

PART 3 THE SANITY CRISIS

Written July 27, 2019

The “chatgate” or “Rickyleaks” scandal represents the surprise witness of the virtual trial of the latest regime of self-serving, elitist, entitled, arrogant, incompetent, and corrupt politicians who have been fleecing the citizens of Puerto Rico and riding roughshod over their impoverished lives. We have known this has been business as usual for decades, but our pleas for transparency and reform have been stonewalled at both the federal and local levels.

Two days ago, the outrage of a million physical protesters (and two million more watching the proceedings on their electronic devices) shared the ubiquitous conclusion that it was time to make changes and throw the bums out. We’re all mad as hell, and we aren’t going to take it anymore.

Since moving to Puerto Rico almost 15 years ago, I have been disappointed by the passivity and acceptance of the population toward the horrible performance of the political class. The list of crimes and offenses that are obvious to anyone paying attention is overwhelming. The governmental disdain for the common inhabitants, and the visible disrespect for the people of Vieques has been disheartening, to say the least. The result has been dereliction of duty and a total failure to govern **for** the people.

The chat is not the issue, it’s merely the evidence and written confirmation of what goes on. There are really no general surprises since it happens everywhere – except that the arrogant little frat boys were so stupid as to write their comments down. Hasn’t anyone learned anything since Nixon?

Our current crisis in government has presented a political dilemma, among other things:

- Our constitution provides a list of succession and does not allow a special election;
- Our Secretary of State (next in line) resigned last week with several other high officials and cabinet members;
- The next in line is the Secretary of Justice, and she is under investigation and would be foolish to assume the position;
- The Governor’s resignation is set for August 2nd, and the easiest way to provide government continuity is to submit a name for Senate confirmation for the Secretary of State position, and the Senate to confirm the nomination; but
- The difficulty will be finding someone who is clean enough to pass public scrutiny and impotent enough not to scare the political machines – a lot more pols could drop if the investigations move toward the legislative bodies.

As I see it, there is a little bit of “rip-stopping” of the corruption investigation between the executive branch and the other two because the Governor and his cronies are truly the good new-boys club while the other pillars of democracy belong to the good old-boys club, and there was friction between the groups. This probably limited collusion among them. Unlike many new bosses, Ricky didn’t seek counsel from his elder statesmen. He brought his own team in, none of whom had governmental experience. Since he only trusted his bros, he had limited resources to deal with. He had twice as many positions to fill than he had trusted buddies, therefore, he doubled up giving many two or more jobs – up to five!

In my work with the government, I came in contact with a number of his people, and I found them to be smart, well educated, hardworking, and generally incompetent: they had no background in the areas in which they were placed to lead, were ignorant of the issues, and

relied on underlings who were experienced but incompetent as well. Enormous amounts of money were wasted under an arrogant mantra of Ready-Shoot-Aim. Incompetence fosters and obscures corruption, and plenty of both have permeated the system. The problems the various government entities of this administration have (and still are) faced were created over the decades by the preceding regimes, and the entire set of administrations share responsibility for the horrific results we face today. There is nobody with clean hands.

I am enormously hopeful, while cautiously optimistic, that the citizens of PR and the community of Vieques will be able to force more transparency and rationalism into the political system. I have seen attitudes change in Vieques since Maria, and the protests in PR are encouraging. There is a lot to be done, and my days are filled with many varied efforts in this regard.

PROMESA and The Fiscal Control Board

Reflecting back to Part 1 from 5 years ago, perhaps a slightly new look at the “blame game” is in order. Since bankruptcy for PR to escape the \$140 billion or so of acquired debt was not authorized by the US, and since repayment by PR was a physical impossibility, Congress created the Financial Oversight and Management Board to facilitate agreements to restructure debt equitably and keep PR operating. This has not gone well.

Efforts by the Board to force austerity at the expense of government services and economic development have been met with great resistance. The complaints against the Board by both local government and citizens alike have been many, but a couple stand out as especially grievous:

- The members of the Board are political appointments – some of whom are considered to be partial to and part of the financial community that created the problem in the first place;
- Despite efforts to have a complete audit of the debt process which initial evidence pointed toward massive corruption in the form of a huge Ponzi scheme, the Board killed it;
- The Board is not charged with support for economic development, despite the fact that without it, there will be no funding available for repayment of anything; and
- With a per capita income of \$25K/yr and a per capita debt of between \$23K and \$45K (without and with pension obligations, respectfully), debt repayment is almost impossible, yet the proposed restructuring agreements are targeting 60 or more per cent, which would turn us into Haiti.

So, when we re-evaluate the blame game, it is imperative to fully understand that the debt crisis was caused by corrupt politicians and the cooperating financial institutions. This is nothing that the people of Puerto Rico had knowledge of, and few outside of the elite and their contractors received any real benefit. I believe this effectively absolves the regular citizens of blame. By not following through and auditing the process, the Fiscal Control Board is now complicit in the fraud that has been waged against the people of PR.

A video summary August 8th: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LYZ5ZApVSNA>

A video mini-summary of the state of Vieques: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CirY0TMZyL8>