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GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS ALERT

Puerto Rico's political landscape changes dramatically; transition process underway

Alejandro García-Padilla elected as new Governor

In a very close contest, Senator Alejandro García-Padilla, the Popular Democratic Party ("PDP") candidate for Governor, was elected over outgoing Governor Luis Fortuño, who was the candidate of the New Progressive Party ("NPP"), by a margin of less than 1.00%. Mr. García-Padilla will be sworn in as Governor on January 2, 2013, for a four year term.

Pedro Pierluisi re-elected as Resident Commissioner in Washington, DC

The incumbent Pedro Pierluisi, the NPP candidate for Resident Commissioner in Washington, DC, was re-elected by a margin of slightly more than 1.00% over PDP candidate Rafael Cox-Alomar. Coupled with the fact that the PDP regained control of both chambers of the Legislative Assembly and the defeat of San Juan Mayor Jorge Santini to PDP candidate Carmen Yulín Cruz, Resident Commissioner Pierluisi will become the highest ranking elected official in the NPP.

Popular Democratic Party takes control of the Legislature

Even though the results for Governor were very close, the PDP was able to take decisive control of both chambers of the Commonwealth Legislative Assembly. In the Senate, the results were most dramatic, as the PDP will double its representation for a total of 18 seats and the NPP Delegation has been reduced to 8, with one last additional at-large seat that still needs to be awarded either to the NPP or to the Puerto Rican Independence Party. It appears that the Senate will be presided by Senator Eduardo Bhatia, while in the NPP Delegation, current Majority Leader Larry Seilhamer will be the Minority Leader and Senator Carmelo Ríos will be the Minority Whip. Outgoing Senate President Thomas Rivera-Schatz will not have a leadership position in his delegation.

In the House of Representatives the results were similar, albeit with a more reduced advantage for the PDP. There the PDP garnered 27 seats and the NPP 22. There are still two districts in play, one subject to recount and the other with close to 1/3 of the votes still to be awarded to the corresponding candidate. As of today, there are two known candidates for the House Speakership. One is Representative Jaime Perelló and the other is Representative Luis Vega-Ramos. As to the NPP Delegation, current Speaker Jenniffer González will be the new House Minority Leader and Representative Carlos “Johnny” Méndez will be the Minority Whip.

Transition process underway

As required by law, the transition process began yesterday. On behalf of the incoming Administration, the Transition Committee will be co-chaired by former Deputy Chief of Staff to Governor Sila Calderón, Ingrid Vila, and former President of the Board of Trustees of the University of Puerto Rico, Salvador Antonetti, with former Appellate Circuit Judge, Dolores Rodríguez de Oronoz, as its Executive Director. Other members will be: attorneys José Andreu and Juan Acosta Reboyras; Dr. Celeste Freytes; attorney and CPA Alberto Bacó; university professors Jorge Sánchez, Juan B. Aponte and Palmira Ríos; banker David H. Chafey; and union leader Roberto Pagán.

The Transition Committee for the outgoing Administration is chaired by Secretary of State Kenneth McClintock, and includes Chief of Staff Miguel Romero as its Executive Director. Other members are: Attorney General, Guillermo Somoza; Treasury Secretary, Jesús Méndez; Secretary of Transportation and Public Works, Rubén Hernández-Gregorat; President of the Government Development Bank for Puerto Rico, Juan C. Battle; Executive Director of the Office of Management and Budget, Juan C. Pavía; Executive Director of the Planning Board, Rubén Flores; Counsel to the Governor, Ramón Rosario; Deputy Chief of Staff for Programmatic Affairs, Carlos Rodríguez; and the Deputy Counsel to the Governor, Alfonso Orona.

Status Referendum

Along with the election of all publicly elected officials in Puerto Rico, voters also had the opportunity to express their opinion about the Island’s political relationship with the United States. In the first referendum question, 54% of all voters expressed that they did not want to remain under the “current territorial political relationship” with the United States. With regards to the status options question, Statehood was able to garner 809,652 votes, Sovereign Commonwealth obtained 441,505 votes, Independence 73,362 votes, while 472,674 ballots were left blank for this question.

If you have any questions or would like our assistance regarding this matter, you may contact any of the following members of our Government Affairs Practice Team:

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