



REPORT BY THE PRESIDENT'S TASK FORCE ON PUERTO RICO'S STATUS

Executive Summary

MARCH 2011





Executive Summary

The President's Task Force on Puerto Rico's Status (Task Force) was created by President Clinton in 2000. The Task Force's sole focus at that time was to examine proposals for Puerto Rico's future status and for a process by which Puerto Ricans could choose a status option. President Bush continued the Task Force's sole focus on the issue of political status. The Bush Administration's Task Force issued reports in 2005 and 2007.

On October 30, 2009, President Obama signed Executive Order 13517, which directed the Task Force to maintain its focus on the status question, but added to the Task Force's responsibilities by seeking advice and recommendations on policies that promote job creation, education, health care, clean energy, and economic development on the Island.

The current Task Force was convened in December 2009 with members from every Cabinet agency. It organized two public hearings in San Juan, Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C. to hear directly from a broad cross section of voices on the issues of status and economic development. Furthermore, hundreds of citizens from Puerto Rico and the mainland offered input by sending materials through the mail and electronically through a White House public comment e-mail address. Members of the Task Force and White House staff also met with congressional leaders, Puerto Rican elected officials, and other interested parties to hear their views.

This Report presents the Task Force's recommendations to the President and Congress. The first section provides recommendations relating to the question of Puerto Rico's status. Following the discussion of status, the Report is divided into three sections: (1) economic development overview and economic recommendations; (2) recommendations for building competitive industries; and (3) recommendations with respect to the island of Vieques. Each recommendation in these three sections sets out the specific issue, the recommendation designed to address that issue, and a realistic timeline for implementing the recommendation. This Executive Summary outlines the key recommendations within the Report.

Status Recommendations

The Task Force's public hearings and meetings revealed that status remains of overwhelming importance to the people of Puerto Rico. This Task Force committed to taking a fresh look at issues related to status without being bound by prior analyses or limited in the issues on which it focused.

Recommendation # 1: The Task Force recommends that all relevant parties—the President, Congress, and the leadership and people of Puerto Rico—work to ensure that Puerto Ricans are able to express their will about status options and have that will acted upon by the end of 2012 or soon thereafter.

The government of Puerto Rico has discussed the possibility of holding a plebiscite this summer that would seek to ascertain the will of the people of Puerto Rico concerning status. Without taking a position on the particular details of this proposal, the Task Force recommends that the President and Congress support any fair, transparent, and swift effort that is consistent with and reflects the will of the people of Puerto Rico. If the process produces a clear result, Congress should act on it quickly with the President's support.

Recommendation # 2: The Task Force recommends that the permissible status options include Statehood, Independence, Free Association, and Commonwealth. The Report provides descriptions of these options.

Recommendation # 3: Although the Task Force supports any fair method for determining the will of the people of Puerto Rico, it has a marginal preference for a system involving two plebiscites. This two plebiscite system would allow the people of Puerto Rico first to vote on the question of whether they wish to be part of the United States or wish to be independent, and then to choose between the available status options, as limited by the outcome of the first vote.

Recommendation # 4: If a plebiscite is chosen, only residents of Puerto Rico should be eligible to vote.

This issue is a difficult one. But on balance, those who have committed to the Island by residing there have strong arguments that only they should vote on its future. In addition, the complexities of determining who is eligible to vote among those of Puerto Rican descent and managing a vote among a population dispersed throughout the United States and elsewhere would be daunting.

Recommendation # 5: The President and Congress should commit to preserving U.S. citizenship for Puerto Rican residents who are U.S. citizens at the time of any transition to Independence, if the people of Puerto Rico choose a status option that results in Puerto Rico's Independence.

Recommendation # 6: The President and Congress should ensure that Puerto Rico controls its own cultural and linguistic identity. The Task Force recognizes that, if Puerto Rico were admitted as a State, the English language would need to play—as it does today—a central role in the daily life of the Island.

Recommendation # 7: If efforts on the Island do not provide a clear result in the short term, the President should support, and Congress should enact, self-executing legislation that specifies in advance for the people of Puerto Rico a set of acceptable status options that the United States is politically committed to fulfilling.

