

The Vieques Renaissance Discussion Guide

Vieques-Libre Corp

This English version of the Discussion Guide is published by Vieques-Libre Corp as a companion to:

The Vieques Renaissance Supplemental Discussion Guide

www.vieques-libre.com/essays/

&

to the more extensive and detailed English volume:

PLAN B: The Economic Development of the Eastern Region of Puerto Rico Through the Decolonization of Vieques

www.vieques-libre.com

This guide is intended to stimulate the thoughts and actions of the community in order to engage in a meaningful dialogue, reach consensus, and actively address the many issues that face our island.

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Contact discussion@vieques-libre.com

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<https://www.vieques-libre.com/essays/>

INTRODUCTION:

FIXING VIEQUES – OUR COLONY OF A COLONY

As residents of Vieques, we are all aware of the multiple crises that have befallen us and the total neglect displayed by the governments that hold dominion over us in addressing our wellbeing. We need to fully analyze the situation and the options we have to solve our many problems and make improvements in the conditions, way of life, and opportunity that each citizen should be entitled to.

This workbook exercise is designed to assist each of us in clarifying our existing reality and the feasible solutions for improvements. We must decide whether or not there is any reasonable possibility of fixing things by utilizing the current system of governance (Plan A); or if we must free ourselves of both the US and Puerto Rican governments and become an independent nation (Plan B).

INT. What's Happening, Vieques?

The question is not meant to find out what's open or what special activities are planned for the weekend. No, we've been through a lot, and the question is intended to find out what the condition of our island is in terms of what's important to you as a citizen of Isla Nena. Multiple crises have been brought to our shores, and it is time for us to take inventory and clarify the status of Vieques.

INT.A. What We Have Endured

1. Violent crime incidents
2. Dengue fever
3. Chikungunya
4. Zika
5. PR bankruptcy
6. PROMESA & the Fiscal Control Board (FOMB)
7. Reduced government support & services
8. Hurricane Irma
9. Hurricane Maria Devastation, Death, & Government Abandonment
 - a. Disintegration of the electrical system
 - b. Collapse of the water & sewage system
 - c. Destruction of the hospital
 - d. Closure of the schools

10. Implosion of the ATM ferry system
11. Earthquake induced school closures

12. Covid-19
 - a. Closure of the schools
 - b. Closure of businesses
 - c. Reduced availability of healthcare
 - d. Continued interruptions and reductions of government services
 - e. Economic ruin

INT.B. What Government Support Do We Have?

From the first morning after Maria devastated Vieques, the municipal and Puerto Rico governments were helpless and unprepared to

assist our island. Official leadership was absent - as in “deer in the headlights” – and consumed with self-serving machoism – falsely claiming the catastrophic situation was under control. Local citizens emerged to fill the void. Private organizations became active in relief.

Although federal and commonwealth responses were late and inadequate, attention at high levels did begin to focus on our electrical service. Promises were made by FEMA, DOE (Department of Energy), and the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee to develop a demonstration project in Vieques & Culebra incorporating a resilient, independent grid and renewable power generation. PREPA and the P3 (Puerto Rico Public-Private Partnership Authority) **killed it!** Whatever system we end up with, it will NOT represent the wishes or the needs of Viequenses, as we have had neither public hearings nor citizen input.

Before Maria, the P3 Authority targeted our dysfunctional ATM ferry service for replacement with a public-private partnership. Again, we had no representation, no seat at the table, and when the mayors of Vieques and Culebra attempted to vote down the contract, the P3 Authority overrode them. The selection of a private contractor was not the major issue: it was the method used, and the horrible terms of the contract that promise to reduce our cargo services dramatically.

Who among the living here isn't concerned and anxious? How many of our friends, family, and neighbors have left the island?

INT.C. What Do You Think?

Let's ask and answer questions that will help us to get a sense of how we are doing. Please write your thoughts in the margins or on a

separate sheet for reference during later group discussions.

1. Are we treated as participating, free citizens and not as inmates by the PR government?
2. Do we have any real say in governing ourselves?
3. Are we truly free and not the tip of the tail of the dog?
4. Are the services provided to us good, adequate, and reliable? Are we allowed to improve or correct the problems ourselves?
5. Under PROMESA will the situation finally improve?
6. Will we benefit from economic development efforts by the O-Board (FOMB)?
7. Will the Congressional Task Force on Economic Growth in Puerto Rico help our situation?
8. Given what has been attempted to force our governments to solve the many issues we have – other than ejecting the Navy - has anything ever worked?
9. Can Vieques force the San Juan government to treat us with respect, give us more autonomy, and fix the many broken services which we are forced to rely on?
10. Can Vieques force a change in the relationship we have with San Juan?
11. Can Vieques force a change in the relationship we have with the US?
12. Is there anything that the municipality can do to gain an equal status with others on the main island?
13. Is there anything that we can do to fix each of the problems identified above?

Are you able to answer “Yes” to any of the above questions?

14. Does the US government try to buy their way out of complex obligations to the island while not improving the condition of life or the future of our people?

15. Do we come under Federal rules and laws (from the Jones Act, to the war on drugs, to taxation....) with absolutely no input or control or vote?
16. What about our infrastructure?
 - a. Education – Is PR the worst in the US, and is Vieques the worst in PR?
 - b. Healthcare – Is it totally inadequate and difficult to access in PR?
 - c. Police Protection – Is it wholly ineffective?
 - d. Criminal Justice – Is it unfair & unjust for Vieques victims?
 - e. Access to government services – Is it limited and inadequate for us?
 - f. Permitting and Business License Acquisition – Does the process obstruct, delay, and cripple our economic development?
 - g. Electrical and water services – Are they unreliable and overpriced?

Are you able to answer “No” to any of the above questions?

PLAN A

Plan A is our evolving effort to improve life in Vieques by attacking and solving our problems one at a time utilizing the “system” placed upon us by the US and Puerto Rico. It is an accumulation of group initiatives and individual activities that have been employed to internally gain control of our island and of our future. For decades, residents have been attempting to break free of the chains used to subjugate and control our island from afar.

To avoid the implementation of a more drastic “Plan B”, it is our hope that sufficient progress will be made in the essential areas of:

- Economic development
- Educational achievement
- Energy & water sustainability, resilience, and emergency response
- Healthcare services
- Recycling and waste treatment
- Security and justice
- Transportation to the main island

It is unclear that this goal is achievable within the constraints of politics and existing law, but it is essential to accomplish as much as possible before defaulting to the more disruptive decolonization movement.

The attached Plan B describes our existing conditions and offers philosophy, goals, and mechanisms to implement changes. While the goals of Plans A & B are generally similar, the means are different. Plan B was developed first, because it was determined that working within a political system that has been stacked against us forever would bear no fruit. Citizens have been trying to make improvements for decades to no avail. So, why even consider a Plan A? *Hurricane Maria!*

Maria was a game changer for us. Devastation on the island was extreme. Isolation was terrifying. Help was not forthcoming. Local government was unprepared and paralyzed.

Electrical power and water ceased to be available. Communications were non-existent.

We residents quickly realized that we were on our own. Everyone knew our infrastructure was weak, but few realized how badly neglected our systems had been. Citizens personally experienced how the incompetence and corruption within the government agencies put our lives and livelihoods in jeopardy. This new awareness caused ad hoc groups to form to make changes.

The first changes came within a week. Government failed to communicate with the people. PR and the US were busy trying to assess the magnitude of the situation, but nothing was reaching Vieques. Private citizens began taking responsibility for gathering information and dispersing it to residents in the plaza every day, and others would carry the message to neighbors throughout the island. Small and heretofore unknown nonprofits began relief efforts getting supplies in under the radar. A dozen satellite phones were flown in by ViequesLove for emergency communications and allowing residents to make 60 second calls to anywhere to let friends and relatives know they were okay and what they needed. People

began to realize that our survival depended upon us first.

The generous outpouring of support from the US Coast Guard and many, many nonprofits sustained us and gave us all a new appreciation for the concerns and capabilities of our friends in the States. Different groups comprised of citizens with similar concerns and appropriate skill sets or interests formed locally to assist in the efforts to repair/rebuild various infrastructure or operations failures.

Command and control changed locally. Four factors contributed this paradigm shift:

- Over the course of the following months, we saw the influence and effectiveness of concerted efforts to make changes in favor of Vieques. While various government entities were initially paralyzed, they temporarily attempted to push some of the grass root operations out of the way. The soon to be apparent success, financial backing, and selflessness of these organizations was not lost on many of these same authorities, and the result has been a substantial increase in cooperation at many levels.
- Coincidental with Maria, the Commonwealth has been in a chaotic financial crisis which has diverted attention at the top and facilitated the creation of inroads into areas never thought possible. Strict rules requiring centralized control of many services have been relaxed due to bankruptcy, and authority is being decentralized into more local citizen groups who can qualify and get funding.
- Awareness of Vieques as a special place and empathy with our situation as a neglected, paternally controlled existence has increased dramatically among the general population and philanthropic organizations throughout the States.

Assistance in many areas has been generously forthcoming, and there is long range interest in continuing projects past relief and rebuilding.

- With a population of fewer than 9,000, the scale of Vieques is manageable. The possibility of thoughtful initiatives making large, positive, and permanent impacts is palpable. This is appealing to local citizens, volunteers, and funding sources all seeking to do good and be a part of a successful project.

We were initially seeing opportunities to have citizen groups participate in guiding power generation and distribution as well as the formation of a local school board with direct funding and control. Privatization of the ferry service utilizing a shorter route was in the works which we believed could stimulate economic development and improve service. Efforts are underway to restart recycling. Residents are working on healthcare and other areas. Emergency response and preparedness is still inadequate, but is improving.

1. Will Plan A confidently work in the seven critical areas we identified above?
2. Do you believe the Governor and the Legislature will allocate the funds?
3. Do you trust P3, PREPA, and Cor3 to grant us meaningful seats at the many tables where plans are formulated and decisions made?

If the answers are “Yes”, then let’s get busy and make it a reality. If we are not certain, then let’s look at Plan B and decide whether it makes more sense than Plan A.

Because a discussion of decolonization covers a whole myriad of topics that may or may not be of interest to each resident, please feel free to discuss any and all issues that you personally

have thoughts or expertise you would like to share. Your feedback (thoughts, comments, errors, omissions....) is essential at:
www.discussion@vieques-libre.com

A more generalized and detailed discussion will be published soon.

I. PLAN B: WHY BECOME INDEPENDENT?

The collection of the world's human inhabitants into less than 200 official countries reflects the reality that governments enforce a global oligopoly with omnipotent control over the lives of our vast global population. Each nation has its own rules, laws, way of life, etc. and citizens are involved to varying degrees in the way the country operates. The common elements are:

- Citizens are forced to conform to their national norms; and
- Opting out is not a Right because there is no place left to go to: no other country is required to accept immigrants.

Through the consolidation and accumulation of population groups, half of the roughly 7.5 billion people live in only six countries. (90% of the world's total live in just 61 countries.)

Regardless of diverse origins and customs of both new and original citizens, governments work directly or indirectly to attain uniformity among their masses in the long run. Initially, in a democracy, the will of the many almost always trumps the will of the few. As time passes, power becomes more concentrated in the hands of the few – the political elite. Even in strong democracies, minority segments of the population lose their voices.

There are approximately 6,500 languages in the world, and 4,500 of them have at least 1,000 speakers, according to Infoplease. Quora.com states that there are about 4,300 adherent independent religions. Does one really fit all?

Should the planet's population be forced against its will into molds to conform to a few hundred national standards? If not, maybe starting a smaller new nation of relatively likeminded citizens makes sense.

In the last 25 years 29 new countries have been added to the United Nations' roster of members. From the total current count of 193 members, 6 were added in this century. Full members must be truly independent, self-governed, and sustainable. It is neither a closed group nor is it an impossible task to become an independent country, but there are many factors that determine just how difficult it will be to change a community's status in any specific situation.

The premise of this plan is that there is nothing short of total sovereignty that will grant us the control and the opportunities that can provide us the sustainable solution to the problems we, and other PR municipalities, are experiencing. It is through our research to solve these problems that we have amassed the information presented here. It is fully expected that others in the community will have different thoughts, suggestions, and opinions. The purpose of this "workbook" is to give daylight to the hopes, ideas, and goals for the future of our island to all concerned citizens.

We are told that our task is impossible for any number of reasons, but upon examination of every objection thus far, one can see solutions and work-arounds. We're told that it is crazy

and naïve to embark on such a radical
endeavor. Maybe it is, but is it not insane to do

and/or accept the same things year after year
and expect any positive change.

“First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win.”
Mahatma Gandhi

I.A. The Case for Independence Through Decolonization

“All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.”

Animal Farm, George Orwell

There are numerous neglected, by-passed, dysfunctional, and impoverished communities in the US and other countries that are as poorly treated and marginalized as is our island of Vieques. While we are US citizens, we are not sovereign and have no permission to participate in the democracy established by the US Constitution. Puerto Rico is the pet dog that lives in the same house, enjoys many of the same comforts, is fed and generally provided for, but is neither free nor equal to the other members of the US household. Vieques is the tail of that dog: we are treated as an inert appendage attached to the dog and without any control over our governance. We are constrained by Federal rule and the total indifference and neglect of our Puerto Rican Central Government host in San Juan.

There is no excuse for our being subjugated and denied our freedom under the rules of the law of the US and the United Nations. We aren't asking for a handout or pity; we're seeking a chance to fulfill our destiny as we choose and work to accomplish it. We wish to be free to take the opportunity to build our nation as we see fit; and to do what the forefathers of the United States did over 200 years ago.

I.A.1. Our Problem

While there is probably no true paradise on earth, Vieques has the natural amenities to

become a close. Due to the occupation of most of the island by the US Navy for over half a century, mega-development that overwhelmed and transformed much of the Caribbean leapfrogged over Isla Nena. On the one hand, the residuals left by the operation of a bombing range on the east end of the island have permanently contaminated many acres of raw land, but on the other hand, after a competent and extensive cleanup, there would be huge areas of natural resources available to be utilized appropriately for the benefit of the new nation.

Beyond the incredible physical qualities of the island, the citizens provide a unique potential for sustainable development as well. The fulltime population (9,200 in the 2010 census) is predominantly born and raised here with a small percentage relocated from one of the 50 states or the main island. Part-time residents account for at least another small segment. Because of failed educational and economic systems resulting in general poverty and lack of opportunity, the majority of our young people have not been successful in reaching their potentials in education, business, or the arts. Many have left or are leaving the island. This could and should be changed.

While the symptoms are many, the cause can be traced to our status as a colony of a colony. We have multiple masters and no control over our destinies. We can ask, beg, or demand, but we can't decide or make much happen to lift our

prospects under the current hierarchies of government. All of the important decisions are made for us. We are treated like children with our US and PR parents determining almost everything from school curriculum to ferry schedules; from career allocations to business options; from utility systems to restrictions on our use of our beaches; everything is controlled.

Our situation (and the related lack of a meaningful future) demands that we make changes. For decades citizens here have tried myriad approaches to no avail. Neither our needs nor our desires have impact on our disengaged governments' decisions. PR mandates the subjugation of Vieques like a life sentence without parole. This existing hierarchy of forced dependency does not favor or support us. We are chattel, mere property to be used, rented out, sold, ignored, or disposed of as the Central Government officials see fit for their own benefit. A clean break and a fresh start are needed. We have tried Plan A, and we agree it won't solve our problems. It's time for Plan B.

I.A.2. Our Imposed Governmental & Political Situation

Evidence indicates that the government of Puerto Rico has been systematically fleecing and suppressing the people of Vieques throughout its history. Other than trivial day to day municipal management, involvement in real decision making was usurped by the Central Government. Vieques exists to serve them rather than the other way around. The wise ones of the political elite figure that the Jíbaros of Vieques are incapable of running the island, so they do. The Central Government collected the monies (**and our land**) provided by the Navy and the US Government, and they

decided where to spend the funds – seldom in Vieques – and they now decide how to use or sell off the land. They control tax collections and limit the funds available to Vieques. They retain most government services on the main island and then force us to go there. Our well-being has no priority in their budgeting process. They maintain controlled access to the main island for both people and products, thereby limiting commerce on Vieques.

Through the ferry choke point, they:

- Protect monopolies and special interests already established in Vieques and in the ATM (ferry) bureaucracy;
- Protect the East Coast hotel operations from “beach tourism erosion” – tourists opting to come to Vieques and Culebra with numerous beautiful beaches far surpassing the main island offerings;
- Effectively by-pass the free market system and plan their personal economies at the expense of Vieques; and
- Plan how the land in Vieques is to be used, developed, or disposed of.

The Central Government has been very effective at isolating our island. Through forced dependency upon the centrally controlled and funded education system, graduates' preparation is so dismal that most youth have little chance of making it through college. This process has left the island in a cycle of arrested development: a shortage of capital and experienced professionals to effectively run local government or more sophisticated businesses has resulted in an inability to properly finance, lead, organize, and equip ourselves to, among other things, fight for our rights.

The Puerto Rico model of citizen participation in government is limited to voting for elected

officials, many of whom receive far less than a majority of the votes. Public hearings and stakeholder input are restricted to after-the-fact comments and not available during the planning processes. Witness zoning & land use regulations, ferry service, PREPA (utility) reconstruction and modernization, and any P3 economic development programs that deny transparency and the involvement our community that confirm that we are treated as inmates, despite being citizens and customers.

During the ongoing pandemic, there has been no sharing of the pain between the government and the citizens; that is, the economic devastation has been exclusively borne by the private citizens: Puerto Rico policy dictated that over two-thirds of the government's approximately 200,000 employees were sent home with full pay and full benefits (including sick and vacation days, pension contributions, healthcare contributions, and even Christmas bonuses). Meanwhile, 50% of the private sector was shut down, and half of the PR workforce became unemployed. Business closing and bankruptcies have run rampant. The only industry in Vieques is tourism, which has been almost totally closed since March, 2020, and few are able to make a living.

(https://www.birlingcapital.com/publications/20201216CB_20.pdf)

The ridiculous false bravado displayed by the Central Government after Hurricane Irma disintegrated into mind-numbing silence and inaction when an actual emergency named Maria arrived. This dereliction of duty defied the purpose of government. **Failure to maintain communications and security eliminates central command and control, thus highlighting the incapacity of the Central Government to govern itself and**

clearly shows its inability to protect and provide for Vieques.

Early incompetence by the PR Health Department led to long-lasting confusion in measuring, reporting, and tracing of suspected Covid-19 cases, as well as poor inventory planning and logistical support for healthcare workers and the population at large. Executive orders were quickly made to shutdown social and economic activities, but protocols of numerous types were inconsistent and counterproductive – as was enforcement. For example, the ATM blocked off ferry seats (eventually physically removing them) and required masks, yet forced people to wait in lines to board the ferry standing right next to one another. Most of our beaches were closed, but the couple they allowed to be open were then densely packed.

A strong case can be made that the discriminatory practices ingrained in the PR systems and methods of governance are in direct violation of the PR Constitution designed to protect us. “Social origin and condition” are specifically protected classes (like race, gender, etc.) and can be applied directly to Vieques. With the current justice system, lawsuits leading to judgements against the Legislative and Executive bodies are often ignored. Recent “chatgate” disclosures display the arrogance of the top government officials and their utter disrespect for the needs and wellbeing of our people.

I.A.2.a. *The Local Constrained Economy*

The available census figures for 2010 don't begin to tell the real story - due to rampant under-reporting - and showed only 723 family units with a third indicating less than \$10,000/yr total for the household income. The highest

reported family income was under \$75,000 and only 9 were above \$60,000. Over half of the population was at or below the poverty line or level.

The bureaucracies throughout the Commonwealth have no apparent clue as to the needs and logistical problems faced by our citizens. We are summoned to appear at various locations of the main island for a whole host of things with no regard for the difficulty and expense required to comply. We are an invisible stepchild.

