

Puerto Ricans decide their fate

by Reagan Warner
Collegian Staff

On November 14, the citizens of Puerto Rico will vote on a plebiscite.

The plebiscite is the referendum in which Puerto Ricans are asked to vote between three political status alternatives: statehood, independence or remaining a commonwealth.

This is not a new subject for Puerto Rico. Since 1898, Puerto Rico and the United States have been addressing the issue of political status. This will be the second time that the issue has been voted on. The first time was in 1967.

For the Puerto Rican students at Behrend, this is an issue of great concern.

Julio Lergier, president of the Organization of Latin American Students (OLAS) believes it is important for Puerto Rico to decide now.

"The choice is critical for Puerto Rico's future," Lergier said. "We have to be careful what we choose because it will have a great influence later."

Marcos Lopez, vice president of the Lion Ambassadors, agrees that the time has come for a definite answer from both Puerto Rico and the U.S.A.

"I feel it's time that the Puerto Rican people express, once and for all, their choice of political status, and that this be acted upon by Congress," Lopez said.

Donnie Sasso, treasurer of OLAS, feels that the majority of

the population is looking for improvement.

"People right now in Puerto Rico want to vote towards a better future which they can hold on to the old ways that they have, while searching for new and better ways to reform their government and economy," Sasso said.

The polls are showing that statehood holds a slight advantage.

Because of the likelihood of the statehood referendum, Sasso has mixed feelings toward the possibility of its success.

"By becoming a state, Puerto Rico would improve economically and educationally, but those things which Puerto Rico is proud of would be taken away," Sasso said. "Things like the flag, Olympic team, and maybe the language and culture."

Lergier sees a positive economic result from statehood.

"Tourism will increase, as well as the chance that more companies or investors will look for opportunities in Puerto Rico," Lergier said.

Along with the positive aspect, Lergier sees a negative one as well.

There is a law known as the 936 of the International Revenue Code. This code exempts U.S. companies from federal tax on Puerto Rican operations. The tax break has been partially responsible for the island's growth because it attracts major companies like pharmaceutical firms and Hewlett Packard.

"Because of 936, we have industry," Lergier said.

An article in Fortune Magazine stated if Puerto Rico becomes a state, nearly 100,000 jobs will be lost along with three-fourths of U.S. investor's companies.

Another option in the referendum is to remain a commonwealth.

Ramsey Baerga, vice president of OLAS, believes a lot of people are voting on past ideas which won't help.

"The first governor of Puerto Rico made the association with the U.S. which helped the commonwealth," Baerga said. "But even before he died, he knew

there would be this time for a change."

Baerga said that the parties are not only fighting for their issues, but also their political lives.

Lopez, a political science major, believes a benefit of this option is the maintaining of their Olympic representation. However, he said that there would still be no political equality, an undefined ambiguous status, and they would remain "second-class citizens."

The final option is total independence. Lopez believes there are several favorable reasons for independence.