This legislation should commit the United States to honor the choice of the people of Puerto Rico (provided it is one of the status options specified in the legislation) and should specify the means by which such a choice would be made. The Task Force recommends that, by the end of 2012, the Administration develop, draft, and work with Congress to enact the proposed legislation.

Economic Recommendations

The Puerto Rican economy started to slow as early as 2006—two years earlier than the rest of the United States—leading to the sharpest economic contraction on the Island since the late 1980s. Per capita income remains at less than one-third that of the mainland, due in part to Puerto Rico's low employment rate and persistently low rate of labor force participation.

Recommendation # 1: Capacity Building and Use of Federal Funds: The Task Force proposes to consult with the Puerto Rico government to increase capacity in its civil service, particularly in the areas of grant and program management. Based on the results of the consultation, representatives of key Federal agencies should work with officials from Puerto Rico to identify an institution or training program that would provide the necessary skills to future professional civil servants.

The Task Force also recommends that Federal agencies that are engaged in partnerships with Puerto Rico collaborate on key strategies to strengthen the Island's capacity to manage Federal resources effectively and efficiently. These strategies should include: (1) identifying and aggregating capacity within each agency to develop teams able to interact most effectively with partners in Puerto Rico; (2) building on existing agency resources aimed at identifying how Federal funds are being used in Puerto Rico; (3) increasing coordination in strategies and activities of Federal agencies that provide grants on the Island in order to improve grantee performance and accountability; (4) forming interagency technical assistance teams consisting of officials from multiple agencies, including a mix of headquarters, field, and regional staff with deep knowledge and expertise of the Federal programs in Puerto Rico; and (5) participating in a National Resource Bank that will align and aggregate public and private funds to provide access to a "one-stop shop" of national experts with wide-ranging expertise to provide holistic support in various areas.

Recommendation # 2: Housing Programs and Institutional Capacity: The Task Force recommends that efforts recently commenced by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and its field office in Puerto Rico culminate in a comprehensive housing plan for Puerto Rico in the near future.

HUD has been working with several local housing agencies to address longstanding problems in program administration and fund expenditures. Furthermore, a technical assistance provider has conducted a needs assessment on the organizational and staff capacity of agencies administering HUD programs in Puerto Rico. HUD should provide Puerto Rico with technical assistance to address the gaps in capacity identified by the needs assessment.

Recommendation # 3: Investing in Education: The U.S. Department of Education (ED) is working closely with education officials in Puerto Rico to ensure that students are able to receive a high-quality education. This means providing enhanced technical assistance in various areas, including best practices, maximizing available resources for implementing a robust education agenda, and grant management support. The Task Force recommends that ED continue to invest substantially in providing technical assistance for improving grant management and education program administration.

The Task Force recommends that ED continue to assess the efficacy and promise of these ongoing efforts, and consider expanding them, as needed, if they show promise of contributing to measurable gains in educational outcomes on the Island.

Recommendation # 4: Child Tax Credit: The Task Force recommends extending the child tax credit to allow households with one or two children to claim a partially refundable child tax credit to the degree they have labor market earnings. Extending the child tax credit to Puerto Rican residents with fewer than three children could help reduce poverty and strengthen the labor force in Puerto Rico, because the credit is conditional on labor earnings.

Recommendation # 5: Incentives for Labor Market Participation: The Task Force recommends exploring the feasibility of using the Puerto Rican employment credit as the basis for an expanded family and worker credit that would provide more resources to families with children while encouraging labor force participation.

The Office of Tax Policy at the U.S. Department of the Treasury should provide technical assistance in the design process for this expanded credit.

Recommendation # 6: Improving the Workforce System to Support Job Creation and Economic Development: The Task Force recommends that the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) provide assistance to use Puerto Rico's existing mobile units and service points more effectively to increase the number of jobseekers and employers served.

Recommendation # 7: Improving Workplace Compliance and Knowledge about Workers' Rights: The Task Force recommends that: (1) existing interagency collaborative programs be prioritized and strengthened, and that these programs work on maximizing results and accountability through tools like joint evaluations and assessment programs; (2) DOL collaborate with Puerto Rico's agencies to make sure their compliance officers have the training required to accomplish their tasks effectively; (3) DOL enforcement agencies continue and deepen their outreach with community-based organizations to seek input, cooperation, and assistance in identifying issues affecting workers and mechanisms for collaborating with DOL agencies; and (4) DOL monitor Federal contractor workplaces to enforce conciliation agreements.