The government of Puerto Rico officially states that all services in the Commonwealth are essential. But during the last several years, funding has been cut on utility maintenance and modernization, education, healthcare, municipal support, roads, and the ferry service to the main island. Puerto Rico has also been aware (and done nothing to correct the situation) that FEMA offered a plan, the contractors, and the funding (up to \$165M) to implement a state-of-the-art resilient electrical microgrid based upon the Rural Utility System (RUS) standards to make Vieques and Culebra a showcase/pilot demonstration project to begin in late August of 2018. PREPA stonewalled and obstructed the process. A similar tactic was used to delay and kill a solar (with battery and diesel backup) solution to power generation on our small islands as well. The impact has been catastrophic to our economy and wellbeing but ignored by San Juan. If there was any serious intent to help us maintain or expand our local economy they would:

- 1) Make ferry access to the island easy and pleasant for tourists instead of inconsistent, unreliable, mysterious, prejudicial, frustrating, and aggravating. If this were to be accomplished, air travel would have more effective competition, and airfare

prices would likely be reduced from current rates as high as \$200 for a 15-minute flight one-way flight to the island.

- 2) Make ferry access to the island for materials and supplies abundant and reliable instead of woefully constrained, inconvenient, and unpredictable.
- 3) Foster the establishment of Viequense owned guest houses and B&B's.
- 4) Utilize the tourism taxes collected from our local businesses to generate customers/guests for Vieques rather than for main island hotels and venues.
- 5) Make the permitting process for everything from boating, to businesses, to building houses reasonable. The existing bureaucratic processes, the rules, and the delays are totally unnecessary and stop economic development before it starts.

Successful development of Vieques could help regional growth as would development of Roosevelt Roads help Vieques. PR has been unable to establish any economic growth in the Ceiba area in over a decade since the former Navy base was closed, and it is clearly getting worse.

I.A.2.b. The Lack of Self-Determination

Every day the US is involved in underdeveloped foreign countries, both physically and diplomatically, attempting to force them into a US style democracy. As US citizens, we, too, drink the freedom Kool-Ade. We know that without self-determination we are subjects, not free men and women.

Puerto Rico, as a territory, is not considered equal to a State and does not enjoy the rights and privileges of Statehood. While Federal jurisdiction is omnipresent, the US citizens of PR have no voice or vote in the creation or

establishment of US laws or regulations, and all PR laws are subordinate to those of the US. The US does not collect any direct taxes from PR residents (except for social security) and actually transfers approximately 20 billion dollars per year to PR and its residents. Nonetheless, even with this seemingly benevolent treatment, if the Commonwealth must live under the laws of another country, it reduces its status to that of a colony, as recently acknowledged by the Supreme Court and Congress.

Vieques is to PR, as PR is to the US – a colony of a colony. Our little island does not possess a sufficient population to warrant its own representation in the PR Legislature. Our needs are almost always overshadowed by the wealthy, connected, and powerful on the main island. Combined with the federal authority, PR governance represents an overwhelming external force reigning on our parade. **They insist on doing things to us rather than doing things for us.** If the people of Vieques are ever going to be free from all forms of imposed outside government dictates, decolonization is the only option – as will be shown.

I.A.2.c. To Establish Our Rights of Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness for All Citizens

The governments of PR and the US have so many laws, regulations, directives, policies, etc. that it could literally take a lifetime and a legal degree to wade through them all. Bureaucrats, law enforcement, and justice department officials seem to discover millions of reasons why we citizens should be terminated, incarcerated, fined, or prevented from pursuing our dreams. While some of these laws might be necessary and even agreeable to us, the

overwhelming majority are for the benefit of someone else: often special interests seeking favors and economic advantage. These are “our” laws, but we have nothing to do with writing or approving them. There is neither due process in their creation, nor in their administration. They are imposed upon us, not created, selected, or approved by us.

We aspire to become “the master of our own destiny”, and that requires self-determination and sovereignty over our island. Collective control is what democracy can bring to the citizens of Vieques.

I.A.2.d. To Provide Our People Opportunities and Futures of Their Own

The people of Vieques have long suffered from “failure to launch”. Part of the historical cause of this has certainly been the isolation of small island living. The other part, as discussed above, has been oppression. Our commerce, healthcare, education, and access to power, water, goods, and government services have been restricted. Many residents born and raised here are only partially aware of how poorly they have been served in comparison to average citizens living in the States. Through years of inferior treatment, some have become so passive to and, accepting of, inadequacies in so many areas that they have essentially given up expectations of any improvement – *ever!*

Twenty years or so ago a successful herculean effort was initiated to convince the Navy to pack up and leave so that Vieques could at last be “free”. While the Navy has left, the real, unstated, objective remains unfulfilled. The vision was never converted into a plan, the goals were never clearly articulated, and the leadership was not empowered. Subsequently,

many of the changes in Vieques have been less than ideal – a disappointment to many.

The future belongs to our children and our children's children, and we must lay the ground work upon which they can capitalize and flourish. We need to get the economy moving so that there are decent jobs available and money to fund the range of necessary services. We must create a school system that will prepare them for meaningful careers of their own choosing. The island must become an attractive option for raising a family and sufficiently sustainable to ensure that our offspring will remain (or return) to help make us prosper.

No matter what age a person may be, there will still be opportunities for improvement when our Isla Nena takes control of itself. Healthcare, education, and employment will expand the horizons for all. We have the luxury of a “clean canvas” as we go forward. Other than inertia, we have few legacy issues of established practices and government obligations. We can design our systems to accomplish what we want without regard to myriad archaic rules and regulations. With our new place in the world and armed with quality educations, there will be many new career options provided by both private and government job offerings.

I.B. Options for Status

If we're not allowed to govern ourselves under the current system, and if we can't change that system, we are left with the single option of leaving the relationships completely.

Many might think such thoughts are fantasy or pipe dreams because they don't believe it is possible given the controlling governments under which we live. They are right, in order to progress in any way, we need to move outside of the established procedures that have never worked for us here anyway. What are our options? The choices are few:

1. Remain a "colony" of PR. While not a formal colony of PR, we are treated as such. This has proven itself to be unacceptable. It's the most straightforward, work-within-the-system approach, but is out of our control and has never delivered any lasting improvement in the decades it has been attempted. Is it not insane to continue the same activity over and over again and expect different results?
2. Become an Autonomous Municipality of PR. Under Ley 81 of 1991 (with over 150 amendments) a municipality can become autonomous and control/execute many of the functions that the Central Government performs paternalistically (and with omnipotence) currently. While a potential improvement, it does not give the municipality sufficient jurisdiction over education, medical care, criminal justice, transportation, or taxation - which makes it impossible to really be out from under the thumb of the Central Government. Additionally, any advantages gained can be unilaterally revoked at any time by PR.
3. Become part of another country. It might be desirable to another country to have a presence in the Caribbean, but it would be next to impossible to convince PR or the US that this would be to their advantages. But moreover, it doesn't necessarily solve the problem: how much control over our destiny could we expect?
4. Become the smallest State. This wouldn't stand a chance. Two senators and a congressman for just 10,000 people wouldn't fly – ever.
5. Annex to a State. This could be feasible, and based upon the terms of such annexation, it could be acceptable. Again, however, it would tend to keep us in an isolated minority position, retaining our colonial disposition, just with a possibly more benevolent overseer.
6. Become a separate territory of the US. This option may be good short term - or as a transitory state - but carries the same baggage as any colonial solution in that Vieques would not be free and independent and would not have any say in the US laws that govern the island. As a purposeful step of short duration during a move to true independence, it could be effective in securing PR "approval".
7. Become the independent country of Vieques. This may seem extreme, but given the current political and economic situation of the US and PR, it is our best and only hope. It's the choice that gives us a real semblance of self-determination. (For reasons that will become clear later, **the former Roosevelt Roads Naval Base would become an integral part of our new nation.**) Independence can be accomplished either with or without formal

continued association with the US. That is, we could “go it alone” with a clean break, or we could enter a Compact of Free Association with the US similar to one accomplished in the Marshall Islands and Micronesia: [The Vieques Renaissance Supplemental Discussion Guide Appendix G](#): at www.vieques-libre.com/essays/

Through the decolonization of Vieques **together with our annexation of the former Roosevelt Roads Naval Base**, a new country and free economic zone could be formed that would provide stable business development opportunities safely isolated from the financial problems of PR yet within reach of PR business

people and labor markets. Huge tax and regulatory advantages in Vieques could attract other investment from outside the area. The economy of Vieques would grow while the Treasury of PR would gain significant tax revenue and collateral business development on their side of the border in Ceiba. While desperately trying to survive, PR has neither the credibility nor the access to resources required to stimulate or grow its economy. BUT we can help from outside. We would not be encumbered by legacy laws, debts, corruption, politics, or a host of other historical practices that have totally eroded any, and all, confidence in the Central Government elite.



II. PERMISSION & PROCESS TO FORM A NEW COUNTRY

Centuries ago, groups of people who were disenfranchised or unhappy with their governments boarded ships and sailed off in search of land on which to establish communities that would be self-governed according to their beliefs and wishes. At some point, all of the land of the earth was essentially claimed by some country. While such claims occasionally overlapped (and may still remain unresolved), the operative issue is that there is not realistically any land left on the planet upon which people who are not happy, or are displaced, can build a community according to their own rules.* Nor can a group of inhabitants of a country simply organize their community and declare themselves autonomous (as in Texas can't unilaterally secede from the US nor Catalonia from Spain) without risking annihilation from the host state.

Typically, new countries arise from war settlements, revolutions, divisions (secessions), combinations, and decolonization. The operative question is: What is required to become a thriving independent country and what obstacles need to be overcome in a totally peaceful secession or decolonization?

*Antarctica is huge and is neither owned nor available. Bir Tawil, between Egypt and Sudan, and Liberland, between Croatia and Serbia, are formed from administrative flukes of unclaimed slices of land.

II.A. Vieques Independence: Can It Be Done?

To most rational people living in the developed world, the extreme effort and risk involved in attempting to form an independent country exceeds the perceived benefit. But we in Vieques are not enjoying the life of luxury that many in other locations are.

If we look at the history of the United States, the colonies declared their independence from England to govern themselves as they saw fit rather than to face heavy taxation, oppression, and humiliation (among other things) at the hands of the British. Their decision to rebel, while in no way unanimous, was informed by their experiences dealing with an oppressor force and their expectations of not seeing any improvement in the situation. They were a proactive group in today's terms.

The United Nations recognizes the issue of struggling territories in Article 73 of the UN Charter:

"Members of the United Nations which have or assume responsibilities for the administration of territories whose peoples have not yet attained a full measure of self-government recognize the principle that the interests of the inhabitants of these territories are paramount, and accept as a sacred trust the obligation to promote to the utmost, within the system of international peace and security established by the present Charter, the well-being of the inhabitants of these territories, and, to this end:

a. to ensure, with due respect for the culture of the peoples concerned, their political, economic, social, and educational advancement, their just treatment, and their protection against abuses;
b. to develop self-government, to take due account of the political aspirations of the peoples, and to assist them in the progressive development of their free political institutions, according to the particular circumstances of each territory and its peoples and their varying stages of advancement...."

II.A.1. Recognition

While any group anywhere can declare itself independent, the response to such a declaration by the rest of the world determines the reality. A newly claimed country that was formerly part of a member state could face a reaction by that state that might: squash the rebellion, concede control of the new state, or offer recognition and aid. The remaining member states of the world have the option of supporting the new country, or not. Recognition is part political and part practical. The practical

aspect is that of true independence, stability, and sustainability. The politics includes everything imaginable from the collection of self-interests of other states.

In order to have a sovereign, recognized, state and be accepted into the UN, a nation must gain formal recognition from most of the countries in the world and receive a majority vote at the UN, with no permanent members of the Security Council voting against them. Full members must be truly independent, self-governed, and sustainable.

Practically speaking, Vieques needs permission to decolonize from both the US and PR.

II.A.2. Why Would the United States Permit Decolonization?

The US has often openly guaranteed self-determination to the people of the Commonwealth by allowing PR to select its own status via a referendum: independent country, Statehood, or Commonwealth. If the vote resulted in Statehood, PR would still require Constitutional approval proceedings of the existing 50 States and Congress. Publicly, no strings have been attached to the independence option, however, a majority of the elected PR politicians are against acceptance.

Decolonization of an Independent Vieques would be an unexpected request. Ultimate determination will depend greatly upon how the pros and cons are assessed by those in power. So, first reviewing and summarizing the issues specifically as they apply to Vieques, we have:

II.A.2.a. Pros

- 1) Elimination of a negative long-term balance of payments – Half of the population lives below the poverty line with 1/3 of the households reporting \$10,000 or less annual incomes. Tax revenues do not reach the costs needed to support the island and fall short by over \$40,000,000 per year. Viequeses pay no US taxes except Social Security, which is minimal.
- 2) Establishment of precedent for the US – Assisting to decolonize part of one of its territories is admirable and an important demonstration of democracy building.
- 3) Economic development of Puerto Rico – The economic development of Vieques would actually enhance the economy of PR,

reducing a large imbalance of payment to support PR. [See [Economic Engine](#).]

- 4) Reflection upon the Ruling Class – The political decision makers have been guilty of continuing moral and economic mistreatment of the island and should be relieved, congratulated, and rewarded political capital for ridding themselves of a problem territory, while both the US and PR receive significant short and long-term economic advantages.
- 5) Resident obligations to the US and entitlements – US citizenship will continue for all who wish to retain it. Existing benefits will be maintained at current or US/PR earned levels. Further resistance from citizens who don't wish to become independent can be mollified by allowing them to remain as residents. No law-abiding resident US citizen will be denied.
- 6) **China & Taiwan** – Within the next few years, China is going to attempt to render its claim to Taiwan and assimilate this independent democracy into the communist state against its will. The US, starting with Nixon's initial acquiescence to and deference toward China, has been playing a catch-up game in attempting to honor its commitment to, and ensure the independence of, a very critical WWII ally. **It will be very difficult for the US to argue for the sovereignty of Taiwan while denying it to Vieques.**

II.A.2.b. Cons

- 1) Establishment of precedent for PR – Allowing a part of the empire to secede would be viewed as a negative precedent to some US politicians despite the economic advantage and moral accomplishment credit.
- 2) Liability – Legal liability for the success or failure of the movement would be absent,

but practically speaking there is a perceived risk in any endeavor. The actual “go or no go” point would not be reached during the transition until the funding was in place and the systems were up and running reliably.

II.A.2.c. *Neutral or Mixed Issues*

- 1) Consumption of US exports – With little disposable income, Vieques per capita consumption is of miniscule benefit to either PR or the US, but the volume of our imports would not change much.
- 2) Military service – Independent Vieques would have no true military, but it is intended that volunteers from Vieques would be considered for duty and for careers in the US Armed Forces.
- 3) Strategic geography – Vieques no longer offers a location of any military importance as declared and verified by the Pentagon.
- 4) Cost of separation – The transition involved in separation would require a redirected financial commitment identical to the current flow of funds by both PR and the US for several years and then eventually decline to zero.
- 5) Hostilities – A close partnership with the US and PR is key to the economic and practical success of decolonization. Our shared values and histories, family relations, and economic trade dependence basically guaranty our close relationship with PR and the US.
- 6) Natural resources – The island is covered with beautiful beaches and a spectacular bioluminescent bay but has no minerals or other economically valuable materials. The beaches and bio-bay are tourist attractions but don’t currently generate enough revenue for the Central Government to even maintain them. Despite the lip service of the Department of Tourism to support and market Vieques, US and PR tourism

would not suffer any loss if the status of Vieques changed. Vieques is not marketed officially as a destination, but rather as a side trip from a main island venue.

- 7) Labor – Vieques provides virtually no skilled or other labor to the Main Island. The largest employer on Vieques is the government. Unemployment is high, and the labor participation rate is low. The underground economy is active but is of negative value to PR and the US.

As an independent country .0025% the size of the States, negotiations for independence would revolve around joint agreements of mutual benefit, not monetary transfers. We would need to demonstrate to the US that we had a viable plan and were suitably funded both in the short and long term. The US would have to agree upon negotiated terms of the transfer of all government land to the Independent Vieques, probably including eventual phase out of the ROTH (re-locatable over the horizon radar).

In the early 1900’s the US granted independence to both the Philippines and Cuba – the other spoils from Spain given to the winner in the Spanish-American War. After WWII, several Pacific island nations were granted their independence. In the 1980’s a Compact of Free Association between the Federated States of Micronesia and the United States, was established, as well as a similar agreement with the Republic of the Marshall Islands and others.

Despite differences in the domestic and foreign situations in 1980 vs 2020, the essence of those agreements provides a roadmap and precedent for establishing a similar relationship between the US and Vieques. Experience with the original Compact informs creation of the one

proposed. With Vieques and the US (Puerto Rico) sharing land boundaries, overlapping or shared marine economic zones, etc., outside or supplemental agreements are required. The promises and precedents exist. See [The Vieques Renaissance Supplemental Discussion Guide](http://www.vieques-libre.com/essays/), Appendix G at www.vieques-libre.com/essays/

II.A.3. Why Would Puerto Rico Permit Secession?

It is not legally required that PR grant us “permission” since ultimately territories aren’t sovereign. (Nonetheless, Congress would no doubt seek basic consensus with PR on the issue.) According to the “Territorial Clause” (Article IV, Section 3) of the U.S. Constitution:

“The Congress shall have Power to dispose of and make all needful Rules and Regulations respecting the Territory or other Property belonging to the United States; and nothing in this Constitution shall be so construed as to Prejudice any Claims of the United States, or of any particular State.”

An Independent Vieques could be a stepping stone for the eventual sovereignty of Puerto Rico, although the extreme economic dependency of the island on transfer payments from the States precludes any short-term move in that direction. The decolonization of Vieques provides a long-term movement toward that possibility. Conversely, the efforts to decolonize Vieques could alternatively focus both national and international attention on the plight of Puerto Rico in general and create unprecedented immediate support for statehood in both the US population and the US Congress. While not the intended consequence of a decolonization movement, both Puerto Rico

and Vieques would benefit from **our** independence and **PR** statehood.

From an economic point of view (everything is about the money), there are huge potentials to both save money and generate revenues that PR would stand to gain through fostering secession and annexation to a new neighbor bearing gifts.

II.A.3.a. Save Money

Vieques secession would save PR money. We are the poorest of the 78 municipalities with very few of us actually paying taxes in Vieques, while at the same time, we cost the Central Government millions per year in services and subsidies. The ATM ferry system represents \$20 million or more in annual losses from Vieques alone. Despite their inferior quality, schools, healthcare, public works, etc. still cost PR millions to provide for us. All of this would be saved. \$40,000,000 per year is a rough estimate of the total net outflow from PR to support Vieques.

II.A.3.b. Development of an Economic Engine at Roosevelt Roads

Eighty years or so ago the Navy expropriated approximately 8,600 acres to create Roosevelt Roads Navy Base. 90% of the land was reportedly part of Ceiba, and the other 10% was from Naguabo. The former US Naval base had a shared history with Vieques and Culebra. With the closure of the bombing range on Isla Nena, the Navy soon closed Roosevelt Roads as well. The facility has no residents but includes hundreds of residential units, many commercial buildings, a hospital, an airport (with a lengthy runway), a 40-foot-deep port, and an infrastructure that was supporting it all when it closed in 2003.

Independent Vieques needs unconditional access to PR via water, and the best way to secure and protect that access is through control of a small land mass on the main island for ferry operations. The land, air, and water resources provided by Roosevelt Roads are worth much more to Vieques than to PR.

Under the control of any Puerto Rican entity, savvy, reputable developers are loath to entrust their fortunes to the traditionally unstable political and economic system of the revolving, incompetent, delusional, and corrupt administrations of the Commonwealth. PR has no money of its own, no way to acquire more, and no rational plan for the former base.

A sustainable economy is absolutely crucial to Independent Vieques. Our plan for this program is presented in the Vieques Commerce Initiative section below. The economic value of our success is shared between PR and Vieques. If in the future Puerto Rico becomes a state, it will be too late for the following benefits to accrue if Vieques isn't already independent:

- 1) If the property were to be developed under the sovereignty of Independent Vieques, there would be jobs and opportunities for the residents of the Ceiba, Naguabo, and Fajardo areas. With ongoing reductions in relevant tax incentives, US firms that have prospered in PR are now withdrawing and leaving unemployed workers in their wake. Existing US businesses planning to leave PR could relocate to the "Port of Vieques" (RR) retaining their workers and gaining tax advantages.
- 2) Most of the business development activities envisioned for Vieques would actually take place on the former base. Significant traditional residential development is not envisioned, so a majority of the employees

would live in the surrounding municipalities – shopping and paying real estate, IVU, and income taxes in PR.