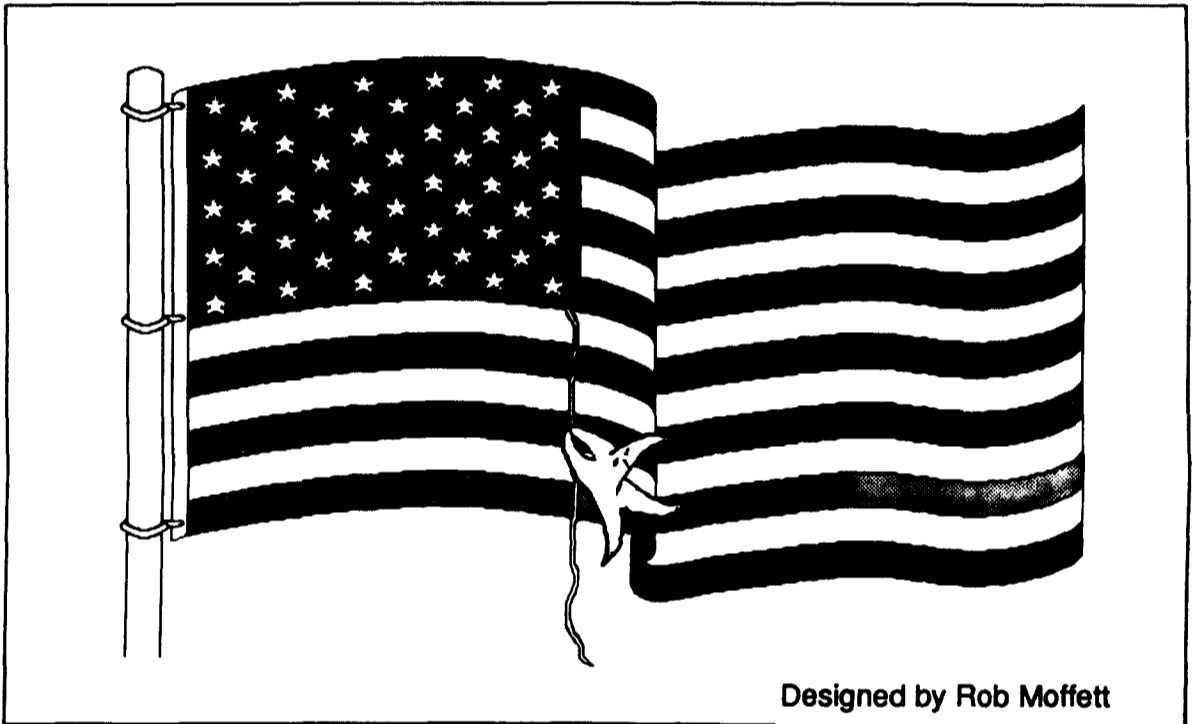
"This way, Puerto Rico would

definitely have Olympic representation, achieve full political sovereignty, and total preservation of their culture," Lopez said.

Even if Puerto Rico approves statehood, the U.S. Congress must still vote on it.

"The November 14th referendum has no binding implications on the United States Congress," Lopez said. "It is merely a vote to pressure Congress to act promptly on this matter."

"The main reason the issue is still unresolved is because of the differences between the U.S. House and Senate on how to approach this issue," Lopez said.



★★★★ Political strategists debate Clinton's progress ★★★★★

by Hal D. Coffey
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Two of the country's most sought-after political strategists came to Behrend on Wednesday to debate President Bill Clinton's progress so far.

Ed Rollins and Bob Beckel held their debate in Erie Hall at 8 p.m. last night on the topic "The Clinton Report Card."

At a pre-debate press conference and dinner, the two men spoke about their opinions on everything from political parties to crime, to recent elections.

One of the biggest topics of interest for the debaters was the significance of the recent elections.

Beckel saw them as surprisingly important.

"This was a very significant off-year election," Beckel said. "People say it was a referendum on Clinton. I don't agree with that, but it was not a good day for the Democrats."

Rollins believes the elections were a reversal of past results.

"Everything I have learned in my 32 years of political work has been blown away by these last two election years," Rollins said.

Rollins and Beckel agree that the voters are targeting their unhappiness at incumbents.

"The electorate is unhappy with the status quo," Rollins said. "Normally an incumbent is the safest job in America, but not in today's elections."

After making general comments, they started talking about results from Tuesday's elections.

The first stop was the New York City mayoral race in which incumbent David Dinkins, democrat, was defeated by the man he beat out to win the position of mayor four years ago, republican Rudolph Giuliani.

Rollins explained this result emerged from the voters' anger and the issue of race.

"Giuliani was voted in by angry voters, but the underlining principle was probably race."

Beckel cited the results of several exit polls as the

significant factor.

"Exit polls showed that 50 percent of the voters said they would move out of the city if they had the ability to. That, along with a poorly executed past four years, helped Giuliani to win."

The next regional issue was from the California referendum that would provide \$2,600 vouchers toward private school tuition.

Supporters argued that the vouchers would reform and improve education by making all schools--public and private--compete for students.

Proposition 174, as it was listed, was voted down.

Rollins said the legislation failed due to a lot of holes in its purpose statement.

"Even through a \$10 million media campaign, the teachers' union was unable to fill the gaps in the legislation," Rollins said.

Beckel stated that California voters are not quick to vote for legislation which has little concrete wording.

The final current election discussed was the New Jersey

gubernatorial upset in which democratic incumbent Jim Florio was defeated by republican Christine Todd Whitman.

Rollins had a special interest in the victory because he joined the campaign as the director.

He can be accredited with bringing the campaign back from a 21 point deficit during the summer.

After managing H. Ross Perot's presidential campaign for 45 days last year, Rollins said he was pleased to join a more positive campaign.

He does not speak too highly of Perot.

"He was a great salesman, but not a good political leader. He just doesn't have the temperament to work within a system, something he had to do if he really wanted to be president."

Rollins said once Perot realized he might win, he backed off a little.

"He stayed in the game only because he liked the attention," Rollins said. "Political people want to be loved. He wanted to

be obeyed."

An example of Perot's lack of political desire was his reluctance to read 600 page reports, Rollins said. Instead he wanted a short, two-page memo summary.

The man who defeated Perot now has an enormous problem on the horizon, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

Rollins believes that the Republicans will stop the legislation from passing.

"In the end, the Republicans may pull the rug out from under NAFTA. After that, we won't have good relations with Mexico and other Latin American countries for years to come," Rollins said.

Beckel said incumbents are trying to avoid controversial topics like NAFTA because they are scared.

"Incumbents are scared that this kind of issue can defeat them," Beckel said.

Both men see the future of politics as an ever-changing world in which the rules will change like no other time in our history.