Recommendation # 8: Expanding Employment Assistance Services to Veterans: The DOL Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs should increase employment for veterans in Puerto Rico by partnering with Puerto Rican government agencies, as well as local agencies and advocacy organizations serving veterans in Puerto Rico, in order to improve the overall quality of employment services to veterans.

Also, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) should collaborate with Puerto Rican government agencies to mentor and train recently unemployed veterans in Puerto Rico in order to reintegrate them into the workforce.

Finally, homeless veteran issues in Puerto Rico need to be fully assessed and require a broader discussion with Island leadership to encourage Puerto Rico's participation in DOL's Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) homeless programs. The VETS Regional Office should provide technical assistance and grant management support to the known homeless service providers to encourage them to apply for homeless veterans grants as well as other DOL/VETS grants that may be available.

Recommendation # 9: Improving Access to Employment for People with Disabilities: The Task Force recommends that DOL assist in implementing the following: (1) deepen partnerships and build stronger relationships between DOL agencies and Puerto Rican government agencies, businesses, and community-based organizations to develop collaborative projects around issues such as customized employment to assist workers with disabilities; (2) facilitate communication and collaboration between DOL and Puerto Rican government agencies; (3) seek out financial literacy efforts, benefits planning, and other asset building efforts encouraging work, which can increase the prospects for employment for people with disabilities, as well as improve their long-term economic outcomes; (4) encourage policies that focus on competitive and customized employment strategies and flexibility in the workplace; and (5) review and strengthen the recruiting and hiring policies of Federal agencies operating in Puerto Rico to increase the employment of people with disabilities within the Federal workforce on the Island.

Recommendation # 10: Medicaid: The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 and the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010 (together, the Affordable Care Act) and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) each made substantial progress toward achieving a more equitable health care delivery system, including by making progress on Medicaid funding concerns for Puerto Rico. The Task Force recommends that the Administration work with Congress to build on this foundation and work toward further progress in achieving a more effective, efficient, and equitable health care system for Puerto Rico. This may include exploring options for improving health coverage and benefits, encouraging delivery system innovations, considering additional adjustments to the Medicaid funding cap, and supporting the potential establishment and operation of an Exchange.

The Task Force further recommends that Federal agencies work together to ensure that the Affordable Care Act provisions are implemented to maximize the availability of health services to Puerto Ricans.

Recommendation # 11: Expanding Health Care Access in Puerto Rico: The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) should work with Puerto Rico to take the following steps to improve health and health care access in Puerto Rico: (1) explore Critical Access Hospital (CAH) designation for rural hospitals on the Island; (2) explore methods to better inform beneficiaries in Puerto Rico about Medicare Part B eligibility and the penalties for late enrollment, and explore using its demonstration authority to waive the late penalties during the education and outreach transition period and for a limited time after this period to evaluate whether the penalties significantly affect beneficiary selection as well as enrollment rates; and (3) prepare a report on the amount of Medicare disproportionate share hospital (DSH) payments needed to account for the higher cost of serving low-income beneficiaries in Puerto Rico, particularly in light of changes made to Medicare DSH payments and Medicaid eligibility in the Affordable Care Act.

Furthermore, the Task Force recommends that the U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services conduct a study to assess to what extent Puerto Rico beneficiaries are unable to access affordable prescription drugs. This study should explore options to ensure access to necessary drug coverage in Puerto Rico.

Recommendation # 12: Combating the Dengue Fever Outbreak: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) should work with the Puerto Rico Department of Health (PRDOH) to build on their partnership to identify best practices, to develop and share mitigation strategies, and to monitor outbreaks of dengue fever.

Recommendation # 13: HIV Outreach and Education Initiative for Veterans: VA should continue raising Island-wide HIV/AIDS awareness and providing onsite clinic testing to ensure that veterans living in high-risk population areas are afforded an opportunity to be tested, treated, and enrolled into the VA health care system. The targeted outcome of this initiative should be 100 percent testing of veterans who consent to be tested and enrollment in health care services for any HIV-positive veteran residing in Puerto Rico who is eligible for services.