- 3) With the support of selected developers, Independent Vieques could buy the land (RR) at a price greater than PR would ever receive from anyone else and without the Central Government's obligation to improve the infrastructure. Puerto Rico would still gain the economic benefit of the development through employment increases in the area. Additional industry and commerce would no doubt develop on the PR side of the border fences.
- 4) Payments to PR for the property could be structured for their optimum benefit in light of the hostile fiscal environment in which they find themselves.
- 5) **PR could receive the HUGE windfall of indirect access to our airport and port allowing limited export/import via international shippers, thus obviating the restrictions of the Jones Act. Savings from by-passing the existing oppressive colonial arrangement could save PR anywhere from \$100,000,000 to \$1 billion per year. In addition, needed supplies and assistance during emergencies could be quickly delivered and distributed from any source without the uncertainty of a temporary suspension of the Jones Act.**

Given our independence and the control of our tax structure, we can offer developers a wide range of economic opportunities for creating new businesses and generating protected returns on their investments. With excellent transportation options, access to a solid labor pool, and a very desirable location, our pro-business country could create a substantial economic engine within the private sector. Given the PR bankruptcy and lack of

empowered trustworthy leadership, it will be decades before RR can be successfully developed by PR.

In return for discontinuing further financial support at the completion of the transition period, PR would abandon all claims to assets in Vieques and the former Navy base of Roosevelt Roads. (Vieques would pay for all ceded real estate “owned” by the Central Government based on a formula that would attempt to reimburse PR for their original purchase price plus improvements.)

II.A.3.c. Other Issues

The Navy purchased most of the island of Vieques from **local landowners**, not from the government of PR. The US Navy was not renting any significant PR assets. PR was not active in Vieques governance during the occupation. According to local lore (although unconfirmed), to maintain “good neighbor status”, the Navy paid to the Central Government hundreds of millions of dollars over the years. Only a small fraction of those monies was used to benefit Vieques. Instead, the Central Government chose to place the contributions into the general fund to spend on the main island. This purported failure of the political elite to use the monies for the local population has always been a thorn in the side of residents. Settlement of possible lawsuits would remove a distraction, bad publicity, and the risk of additional financial loss by PR.

The people of Vieques have justifiably been a constant annoyance to the Central Government. There is an endless cycle that is fed by neglect. It is very straight forward:

- 1) There is a problem in Vieques that requires action by the Central Government
- 2) PR is notified

- 3) The government does not respond
- 4) PR is notified again – this time in louder terms
- 5) Some PR politician responds that they are deeply concerned and looking into the situation
- 6) Hearing nothing after a time, residents take some action – louder terms and/or protest
- 7) The problem escalates to a higher level of government official who visits Vieques, dictates a minor improvement, and pledges a study or further action
- 8) After a short time, nothing is really fixed or improved
- 9) PR is notified again
- 10) The internal government conversation identifies the problem as ignorant Viequenses who are never satisfied
- 11) There’s a new election and a new party
- 12) The cycle repeats

If we are set free, the cycle ends, and the entire distraction goes away for the politicians.

In order to prepare to approach PR, we absolutely must provide a united front among the participating stakeholders. The major players are primarily Vieques residents, but other crucial members include the denizens of Naguabo, Ceiba, Fajardo, and Culebra as well. The stakeholders must all understand the significance of Vieques becoming independent with RR and how this is the optimal solution for their own economic growth and improvement.

II.A.4. Size as a Factor

20% of the world’s nations have populations under a million people and 5% less than 100,000. Some might argue that populations under some arbitrary number are too small to

become an independent nation. While it may seem generally easier if the new country were larger and had more resources, the critics are wrong. The smallest UN member, the Vatican, has a population of less than 900. The next largest members are Nauru and Tuvalu with about 9,500 and 11,000 respectively. The last two are Polynesian islands from Micronesia. Both of these countries are isolated island nations - socially and economically. Both isolated and remote nations were assisted by their former Commonwealth parents in decolonization.

The disadvantages of few resources and less expertise may be readily overcome by simplicity, less diversity, and access to the required capital. The costs of creating systems (education, healthcare, etc.) and infrastructure are small enough to be eligible for grants, sponsorships, philanthropy, and private-public partnerships. The scale is manageable.

III. WHAT'S THE VISION?

*"Where there is no vision, the people perish."
The Old Testament Proverbs 29.18*

It is the vision that must drive the process, and it is the quality and feasibility of this vision that will enable the long-term success of the mission.

Vieques is a jewel, an uncut diamond. While so much of the Caribbean has been over-developed, resulting in polarized populations of haves and have-nots, Isla Nena sits naturally in her raw splendor. The arrested development of the island caused by the Navy occupation has given us both the opportunity and the responsibility to guide her future through the implementation of a plan of development which is intelligent, controlled, sustainable, appropriate, and embraced by the community.

The formulation of the vision and related objectives of seeking the decolonization of Vieques encompass many issues and components that must be agreed upon by our united community:

1. We need to understand our existing situation and the condition of our total infrastructure.
2. We must investigate and define the mechanism of economic development for generating the funds to finance our new nation.

3. The citizens will be required design and approve a new form of government.
4. A philosophy of regulation and taxation needs to be articulated and become an integral part of the system.
5. Infrastructure (physical and programmatic) must be recreated.
 - a. Public Works
 - b. Utilities
 - c. Healthcare
 - d. Social Services
 - e. Education
 - f. Legal System
 - g. Transportation
 - h. Security
6. The development of a sustainable economy through the Commerce Initiative is required.
7. Social and economic objectives need to be codified in order to guarantee upward mobility for all.

The following pages outline facts, thoughts, theories, suggestions, arguments, and opinions that are intended to inform and stimulate our community discussions. Your contributions are critical in developing our collective vision.

III.A. Existing Conditions

As an island, there is abundant access to the Caribbean Sea and beautiful beaches. There is a natural harbor in Esperanza, a limited harbor in Isabel Segunda, and mile long “Mosquito Pier” on the north side. Just east of the big pier is the airport with a 4,300-foot runway.

Until Hurricane Maria, electrical generation was performed on the main island and delivered by two old undersea cables. A pair of seldom working, poorly maintained diesel generators located in Vieques east of the populated areas were the only backup, and they failed miserably. Our cable connections to the main island were severed due to damage and destruction of the on-shore substations at both ends. The cables have been repaired and the backup generators are potentially operational. Our antique electrical grid was destroyed, repaired, and kludged together sufficiently to restore power to every household. The system is fragile and incapable of surviving any future hurricanes without significant damage.

Our phone service and internet connections are through private companies, and destruction of their towers presented major communications problems. Repair and reconstruction resulted in some carriers having improved to a higher quality than before the storm, while others are still weak. Land line telephone service has never been restored and Movil/Claro has given every indication that it will never be viable again. Internet options are adequate for residential use on much of the island, but too many remain underserved or have no service at all. Online capacity for school children learning during the pandemic has been dismal.

We have a high school, a junior high, and several elementary schools. For the most part, the buildings are Spartan and almost no classrooms have air conditioning, window screens, or adequate athletic facilities. The island has no hospital, just a condemned emergency facility combined with a clinic now

operating out of a temporary location. Medivac is required for any non-trivial or potentially serious issues.

In the last decade, the only development on the island has been private, and there has not been much of it. Residential, in the form of single-family houses, is the primary source of construction, and most has been remodeling. There are virtually no condominiums on the island, and no significant private apartment buildings. Commercial construction has been almost exclusively remodeling. There has been no industrial construction.

We have a credit union and a branch of Banco Popular. Lending has been minimal. Many homes lack titles, and therefore, are not eligible for mortgages.

Despite the transportation obstacles tourists need to overcome to get here, prior to the pandemic, demand had still created a growing market for house rentals like Airbnb. Our government financed and controlled ferry service is horrible, constrained, and unpredictable leading to inadequate and expensive shuttle airline service in the face of higher demand.

We have no significant agriculture (other than boutique operations) or aquaculture businesses at this time.

III.A.1. Demographics

Meaningful data elude census takers because of the seasonal variations and temporary occupancies of so much of the population. Efforts during the 2020 census may provide a distorted picture of our reality due to the pandemic. Collected figures in 2010 indicate that of the 9,000 or so residents, 422 were born in the States and 123 were born in foreign countries. Most of the North Americans who

live here, spend more than half of the year elsewhere and do not contribute information for the local census. Some figures:

Population

- In 2011 there were 2,256 children 18 years old or below; and we lost 250 by 2015
- Further emigration due to Maria has been significant

Education & military service

- 66% have high school diplomas (or equivalent) and 17.5% have bachelor degrees
- 6.7% are military veterans

Income and poverty

- In 2015, of 2,711 households, 25% had less than \$10,000 income and only 6% more than \$50,000
- The median income was \$17,934 and the mean \$22,794 with a per capita of \$6,866/year
- For children 18 and under the poverty rate was 57.6%

III.A.2. Physical Infrastructure

The existing infrastructure of Vieques is antiquated and has been imposed upon the island without Viequense input or approval. The laws are the laws of the US and PR. The schools are part of the PR system and suffer from inadequate facilities, underfunded programs, poorly trained teachers, and incompetent administration (the recent Secretary of Education was arrested and resigned). The healthcare system is totally controlled by the Central Government and does not come close to meeting the needs of the island (the Puerto Rico Health Insurance Administrator was arrested and resigned). The ferry system uses inappropriate equipment, delivers horrible service, and operates as the dictator/gatekeeper in control of access to the main island. The utilities, water, justice system, streets, sewers, and every other element of our

infrastructure are failing and need renovation or replacement designed to meet the needs of the residents.

III.A.2.a. *Roosevelt Roads*

According to the “Roosevelt Roads Reuse Plan: Site, Context, & Market Conditions Appendix A.c”, the facilities at the former base are vacant and include:

Facility Type	Net Square Feet
Residential *1	2,417,010 SF
Business	500,548 SF
Industrial	459,293 SF
Storage	434,998 SF
Retail	189,543 SF
Recreation	185,864 SF
Educational	182,125 SF
Institutional *2	142,717 SF
Assembly	120,724 SF
High Hazard	106,623 SF
Utility	74,339 SF
Municipal	21,395 SF
Military	21,117 SF
Subtotal	4,856,296 SF

*1 Over 800 residential buildings including single and small-scale multi-family dwellings, apartment houses and a hotel

*2 Includes hospital, assisted living, and correctional [see

<http://www.rooseveltroads.pr.gov/rfp/Pages/RF P-Hospital-Parcel.aspx>]

The base closed in 2004, and an assessment of the facilities was performed. The conditions varied, but generally the buildings were considered good. Since then virtually no significant maintenance has been performed, while neglect, thievery, and sabotage have taken a huge toll.

Air and sea transportation related facilities are in varying degrees of repair, but they present huge potential for development. A reasonably complete inventory of facilities is available.

III.A.2.b. Vieques

A rough inventory of our current (fluctuating) assets includes:

- 1) Several government run housing projects and apartments totaling approximately 660 units [<http://www.city-data.com/zips/00765.html>]
- 2) 4,388 houses [2010 Census]
- 3) 1 major hotel – The W Retreat & Spa – heavily damaged and not being restored or maintained
- 4) 19 claiming to be minor hotels: from hostels to guest houses with 3 to 20 rooms
- 5) 2 gas stations
- 6) 3 small grocery stores
- 7) 20 or so small convenience stores
- 8) 30 advertised restaurants
- 9) About 30 more unadvertised local style restaurants
- 10) 3 hardware stores
- 11) 3 tire shops
- 12) Approximately 40 small retail and service provider storefronts
- 13) 1 small assembly plant – formerly GE – in the process of closing
- 14) 1 concrete batch plant
- 15) 1 high school, 1 junior high, and about a half dozen small elementary schools
- 16) 1 fire station
- 17) 2 police department offices – one state and one municipal
- 18) 1 court house
- 19) 2 condemned former emergency clinics/hospitals and 1 operational temporary clinic
- 20) 40 or so assorted government buildings
- 21) Antonio Rivera Rodríguez Airport with a 4,300-foot asphalt runway
- 22) Mosquito Pier – 1.3 statute mile long, manmade, rock filled, “pier” with asphalt road
- 23) Isabel Segunda Pier – approximately 200 feet long ferry dock in marginal condition
- 24) Esperanza Pier – a derelict former sugar pier approximately 200 feet long

III.B. Preparing for Economic Development

With a thorough objective analysis of the existing assets and liabilities of the new nation as listed above, how does one play to the strengths and minimize the weaknesses to create an attractive draw for the purposes of creating a sustainable economy? What are the potential areas for new and expanded economic development?

The role of economic development is to determine what will attract desirable businesses, implement the attractions, and market the attractions directly.

III.B.1. What Helps Form an Ideal Business Environment?

Companies are attracted to:

- a. Stable government with a predictable and favorable legal system;
- b. Skilled labor - follows the good jobs, and attracting such labor ahead of the businesses is another chicken and egg problem;
- c. Low, but fair, wages;
- d. Reliable low-cost utilities - Electricity costs cannot be easily reduced with legacy systems such as used by PREPA. Renewable, independent sources should be developed for long term stability and to lower our costs;
- e. Access to markets – good transportation;
- f. Low taxes – for high income people and those businesses that have large profits;
- g. Appropriate and rational regulation - is both desirable and necessary. The constraints of the past are no longer automatically carried forward. The new nation won't have the host government organizations from the mother countries. Decolonization will leave behind the EPA, OSHA, IRS, DEA, TSA, HSA, FDA, FAA, FCC, FBI, CIA, HUD, ADA, SEC, DOT, USCG, and hundreds more other regulating organizations that currently exercise control;

- h. Ease of starting and operating a business is a key element of economic development -it is a must. (Most of the procedures (and delays incurred) in US/PR dealing with licensing, permitting, inspecting, etc. are purportedly designed to protect the public. The original intent might have been pure, but the systems quickly became tools to restrict competition and grow bureaucratic empires of graft and patronage.);
 - i. Absence of import and export duties; and
 - j. Good schools, daycare, and healthcare to attract employees.

Executives, entrepreneurs, and independent consultants prefer to locate based on family needs, schools, healthcare, weather, special interests, low taxes, low cost of living, etc. They typically must have stable infrastructure: electricity, cell phone, and internet being the big items. They bring with them skilled labor.

Note: High tech firms have difficulty finding and hiring suitably trained workers in their local areas. They will often opt to hire foreign workers with the critical expertise they need. Due to immigration and work visa limitations in the States, hiring these aliens can be difficult or impossible. This option may provide a convenient ramp up to a critical mass in various technical fields.

With a new independent country, the canvas is clean, and the task of designing the new government is necessarily performed with business development as an absolute requirement. Considerable effort is necessary to satisfy the criteria listed above. Not all will be applicable or possible, but the more that are available, the better the chances of success. Flexibility and later modifications will be useful.

III.B.2. Actively Marketing Our New Country

Sustainable economic performance is so critical to Vieques that every effort must be made to find the right businesses, present the opportunity to the owners, and gain their participation. There is no safety net for supporting failed nations.

As the decolonization of Vieques emerges in the headlines, there will be significant interest and media attention. This will give us a free forum to present the broad range of opportunities as news and information. With the feedback that this generates, a better understanding of the market should result, and a more directed marketing effort formulated. This is an iterative process as both the country

and the market become educated. Constructive use of social media will be imperative. Savvy professionals should be hired and/or consultants contracted to fill the gaps in our local expertise.

The business development group will make lists of business categories – and even specific businesses – that are deemed suitable for the new country. Once identified, these entities should be targeted for direct marketing. Keeping open minds during this process will allow the group to capitalize on targets of opportunity that appear out of nowhere as well as excellent ideas offered up from the marketplace.

Economic development is a continuous effort, not a onetime event. The global markets are fluid, and our new country needs to anticipate and prepare for conditions to change.

III.C. Vieques Government & Regulatory Design

With a population of only 10,000 to 20,000, it is neither necessary nor desirable to have a large, multilevel, clunky government. It is more appropriate to operate like a small suburban city, medium sized corporation, or a large condominium association (which can be as large as a 100,000 residents).

While the scope of issues that a country needs to address is greater than a management association, the structure can be very similar: horizontal, not vertical. An elected part time council/legislature is quite suitable to **hire and direct** a professional manager and permanent upper level staff. Most of the government services can then be provided under contract to private firms.

As an example, we might have a Council-Manager form of government with a Council President (titles to be determined) and a 15 to 21-member Council. Elections for the office of Council could be held at two-year intervals in November of even years – each election for half the members. Elections would be non-partisan in structure, and all members of the Council elected for four-year terms, yet continuity within the council body would prevent radical changes in direction with every election. The President would then be elected from the body of the Council for a two-year term in every odd year. Term limits could prevent dynasties.

The Council would set Independent Vieques policies, enact ordinances (laws), and hire and oversee a professional manager. The Island Manager would serve at the pleasure of the Council and would administer the daily operations and programs of the government through a very small group of department heads

and staff members with roles to manage the private contractors. The intent is to contract out the services rather than directly hire and manage employees. (This would end patronage and the hiring of unqualified people.) Contractors unable or unwilling to perform as directed would be fined and/or replaced.

Since Independent Vieques will be evolving anew through a significant transition period, we have the rare opportunity to contract experienced professionals to help organize, teach, and counsel our people at all levels of government.

III.C.1. Philosophy & Constitution

The guiding philosophy of the new government should simply be to implement the procedures and programs that the citizenry wants. Citizen input takes several forms:

Charter/Constitution. This lays out the limitations and obligations of the government. In our situation, there is no union of states, nor counties, nor townships, etc., but just one group of approximately 10,000 citizens who have all of the rights that life can provide and want them protected. We are forming an agreement among ourselves to create a limited, minimum governing authority to help us manage ourselves and maintain order. We wish to govern our island democratically, but we know that we need to protect everyone on any issue from being unfairly dealt with. See The Vieques Renaissance Supplemental Discussion Guide Appendix C, at www.vieques-libre.com/essays/

Council. The purpose of the council is to act on behalf of the citizens regarding numerous functions required in guiding and overseeing the running of the country. The individual members would have the responsibility to become well informed on the issues, to attend regular meetings to discuss and debate proposals, to head various committees, and to vote on pertinent actions and resolutions.

III.C.2. Cabinet Structure

As a nation, important functions should be guided, monitored, and directed by skilled key personnel appointed by and advisors to the Council. These department heads would likely have fancier titles. Initially, outside recruiting may be required for some ministries, but the long-term goal is to develop the requisite expertise in-house. The intent is to have ministry functions performed by contractors under each minister rather than having government employed staff.

Prime Minister

Cabinet Ministerial Positions

- CIT (Communications & Information Technology)
- Finance/Treasurer
- Public Works
- Security
- Parks & Recreation
- Commerce & Business Development
- Education
- Health & Human Services
- Justice
- State
- Transportation

Other Appointed Positions

- Ambassador to the United Nations
- Ambassador to the US - Washington, DC
- Ambassador to the US - Puerto Rico
- Inspector General

III.C.3. Taxation

Puerto Rico has based its economy on tax advantages to attract foreign companies, not on lasting or inherent assets; not on an educated and skilled labor pool; not on efficient government and regulatory systems; not on ease of doing business; and not on robust and reliable infrastructure. A country can hook new industry or business with low taxes, but sustainability and competitiveness require all of the other components to keep companies from leaving and to attract good quality, long-term business. As other countries play similar tax games, comparative advantages evaporate – as we have witnessed.

Taxes are essential to run the new country, but the structure can be created in many ways to optimize the results and minimize the effort and cost of compliance. The fewer categories of taxes, the easier, more efficient, less costly, and more universal the collection becomes. Tax evasion is an important consideration and dictates a system for us that is nearly impossible to thwart.

