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OPINION

Republicans looking to add a 51st state should start with Puerto Rico

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By Josh McKoon | Chairman, Georgia Republican Party

President Trump recently proposed making Canada the 51st state, buying Greenland and taking over control of the Panama Canal.

Whatever you make of those ideas, it's clear that Trump is outlining an economic and foreign policy plan focused on expanding America's influence and reach — not just geographically and economically but also in terms of national security. However, there's a much easier way to achieve that goal than trying to annex Canada or taking over Greenland.

Whatever you make of those ideas, it's clear that Trump is outlining an economic and foreign policy plan focused on expanding America's influence and reach — not just geographically and economically but also in terms of national security. However, there's a much easier way to achieve that goal than trying to annex Canada or taking over Greenland.

Trump and Republicans in Washington should look to Puerto Rico first to begin achieving his vision and receiving all of the economic and political benefits a 51st state would include.

There are more than 3 million U.S. citizens living in Puerto Rico, most of whom have voted to gain statehood for years. Last November, 58% of Puerto Rican voters chose statehood, with the next option on the ballot earning 29%. Puerto Ricans also voted for statehood in 2020, 2017 and 2012.

Unlike Canadians, Puerto Ricans actually want to become a state. They are eager to gain the full rights and responsibilities of statehood, and they have a lot to offer.

Statehood for Puerto Rico would unleash a wave of untapped economic activity for the island that would help drive growth for the mainland, which already enjoys \$70 billion yearly in interstate commerce with the U.S.

Puerto Rico's status as a territory and the federal government's confusing and unequal patchwork of laws and regulations prevent many investors from taking advantage of opportunities on the island. In addition, the island faces an unequal playing field in terms of federal resources compared to the states, undermining its competitiveness and limiting its economic development as island residents are incentivized to move stateside, which unnecessarily weakens its economy.

Statehood could strengthen America's national security position by pushing back on efforts by China and other global competitors to extend and deepen their influence in the Caribbean and Latin America.

There's also a political benefit to making Puerto Rico a state. While Canada is solidly liberal, Puerto Rico has shifted to the right and would likely elect Republicans to represent them in Washington, just as they have in recent years.

In November, Puerto Ricans elected Jenniffer González-Colón, a Republican and Trump supporter, as governor. González-Colón served as the resident commissioner of Puerto Rico — a non-voting member of the U.S. House of Representatives — from 2017 through 2024. Additionally, Puerto Rico elected a Republican shadow senator in 2021, Zoraida Buxó Santiago, who also endorsed Trump. Plus, legislators in Puerto Rico's House and Senate elected Republicans as the leaders of the chambers.

Puerto Rico is moving to the right; Republicans have everything to gain politically by giving the island statehood and the right to send full voting members to Washington.

Statehood for Puerto Rico would be a win for the GOP, economically and politically. Fortunately for them, Puerto Rico can become a state with an act of Congress. Unlike making the District of Columbia a state or taking over Canada or Greenland, the [process](#) for Puerto Rico statehood is simple.

Trump could make history by leading the charge for Puerto Rican statehood. He would achieve many of the same goals behind his push for Canada, Greenland and the Panama Canal. He can continue those fights, but he should start with statehood for Puerto Rico.

Editor's note: Josh McKoon is chairman of the Georgia Republican Party. He wrote this for InsideSources.com. Please send your comments to AzOpinions@iniusa.org. We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our [Civility Guidelines](#).