Recommendation # 14: Drinking Water Systems: The Task Force recommends that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) work with pilot communities to identify funding opportunities to install proper filtration and disinfection equipment and new ways to implement small drinking water purification systems. EPA would gain knowledge and insight working with these communities,

and could use those successful experiences as positive examples when working with other communities to provide safe drinking water.

Recommendation # 15: Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems: EPA should provide training for municipalities, which should focus on the permit requirements (issued pursuant to the Clean Water Act) that each municipality: (1) develop, implement, and enforce a program to detect and eliminate illicit connections on its storm water system; (2) address non-storm water discharges on the system; and (3) properly operate and maintain its system.

The training sessions should also provide information about potential funding from the Clean Water State Revolving Fund, which may provide assistance to fund necessary construction projects.

Recommendation # 16: Building Capacity in the Puerto Rican Criminal Justice System: Federal law enforcement agencies should significantly deepen their engagement with the Puerto Rican criminal justice system to provide necessary training and technical assistance. As a first step, the Task Force recommends that the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) identify high-level stakeholders in Puerto Rico to partner with DOJ, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and other Federal law enforcement authorities to begin the process of building consensus for implementing appropriate reforms of the justice system in Puerto Rico.

To advance this effort, DOJ, DHS, and other Federal law enforcement agencies should identify a research partner in Puerto Rico and commence a research-based needs assessment of various public safety sectors, including the police department, court system, juvenile system, victim services, prosecutorial system, and other aspects of the public safety system.

Recommendation # 17: Development of Formal Interagency Public Safety Coordination: The Task Force recommends that the various Federal agencies with security and law enforcement responsibilities convene a working group to begin a formal, interagency process of coordination and collaboration regarding Puerto Rico's security and safety. The Administration should invite Puerto Rico to designate a representative from the Governor's office, or from a cabinet-level agency, to this interagency working group.

Recommendation # 18: Connecting Puerto Rico to Broadband Access: Following the award of the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program grants to Puerto Rico from the U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC) National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), the Task Force recommends that NTIA help develop an interagency team to assist with capacity building efforts. NTIA's efforts should include the implementation of an oversight plan designed to ensure that awardees complete projects on time and on budget, as well as to prevent waste, fraud, and abuse. The Task Force recommends that NTIA complement these efforts with appropriate capacity building strategies on the Island.

Recommendation # 19: Naval Station Roosevelt Roads (Ceiba, Puerto Rico): The Task Force recommends that a Federal team consisting of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI), the Department of Defense Office of Economic Adjustment, the U.S. Department of Transportation, DOC, HHS, HUD, and EPA convene to coordinate Federal support (both technical and financial) for the Local Redevelopment Authority's specific infrastructure requirements.

Recommendation # 20: Economic Empowerment Zones: The original Empowerment Zone program was launched in 1994 as a combination of tax incentives and grants for distressed communities. The 2012 budget includes a proposal for a new, national competition to identify 20 Growth Zones, which are designed to build on the successes of Empowerment Zones. The zones will receive flexible grants for planning, seed capital, technical assistance, and other activities through the DOC Economic Development Administration (EDA), Federal program flexibility, and two tax incentives: an employment incentive and an investment incentive. As the Obama Administration further develops this proposal, the Task Force recommends that zones in Puerto Rico be eligible to apply for the designation to take advantage of the benefits that are associated with it.

Recommendations for Building Competitive Industries

Once the building blocks of growth are in place, Puerto Rico must look forward to develop a competitive set of industries that will drive growth and job creation in the decades to come. While we expect Puerto Rico's own leadership and local stakeholders to be best positioned to articulate an economic development strategy, the Task Force has identified three industries that could potentially drive long-term growth and job creation on the Island. In particular, Puerto Rico has a solid foundation on which to grow its clean energy, its role as an economic and tourism hub and gateway to the Caribbean and Latin America, and its health care industries.

Recommendation # 1: Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Strategy for Puerto Rico: Puerto Rico is well positioned to become a model for implementing efficient and sustainable green energy projects. The Task Force therefore recommends that the President and Congress work closely with, and support, Puerto Rico's efforts to fundamentally change the Island's approach to energy and the environment.

The Task Force's recommendation is divided into two sections, the second of which has two phases, which are roughly equivalent to short- and long-term goals.

First, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), along with Puerto Rican and the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) government agencies, should participate in a feasibility study to examine the technical and economic potential of a subsea electrical interconnection between Puerto Rico and USVI. Furthermore, to advance discussions in the Caribbean region on the potential for subsea electrical interconnection under the Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas, the Department of State, through a grant to the Organization of American States, should fund a pre-feasibility study to examine an interconnection between Puerto Rico and St. Kitts and Nevis.

Second, the Federal Government should help Puerto Rico transform its energy economy. The first phase of this recommendation is that the Federal Government, including DOE, should support efforts by Puerto Rico to change its energy regulatory structure. Such an overhaul will require collaboration among Puerto Rico's government agencies, key members of the Puerto Rico Legislative Assembly, and the private sector. At the outset, the Task Force recommends that DOE work with Puerto Rico's Executive Branch Reorganization and Modernization Committee, which was created in 2009 to reform Puerto Rico's executive branch. This Committee was empowered to create new agencies, which could include a public utilities commission with regulatory and enforcement power.

The second phase of this recommendation is that DOE assist Puerto Rico in developing a comprehensive plan for a new energy economy. DOE has developed a comprehensive energy deployment approach, called the Integrated Deployment model, that addresses the entire energy system for any given location. The mission of this approach is to accelerate market adoption of renewable energy solutions to power homes, businesses, and vehicles. The Task Force recommends that, consistent with the completion of the first phase, Puerto Rico, with assistance from DOE, assess the feasibility of applying the Integrated Deployment model to the Island. Assuming Puerto Rican stakeholders make a commitment to the project, the first step should be to establish an agreement with Puerto Rico to move toward an aggressive, cost-effective goal for energy efficiency and renewable energy implementation.

Recommendation # 2: Integrated Bio-Refinery Project: To bolster Puerto Rico's clean energy leadership potential, DOC Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) is helping develop a public-private partnership called the Integrated Bio-Refinery Project (IBP) of Puerto Rico. IBP will produce high value bioproducts, especially biofuels, using locally available biomass such as post-harvest agricultural "left-overs." Locally produced biofuel will reduce the Island's dependence on imported fossil fuel in the near term, while non-fuel products (such as human nutritionals, specialty chemicals, and organic feeds and fertilizer) hold significant worldwide export potential.

The Task Force recommends that MBDA continue to assist Puerto Rico in creating an innovation economy that addresses the local, national, and global needs for clean, renewable energy while also creating jobs. In addition, using the private sector and other government agencies, MBDA would help find ways of financing the project.

Recommendation # 3: Renewable Energy Tax Credits: Two ARRA programs provide grants and tax credits for renewable energy. The section 1603 program provides grants to specified energy properties that are placed into service by a particular date, with the goals of creating and retaining jobs, as well as expanding the use of clean and renewable energy. The section 48C program provides tax credits for qualified investments in advanced energy projects to support the building and equipping of new, expanded, or retooled factories that manufacture the products needed to power the green economy.

The Task Force supports the extension of the 1603 and 48C programs to further advance the goal of facilitating the development of clean and renewable energy. The Task Force recommends treating energy entities in Puerto Rico and their U.S. subsidiaries as U.S. companies to allow their participation in these programs.

Recommendation # 4: Assessing Potential Enhanced Access for Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport: The Task Force recommends that DHS Customs and Border Protection conduct a resource impact analysis assessing facilities, personnel, and information technology resources that would be required to establish secure in-transit programs for U.S. airports. This analysis, along with other factors, would inform DHS's decision on the future of in-transit programs.

Recommendation # 5: Travel and Tourism: The Task Force makes several recommendations to strengthen Puerto Rico's travel and tourism industry. First, the Office of Travel and Tourism Industries (OTTI) in the DOC International Trade Administration should work intensively with the Puerto Rico Tourism Company and the Puerto Rico Ports Authority to use the Survey of International Air Travelers research program to deliver a custom report. That report could assist in developing international market-

ing efforts and potential air service routes for the airport. Second, Puerto Rico should be more robustly featured on DiscoverAmerica.com, a multilingual consumer website that now serves as the United States' official travel and tourism website.