In the US/PR, the systems have become overwhelmingly complicated through the bending and twisting of miles of paper highways to accommodate the heavy traffic of special interests. Our taxation and regulatory systems must be simple, fair, stable, predictable, attractive, and only implemented if absolutely necessary. They need to be easy to understand and comply with, as well as nearly impossible to evade. Appropriate taxes to establish include – or not:

III.C.3.a. *User Tax on petroleum fuels*

Auto and truck usage is responsible for the wear and tear of roads, recycling of spent fluids, etc., so taxing petroleum products is logical (and easy at the port of entry). In an effort to

reduce our pollution from hydrocarbons, a punitive component could be added that would raise revenues and encourage conservation or switching to alternative cleaner energy sources. Aviation and marine fuel taxes could be minimized as incentives to attract further business but should cover the environmental and operational costs of service.

III.C.3.b. Vice Taxes

To fund remedial actions necessary to combat abuse and negative health effects caused by alcohol, tobacco, gambling, prostitution, and recreational drugs, appropriate taxes should be levied. The evidence that we all see - from over 100 years of attempts to restrict these vices - is that making such activities illegal does not significantly reduce their use and levies far greater costs on society and the citizens they are meant to protect than a program of legalization, regulation, treatment, and education. The level of these taxes should be sufficiently high to provide some deterrent value, but not so high as to foster the development of a black market.

III.C.3.c. Sales, IVU, Import/Export, or VAT Taxes - NONE

III.C.3.d. Personal Income Tax - NONE, but...

Note: This tax is typically the largest contributor to funding a government. It can be designed to be simple, progressive, fair, and easy to comply with; however, it is usually a complicated mess that becomes a political football, a nightmare for both compliance and enforcement, and the source of innumerable special interest giveaways and distortions.

III.C.3.e. Corporate Income Tax - NONE, but...

Note: While low corporate taxes can be a draw to profitable companies, many businesses pay little income tax anyway. Startups may not be profitable for years. Foreign corporations may or may not be able to benefit directly if they still are required to pay the mother country. Loopholes in many situations allow legal tax avoidance. One of the big benefits of no tax is no paperwork or filing: the cost of compliance is zero, and consumers benefit as well.

III.C.3.f. Inheritance Tax - NONE

III.C.3.g. Resident Alien Tax

This is a unique income tax assessed on the income of any and all resident aliens and corporations who pay income tax to any jurisdiction that grants taxes paid to a foreign country (in this case Vieques) as a credit against their income tax obligations. Therefore, if a high-income earner from the US, or other country with similar rules, is obligated to pay taxes to that country, then the individual or company pays 50% to Vieques and 50% to the foreign country to which they have the obligation. The taxpayer pays the same gross amount, but half goes to Vieques, where the individual or organization is actually a resident.

III.C.3.h. Real Estate Tax

The economic value of the island is clearly its location and its natural resources as tourist, investment, and retirement destinations. As such, it seems most appropriate to select a real estate tax as the most important and sustainable source for revenue. The system would be established based upon annually appraised value.

- Zoning and real estate taxation must be coordinated. Areas set as agricultural would be taxed at a very low rate that would reflect the lower market value of land

restricted to that purpose. Areas of raw land or blighted neighborhoods that the master plan would foresee developed - or not - could have differing rates for stated limited times.

- A new orientation toward property ownership, inheritance, and forced sales is required to foster the improved value of real estate and the quality of neighborhoods suffering from empty and decaying buildings. Title reconciliation and registration would be put on the fast track.
- Owner occupied homes and bona-fide nonprofit institutions would receive a dollar amount discount on the tax due.
- As addressed above, from the census information we can see that there is over \$800,000,000 worth of developed residential and commercial property on the island. The value of raw privately-owned land would add another estimated \$200,000,000 for a total in the neighborhood of \$1 billion.
- The average US property tax as a percentage of market value is 1.38 [Moody – economy.com] and about 20% of the States are above 2% with some communities over 3%. In all of these other locations, taxpayers are also subject to sales tax, income tax, and numerous other less obvious taxes or fees.

- The commercial development of Roosevelt Roads could yield substantial tax revenue, initially without a significant revenue draw for family services: zero residents would result in neither schools nor social services required.
- Part time residents pay their fair share of the cost of operating the nation rather than the minimal sums currently paid.

III.C.4. Regulation

The primary view of a regulatory environment is that of protecting the citizens, providing a level playing field for businesses, and to offer a fair and fertile environment for innovation. In our situation, domestic concerns are important, but the total domestic market is too small to attract significant economic development, and Consumer Affairs could be a direct function of the legislature. Major businesses here will cater to international markets.

We will need to grow a business community that will work with us to develop “Vieques, Inc.” Our regulatory orientation will be international and the design a result of collaboration between the government and businesses as partners.

About 60 years ago, the legal philosopher Lon Fuller specified the conditions that he believed were necessary, at least in some minimal form, for the very existence of law. They were: the making of rules, so that issues aren't decided on a case-by-case basis; transparency, so that affected parties are aware of the relevant rules; not applying rules retroactively, so that people can rely on current rules; comprehensibility, so that people understand the rules; not issuing rules that contradict one another; not issuing rules that require people to do things they lack the power to do; relative stability of rules, so that people can orient their action in accordance with them; and no mismatch between rules as announced and rules as administered.

New York Times article

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/15/opinion/us-government-constitution.html?action=click&module=Opinion&pgtype=Homepage>

III.D. Vieques Commerce Initiative

It is elementary economics that to provide any sustainable growth, the amount of cash coming in must exceed the dollars flowing out. Our monetary outflows are numerous: food, gas, equipment, consumer goods, cars, building materials, utilities, taxes, services, etc. Our inflows are scarce: government transfer payments, immigration, and tourism.

We have an excellent study from 2003 performed by Estudios Técnicos called “*Plan Maestro para el Desarrollo Sustentable de Vieques*” which reviewed our history, described our resources, evaluated our human and social conditions, analyzed our options, and made recommendations. It suggested areas where we should work to improve our situation and offered a potential vision of our future development. There appeared to be little, if any, disagreement within the community over the findings and recommendations, but the Central Government gave it no priority, and we had neither the leadership nor the means to actually implement it by ourselves.

According to the study, there was little hope of creating businesses based upon manufacturing. While construction and service sectors could grow to match our local needs, the only two areas for real economic hope were thought to be eco-tourism and agriculture. Given the lack of farmers, it will not be easy to revive agriculture as a profitable industry, but one that could appeal to a significant group, and should be supported. Essentially, the conclusion of the study was that our major strength was in our unique environment. We theoretically had the opportunity to use our tremendous resource to create a world class living demonstration of

sustainable development and environmental management.

The common notion of the eco-tourism plan included numerous small guest houses and specially designed guided nature tours and activities. This type of development would keep the small scale of the island intact while providing career opportunities for Vieques residents. The thought was that that such operations would help lower the impact of tourism on our environment and simultaneously keep the money in the hands of local, island residents. The bigger developments, such as large hotels, golf courses, and casinos, were (and are still) considered undesirable because they tend to over-power and damage the environment, while at the same time, export a greater percentage of their revenue to absentee owners.

The study was silent on the often-overlooked benefits of “quasi-immigration”. By this is meant the growth of residential development targeting new part-time and full-time residents. This is a close cousin of tourism. Individuals buy properties, fix them up, and live in them, and/or rent them out. Many are retirees, some in transition, and others come to live and work. These new residents typically have off-island sources of income and wealth, and they often bring money to the island more effectively than the exportation of manufactured products. The limited development brings money and jobs to Vieques: the long-term benefit is a resident who shares our view of the environment, spends money, and pays property tax here.

The study was for Vieques alone and did not consider Roosevelt Roads or independent regulatory and tax structures as part of the plan. It did not envision the possibility of medical tourism, energy production, or any other businesses for which the island did not have the existing resources (natural, financial, infrastructure, and trained labor) to give it a specific identifiable competitive advantage. Upon further analysis, it can be seen that there are actually many types of businesses that could flourish on an independent Caribbean island. **The key to development is to create diversified, credible business plans aimed at securing private companies to work within the vision of the community** to build and operate these new ventures.

It is essential to remember that a primary goal of independence is to guaranty the freedom, health, wealth, and wellbeing of our citizens. Our development must strive to raise the level of opportunity for the growth of everyone. We will ultimately need to focus on those major business opportunities in which we can gain true competitive advantages and partner with the expert firms and individuals in the selected fields to create “Vieques, Inc.” If we aren’t able to differentiate ourselves positively, we won’t capture the market and earn the premiums that market leaders enjoy.

Our valuable natural resources include sun, water, beaches, and a superb location with natural amenities. While these elements are excellent components of an eco-tourism industry, there are no minerals or other materials of commercial value to extract. We have no other industry from which to build or grow. We will have an airport and a sea port that should become the basis of new businesses. Our Vieques labor force is void of

specific expertise, and the available nearby Puerto Rican labor is a mixed bag.

We will need to bring in the investors, the expertise, and the **initial**, appropriately skilled labor. In order to be sustainable for the nation, the economic development must generate sufficient property tax to fund our intended programs. As a nation, we therefore benefit greatly as more money is invested in facilities for industry, commerce, and residential structures attached to our land. Our citizens directly realize gain from higher paying high skilled jobs. To summarize the immediate affects: **individual wealth is built from high income jobs and business creation. National income is generated through taxes on the value of our land and the improvements there on.**

The following initial identification of potential businesses is not intended to be exclusive. The goal is not to attempt to micromanage our economy or pick winners and losers. The task is to divine a preliminary list, a starting place that seems reasonable, toward which an aggressive marketing effort could be aimed:

Internal domestic businesses:

- Alternative Energy Production
- Water Desalinization
- Electric Vehicle Sales and Service

Primary “export” service businesses:

- Eco Tourism
- Sustainable Retirement Community
- Medical Tourism Specialties & Alternatives
- Air-Sea Cargo Hub

Secondary “export” businesses:

- Financial Services
- Independent Contractors & Entrepreneurs
- Agriculture & Aquaculture

Possible non-traditional businesses:

- Space Port
- Seasteading Hub

III.D.1. Creating the Plan

One of the most difficult tasks people face is making decisions with information they consider inadequate and imperfect. No one ever really has all of the facts ahead of time, but decisions must be made nonetheless. Such is our situation, so “best guesses” allow us to move forward. More in-depth studies can be accomplished as the project progresses. Preliminary analysis is summarized in the following paragraphs. After discussion of the potential options for developing commerce to meet our goals, we need to create a suitable land use plan that also reflects our prudence to provide an upper limit on the speed of growth and the density of population that would be appropriate.

Economists cling to continuing growth as the holy grail of economic health. Few want to acknowledge that there are limits. Instead, they focus on: more population, more production, more exports, greater efficiency, more jobs, etc. It is true that an independent Vieques will not be sustainable without growth from where we are now, but we must be careful to balance the long-term growth we target with our desired quality of life. We should be seeking lives that thrive for our citizens as **the** measure of success.

Commerce is essential for a society to prosper. Wealthy individuals spend far more than poor people. We intend to grow our economy, and therefore, we need to: First, attract wealthy people to invest and/or spend their money here;

and second, provide opportunities to help our own citizens become wealthier.

III.D.2. Evaluating Potential Business Opportunities

Because we are so small, the scale of any new approach or new industry is also small. We need to provide work opportunities for roughly 60% of the resident adult population. Employment will also be provided for the communities of Ceiba, Naguabo, and Fajardo. We prefer that a large percentage of the funds that pay for our labor come from off-island sources. [See [The Vieques Renaissance Supplemental Discussion Guide Appendix D: Patrimony & Local Business Development at www.vieques-libre.com/essays/](#) for further discussion of local issues.]

III.D.2.a. Alternative Energy Production & Sales

Becoming self-sufficient in energy generation and water service are essential components of becoming independent. Fortunately, we have the opportunity to do this in a most ecofriendly manner.

The self-serving orientation and gross incompetence of the government run electrical and water companies are legion and publicly demonstrated a total collapse during and after Hurricane Maria. The infrastructure is decayed. Electrical interruptions are common, droughts lead to water shortages, and the quality of our water is no longer tested and questionably meets EPA standards. We are experiencing a huge crisis. A PREPA plan that has been laboring unfunded can be reviewed in two documents:

- [Vieques & Culebra Microgrid](#)

<http://nebula.wsimg.com/b7904704a18212ef9cced43d67fb5e00?AccessKeyId=CA8929B36EA4B8693354&disposition=0&alloworigin=1> and

- [Energy Technical Advisory Council \(ETAC\) Vieques & Culebra Generation & Microgrid Technical and Financial Funding Justification](#)

<http://nebula.wsimg.com/e8bd7c88e3ee516772db515db6a56759?AccessKeyId=CA8929B36EA4B8693354&disposition=0&alloworigin=1>

Representatives claim that the high cost of electricity is caused by the fact that most of the power generation is fueled by oil. The truth is that even after the very high fuel cost is separated out, the remaining \$.14/KWH for distribution, maintenance, and overhead is higher than the total cost, including fuel, of almost all stateside electrical suppliers! Of further importance, while prospective businesses do not like high utility costs, they like unknown future prices and surprises even less.

Electricity used in Vieques has been produced and distributed (via two underwater cables – both at the end of their service lives) by AEE on the main island. The capacity of our system is about 10MW, and we typically use under 7MW. Culebra is linked to the main island through Vieques like a daisy chain through a continuing underwater cable. A backup oil based generating facility was built in Vieques but was seldom brought on line – even during extended power outages – it failed miserably during both recent hurricanes.

Water is supplied to the island via a pipe from the main island that also continues on to Culebra. Water usage is approximately 600,000 gallons per day for Vieques and 150,000 gallons for Culebra. The service failed during Hurricane Maria and was totally

inoperative for over a week. The system is poorly maintained, vulnerable, and subject to failure during emergencies.

Examination of the natural resources of Vieques illuminates the incredible potential we have to enter the domestic electrical generation business. Historically, Vieques has been blessed with significant sunlight and moderate to strong winds. Research suggests that the best winds and the most sunlight are available on the east end of the island. Considering both solar collection and wind power, studies show that we have “good” conditions as rated by both wind and solar experts. We are not rated “excellent” due to the seasonal variations of winds and clear skies. Proposals for both wind and solar should be solicited and evaluated. The cost of both collection and storage has been dropping dramatically every year to the point that it is already a more cost-effective alternative to our antiquated petroleum-based service.

Catastrophic failure of the Puerto Rican grid after Hurricane Maria left Vieques without electrical service for four to seven months, depending upon the neighborhood. We were forecast to remain on unstable backup generators for another four years, however, the transmission lines were temporarily reestablished after almost 15 months.

III.D.2.a.1) Solar

Solar technology can be utilized in both centralized and decentralized (distributed) installations. The advantages of decentralization include: the reduction or elimination of distribution lines, equipment, and costs, as well as reduced vulnerability to storm damage. The advantages of centralization are greater efficiency and a lower original cost for the solar plant. Solar with battery storage is already cost effective in many market areas and

could be implemented now in PR if the monopoly-protecting obstacles placed by the power company and government officials were removed.

To begin with, small solar systems can be efficiently installed immediately on the flat roofs of most existing houses. These are light weight panels with or without batteries. Power would pass through an inverter to convert the DC current to AC which would then be connected to the house circuit breaker panel with a transfer switch which selects either the grid or the solar source. A power conditioner would provide a constant, clean voltage for the devices connected within the house. Batteries would permit continuation of the supply of electricity while the sun is unavailable. The system is scalable: one could have just a couple of panels to run a refrigerator, electronics, a fan, etc., or an extensive system could be installed to cover everything in the house during sunshine and a couple of days of clouds.

Larger scale arrays can be placed in a single area and sized to supply the whole island including backup batteries. Alternatively, to reduce distribution costs, multiple dispersed arrays can be located in or near various neighborhoods and commercial areas. Although much of the distribution system has been damaged by hurricanes, some may be usable, and further development worked around the existing systems. New distribution should conform to the Rural Utility System (RUS) standards and also be below ground. Existing elevated components should be buried as soon as practical. An electrically powered desalination plant could be located nearby.

Desalination technology has become less costly through technological advances in the last several years, but it is still more expensive

than our current costs of about \$32/month for a typical residence using 6,000 gallons per month (about one half a cent per gallon). Forecasting the exact cost of desalination is extremely complex and varies considerably based upon many different existing conditions. One of the largest cost components is electricity, but with our own solar generation, we could end up with very favorable numbers. Nonetheless, we should figure that water costs may **initially** exceed our current charges by 50%: a small price for independence, redundancy, and resilience.

III.D.2.a.2) Wind

Wind technology has also made huge gains, and prices have dropped consistently as well. While we don't wish to have wind turbines distributed throughout our neighborhoods, the east end of the island is off limits indefinitely, and a large windmill or three could be placed on otherwise useless land and be almost out of sight from residential areas ten miles away. Off shore locations are more expensive, but could be used if desired and could expand our market to include the Virgin Islands.

Wind energy is an excellent complement to solar given that it still functions without sunlight. The combination of the contributions reduces the required amount of battery backup needed to prevent blackouts or using carbon based fueled backup.

III.D.2.a.3) OTEC

Ocean Thermal Energy Conversion (OTEC), a process of extracting energy from the differences in temperatures found in very deep water versus shallow surface water, might be another option. Applicable mainly in the tropics, this form of electrical generation was pioneered in the late 1800's and continued slow refinement over the last century. [Wikipedia]

Vieques is surprisingly well suited geographically because it sits within two miles of an off shore shelf of 2500 feet and within 3 miles of 4500-foot-deep water. Punta Vaca on the southwest part of the island is about the closest point.

OTEC technology is in its infancy. The theory is tried and true based upon a low efficiency heat engine that converts thermal into mechanical energy to drive electrical generation, and in open cycles, the simultaneous desalination of seawater into drinkable fresh water. The costs are high, but the power is constant 24/7 regardless of the weather.

A half dozen demonstration projects have been successful at producing net power, but nothing yet has been built at a scale of 10MW or above. “Lockheed Martin built a ‘Mini-OTEC’ off the coast of the Big Island [Hawaii] in the 1970s and recently partnered with Makai Ocean Engineering - <https://www.makai.com/ocean-thermal-energy-conversion/> - to build a pilot plant....” [Pacific Business News, Nov 22, 2010]. Lockheed has invested millions in the hopes of becoming a major player, and they were looking for more projects at a larger scale. They have won a 10 MW project in China, but it is not yet on-line. There are others in this industry as well.

Our needs can be met with a 12.5MW system that can deliver 8MW of net electrical power while producing daily 1.25 million gallons of fresh water for both regular and aquaculture use. Financing is included with a power purchase agreement (PPA) with a 20 to 25-year contract at **fixed energy and water costs** possibly lower than what we currently pay. This technology is probably too rich for our budgets at this time, unless a great deal of grant money were to become available.

III.D.2.a.4). **Lithium-ion Batteries**

Battery storage has evolved dramatically, based in no small part on the efforts of Tesla and Solar City. The manufacturing costs of both panels and batteries have been decreasing by roughly 20% year after year. We cannot afford to invest in the antiquated technology and business model of the AEE power company. Other battery technologies promising great improvements are being developed as well. [See Clean Disruption, Tony Seba - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2b3ttqYDwF0&app=desktop>]

III.D.2.b. **Electric Vehicle Conversion, Sales, & Service**

It appears that supplying gasoline to Vieques is quite profitable for both the distributor and the owners of the two gas stations on the island. We suffer from limited numbers of pumps, limited hours of operation, interrupted supply, and an inability to pay at the pump – resulting in huge lines on occasion. Both service stations are on the same street, and residents and tourists alike are required to drive to the stations to determine if gas is even available. Round trip from Esperanza is 12 miles. It is a constant hassle and a source of anxiety to all of the drivers on the island, especially the tourists with rental cars. Resupply during emergencies takes days, and lines at the pumps can require up to 8 hours of sitting.

The cost of purchasing, running, and maintaining an automobile with an internal combustion engine is high compared to an electric vehicle, and the difference is growing every year. Within fifteen years there will be few if any gas-powered autos manufactured anywhere in the world. Combine cheap solar power with electric vehicles, and the transportation systems in Vieques become

dramatically less expensive. The transition can begin now.

