

## Statehood for Puerto Rico- The Party Platforms Leading into the 2008 Conventions

By David Gorgani

The 2008 Democratic and Republican National Conventions are around the corner. Although these conventions may be physically distant from Puerto Rico, their pertinence is clear. The National Conventions are where the Democratic and Republican parties formally announce their presidential candidates, and perhaps more importantly, their platforms for the coming four years. These platforms announce the parties' stances on topics ranging from the war in Iraq to Puerto Rico's status.

With the emergence of new issues in the public consciousness, an updated party platform is pivotal to maintain a strong electoral base. Maintenance of the base also entails tailoring positions to public opinion. This is where Puerto Rico fits in.

To stay in touch with their electoral bases, both parties have introduced creative new grassroots elements to their 2008 platform construction processes. Democrats are holding Platform Meetings throughout the U.S. so that "for the first time, voters will have the opportunity to ... shape the Democratic Platform," according to the Democratic National Committee website.

The Republican National Committee, in what their website terms "The Republican Party's Historic Online Platform," calls for the submission of text and video entries to an online database for consideration in formation of their platform.

These innovative strategies call for an unprecedented amount of public participation in construction of the platforms. The parties are listening to citizens, both in consideration of where their stances should be, as well as in consideration of what issues are the most important to their constituents. Issues like the unequal status of 4 million citizens in Puerto Rico can be brought to the forefront of the parties' concerns through the Republican Party's online database and the Democrats' Platform Meetings

The 2004 Democratic and Republican Party platforms both addressed Puerto Rico's current undemocratic status as an issue to be resolved. The 2004 Democratic Party Platform stated, "We believe that four million disenfranchised American citizens residing in Puerto Rico have the right to the permanent and fully democratic status of their choice."

In an even more clearly pro-Statehood for Puerto Rico stance, the 2004 Republican Party Platform stated, "We support the right of the United States citizens of Puerto Rico to be admitted to the Union as a fully sovereign state after they freely so determine." The 2000 Democratic and Republican platforms expressed opinions very similar to those in their respective 2004 platforms.

Young Democrats of America have fully enshrined ending Puerto Rico's current unrepresentative territorial status in their platform language. *"We stand for... 11. Providing the American Citizens of Puerto Rico with a fair and federally sanctioned process to determine their final, non-colonial and non-territorial political status, which will define their future relationship to the United States of America either as a state of the union or as an independent nation."*

What do the parties' positions mean for citizens? Since their views on Statehood for Puerto Rico remain relatively unchanged in recent years, it would seem that significant change in 2008 would be unlikely. However, the Young Democrats' enthusiastic support for an end to the subjugation of Puerto Rico

and second class citizenship, along with continued GOP support for Puerto Rico Statehood are evidence of a growing and continued commitment. Additionally, with continued exposure of the current undemocratic status, a shift to a more pro-Statehood position by Democrats is not farfetched.

These new systems for constituent input are vehicles through which political party members can encourage the Puerto Rico issue to be addressed in an unabashed, pro-Statehood manner in both of the Party Platforms.

***David Gorgani is a senior at The University of California, Los Angeles where he studies Political Science and Economics. He interned at the U.S. Council for Puerto Rico Statehood this summer of 2008.***

**Convention Dates:**

August 25-28: Democratic National Convention - Denver, Colorado

September 1-4: Republican National Convention - Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota

**Author's Note:** The Party Platforms are being developed as you read this article. Eligible participants should provide input to the Republicans' online system and in the Democrats' Platform Meetings. Consistent reminders to party members, delegates and officials of support for Statehood for Puerto Rico are a surefire way for 4 million U.S. citizens to gain equal representation, rights and citizenship.