The Travel Promotion Act of 2009 established the Corporation for Travel Promotion (CTP), a private, nonprofit entity to promote and enhance tourism to the United States and to communicate U.S. entry policies. OTTI should work closely with the Puerto Rico Tourism Company and the new CTP to develop and execute specific goals for CTP to advance tourism to Puerto Rico.

Also, the Executive Director of the Puerto Rico Tourism Company should apply to serve on the Travel and Tourism Advisory Board, an advisory body to DOC, and on the Board of Directors of CTP. Finally, DOC announced that the Market Development Cooperator Program (MDCP), under which DOC partners with nonprofit industry organizations to develop, maintain, and expand foreign markets for nonagricultural goods and services produced in the United States, may have funding for fiscal year 2011. The Task Force encourages the Puerto Rico Tourism Company to apply to DOC for MDCP funding should any funding opportunities be announced.

In addition, EPA is working with the Puerto Rico Tourism Company and other local agencies to develop a comprehensive plan for green tourism in Puerto Rico.

Recommendation # 6: National Export Initiative: The Task Force recommends that the U.S. Export Assistance Center in San Juan help improve the Puerto Rico export initiative, in consultation with the Puerto Rico Secretary of Economic Development and Commerce.

Recommendation # 7: Puerto de Las Américas (Port of the Americas): Puerto de Las Américas (POA) is a strategic project with the potential to generate investments and to foster economic development in the entire Caribbean region. The expansion of the Panama Canal may substantially increase ocean borne, commercial, containerized cargo activity in Puerto Rico. Officials from DOC have met with Puerto Rican officials to discuss the potential of this opportunity to generate jobs. Furthermore, POA's Executive Director and DHS representatives have discussed applicable security legislation to ensure a secure environment for port operations.

The Task Force recommends that DOC and DHS build on these efforts by working with Puerto Rican officials to fully utilize POA's strategic location for moving U.S. cargo through the Panama Canal to the Caribbean and Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. These efforts should help meet President Obama's goals in the National Export Initiative and ensure, as with every port in the United States, that the safety and security of POA continue to be monitored.

Recommendation # 8: Creating the Caribbean's Health Science and Research Center in Puerto Rico: Puerto Rico has many of the infrastructure elements necessary to develop a regional health cluster as an engine for economic development. The Task Force's recommendation to create a health science and research center helps meet both the health and economic challenges confronting Puerto Rico.

To continue the process already started by Puerto Rico, the Task Force recommends that: (1) DOC EDA, the U.S. Office of Management and Budget, and HHS conduct a cluster analysis to determine the feasibility of establishing a Puerto Rico Health Cluster as part of the Federal Government's sector development plans; (2) CDC consider expanding its work with the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), EDA, and

private sector developers to provide financing for medical services and technology in Puerto Rico; and (3) DOL consider directing workforce development funding to expand training of bilingual health professionals.

Recommendation # 9: Updating Puerto Rico's Gross Domestic Product Methodology to U.S. Standards: The calculation of Puerto Rico's gross domestic product (GDP) does not currently follow the standards used for GDP for the rest of the United States. The Task Force recommends that DOC assist Puerto Rico in updating its GDP methodology by conducting a comprehensive assessment and providing technical recommendations to the Puerto Rico government on statistical modernization, using existing resources.

Vieques Recommendations

There is much that the Federal Government can do to improve the quality of life for the people of Vieques. The Task Force's recommendations encompass issues ranging from health care to environmental issues to tourism.

Recommendation # 1: Superfund Cleanup and Job Training: The cleanup of the former military areas on Vieques is ongoing and expected to last another decade. Since 2005, the U.S. Department of the Navy (Navy) has documented over 1,700 trespassing incidents into waters around the former bombing range.

The Task Force recommends that the Navy accelerate the pace of the cleanup of unexploded ordnance and address the issue of underwater unexploded ordnance. The Task Force further recommends that trespassing issues, which are more difficult to resolve because of jurisdictional limitations, be addressed through a coordinated effort among the Navy, U.S. Coast Guard, EPA, DOC National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, DOI, and the government of Puerto Rico to develop a multiagency plan to keep trespassers off the contaminated land and out of the affected waters.

Recommendation # 2: Vieques Sustainability Task Force: EPA has recently established the Vieques Sustainability Task Force to coordinate Federal and local efforts for comprehensive cleanup and remediation at the closed military range on Vieques. In addition, this task force will develop and implement policies that boost sustainable economic growth and job creation on Vieques.