Since almost all of the driving in Vieques is within 6 miles (12 miles round trip), and the highest speed limit is 35 MPH, electric vehicles could ease the problem and provide an economical transportation option. The normal negative factors to overcome are not insurmountable here at all:

- High cost (\$25,000 minimum) of new electric vehicles – retrofit older gas-powered vehicles
- Hills, which take more power – short duration – no problem
- Recharging infrastructure – none required – charge at home
- Risks of new technology – nothing at risk for us

Examination of electric vehicle availability points us to conversion as a phase 1 affordable option. The majority of the population is unable to buy new cars at current income levels. To initially address the potential offered by conversion, we find suitable older model cars that are cheap to purchase, light in weight, marketable, plentiful, and preferably have manual transmissions.

The initial candidates do not require a working engine and are low end autos without bells and whistles. In total, an average investment of under \$8,000 is required for each, plus the cost of the used car. More upscale vehicles would cost more.

In phase 2, during our transition period into an independent country, we could avail ourselves of new, small, inexpensive, foreign cars, trucks, and buses that are not available in the States because they don't meet import restrictions. Asian EV's currently start at around \$15,000, and these are real cars, not golf carts limited to

25MPH. Rental car fleets could clearly benefit enormously.

There is added synergy when we take control of our energy production and reach even lower costs of operation. This is a business opportunity that does not create an inflow of cash, as an export business, but contributes to the net balance of payments by reducing cash outflows to foreign countries, typically the US, for the vehicle, fuel, and aftermarket parts.

III.D.2.c. *Eco-tourism*

Although subject to the ravages of Chicken-gunda, Zika, the PR debt crisis, hurricanes, earthquakes, and the pandemic, our vulnerable tourism has been the only significant business model in Vieques for years, and it has been generally small scale and eco-friendly. Expansion of the concept is not difficult to envision, but studies may be conducted to determine how and in what directions the business should grow. Any credible plan would include a coordinated effort of the service providers and the establishment of a cohesive marketing program. Of critical importance is the immediate introduction of inspection and policing of activities in the sensitive environmental areas such as the Bio-Bay and the Ceiba tree, as well as, the historical areas of the sugar cane mills, lighthouses, and the Hombre de Puerto Ferro archeological site.

A typical eco-tourist would be in the market for water sports, bicycling, horseback riding, hiking, birding, and educational activities. These would require added planning and infrastructure. Consistent with the talk of ecotourism is the walk. The island would need to demonstrate sensitivity toward the ocean, plants, animals, and sustainability. This would include animal control, fishing regulation, litter reduction, storm water release/run-off, waste management,

recycling, and environmentally sound sewage processing.

A newly discovered form of tourism called voluntourism has emerged in recent years and fits our situation very well. Combining leisure activities with volunteer opportunities can be a win for the tourist, for tourism businesses, for NGO's in need of volunteers, and for the end beneficiaries of the work project.

In keeping with the philosophy of small guest houses, companies like Airbnb or a local similar organization can offer new opportunities where extra rooms can be rented out by locals. This could become a small income source for many families. Further, it would invest more of the community in the tourism business. Locals would understand that they had "skin in the game". Classes could be held to educate the new B&B owners in the areas of what to do and how to do it. Small contractors could specialize in modifying houses for this market. Micro loans could be offered for minor improvements. A **Vieques, Inc.** type brand could be offered with certified housing.

Ecotourism is not limited to land-based destinations and should include marine facilities as well. Development of Eco sensitive marinas would serve as demonstrations of sustainability while providing secure mooring, protected docking, and needed services for local fishermen and boaters as well as tourists. Nearby sea platforms could provide additional venues for marine activities of all sorts.

III.D.2.d. Retirement Community Development

Residential development that is oriented toward individuals who are retiring or contemplating retiring is a worthy concept. During the period before retirement the unit, condo, villa, or

apartment could be in a rental program. Amenities could be varied. Retirees who could afford such housing would bring more money into the system than would be taken out.

The concepts of Eco friendliness and sustainability are critical. Everything from land use and building design, through operations should be addressed. Scale should favor multiple small projects rather than just a couple of larger developments. Clusters of buildings would be preferable to chopping up the land for individual house lots, but there would be a mix of types throughout the community.

Historically, land use planning imposed by our Central Government has been inappropriate and responded to special interests, political influences, and a lack of understanding of our island. A well thought out, island wide, general land plan and accompanying zoning ordinances are essential for rational land use that meets the community's needs.

Medical tourism provides the synergy quite necessary to attract older residents. Higher levels of care for those who progress into situations of assisted living could be added to the offering to provide a continuum of coverage that could stretch into end-of-life care. There are many economic models for these service arrangements, but requirements and costs of such provisions require further study. Initial subsidies in the form of infrastructure or other incentives that bring good healthcare to the island could easily be paid for through property taxes from retirement and guesthouse projects.

III.D.2.e. Medical Tourism [[See The Vieques Renaissance Supplemental Discussion Guide Appendix E: at www.vieques-libre.com/essays/](#)]

The high cost of medical procedures, drugs, and convalescent care in the US and other locales could offer us a significant market advantage if we focused on services that we could offer for less. Stateside regulations, mandates, Prescription Benefits Managers (PBMs), litigation, insurance, etc. **result in huge costs** that could be greatly reduced without sacrificing the quality of services provided. Our offerings might include a range of medical procedures that:

- 1) Are neither high risk nor likely to generate complications;
- 2) Have long convalescent care periods;
- 3) Don't require a wide range of specialist staff;
- 4) Don't require a diverse array of expensive equipment; and/or
- 5) Are significantly more expensive elsewhere (including drugs and devices) than they would be here.

Staffing would be oriented toward the offering of therapy, nursing, and related support. Only limited general physicians or surgical staff would be required. Specialists and higher priced professionals could be:

- 6) "Guest" workers that come in for a short stint of days, weeks, or months;
- 7) Rotating staff that spend a week or several months;
- 8) Personnel from affiliated hospitals in PR or the US or other countries; and/or
- 9) Semi-retired or retiring practitioners.

Many healthcare professionals are frustrated at the evolution of their practices forced upon them by onerous new laws, rules, regulations, procedures, etc. that have seemed to suck the purpose and the joy out of treating patients. Most have been forced into group practices with integral hospital association and control. Paperwork, forms, reporting, compliance... are

transforming doctors into profit oriented legal assistants. Most practitioners would jump at the chance to actually practice as they feel medicine should be practiced.

Facilities would include:

- 10) Convalescent residences to accommodate patients and companions from anywhere – including medical tourists who have surgeries on the main island or elsewhere;
- 11) A surgical center in our **existing** 120,000 square foot hospital in the heart of the Port of Vieques (RR);
- 12) Provisions for co-located amenities and interfacing businesses; and
- 13) Utilities, transportation, and municipal services/infrastructure.

New opportunities and markets are opening in the arena of alternative medicine. With the rapid advancements in the fields of medical technology, nanotechnology, gene therapy, drug research, surgical techniques, and alternative treatments, many potential "cures" are already available in the lab but not in the hospitals in the US or most other countries. The lengthy procedures needed to gain FDA and professional acceptance of new treatments or drugs forecloses many seriously ill patients from the opportunity to try an experimental alternative to live. The costs associated with bringing new drugs to market and allowing physicians to prescribe them is so high that inexpensive, nonpatentable, and more natural solutions never get sponsored because there is no way for a company to recoup the investment and make a profit.

Filling this gap in medical offerings in a high-quality professional environment could offer a profitable service to the patient, the hospital, the staff, the research community, and the world at large. The initial focus could be on terminally ill

or elderly patients with a great deal of transparency in the process. There would be high standards for staff selection and audited procedures. The purpose is to offer alternative medicine not to sell snake oil or dubious treatments. Credibility would be extremely important.

End-of-life care is a natural extension of the services offered to terminally ill (or terminally old) patients.

Required facilities, equipment, and staff would be matched to the needs of the programs. Global partners would include university and private research companies who would fund the efforts. Local residents would receive added benefit in co-use of the facilities and professional staff through a synergistic relationship between our own healthcare system and Medical Tourism efforts.

Whether through a subcontractor or an umbrella type organization, a method of Medicare utilization must be established for local use as well as for tourist participation. The goal would be to allow Medicare recipients access to our system and gain appropriate reimbursement locally. We wouldn't want to be pulled into making a US type medical system, but we would need some method of gaining qualifications for authorized Medicare services. Offering subcontracted services to nearby PR hospitals should also be possible.

III.D.2.f. *Air-Sea Cargo Hub*

The elimination of the Jones Act combined with the long runway at our airport and the harbor left from the Navy gives the retired Roosevelt Roads complex excellent opportunities to act as a profitable mini distribution center adjacent to the PR market. There is significant demand for an airport facility that would allow foreign cargo

aircraft to refuel on their way from South America or Mexico, drop off freight for Vieques and Puerto Rico, and then continue on to the US (and back).

Likewise, shipping experiences the same restrictions. We have excellent potential for developing the port for cargo. With the expansion of the Panama Canal, container ships with over three times the capacity of previous models will soon be reaching the Caribbean. These ships are too large to dock at most existing facilities, so a system of hubs allows the bigger vessels to transfer up to 20,000 containers to and from several much smaller ships that then run more local routes. Competition for creating these transshipment ports began several years ago, but our port is only 40 feet deep and not acceptable for the very big ships. Opportunities to capture smaller vessels in need of transshipment could be successful using the existing facilities as a base without the need to significantly dredge the port. While not necessarily a "boutique" operation, it could offer better economy and service for smaller shippers.

III.D.2.g. *Financial Services*

Offshore banking has historically been a lucrative industry for small independent islands. The regulatory landscape has changed dramatically in recent years thanks to the omnipotent US Treasury, with whom we do not want to run afoul. Nonetheless, there are now, and will be in the future, many legal financial activities that could prove profitable to the island. These businesses may well change very rapidly and represent targets of opportunity undefined at the moment.

While Vieques income tax benefits may not accrue to US citizens due to current US laws, many other nations do not tax their residents on

income earned in other countries. With no income tax, we could become a draw for wealthy investors and entrepreneurs who relocate and/or open businesses here.

Local financial services will include an expanded role for local lending. One element that retards the climb out of poverty is the inability of the poor to receive mortgages [Note, of the 4,388 houses in the 2010 census, only 166 had mortgages] or business loans. This cannot be a give-away, but a **program of small-scale lending is absolutely required** and will possibly need to be backed by limited public funding.

III.D.2.h. Independent Contractors, Employees, & Entrepreneurs

The COVID pandemic and resultant lockdowns and quarantines have demonstrated the flexibility and desirability of remote meetings, working from home, reduced travel, employee satisfaction, and corporate cost effectiveness. The genie is out of the bottle, and not about to go back in. This emergence of *telecommuter freedom* is a huge factor for people in making relocation decisions. Able to live wherever it suits them, these workers are no longer bound by the traditional limitations of the corporate office complex. They locate based upon family, weather, healthcare, special interests, taxes, cost of living, etc. They typically need stable infrastructure: electricity, cell phone, and internet being the big items. While they don't necessarily have many, if any, employees, they spend money and pay property taxes (directly if they are owners or indirectly if renters) locally.

High-tech firms have difficulty finding and hiring suitably trained workers in their local areas. They will often opt to hire foreign workers with the critical expertise they need. Due to immigration and work visa limitations in the

States, hiring these aliens can become difficult and sometimes next to impossible. Therefore, companies are forced to open "branches" in other countries to gain the required capabilities. Combined with universal healthcare and universal basic income, concerns over employee benefits and *gig* worker security disappear. Vieques could provide an excellent location for such branch offices.

Specialty remote-work oriented mini or shared offices can reduce the isolation of remote work and offer opportunities of collaboration for entrepreneurs and technical personnel. Other incentives may be discovered to encourage these businesses.

III.D.2.i. Agriculture & Aquaculture

Our experience in agriculture is mostly a faded memory. We have several farms and cattle ranches, but we are not generally experts. What we know is that we have the natural conditions to allow for successful food production, but we need to develop a plan to capitalize on the desires of many to become more self-sufficient and entice people to enter the business. Water limitations will affect both crop selections and growing methods.

Our small size, wage levels, and remoteness generally make it inefficient to export outside of PR. However, if we could develop a boutique island brand, it is possible that exporting to high end markets could be justified. As an example, from a marketing perspective, if the world knew that every item from Vieques was high-quality and totally organic, it could give our industry an edge. The cost and effort for organic certification is typically onerous in part because of contamination potential from neighboring farms. Vieques could prohibit chemicals that prevent certification and keep such cost to a minimum. We could have a small processing

plant that was able to switch operations quickly to accommodate the variety of seasonal fruits and vegetables. In any event, we could become less dependent on imported food.

Land based aquaculture becomes a major possibility with the initiation of the OTEC (or other desalinization) operation generating fresh water. The ocean provides us additional options for fish farms, algae, and seaweed harvesting if we can inspire our citizens or others to take advantage of these relatively unique opportunities. Furthermore, as an independent country, we can set our immigration policies to include appropriate work visa offerings for foreign agricultural workers, not just for unskilled labor, but also for others with education and experience in similar environments.

III.D.2.j. Space Port

Four new private US companies are currently competing for contracts to carry personnel, satellites, and/or supplies into space. Other countries are developing similar programs. These high-tech startups are revolutionizing the industry.

This emerging commercial enterprise benefits greatly from the use of near equatorial launch sites that are easy to resupply and viable for housing launch crews and other required facilities. Vieques offers much of what these companies might need. The far eastern end of the island will not ever be deemed safe enough for tourism or residential development, but it might be quite suitable for a launch facility.

Currently, sites in central Pacific islands are positioned well for launch and orbital insertion; however, they are not well suited for logistical support. Launching from California, Texas, and Florida space ports are logistically easier, but

not as efficiently positioned for orbital insertion. Additionally, these companies might soon tire of the competition, restrictions, regulations, administrative procedures, and other obstacles attendant to the use of a US government facility. Safety is, of course, paramount, but the other government hassles can become aggravating and expensive. Vieques could provide both land and water-based areas (down range platforms) where this new industry could economically build the customized infrastructure from the ground up and operate without bureaucratic interference or competitive overview.

III.D.2.k. Seasteading Hub

“Seasteading is the concept of creating permanent dwellings at sea, called seasteads, outside the territory claimed by any government. The term is a combination of the words sea and homesteading.” [Wikipedia]

Floating communities offer huge varieties of community organization, governance, economic, research, and social pursuits that can become of great benefit to themselves and the rest of the world. Aquaculture is an important natural endeavor for seasteading.

The technical problems faced in launching floating cities need not be that difficult nor radical; however, the legal and political issues can present significant hurdles. While the open seas do not belong to any one country, they are controlled by maritime laws that only recognize established countries. Autonomous floating cities have no such standing. Vieques could act as a hub and sponsor for selected seasteading organizations. Logistics and support through our existing ports could provide economic synergy with some types of floating nomadic and/or anchored communities. (See

www.seasteading.org and Seasteading by Joe Quirk with Patri Friedman).

Hurricanes in the Caribbean pose a problem, but with proper engineering and planning, we've seen sufficient resilience in the oil platform arena to justify our location.

III.D.3. Summary

Vieques has very little industrial, service, or technical expertise. Essentially, we have no competitive market advantages in anything other than eco-tourism. We must reinvent ourselves, create a fertile economic development environment, and invite business leaders to grow or transplant their enterprises here. We can't rely on internal growth or development for which we have no capabilities. We have an excellent location and a beautiful island. We must leverage these factors through the successful development of Roosevelt Roads, what we call our Port of Vieques.

Alternative energy production and desalinization are critical industries for our domestic and commercial existence. They are "must have" services. The stability, quality, and pricing of these services affect the success of our efforts to recruit other businesses as well as our ability to realize our vision for the nation.

Solar and wind power with improved battery technology combine to make electric automobiles a global game changer within the next eight years. We need to go with the flow and begin making it a reality for Vieques. The money that our citizens will save in the purchase of cars, parts, fuel, and service is enormous. New careers and jobs in installation and repair will emerge.

Eco-tourism is what we are all about on the island of Vieques. This should be expanded and become more encompassing and inclusive. We live in paradise and need to organize and plan so that we can share the joy with more people without compromising the environment or the experience.

Retirement communities are almost everywhere in the civilized world. In Vieques, they will provide a needed service to primarily immigrant senior residents, construction jobs for local workers, support service jobs for local workers, retail commerce, and property tax to the nation. Many have offshore retirement income and use very few government services. **Access to excellent, affordable healthcare is required.**

Medical tourism is potentially huge for Vieques. By assembling a team of medical experts to select and guide the development of offerings in niche medical markets and alternative methods and medicines, our healthcare businesses can produce needed economical services globally. Simultaneously, we can deliver top rated universal healthcare services to our own citizens. As business expands, more facilities are required for additional functions and support services, which lead to more property tax and jobs.

The creation of transportation hubs at the airport and seaport affords the opportunity to totally bypass the US Jones Act limitations and provide a life line to PR as well. Contracting with multinational businesses that develop and operate such ports can solve infrastructure funding problems and provide the required expertise, while generating significant property tax and creating many jobs.

Every country offers opportunities in financial services, but some smaller nations have run

amuck of international norms through practices that their neighbors feel foster illegal and/or immoral activities. We need to be creative but also legal and ethical. We'll let the market speak. Note, however, that unless there are significant direct or indirect factors leading to the creation of real estate value (and related property taxes), the benefit to Vieques is not monetary but merely local consumption. Day traders may be of little value to the community.

Independent contractors, consultants, and telecommuting employees looking to live in paradise provide an excellent source of property tax and a general elevation of the intellectual and technical levels of the community. It is to our advantage to organize this group to the point of determining what we can provide to grow this market.

Agricultural businesses are not always the most stable or profitable but add greatly to the resiliency, aesthetic attraction, and natural quality of the community. Emphasis on low energy, low water, and small footprints is a key. Aquaculture has many forms and will become extremely significant to the island in the future. We need help determining just how we can move into this arena - perhaps with seasteads?

Space port activities are exciting, high profile operations that would probably work well for us. The major players all currently have acceptable home bases, so the question is whether we can provide a better alternative for any of them. Equally as important, as the industry becomes more active, can we capture any new entrants that need launch facilities? Or, can we work with a multinational that operates launch facilities to develop one here?

Seasteading is on the horizon. While the issue of hurricanes is a factor in the Caribbean, demand will grow and hubs and sponsors will be needed. With our transportation hub, appropriate regulatory structure, and excellent coastal access, we are well positioned to capitalize on the market as it develops.

Most importantly: We are neither clairvoyant nor experts in the many businesses that might excel in our environment in future decades. We must invite the world to creatively look at what we can offer, help guide our regulatory structure, and partner with us to build Vieques, Inc.

IV. INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

Our vision for our island is predicated on achieving high quality lives for our citizens and securing the opportunities for constant improvement in the future. In this regard, the creation and implementation of the domestic systems necessary for the productive health, safety, education, legal, and economic programs are imperative. These systems should all work together in an integrated approach reinforcing the community's goals and desired way of life.

In many cases, few among the group seeking independence are experienced in the disciplines necessary to design the systems, organize the project, and train the participants. Transforming an existing community or building a new one from scratch will require the help of outside experts.

Depending upon the specific circumstances of any independence effort, creation of a new country could capture the attention of millions of people. Skilled professionals with critical experience in business, politics, planning, economics, healthcare, law, government, etc. might, with a targeted recruitment plan, be eager to assist. In return for their efforts they would probably have one of the most incredible challenges of their lives and simultaneously enhance their stature with potential clients and within the global community in general. Additionally, they could be offered contingent citizenship. With access to the best and the brightest to help plan, train, negotiate, and implement creative restructuring, a new version of a great new nation would be feasible.

