

April 28, 2010

## **FACT SHEET: Possible Puerto Rico Statehood & English as the Official Language**

### **Should English be the Official Language of Puerto Rico?**

In 1998 when the House of Representatives last debated a Puerto Rico bill similar to H.R. 2499, the most contentious issue was whether English should be the official language if Puerto Rico were to become a state.

Currently, both Spanish and English are official languages in Puerto Rico. However, as a practical matter, Puerto Rico is predominately Spanish-speaking. Spanish is used in the State Legislature, local courts, businesses and in schools.

During the 1998 debate, an amendment on the issue of English as the official language was allowed to be offered on the House Floor. It is not known whether House Democrat leaders will allow a vote on a true English as the official language amendment during debate on H.R. 2499.

During Committee markup of H.R. 2499 in July 2009, an amendment to make English the official language under Puerto Rico statehood was defeated along a party-line vote.

During our history, the matter of the English language was addressed during the admission of other states into the Union, including Arizona, Louisiana, Oklahoma and New Mexico. Today, there are 30 states with official English language laws.

**BOTTOM-LINE:** If Congress is going to ask Puerto Rico if they want to be a state, as H.R. 2499 does, then Congress has an obligation to address, in advance, the question of whether English would be the state's official language. That is the fair and responsible approach for both the residents of the existing 50 states and the people of Puerto Rico.

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**House Natural Resources Committee Republican Press Office**

Contact: [Jill Strait](#) or [Spencer Pederson](#)

202-226-2311

<http://republicans.resourcescommittee.house.gov>

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