The relevant Federal agencies, such as EPA, Navy, DOI, DOE, SBA, and HHS, should continue to develop and empower the Vieques Sustainability Task Force to expedite resolution of some of the longstanding issues in Vieques and to ensure that Federal projects to address the challenges faced by Vieques are implemented in a timely fashion.

Recommendation # 3: Solid Waste Strategy: EPA launched the Puerto Rico Recycling Partnership in collaboration with the Puerto Rico Solid Waste Management Authority and the Puerto Rico Environmental Quality Board. The main goal of the partnership is to establish a comprehensive waste reduction, composting, and recycling program throughout Puerto Rico. The Task Force recommends that the work of the partnership include Vieques.

Recommendation # 4: Health Care for Residents of Vieques: HHS should work closely with the governments of Puerto Rico and Vieques to improve the quality of health care for the residents of Vieques.

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The Task Force believes that a needs assessment should be completed to identify the most effective and efficient way to ensure that the people of Vieques receive the care, including expertise in environmental medicine, that they need.

In the near term, the Task Force recommends that HHS assist Vieques and PRDOH in exploring two programs that could improve health care on Vieques. First, HHS and Puerto Rico should explore funding for health centers under the Health Center Program established by section 330 of the Public Health Service Act. Vieques could partner with an existing health center to apply for health center funding. Second, HHS and Puerto Rico should explore CAH designation. Certain facilities participating in Medicare can become critical access hospitals, which are eligible for reimbursement based on 101 percent of reasonable costs for treatment of Medicare beneficiaries. The HHS Regional Office should continue to work with PRDOH to determine if the Centro de Salud de Familia facility in Vieques meets the statutory requirements for CAH designation.

Recommendation # 5: Clean and Renewable Energy Options: The Task Force recommends that DOE begin exploring renewable energy opportunities to make Vieques a Caribbean Green Island. As a first step, DOE should continue its work with the Puerto Rico and Vieques governments to reduce the amount of energy used through efficiency measures such as solar water heaters, weatherization improvements, appliance rebate programs, and other proven, cost-effective technologies.

In addition, the Task Force recommends that DOE, with the support of the Vieques Sustainability Task Force, work with Vieques to consider clean, renewable energy options that would lower electricity rates for businesses and consumers and create new jobs. Such options should include distributed renewable generation that could provide backup power in emergency situations and deployment of highly energy efficient vehicles.

Recommendation # 6: Watershed Protection of Bioluminescent Bay: The Task Force recommends that EPA develop a plan to protect Mosquito Bay, an ecologically unique bioluminescent bay in Vieques. EPA has solicited proposals from eligible entities for the development of site-specific innovative demonstration projects that would reduce sediment, pesticide runoff, and/or nutrient loading in Mosquito Bay.

Recommendation # 7: Green Hospitality Initiative: EPA has launched a green hospitality initiative in partnership with Puerto Rican government agencies, such as the Puerto Rico Tourism Company. The Task Force recommends that Vieques be included in the agreement to encourage third-party green certification for its hotels and restaurants.

Next Steps for the Task Force

The existence of the Task Force and its mandate to submit a report to the President and Congress has energized many Federal agencies into developing collaborations with Puerto Rico, which, in turn, have resulted in meaningful projects with the potential to advance infrastructure and economic development on the Island.

Task Force members will work on the implementation of these recommendations and will report back to the Task Force as a whole on their progress. The Task Force will monitor execution and completion of the recommendations laid out in this Report. Furthermore, the Task Force looks forward to further

study and implementation of additional economic recommendations it received during the course of its consultation with stakeholders in Puerto Rico and on the mainland.

In order to advance the conversation on some of the key sectors that the Task Force has identified as priorities, the Task Force plans to conduct at least two summits in Puerto Rico over the next year to focus on individual subject areas. To demonstrate its commitment to this next step, the Task Force plans to convene a summit on education during the first half of 2011, with senior-level participation from Cabinet agencies, as well as key officials and stakeholders from Puerto Rico. The Task Force anticipates that this will be the first of several events that continue the important work of ensuring that the Obama Administration is deeply engaged in the advancement of Puerto Rico for the long term.