The difficulty with bringing in outsiders is the legitimate fear that control of the future could be lost to them. Resident voices may not be heard among the more powerful. The key to avoiding this is to have a general plan and philosophy well thought out and available so that, as others with skills, funds, and services are vetted, a clear, mutual understanding of goals and roles is agreeable to all. **The invited experts will act as consultants to citizen decision makers.**

IV.A. Public Works

IV.A.1. Land Use Plan

A plan developed to accommodate the agreed upon vision of Vieques will dictate the general requirements for the nation's infrastructure. As new owners of a tremendous amount of prime land, it will be incumbent upon us to manage it well for the long-term benefit of the island and its residents – present and future. The overall plan will guide us through measured growth. On the one hand, we will have control of valuable property that could yield a small fortune if sold off efficiently. On the other hand, if too much land is developed too quickly, the infrastructure will be overtaxed, the population density too crowded, and the quality of the island we love so much would be lost. The past overall master plans for the development of Vieques were created by the Central Government, not responsive to the will of or the future of our people, and are obsolete in view of the potential now to take charge of the big picture and include Roosevelt Roads, the new Port of Vieques.

All industry and major commercial development is intended to occur at the Port of Vieques. The nature and requirements of that development are not fully known at this time, so the plan for that infrastructure awaits the input from potential business developers. Much will need to be done to restore the former base to a working community. Estimates of the cost to renovate the infrastructure to accommodate the previous redevelopment master plan were around \$100M broken into four phases.

Unless otherwise noted, further discussion of public works

infrastructure improvements relates to the island of Vieques.

IV.A.2. Roads

The majority of the existing roads in Vieques were built decades ago, and buildings were placed very close to them. Consequently, many streets are much too narrow to accommodate parking, sidewalks, utility easements, or bike/horse trails. Taking land from street-front property owners for such purposes is a legal option, but will be controversial in many areas. **If too little consideration is given to painful changes (condemnation or street widening) in existing neighborhoods, new development will naturally be redirected to less developed areas, and improvements will leapfrog current residential areas.**

IV.A.3. Sewage Treatment

Sewage treatment of residential and commercial waste water results in both sludge and discharged effluent which must be disposed of. The purity of the byproducts is dependent upon the type and level of processing. Most systems are designed to perform a "secondary" level of treatment, as we currently have in areas with sewers. Living on a small island or on the coasts, our Eco structure is quite fragile, and we must ensure that we do no harm to our aquatic life. This requires effective "tertiary" processing, which in turn, can be returned to our water source, reducing our required desalinization volume.

Most of the houses outside of Isabel Segunda and Esperanza do not have sewers and rely on antiquated, simplistic septic tanks. When these tanks are located near waterways, as many are, contaminants are carried down to the ocean

polluting and damaging the coral reefs and aquatic life. It is difficult and expensive to construct and operate sewer systems through the hills and valleys of the island, but the ill effect of the pollutants has been taking a toll and exacerbating the demise of the corals. Many sections of the existing system are inadequate and need redesign and replacement.

There are many efforts worldwide to combine treatment with reuse, and Vieques should be on the cutting edge. Symbiotic activities utilizing aquaculture and appropriately treated waste water must be examined and considered.

IV.A.4. Storm Water

Vieques is a bit like a rock when it comes to rainwater flow. Due to the high hills and the narrow width of the island, gravity pulls the rain water down to the sea very quickly through the arroyos. Along with rain come the products of erosion (silt), solid garbage of all sorts, toxins from septic tanks, and roadway contaminants. Total purification of these discharges can be cost prohibitive; however, the use of retention ponds along the arroyos would slow the flows, capture the solid objects, allow silt (and other precipitates) to settle out, and significantly reduce the flows of pollution into the beach and coral areas. Suitable areas for any retention need to be designated and procured.

IV.A.5. Water Filtration & Distribution

We must have our own independent water sources. PR water services are inadequate to handle significant recurring droughts, and the quality fails to meet EPA standards. One practical method to do this is through

desalinization which can be accomplished with a standard electrically powered facility or in combination with **OTEC** electrical generation.

Existing aquifers in Vieques had experienced depletion followed by saltwater infiltration decades ago and were deemed unpotable, forcing the closing of all wells. It has been reported that the aquifers have been replenished and may now be suitable for limited extraction. Tests should be made in various aquifer locations to determine the purity and quantity of water likely to be available for emergencies and limited routine use.

An agreement with AAA, the Puerto Rico water company, to continue to supply the Port of Vieques is temporarily preferable to constructing a new pipeline from Vieques. Arrangements may also be possible to reverse the flow through the existing pipeline - connecting Vieques to AAA in Naguabo - to offset water usage and/or sell extra supply from Vieques during water shortages on the main island.

Vieques and the Port of Vieques require remedial work on filtration and distribution systems. Both need long term planning and design.

IV.A.6. Telecommunications

In order to keep our citizens well informed and to attract contemporary new businesses, reliable cell phone and high-speed internet must be available throughout the island and the Port of Vieques, even immediately following a hurricane. The system should be designed to handle substantial bandwidth using fiber optics and/or other technologies that will carry development for the next twenty years. **Basic** Wi-Fi internet service should be available to all

residents and guests provided under a government contract. National **intranet** service should be provided to all citizens throughout the island for local, secure, internal communication.

Cellphone services should be available through commercial competitors with limited, but appropriate, oversight. Likewise, land line telephone, internet, and cable can compete in the market for customers. All telecom systems should be hardened to protect them from hurricanes and earthquakes so that they are immediately available during emergencies.

IV.A.7. Power Generation & Distribution

Every sovereign nation must have control of its own electrical power generation. It is prudent to select renewable sources to protect the environment, to maintain stable prices, and to avoid interruptions. [See III.D.2.a. Alternative Energy Production & Sales]. Given the probabilities of high winds and hurricanes, putting the distribution lines underground is critical, despite the higher costs.

IV.A.8. Parks & Recreation

The nation of Vieques has an abundance of natural resources that constitute our patrimony and must be protected from overdevelopment and misuse. Our beaches, Bioluminescent Bay, mangroves, archeological sites, Ceiba Tree, and a host of other attractions demand our stewardship and care while making their beauty and grandeur safely available to residents and visitors alike. Although not the tourist destination of the island, the Port of Vieques has notable natural resources that need planning, preservation, and protection as well.

Development of retention pond systems provides a challenge but can work synergistically with park and pathway planning, and at the same time, help alleviate storm runoff problems discussed earlier.

IV.A.9. Government Facilities

Vieques has a number of government buildings and other facilities scattered throughout the island. A cohesive plan should be formulated to guide the configuration of facilities necessary for the new government and the contracted services. The real estate should be analyzed and determinations made as to what to keep, what to sell, and where everything should be located. The Port of Vieques will be owned by the Vieques government, but the planning cannot be done in earnest until our business development partners have been selected.

Concept #1 for consideration:

The plaza and surrounding municipal buildings form an attractive and unifying theme for Isabel Segunda. An Old San Juan kind of feeling might be a stretch, but a quaint, historic flavor could be expanded upon. Concentration of most national buildings and consolidation of offices near the plaza might create a “capital city” for both beautification and efficiency. Amenities could be added to encourage more walking and less driving in town: park and walk. More one-way streets and angled parking could significantly help traffic flow. Removing some derelict buildings and using the land for parking would assist the effort. Wider walkways in some areas are needed.

Concept #2 for consideration:

The hospital, firehouse, and heliport provide an excellent basis for collocating Public Works and all emergency services, such as the police, OMME, and a command center.

Concept #3 for consideration:

The “terminal” at the end of Mosquito Pier could become destination venue for dining and music/dancing utilizing either kiosks or permanent structures.

IV.A.10. Airports

The airports currently function satisfactorily but will need to become “international” with customs and security. The projected operations will need to be studied based on both tourism and air freight. Innovative use of Vieques certified customs and security officers as airline employees serving dual functions may initially make the island airport operations cost effective. There is a great deal of potential, but there are many unknowns at this point.

IV.A.11. Seaports & Marinas

The Vieques ferry system is crucial now and will continue to be in the foreseeable future for both cargo and passenger service. Mosquito Pier should be configured to accept the ferries, barges, fishing boats, and pleasure craft. [See [The Vieques Renaissance Supplemental Discussion Guide Appendix F at www.vieques-libre.com/essays/](#)] Large container, cruise ships, or others requiring heavy infrastructure would call at the Port of Vieques facilities. New facilities would be designed to minimize the

environmental impact and be consistent with our eco-island approach to everything.

Marinas for both fishermen and pleasure boats should be planned for Isabel Segunda, Esperanza, Mosquito Pier, and a facility at the Port of Vieques (perhaps in some combination with Ceiba). This network of docks should have security, weather protection, nautical services, and moorings for residents and visitors, short and long term. All fuel services should be of the latest ecology-protecting designs. Any extensive docking structures should include appropriate shore side commercial development in the plan.

Some question the need or advisability of having marinas. Boat owners spend money. From our perspective, there are multiple benefits:

- Security for commercial and recreational boats.
- There are docking and utility fees.
- We can sell fuel and pump out services.
- Businesses can offer maintenance and repair.
- Travelers can visit restaurants and other tourist venues.
- Boat owners can be encouraged to live in Vieques either on their boats or in homes on the island.

IV.B. Healthcare

Providing appropriate, effective, affordable, healthcare is an extremely important aspect of creating a new country. The intent is to provide both physical and mental health services. It is a task that has confounded most existing countries, and there is no clear right answer or consensus.

The first step is to define the problem. Before designing a detailed plan, we must determine the existing situation and minimum needs. We need to collect and analyze data on current medical support services, payments, and insurance benefits. The situation is – especially in the US - BIG BUSINESS. It is very complex with multiple levels of inefficiencies, middlemen, service providers, pharmaceutical companies, hospitals, brokers, insurance companies, government agencies, mandatory programs, regulations, certifications, unethical pricing and billing practices, doctors for profit, etc.

[Note: [An American Sickness: How Healthcare Became Big Business and How You Can Take It Back](#), by Elisabeth Rosenthal, is an excellent primer on the subject of the perversion of the US healthcare system.]

Second, we need to determine the real requirements of the community and the funding the nation is willing to commit to building and operating a new system.

Efforts to develop Vieques as a medical tourism destination are intended to generate a double benefit. Creating a medical complex for tourism

pays for the establishment of the infrastructure and brings the professional and technical expertise required to support the 9,000 Vieques residents and a foundation for retiree medical services. The synergy provides a win-win scenario.

IV.B.1. Medical

Medical services could be provided to all citizens through a variation of universal healthcare that is aimed at delivering basic medical and mental healthcare treatment (with a small copayment) using an HMO type model. Program limits of basic services would be set based upon an analysis of the community needs and the monies available. This single payer system can be installed through private contracts bid and regulated by our government. Preventive care and education provide the most cost-effective foundation to the system. Emergency services and treatment of illnesses are, of course, essential. Based upon our experience with the pandemic, we know we must have ICU capacity. Private supplemental insurance should be available.

IV.B.2. Mental Health

Mental health treatment is extremely important and includes all forms of mental illness and addiction effecting all ages. Education, counseling, addiction therapies, and family services are also important, and should be offered.

IV.C. Social Services

Families and individuals with financial or other nonmedical issues can receive outside assistance when necessary. Emergency care can take many forms from counseling to temporary housing. Long term, there are two options for providing food and shelter coverage: Safety Net and Universal Basic Income.

IV.C.1. Safety Net

The safety net covers food and shelter at a basic (dignified, but almost subsistence) level for an individual or family during their period of need - those who are able and those who are unable to work or take care of themselves. Of the latter case, some are permanently (or terminally) disabled while others temporarily. The system philosophy is to facilitate the return of the citizen(s) into the normal flow of society quickly, if possible. This is to prevent hunger, homelessness, physical harm, family disintegration, etc. In order to receive these benefits at any higher level, people may be required to contribute financially or participate in community service at specified levels. Those mentally ill, physically incapacitated, or otherwise unsuitable for service might have custom programs designed for them to contribute if feasible.

Past welfare programs in the US have created huge bureaucracies, generations of dependency, and ghettos of warehoused families left with little hope. The aim should be to teach one how to hunt rather than perpetually providing his or her dinner. A means-tested program that accomplishes this might include:

- Training
- Counseling

- Housing – temporary and short term
- Food
- Cash payments or vouchers

In the real world, we have constraints. It would be wonderful if funding for these programs was limitless, but it is not. The community must decide what the limits will be and how any program will be implemented. This is basic resource allocation.

Poverty helps no one except predators, politicians, and government contractors. Poor people don't spend money; they cost the community money and resources. Therefore, consideration should be given to ensure all programs are designed to raise the capabilities for employment and the inclination to work for those born into poverty or those caught temporarily in unfortunate situations. For those able, education, training, internships, OJT, or volunteer participation might be required. Better public accommodations could be available to those who expend effort to become self-sufficient. There will always be some who have more than others (haves and have-nots), but the objective is to provide a means and an incentive for those with less to earn more.

Past financial incentives (government subsidies) for having children will be eliminated. Contraception should be available. Addictions should be treated, and incarcerations minimized. Some recreational drugs may become legalized resulting in less crime, less police involvement, more education, better monitoring, and treatment. Marriages and partnerships could be supported, and penalties for traditional family structures removed.

Subsidies structured to incentivize work may be effective.

IV.C.2. Universal Basic Income – The Better Choice

Universal Basic Income, or UBI, is a concept based upon the theory that society is productive enough to provide basic resources to everyone to cover their subsistence. Furthermore, we are globally moving into an era where traditional work may not be required, and there will be insufficient employment opportunity for everyone to participate. In the extreme, our technical advances make manufacturing so automated that labor becomes a much smaller part of the process. People are more productive in the knowledge-based society when they are learning, sharing, innovating, problem solving, and otherwise contributing to the pool of knowledge available to everyone via digital media.

For our purposes, UBI is the monthly distribution of money to every **resident citizen**, regardless of income, with no strings attached. It is intended to be sufficient to cover the minimum necessary for food, shelter, and transportation. This is a minimally sufficient allowance for every person and not intended to provide anything above such a level. Most people (95% in past studies) will work to earn more to purchase the products and services that they want in excess of what they need.

In addition to covering subsistence on a routine basis, UBI provides the mechanism to support those members of the workforce who are laid off, fired, injured, quarantined by a pandemic, or in any other way unemployed. Those who are dissatisfied with their employment or the way they are treated or compensated have the

flexibility to quit and look for another job. Those who wish to create a new business or retrain have a financial buffer while they work to start their new careers or enterprises.

This form of support is extremely easy to administer and saves costs in many other ways. It eliminates the need for unemployment insurance. It obviates required welfare components, such as housing, food stamps, alimony, etc. Because it is for life, employer and government provided pensions may become unnecessary. Supplemental savings would be prudent, but it would be a personal choice. Hawaii is currently investigating the possibility of UBI. [For further information on Universal Basic Income, see: [TED UBI](https://medium.com/basic-income/7-great-ted-talks-for-basic-income-1472e77b737f) at: <https://medium.com/basic-income/7-great-ted-talks-for-basic-income-1472e77b737f>]

The population of Vieques can be divided into several income related groups:

(\$1,000)	% HH	Number HH
Under 10	24.9%	675
10 - 15	14.3%	388
15 - 25	23.8%	645
25 - 35	13.8%	374
35 - 50	17.3%	469
50 - 75	5.5%	149
75 - 100	0.5%	14

Table 4.1: INCOMES PER VIEQUES HOUSEHOLD (2015 census distribution estimates)

A minimum wage full-time job will pay nearly \$15,000/year. A \$10/hour job will pay \$20,000/year. Clearly, over half of the households currently receive some subsidies in order to survive. Today, there are programs for housing, food, medical, transportation, education, and all sorts of special needs for

citizens of all ages (newborn through elderly). The cost for this effort including labor, materials, contractors, and direct payments is large. It is far more efficient just to pay every resident citizen the UBI.

Vieques, as a new democratic nation with a poor population, will face a far different environment than fellow citizens in the States would if they were to attempt a UBI system. The myriad of taxes and social service agencies are so complicated and integrated into a tangled mess, that failure would be guaranteed. Our needs for support are great, and one way or another they must be met. Starting from scratch in designing a system using our known requirements as a base, will allow a pure and efficient implementation of UBI to be developed. We can keep it simple.

As an example, one could allow each adult \$5,000 per year and each child \$2,000. A family of 4 would receive about \$14,000 per year. This is a large sum that will need to be raised through taxes – approximately \$39 million for our population. Most residents would end up returning some of the distribution through property taxes, and many would pay far more in taxes than they received. Some taxpayers will not be resident citizens but solely part-time and absentee homeowners, who don't receive the UBI.

The distribution of monthly funding for **resident citizens** would be through a government run or contracted bank or banks. Access to the funds would be through the use of the **national ID**. The design of the system includes a national

database as described later. Each living citizen (from birth through death) is represented and has a personal UBI account. The ID card can be used as a debit or ATM card in Vieques.

It would be both relevant and justified to address the concept that older adults who have been raised in a system of entitlement and not trained or expected to work are not going to change. These individuals will essentially be unemployable for the remainder of their lives. Therefore, the existing systems of US support should be maintained for all such individuals who are currently in the system and have reached the age of 45 (or other appropriate age) until death.

A declining payment plan made directly from the applicable US and PR agencies to Independent Vieques should be based upon negotiations with both governments. All below the cutoff age would be the responsibility of Vieques. As an issue of negotiation, payments may be offset by other financial settlements. The advantage of this approach to the new country is that older citizens may fear that Vieques won't be able (or willing) to support them, but they would be comforted if the US committed to maintain the payments in some way. Those on earned social security and government pensions from the US and PR should continue to individually receive the amounts for which they would normally be eligible. Those receiving any form of welfare or disability would be entitled to the UBI less the US payment.

IV.D. Education

Historically, US schools were designed to teach only formal subjects (reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, and history) needed for literacy. Parents were obligated to raise their children with core values and survival skills. By WWI every US state had compulsory education provided at no cost. Over the last few decades, the Federal government has hooked the states through funding strategies that are almost nationalizing the curricula, testing, etc. Despite the constant updating of both the content and the delivery procedures, it seems as though the system has become hostage to ancient criteria. Society's needs and the government's proscribed programs are mismatched. The system is attempting to solve an out of date problem and is failing.

The educational objectives of different societies vary based on socioeconomic factors, culture, family structures, parental involvement, etc. One size does not fit all. In impoverished areas such as Vieques, it seems that many families within the community lack the experience to handle behavioral issues, teach life skills, or engender an appreciation of the opportunities available to their offspring through education. Consequently, to assist these young people, longer school days in a supportive environment can pay huge dividends in filling the critical voids. The approach can be much broader than academics and encompass the development of the whole child.

IV.D.1. Student Preparation

While most would agree that a public-school system is important to both the community and the students alike, in many school systems,

they are not accomplishing anywhere near what they could be in preparing children to become the best they can be.

- a. Do short duration in-school efforts become nullified by lengthy out-of-school experiences?
- b. Are behavioral issues usurping so much teacher attention that teaching/learning are suffering?
- c. Are the systems truly providing optimal opportunities for well balanced growth in the many areas of human development?
- d. A tremendous amount of time and money is spent educating a child from Pre-K through college. Is the focus broad enough and are the results sufficient to justify that expense?

There is much research and many studies of these issues available for us to review. Assessments need to be made of goals for content, delivery methods, and logistics to determine the full picture of the system to create. The breadth of public-school priorities might include:

- e. Affordable preschool and daycare offered to integrate education from the cradle through adulthood and to free parents to pursue jobs, careers, volunteer positions, or higher education for themselves;
- f. K through 12 options for alternative systems (such as Montessori and the International Baccalaureate® (IB));
- g. A strong core focused on critical thinking;
- h. Vocational training as a track option in high school for those not intending to go to college;

- i. Intern programs in both academic and vocational settings created to allow high school students to experience different opportunities that may capture their interests and inform their career choices; and
- j. Continuing/adult education for vocational training or retraining essential in a world where technology changes - eliminating some jobs and creating new opportunities for others.
- c. Enrichment programs in athletics, physical fitness, the arts, and remedial assistance through universal extended days, such as 7:30 AM – 5:30 PM;
- d. Life skills classes (called *Adulting 101* by some) at appropriate levels and in after-school activities; (*Graduates of high school should possess the knowledge to effectively plan their lives and manage a household. They could receive career planning and parenting training including introduction to child psychology and health. They could have the basics of health, ethics, nutrition, cooking, cleaning and maintaining a home, energy conservation, driving and maintaining a car, banking (checkbook balancing), consumer credit, budgeting, applying for work, work ethic, etc.*);

IV.D.2. Curriculum

The number of children in our school system has been declining steadily from the year 2000. At the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year, we had an enrollment of fewer than 1,500 students. The pandemic closed the schools and “teaching” reverted to online programs that reached only a fraction of our students. More families are leaving the island.

