthcare, food safety, or education.

I have denounced—and will continue to denounce—the harmful impact of the Trump administration's proposed budget cuts.

Whenever I speak out, I'll do so respectfully and calmly, without personal attacks or baseless insults. I won't insult the president during a hurricane, nor will I go on CNN and say I'd punch him in the face. But I will never, never, never hesitate to tell the *americanos*—in English and Spanish—that my people demand respect.

I also will not betray my ideals—nor my commitment to democracy.

You all know that I won't address the status issue unless others put it on the agenda. If they do, I will always be clear and honest with the people of Puerto Rico and my colleagues in the U.S.: any attempt to address status

must include the option to maintain and improve our glorious Commonwealth status.

Excluding *estadolibristas* (commonwealthers) is undemocratic—period.

Likewise, I will not allow a minority to bypass our democratic will to remain united with the United States.

Our people have repeatedly, directly and indirectly, said that they want to remain tied to the United States—whether as a Commonwealth or a state.

If one day Puerto Ricans choose independence, I will defend their right to it.

But I will oppose any external or internal enemy who tries to impose independence—whether through clownish threats of military invasion, like Nicolás Maduro did, or through “interesting developments” like undemocratic and unconstitutional executive orders promoted by people that Puerto Ricans never elected. Here, Puerto Ricans are in charge—and we govern through votes, not violence.

Our Team

Before closing, I want to introduce the team at our office. Most of them were recruited through the résumé bank we launched in November.

Steffano Saltalamacchia, Director. I met Steffano two years ago while he worked as legal advisor to the municipal legislature of Caguas. I was impressed by his character, professionalism, and loyalty. He submitted his résumé and was hired for the role where he could best serve.

Guillermo Guasp, Deputy Director. Guasp has been a friend for many years. One day, while reviewing résumés, I came across his and asked why he hadn’t told me directly. He said he prefers to follow procedures—and in doing so, earned my trust.

Ángel Harry Román, Press Secretary. Creative, talented, persistent, and above all, patient with a boss who’s a stickler for communications.

And our caseworkers and field representatives, who will provide the services the people come to this office for: Paula Fournier, Sonya Matos, Luis Calderón, and Bryant Villegas.

This office will provide support services for Puerto Ricans in matters related to federal agencies, such as:

- Helping seniors with their Social Security benefits
- Ensuring our veterans receive the services and benefits they've earned
- Working on nominations for Puerto Rican youth to U.S. military academies
- Supporting small businesses with the Small Business Bureau
- Assisting with passports and visas through the State Department
- And much more

We didn't wait to have an office to start serving. From cafés, coworking spaces, and our homes, we've already helped constituents resolve issues with electricity, Social Security, and passports.

We Are Here to Serve

We are here to serve—with history in our conscience and the future on our agenda. As Luis Muñoz Rivera told us: “We must keep our eyes on the past and on the future. The present is nothing: it is a fleeting moment. The lessons come from yesterday and serve for tomorrow.” You know that I understand, value, and seek inspiration from our history. Today I speak to you, spiritually surrounded by the Resident Commissioners who came before me, who are no longer with us, and who contributed to the welfare of our homeland.

When I say we are here to serve, I mean:

- We are here to serve with patriotism, like Luis Muñoz Rivera
- We are here to serve with respect for workers—especially federal employees—like Santiago Iglesias
- We are here to serve with creativity, like Antonio Fernós Isern

- We are here to serve with youthfulness, like Santiago Polanco Abreu
- We are here to serve with intelligence, like Jaime Benítez
- We are here to serve in the face of federal cuts, like Baltasar Corrada del Río
- We are here to serve with justice, like Jaime Fuster

And we are here to serve in times of great uncertainty and difficulty. The road ahead is steep.

The immediate future will bring challenges and struggles. For a time, we will suffer more and celebrate less. Sometimes we will feel powerless, abandoned, and hopeless.

But always remember the lessons of our history: remember that we overcame the Great Depression of the 1930s; remember we overcame the cuts of the 1980s; and remember—we will overcome the coming storm.

Puerto Rican: remember that “strength lies in the people.”

Puerto Rican: never lose faith in your own will.

Puerto Rican: remember—you are not alone. We are with you. And in the face of the winds blowing from the north, we will fight together—with will, courage, and sacrifice.

Thank you very much.