The educational system must be reinvented from scratch. Despite the numbers of our citizens engaged in local teaching activities, we wish to have a total curriculum designed in consultation with outside experts **of our choice** and **directed to accomplish our goals**. The small size of the school system precludes the effective implementation of multiple approaches and school choice. All public students will attend the same schools using the same facilities, teachers, and curriculum. The breadth of school priorities should include:

- a. Bilingual teaching and learning is essential for Vieques to give our young people opportunities bridging the US and Latin America;
- b. Global orientation to grant Vieques new international opportunities upon which to capitalize;

- e. Integration of internet-based programming: educational opportunities that can be utilized in both a classroom setting and in independent study - a system to teach, monitor, and encourage this form of lifelong learning should be included at all levels;
- f. Preparation for capitalizing on new international opportunities - different technologies, languages, and roles will identify subject areas that might need to be rapidly added to the basic curriculum; and
- g. Some standard testing for comparisons and feedback would be included.

Logistical issues:

- h. Multiple recess periods throughout a longer school day could be scheduled to allow children to exercise, wake up, become reinvigorated, have some fun, snack, and provide a quiet period to assist the more disruptive children to settle down - **Napping** can further help rejuvenate people of all ages, especially children;

- i. Lunch periods should be adequate in length and supplied with nutritionally balanced meals and snacks - junk food should be unavailable; and
- j. Serious consideration should be given to extending the school year (year-round) and including more, but shorter, vacations. This would make the program more integrated with normal family/parental work life and eliminate the “retraining” to get everyone back up to speed each fall. [Note: Typical US school systems require 180 days of classroom experience per year. Employment is generally figured for 250 paid days (or 2000 hours) per year. Perhaps 230 school days (46 weeks) would be more optimal.]

IV.D.3. Facilities

Active Vieques schools include a high school in Santa Maria, a junior high in Isabel Segunda, and several elementary schools throughout the island. Generally, they are neither appropriately designed nor well maintained. Year-round occupancy would require modification or redesign to make the spaces comfortable and conducive to learning. Buildings with good airflow, large overhangs, high ceiling, ceiling fans, and insulated roofs can be pleasant most of the time, but A/C should be considered for short periods during the hotter months in those buildings that aren’t acceptable as is. Screened windows and doors are also a must. Roof mounted solar panels and cisterns should be accommodated for resiliency.

Some of the older, smaller, clustered, existing facilities would be better off closed and new facilities built in more appropriate locations in the long term. Creating a more campus like environment with the high school and junior high would allow the sharing of sports, arts,

reference, and many other new facilities needed for a contemporary school system.

IV.D.4. Staffing

Clearly more teachers, assistants, and administrators are required to operate the schools from 9 to 11 hours per day in a year-round program. New curricula and augmented programs create new demands for trained staff. Experienced and qualified teachers (and substitutes) are the key to the successful accomplishment of the program goals. Recruiting and retaining the best possible teachers is essential. Pay must be raised to levels commensurate with skills.

IV.D.5. Other Thoughts

We have already seen the value of establishing partnerships in cross culture learning through sister schools in other parts of the world. Activities to broaden the vistas of our students while developing international friendships aids dramatically in expanding the opportunities for foreign exchange and global awareness.

Without a university in Vieques, college prep would be aimed toward schools in other countries giving our youth the opportunity to become global citizens. They will become familiar with different cultures and gain work experiences within a wide range of new and different offerings. It is further hoped, that at some point, many of the graduates would return to Vieques with their acquired skills, experiences, and insights to contribute to the community in an informed manner.

Given the Eco-Attraction of our island, it would be prudent to attempt more partnering with academic and research entities to establish

facilities for field work, workshops, and extension classes on the island. It could also be possible to allow local students to gain credits toward associate or bachelor degrees. Our location is deemed suitable, and efforts have been initiated, to secure a remote astronomy observatory.

As important as any other element of the program, a plan for motivating parents to stress and encourage education must be included. It is certain that not all parents will care, and not all students will perform. It is our goal to reach everyone, but our initial focus is to develop our programs to target the 90 to 95% or so that can be reached efficiently, without excessive resource demands.

IV.E. Legal System

Legal systems of the free world are generally based upon some combination of the principles of common law with judges ruling on the basis of precedence, or civil law (such as Napoleonic) based on strict statutes. In the US, common law is heavily supplemented by civil codes with an enormous array of statutes, rules, and regulations.

Another form for a legal system, a newer concept called Polycentric Law, can be an overlay of multiple legal systems operating simultaneously in the same place and/or a range of alternative competing legal systems. In the States, there are federal, state, county, and city hierarchies of laws and jurisdictions that are not intended to be chosen, but rather imposed. Forming a new country gives the founders latitude to select an existing system, create a new system, or let the marketplace select by agreement systems as they would any product or service.

Our intent is to install a **democratically elected government** of minimal size to execute the will of our citizens. Our Constitution shall be the foundation of the system to create laws and maintain law and order. It must be fair and treat all citizens equally. It must protect minorities of all sorts and be consistent with a philosophy of minimalism. It should follow the guidelines below.

IV.E.1. Guidelines

The starting point for any system, organization, operation, or effort is the establishment of goals and objectives. The embodiment of these goals in a legal system should be the Constitution or Charter, and it should contain an enumeration

of the people's rights. The United Nations has created the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** which is the gold standard and an excellent guide. All laws of any sort must be consistent with, and subordinate to, these founding documents.

Regardless of the actual legal system chosen or formed, the foundation must rest on both due process in the creation of all laws and due process for all who must face legal actions or otherwise interact with the system. Additionally, the system should be designed to be:

- a. Simple and straight forward;
- b. Written in common language understandable by lay people;
- c. Fair;
- d. Consensual;
- e. Based on arbitration when effectively possible;
- f. Efficient and cost effective;
- g. Minimalist - creating only those laws that are clearly justified;
- h. Measurable - reviewing the effects of laws for efficacy and removing the ineffective ones;
- i. Free of special interests and lobbyists in the actual process of writing laws; and
- j. Protected from Shifting Baseline Syndrome.

Laws, rules, regulations, policies, etc. should be proscriptive rather than

prescriptive – defining the objectives and parameters not describing how every little thing must be performed. They should be based upon principles - not complex, detailed directions. Laws should define limits and not be meddling in methods. People should be allowed to make judgments for which they would be accountable. Mindless reams of

ridiculous bureaucratic paperwork would be obviated by allowing certified and registered experts in most professions to make decisions and recommendations within their fields.

The agreed upon community morals and norms can be standards by which judges and other professionals determine what to do and how to do it. Transparency and responsibility (personal and commercial) can replace thousands upon thousands of pages of rules and regulations. Attempting to codify every potential action (both right and wrong) with the intent to eliminate employees from thinking has become the goal of many governments. It is wrongheaded, inefficient, and dehumanizing, while it stifles innovation, slows the economy, frustrates most citizens and bureaucrats alike, and creates layers of self-interest-based interference.

Special interests and bad actors use the specific wording in the laws to find loopholes – and there are always loopholes, some of which are actively planted in the obscurity of superfluous verbiage. More law is then piled on to prevent use of the loophole, and the cycle continues. The result is an incomprehensible pile of immovable inertia preventing the timely accomplishment of critical activities and projects. No one has the ultimate authority to ignore or refute inconsistent or irrelevant regulation and legal statutes. The courts are further used to extend the process and reward those whose lawyers are the best at finding useful cracks in the system.

Many in the US complain about the litigious nature of the society. This is greatly a result of a legal system that has morphed from reasonable judgment into a complex and twisted analysis of tons of case law. Malpractice and product liability claims may entitle “victims” to enormous compensation.

People make errors. Professionals make thousands of decisions a week. Some of the decisions are wrong. If they are made in good faith, the professional should be responsible for correcting it to the best of his or her ability but should not be punished. Repeated mistakes, illegal activity, willful impairment while performing services, etc. could be cause for punishment in some reasonable form. Reasonableness in today’s courts is often absent. Awards are irrational and inconsistent. Attorneys are allowed to file nuisance lawsuits, drag out proceedings, and generate huge fees. Any new system should avoid these pitfalls and be based extensively on arbitration and common sense.

IV.E.2. Property Rights & International Law

Property “rights” are a human invention. In nature, one is entitled to use what one can acquire and secure. From the beginning of man’s history on earth, people fought over the “right” to use and control land. Cave dwellers plundered one another, tribes of humans all over the globe battled other tribes, and nations have continued to follow the pattern. The spoils went to the victors.

Historically, “might” triumphed over “right”: laws of the conquering nation were imposed on the less sophisticated and/or less formidable occupants of the land. The end result has consistently been to recognize ownership of the land by the more powerful group, and those formerly residing there were killed, driven off, enslaved, or required to live by the laws of the new ruler. While indigenous groups have laws or rules on the use of “their” land, hostile victorious outsiders don’t follow the rules of the conquered.

With sovereignty comes the ability to define property rights within the new nation. It has been shown time and time again that the rule of law and solid, well defined property rights are essential for the long-term economic health of any country.

IV.E.3. Vieques Real Estate

Many parcels of Vieques land were “squatted” on for years by individuals, and no legal title for the possessor exists. All privately owned real estate records must be reconciled. This will take some time and notifications must be aggressively pursued to help ensure that potential owners are aware of any conflicting claims to their properties. Various time periods should be established for presenting claims, but after a limited period of years, all properties will become properly titled (including national lands) and further claims will be refused. Real estate titles duly executed would prevail. *Perhaps a small fund would be established to otherwise compensate foreclosed claims when there were extenuating circumstances that caused the claimant not to come forward in a timely fashion.*

Upon completion of the registration process, the “adverse possession” or squatting activity will be over for good. No more land rushes. No more wild-west fencing frenzies will be tolerated. Land ownership will be organized, orderly, and legal.

The existing real estate records of municipality owned land and structures are in shambles. PR and US government lands would become “nationalized” by negotiation and be added to the inventory. Physical surveys and formalized titles will be required for all government land. Implementation of a geographical information

system (GIS) must proceed to tie all property descriptions to a geocentric based system. Integration of all appropriate related data - graphic and text – at all levels of utilities and public works infrastructure is essential. The government of Vieques will maintain all official records of ownership.

IV.E.4. Land Use

The past overall master plans for the development of Vieques were not very responsive to the will of our people and are obsolete in view of the potential now to take charge of the big picture.

We must determine the nature and the image of the island that we want to see decades into the future. We need to evaluate the qualities and attributes of the various land areas, the needs of the population, the economics of development, the existing/required infrastructure, the environmental impact, the target growth rate of the community, and many other factors.

If we decide to encourage agriculture, fertile soil areas with lesser slopes will need to be zoned for such. If we elect to solicit aquaculture, coastal areas may be necessary. “Growing” new coastal reefs strategically surrounding the island could greatly enhance local sea life and aid various aquaculture activities. Wealthier residential venues will be drawn to waterfront areas and higher hill parcels for views. We could lead the market and the rational development of the country through phased infrastructure implementation.

The east end of the island was a former US Navy bombing range until 2003. Upon leaving the range, the Navy began an extended cleanup operation to remove live ordinance and

comply with EPA requirements. As a “Superfund” site it received both attention and priority. Not wanting any future development of the lands (in part due to the higher cleaning standards and potential liability), the east end was designated a Wilderness Area through an Act of Congress (in violation of their own clearly restricted definition of a Wilderness Area), and management of half of the island was turned over to the Fish and Wildlife Service, a bureau in the Department of Interior. This would change for an independent Vieques!

New development should reflect eco-friendly infrastructure such as sustainable water and power generation and distribution, mini parks and hiking/biking/horseback trails. Planned Unit Development techniques, described by Wikipedia should be favored over simple subdivision:

- a. *A mixture of both land uses and dwelling types;*
- b. *The clustering of residential land uses providing public and common open space;*
- c. *Increased administrative discretion to a local professional planning staff while setting aside present land use regulations and rigid plat approval processes;*
- d. *The enhancement of the bargaining process between the developer and government municipalities which in turn strengthens the municipality's site plan review and control over development for potentially increased profits due to land efficiency, multiple land uses, and increased residential densities.*

IV.E.5. Sea Use Planning

An exclusive economic zone extending out 12 miles to sea and a negotiated zone sharing those areas of the US whose 12 miles overlap

with ours, will offer us a valuable resource to be protected. Repair and nurture of the natural reefs, plants, fish, and other sea creatures represent a critical priority for our healthy future. Sea use planning and targeted investments are essential.

Aquaculture is emerging as an option, and the opportunities for Vieques to participate in the growth of this industry are significant. Seastealers, those forming a floating “nation”, can fit in well within this economic sector and our off shore development. We will have a critical need for proper planning that includes a wide range of factors and considerations far exceeding those on existing terra firma.

IV.E.6. Criminal Justice

Incarceration is expensive and ineffective at changing the behavior of most inmates in a positive way. An appropriate program should:

- a. Discourage crime;
- b. Protect the community;
- c. Be cost effective;
- d. Rehabilitate;
- e. Reduce recidivism; and
- f. Include restitution to victims.

Current US systems do not accomplish even a third of these goals. A comprehensive program that begins in the homes and the schools to teach parents and young people the meaning and practice of “community” would make a great deal of sense. Once a consensus is established, peer pressure could enhance conformity to the community standards. Parents would, likewise, have a common understanding to communicate to their children.

Discouraging crime must not mean stigmatizing light or first-time offenders. The logical reaction

citizens normally have is to ostracize criminals. But the problem then worsens since isolation results in a lack of integration back into society and the shared values of the community. Furthermore, for understandable reasons, criminal histories often cause rejection by employers.

Education of children, and the community in general, must inform all to the downward spiral that occurs once an individual becomes branded a criminal. Parents must be guided to realize that condoning antisocial behavior will eventually become devastating for their children. Poor parenting is known to be a large part of the problem. Parents must be trained to become a substantial part of the solution. Anti-social and violent behavior in children must be identified early and treated. Mental health is an issue for the individual, the family, and the country. Basic levels of treatment should be provided to all.

House arrest combined with mobility restrictions is becoming more common with the advent of electronic monitoring. This is both less expensive and less isolating than warehousing offenders in prisons. While it is not suitable for all crimes or criminals, it appears to be more effective for most.

Laws need to be written, understood, and enforced. They must be reasonable and necessary. Some smaller nations may be extremely homogeneous and wish to codify their moral and religious beliefs into laws which would maintain the “purity” of the community – this is their right. Others having more diversity, like Vieques, should create a legal system to reflect a broad range of community consensus and not merely conform to the religious, moral, or opinionated rules of particular groups.

We know from centuries of experience that one cannot successfully legislate “good” behavior or activities when a significant portion of the population is not in agreement. Black markets form and criminal activity flourishes with far more harmful side effects than the prohibited products and activities themselves. That doesn’t mean anarchy or total laissez faire but requires appropriate regulation and enforcement to minimize harm and maximize education. Laws for the benefit of special interests should not be tolerated. In Vieques, we are currently plagued by a significant drug transmission trade: we are a transit node in the flow of illegal drugs from Latin America to the States. Once a young boy reaches high school, the pressure to become part of the “business” can be compelling in the absence of other opportunities. Legalization of such drugs would dramatically reduce local crime – especially murders.

IV.E.7. Law & Order Enforcement

Police departments are charged with the responsibility to enforce the law, but in a national context, there are many levels and overlapping jurisdictions. In the States, the following are just some of the many entities who are authorized to enforce laws and carry lethal weapons:

- a. Treasury Department
- b. FBI
- c. Homeland Security
- d. TSA
- e. DEA
- f. Postal Service
- g. State Police
- h. National Guard
- i. Highway Patrol
- j. County Police

- k. City Police
- l. Sheriffs
- m. Marshalls of various sorts
- n. Housing Authorities
- o. Transportation Authorities
- p. Park Rangers
- q. Forest Rangers
- r. Fish and Wildlife
- s. Department of Natural Resources
- t. US Coast Guard
- u. Border Patrol
- v. Immigration
- w. Customs
- x. Department of Justice Officers
- y. Correctional Officers
- z. Juvenile Authorities

And add the many, many regulatory agencies that investigate, apprehend, and prosecute “violators”. This mentality implies that citizens need to be closely managed to keep them under control. We don’t need this in Vieques!

A system that differentiates between forcing (enforcing the law) and coaching (maintaining order) could lead to a nation with far less violence and hostile conflicts while resulting in a much more civil society, tighter community relations, and far fewer incarcerations.

Force is conflict and generates a response that often escalates into violence – in many

cases it is actually **caused by the presence** of the armed officers. Force should be reserved for those infractions that would otherwise lead to violence. Armed police should only be present if there is a reasonable threat.

Community coaches can be effective in defusing the more common elements of order and conflicts in neighborhoods ranging from annoying behavior (like neighbors making too much noise), to littering, to nonviolent domestic disputes. Unarmed staff trained in psychology and conflict resolution can more easily resolve issues between residents without inducing fear and threatening behavior. With their understanding of community norms and experience in and knowledge of the neighborhoods and residents, the coach is able to facilitate a peaceful, safe resolution in the short term. In the longer term, behaviors can be modified in a positive way.

Coaching can be expanded to include the roles of social workers. Another benefit of universal basic income is that eligibility, payments, and entitlements are not a concern, so the focus shifts to the child and family welfare.

IV.F. Transportation

Systems of public and private transportation include integration of cars, trucks, taxis, buses, trains, airplanes, boats, and ships. Whether beginning from scratch or making major modifications to the built environment, there are new technologies that should be considered in the planning and designing for the future, which might be only 10 years out.

Every modern mode of major transportation uses fuel: gasoline, diesel oil, jet fuel, LPG, or electricity. It is important to consider several factors in determining the fuels one might select for infrastructure development. Equipment requirements, availability, supply stability, current and forecast prices, cost stability, pollution, volatility, toxicity, and distribution systems will certainly impact the choices. The petroleum-based fuels are the most cost effective today while supplies are generally up and costs down; and subsidies are enormous, so most transport systems are configured for these fuels. Times are changing, and we are in a gigantic transition period from such fuels to electrical based technologies. While feasible for short haul ships and ferries, regulatory limitations currently prevent the use of battery powered commercial vessels, but this will change.

The rapid growth in automated systems is just now opening up the industry of self-driving vehicles. Evidence shows that, even in these early stages, the AI capability to operate safely and quickly can exceed the skills of a human driver. Electrically powered vehicles are preferred for such tasks. The equipment, communications, and software forming an integrated system will be different than what we see today.

Electrically powered automobiles, buses, and small trucks will be encouraged through the use of increasing taxes on gasoline, along with the declining prices of electric vehicles. In order to attract more tourists, however, taxes on boat and aircraft fuel will be low – just enough to cover related expenses. The ferry system between the island and the Port of Vieques is described in [The Vieques Renaissance Supplemental Discussion Guide Appendix F](#) at www.vieques-libre.com/essays/.

As noted in *III.D.2.b. Electric Vehicle Conversion, Sales, & Service*, retrofit of new and used vehicles could be a profitable domestic business.

IV.G. Security

Vieques enjoys a close economic and geographical relationship with both the US and Puerto Rico. On a macro level, it is expected that our neighbors will actually want higher levels of security for us than we would otherwise be willing to establish. We are located in their backyards, and they won't want unexpected threats suddenly emerging due to our potential lack of vigilance. Compromise will need to be negotiated.

IV.G.1. Military

The protection of a country from foreign threats is the primary function of a military in a democracy. The armed forces typically must address both tactical (small scale and temporary – like border disputes) and strategic (long term with varied scales – major attacks by aggressive neighbors). Large countries spend enormous amounts on self-defense, but smaller ones assess the threats more pragmatically. Their forces will never be able to outgun the large nations. Different defensive strategies for smaller countries include:

- a. No military – assume the country is of no value to anyone else; no natural resources or strategic location;
- b. No military – rely on alliances with large “protecting” nations;
- c. Tactical military forces only;
- d. Possess a big weapon that can be used as a deterrent – nuclear bomb or other new technology; and
- e. Some combination of the above.

Small countries pay a premium price for equipping their armed forces since they typically do not have their own military industrial

complexes, and everything is imported. The defense industries of the larger nations are huge and work in concert with their governments to charge a mix of high prices, lucrative financing, and “special agreements” that can take many forms: from alliances to trade agreements, to voting at the UN, to other favors.

Care must be given in accepting common defense treaties considering that offense, counterterrorism, and subversion have become the new “defense” in the minds of many big powers. New nations are not inclined to want to bully or intimidate others, but the old, authoritarian guard has a history of it.

It is not our intention to establish a military.

Without alliances our flag might as well be “white”. It is far more prudent to have joint alliances and agreements for our protection from outside threats. The US would be the most likely alliance partner at this time. Because many, if not most, of our citizens will also retain US citizenship, those who might wish to seek military careers could possibly enlist in the US armed forces.

Reserves or militia may provide a modicum of defense as part of other organized activities like emergency response, antiterrorism, or policing. There are options.

IV.G.2. Border Protection

Military forces often contribute heavily to border control, especially in the rare cases of large and/or organized incursions and infiltrations. Most border protection activities, however, are small scale responses to illegal immigration and

illegal importation. Coast guards and border patrols are the common forces for interception and interdiction. In the unlikely event of large or organized incursions and infiltrations we would no doubt rely on the USCG for assistance.

Some have made favorable arguments for open borders as a humanitarian philosophy for world order, but there are very practical reasons why borders must be controlled for the safety of the citizens. The problems caused by porous borders can include:

Illegal immigration:

- a. Bad actors and criminals hiding out and/or setting up illegal activities;
- b. No control over international pandemics;
- c. Large numbers of refugees overwhelming the infrastructure and/or no interest in conforming to the laws and practices of the nation;
- d. Workers seeking better lives competing with citizens and depressing the wage levels; and
- e. Human trafficking.

Illegal importation:

- f. Controlled substances and
- g. Arms and tools of terrorism.

In very small countries like Vieques, the primary purpose of the illegal immigration and importation is not necessarily as a final destination in that country. More often, the small country is merely a stopping off point, a staging area, or a safe house, to gain easier access or entry to a more difficult location. Vieques already has a history as a “trampoline”: drugs and other contraband can be easily smuggled onto the island and then jump (bounce) to the main island undetected. Without efforts to prevent this, Vieques will acquire a great deal of illicit activity. This situation can

create dangerous conditions for the citizens and provoke angry responses from neighbors who are the ultimate destinations. So, we will have an active coastal (and land based) border patrol whose role will include safety and rescue in addition to interception and interdiction of suspected criminal activity.

IV.G.3. Customs

Vieques will be operating without import or export duties on typical consumer items. As citizens, immigrants, and commercial transporters/agents pass through borders and check points, custom agents inspect for compliance with the laws and collect any taxes due. Prohibited items may be confiscated or denied entry. Owners may suffer prosecution, fines, taxes, or merely loss of items depending on the type of contraband possessed.

IV.G.4. Gun Control

As a new nation, the citizens can make a definitive statement as to what they want and implement it. Gun enthusiasts take many forms from hunters, to sport competitors, to self-defense advocates, to collectors and military enthusiasts. The people must decide.

Gun policies are quite important, but opinions are very polarized. Consensus in this area is necessary for successful enforcement. As a small island we could be gun free for the general public, or not! Clearly, if guns are outlawed, the problem will be illegal weapons in the hands of only the criminals. Enforcement would be very difficult, but several Caribbean islands have made it work. It would seem appropriate to have a referendum specifically on the issue.

IV.G.5. Identification

A national ID system should be implemented using a card (much like a credit card) with an encoded link to be read by electronic readers. The purpose is to provide security and convenience for both the government and the citizens. Resident privacy is not compromised since the information is already known by and/or volunteered to the government. With only 9,200 residents, everybody probably knows everybody through at least one friend. Outsiders (tourists, guests, foreign workers, etc.) are tracked via a visitor ID card, and the information gathered is much like the passport plus emergency data and information about purpose and accommodation.

We would expect that the use of the ID card in Vieques would be extensive. Given the mistrust locals have for banks, a government sponsored ID account for the easy, secure, and reliable distribution of the UBI and the payment of taxes, fees, and third-party charges would be quite welcome. Since there will be no tax on income, reluctance to use the system should be minimal, as long as there is transparency and secure permissions required for withdrawals.

There are many advantages of using a single ID system that can serve a multitude of functions. A single card issued by the government can include security and limited personal information that is not displayed on the card itself. The card can be linked to various government organization databases with appropriate information accessible to a given department on a need to know basis. Parts can also voluntarily be linked to various commercial and/or financial organizations to be used as an ID or even a credit/debit authorization. Any government and commercial entity can have a reader that brings up the picture of the owner

when the card is used. If lost or stolen, the card becomes useless.

First, let's look at a few of the many types of information (things governments already know) that could be linked at the time of issue:

- a. Picture;
- b. Name – in multiple variations based on country of origin; nicknames, etc.;
- c. Date and location of birth;
- d. Names of parents;
- e. Fingerprints/eye & face scans;
- f. Address(es);
- g. Phone number(s);
- h. Passport data; and
- i. Vaccination record.

The information recorded is stored in a government database. The card merely has a name and picture, plus an encrypted electronic identifier that is the key to the database entry. Other government collected or personally selected data could be added, such as:

- j. Driver's license (Learner, general, large vehicle, bus, etc. and foreign driver's license information);
- k. Account reference for interaction with government offices. Any form submission or payment made to the government in person would be recorded using the submitter or payer's ID combined with the government employee's ID to document the transaction for auditing. Any online transfer payment either direction would reference the ID account as well as the related debit account. *[Note: keyboards with reader slots for user ID's are common. When a clerk or agent uses the computer, all activity is logged with the name or number of the person whose card is inserted. When a transaction is made with another person, their card is also read, and the transaction*

is fully documented. This is applicable for almost any activity from quarantine status to healthcare to form submission to tax or retail payments.];

- l. Criminal status. House arrest, probation, or other limits and restrictions, etc.;
- m. Resident status. Citizen, resident alien, temporary worker, day worker, foreign government, tourist, or other such categories; Each status could be on a different colored ID card for quick identification; Minors (under the age of 18 or so) could also have a secondary color pattern for quick reference;
- n. Temporary visitors. Tourist and other transient individuals could have temporary ID's with data entries indicating the intended dates of visitation, their local contact information, passport images, and other pertinent data;
- o. Drug prescriptions and purchases. Recreational and prescription drug purchases would be tracked. Medical information (or links to it) could be included at the option of the individual;
- p. Next of kin. Family information including contact information for relatives could be provided at the option of the individual. Cross reference of minors and their parents (residents & citizens) should be mandatory;
- q. Retina scans, facial recognition, and DNA sample. Link to DNA data could be added at the option of the individual, but mandatory if convicted of a felony;
- r. Medical information. Patient directed instructions for treatment and living wills could be accessible for emergencies;
- s. Additional certifications. Occupational information, licensing, gun ownership, etc. can be entered as well. One card **links** to everything; and
- t. Secure transactions. Online transactions can use two forms of authentication since

there is no live agent to verify the database picture to the person. These could include facial recognition, figure print, retina scan, cell phone, etc.

IV.G.6. Internet & Technology

Cybercrime and identity theft are huge today and occurrences will grow vigorously over time. It is mandatory that information technology be addressed as a core element of government, commercial, and personal security. IT designers' criteria should consider:

- a. A nation of two networks: the regular World Wide Web we refer to as the internet and an isolated intranet for national business, government, and use of the ID activities;
- b. ID card confirmation with retina scan verification for login to the government intranet;
- c. Nationwide high-speed internet access for all citizens;
- d. Kiosks or technology center(s) where citizens can gain computer access if they need it;
- e. Use of more secure computer operating systems for government systems – and similarly secure systems recommended for citizens;
- f. Display of transparent public records and information online; and
- g. Blockchain database implementation.

With a small area and population, having a nationwide intranet is a feasible means for isolating the key systems of government and commerce from some of the peril associated with the World Wide Web. The independent operation of the internet (for personal and international social, educational, entertainment, and economic purposes) and the intranet (for protected governmental and commercial use

within the nation) should provide secure and flexible access and communications appropriately for all citizens.

The design of the intranet should include both hardware and software safe systems that reflect the high level of security dictated by the national interest. Monitoring and recording of all activity should be included. Only certified users and equipment should be allowed to connect to the network. The design of the internet system should address security and redundancy as high priorities and be fully connected to the World Wide Web.

History has proven that without due attention given to durability, our systems become useless during emergencies – when we need them the most. It is incumbent upon us to harden all internet and telecom systems to withstand any and all forms of disaster – natural and manmade.

IV.G.7. Citizenship & Immigration

Vieques will require skilled workers to support economic development in most new endeavors. Many will be US citizens living nearby in Puerto Rico. If agriculture and aquaculture efforts begin to make traction, workers from the Caribbean and Latin America might provide the expertise and labor required. We will need a system in place for guest workers and the equivalent of green cards. Many foreign workers will probably live in Eastern PR, but some may eventually live in the Port of Vieques housing or on the island.

The demand for Vieques citizenship will be strong, and it will be important to have comprehensive regulations on the granting of

full citizenship, resident alien visas, and work visas right from the start. Rapid growth in the population would cause chaotic real estate development as well as stretch existing infrastructure to the breaking point.

Determination of the rights to citizenship might factor in many issues with an emphasis on the following status items as of a particular date (At this point, an appropriate cutoff date might logically be January 1, 2022):

- a. Place of birth;
- b. Current domicile;
- c. Current residence;
- d. History in Vieques;
- e. Family in Vieques;
- f. Property owned in Vieques;
- g. Personal effort to help gain independence and/or disaster recovery;
- h. Work in Vieques; and
- i. Retired in Vieques.

Other factors that could come into the decision matrix could include:

- j. Business and real estate investment;
- k. Deposited Assets;
- l. Job creation; and
- m. Criminality.

Every nation wants to have motivated, energetic, good people as community members, but it wouldn't be desirable to see an influx of people who merely have their own agendas. Those possessing critical skills and/or providing significant and appropriate investment would certainly benefit from favorable review. An orderly process for securing visas and applying for citizenship needs to be created. Existing infrastructure dictates population planning to determine the limitations, acceptable growth rates, and procedures.

The question of emigration addresses a citizen's right to leave. Other than being rightfully detained for a crime or obligations to Vieques or other citizens, people should have the right to leave with all of their personal property. Since no country is forced to accept anyone other than its own citizens, those with dual citizenships will be advantaged. In the formation of our new country, citizens may or may not choose to give up their previous citizenship. Criminals can be denied citizenship and deported to their "home" countries – primarily Puerto Rico or the States.

IV.G.8. Emergency Response

Disaster preparedness is important for everyone everywhere, but supercritical when one lives on a small island in an active earthquake and hurricane region. In our situation it is not if, but when.

We see emergency response in Vieques as an essential effort combining a very small full-time government cadre with a substantial volunteer organization. The purpose of the government personnel is to organize, train, equip, and oversee the volunteer group(s). If combined with a national service for high school graduates, it could be patterned after military reserve programs. The intent is to develop a very competent system with well-trained citizen specialists to allow us to handle almost any level of emergency without relying on outside assistance. The expertise developed within the population is a huge asset and provides the community a level of insurance against disasters that money alone cannot buy.

For example, an 18-year-old enters a "boot camp" for six (or more) months of paid training that includes a broad range of introductory learning activities from EMT to water rescue to temporary shelter and sanitation construction. A portion of the training may be focused on a single area to enable certification at some level. After boot camp, the graduate joins the Emergency Response Team as a volunteer responder for a several years and attends classes and exercises regularly. Those going on to college out of high school, are pregnant, or have other special circumstances are eligible to receive deferments that postpone or break boot camp into smaller chunks of two or three month stretches. All able-bodied adult citizens would participate to some degree.

Out of the ashes of Maria came a much stronger relationship between the municipal emergency response office (OMME) and the community. Major efforts are continuing to train and equip both government and non-government groups in a wide range of disciplines appropriate for a variety of crisis responses. A comprehensive system of creating, assigning, and posting street names and addresses is also underway.

While it is imperative that we harden our technical infrastructure, we also need to organize our neighborhoods to aid in communications and provide for an immediate response confirming the status of every resident. Barrios will have a representative member in the legislature and should also have a central facility (which may also be a shelter) for meetings, communications, and distribution. A reporting structure will be created for allowing record keeping and continual monitoring of those in need.

IV.H. Fiscal Accountability & Transparency

*Accountability and transparency are founding principles of our government.
Violation of the peoples' trust is a "high crime".*

Due to the nature of man and the highly suspicious disappearance of funds from government coffers historically claimed, a transparent method of accounting needs to be provided to ensure accountability for all inflows and outflows of monies and the related transfers of assets, goods, and services. Secrecy undermines trust and informed decision making. There is no excuse for anything less than full disclosure of almost everything. Lawsuits, personnel actions, bidding, and foreign affairs may initially require confidentiality during negotiations; however, the results should be fully released in a timely manner.

To accomplish this, appropriate accounting records should be placed online for citizens to see exactly where funds have come from and where they have gone. Very few (if any) journal transactions need to be "secret", and even these can be identified in a footnoted, sanitized manner. With full information at the fingertips of each citizen, trust goes up, rumors disappear, and questionable transactions are identified and investigated. Monthly internal audits and online

updates would ensure timeliness and accuracy of the data. Accounting should use accrual methods with cash flow monitored and reported as well.

Because transition to independence requires a significant supply of money and talent over a ten-year (or more) period, funding from various sources would likely be utilized. Many donors and grantors would have neither history with nor direct ties to the new country and no reason to trust the national integrity. It is, therefore, incumbent upon all to instill unfailing confidence in the minds of potential participants over a long term. Perhaps a trusted NGO could accept and dispense donation and grant monies as a fiscal agent during the transition – until the new government is functioning appropriately. All donations should be recorded real time online with the date, the amount, and the name of the donor (or pseudonym). As funds are used from the account, near real time posting will inform all as to exactly where the monies are going. Again, a monthly audit will be important verification.

V. TRANSITIONAL & INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

Every independent country needs to be economically self-sufficient in the long-term. The financial resources for all future sustained operations and community/social development must be self-generated via taxes and other government funding sources. Transition into independence and short-term viability will require additional sources such as outside investment, grants, negotiations with the US/PR, and/or donations.

Due to:

- The corruption and incompetence of the Central Government,
 - The financial crisis leading to bankruptcy,
 - The creation and installation of the Financial Oversight Management Board (FOMB),
 - The animosity of the former POTUS and others toward PR,
 - The undeniable effects of “chatgate”, and
 - Other resource commitments caused by the global pandemic,
- government funding will certainly be delayed, and many promised reconstruction payments will end up being unfulfilled. Likewise, any level of confidence in the Puerto Rican government has evaporated. The perceived economic stability, investment environment, and short-term future of the Commonwealth among private investors, NGO’s, and nonprofits of all varieties has suffered tremendously.

As dismal as the opportunities in Puerto Rico appeared due to bankruptcy and Maria, the picture for improvements just became even bleaker. But Vieques is telling the world a different story: it doesn’t want to be a Puerto Rico colony anymore and is eager to learn a better way. In return for the assistance of government and non-government entities, Vieques will become a demonstration project for how to grow a thriving, transparent, sustainable democracy from a captive colony.

Vieques will become a very visible experiment on the international stage. At such a small scale, the actual results will have small direct consequences for anyone other than the local communities. Failure will be inexpensive to salvage and will inform future similar efforts. Success, on the other hand, can be both instructive and liberating to small “colonial” populations everywhere.

V.A. Financing

Note: Despite our plan to secure the vast majority of our required capital through grants and partners, some financing will be required. Debt used as a tool for infrastructure that pays for itself from the income provided from the investment is usually economically justified. Debt without stable supporting income or without verifiable requisite growth is not contemplated.

V.A.1. Capital – Money Sources

Philanthropists (and politicians through government largess) have traditionally given money to schools, hospitals, and communities in the form of buildings with plaques on the walls listing the fine and generous citizens who contributed to the edifice. Today's superrich, to their credit, tend to be more intent on making a difference rather than just building another monument. Programs combined with physical infrastructure offer a more holistic and ideal approach.

V.A.1.a. *Passion Grants – Appeal to Those Who Really Wish to Make a Difference*

According to Forbes, in the very early stages of the pandemic (November 2020), there were 650 billionaires in the US collectively worth almost \$4 trillion. 18.6 million U.S. households had net assets of at least \$1 million in 2019 [Credit Suisse, as reported by Wikipedia]. Most of these wealthy individuals are also philanthropists who truly want to improve the world consistent with their visions. Having all this resource, one would expect that it would be easy for them to fund an operation successfully

according to their individual philosophies. Well, it's not!

Many a wealthy donor finds it frustrating and exceptionally difficult to sell his or her theories even while offering millions toward a potential shared goal. The politics of changing systems of education, health care, energy production, justice, welfare, land use, taxation, or government in general is overwhelming, and efforts to make such modifications usually fail or are at best temporary. Communities and bureaucracies are eager to receive funds but loath to the idea of ceding power or surrendering the direction of a project or an ongoing operation to a wealthy outsider. These unfulfilled philanthropic individuals and foundations may well be a major source for transition funding of our groundbreaking opportunity.

As an independent nation, Vieques would offer a different opportunity: a welcome reception for new ideas and a relatively clean canvas. While all of the issues would be of high importance to our residents, the drag and reluctance of vested interests and large, entrenched, government bureaucracies are absent. The efforts to implement any program would, of course, need to be sold to the community, but **not to a large existing hierarchy of government workers protecting its turf**. Selling anything new to an anxious, skeptical, and untrusting citizenry would not necessarily be easy, but it would be greatly preferred over trying to convince officials to abdicate many or all of their positions, careers, power, and income.

Vieques can be somewhat of a laboratory, within reason. The first step is for the

community to establish the goals for a program, and the next step is to seek out solution providers to meet the goals. The donor would develop within the context of a small-scale new country, which would be a once in a life time event, complete with great personal satisfaction, proof of concept, visibility, and new opportunities. This is an environment where smaller amounts of money and a strong vision could have measurable impact in many areas.

A marketing plan should be created that begins with researching various foundations and high worth individuals to determine who would be likely to either provide a grant for or invest in the development of the systems discussed above. In some cases, our citizens might have to accept becoming part of an experimental program in order to get a certain level of funding, but those issues could be decided upon when presented in the context of other options.

V.A.1.b. *Traditional Grants*

Huge sums of monies are provided through traditional grants from governments, NGO's, and foundations. Typically, applicants do vast amounts of research to locate funding sources, work with scattered submission dates, fill out reams of forms, and jump through all sorts of hoops to sell themselves. This demands hard work and meticulous attention to detail, but it is necessary.

V.A.1.c. *Government Grants*

Grants from the US Government may be a possible source for any number of specific needs and should not be overlooked. Situations that might precipitate the awarding of grants include:

- a. Restoration of destroyed land through pollution or other hazards;

- b. Construction of infrastructure for healthcare, sanitation, utilities, education, communications, etc.;
- c. Planning;
- d. Program and/or system development;
- e. Security;
- f. Environmental protection; and
- g. Transportation.

Negotiations with the US during decolonization could result in phased grants with terms and conditions for compliance versus bulk cash payments. A Compact of Free Association, as described in [The Vieques Renaissance Supplemental Discussion Guide Appendix G at: www.vieques-libre.com/essays/](http://www.vieques-libre.com/essays/), offers a blueprint of how we could accomplish this.

Grants from other countries may be expected if there are opportunities that they feel beneficial. Infrastructure development by foreign companies may be subsidized by the home nations. Grants may be offered for political or economic favors.

V.A.1.d. *Other Funders*

With considerable on-going public attention via traditional and social media, corporate sponsorship (money and other benefits) in return for endorsement or advertising would likely be negotiated. Any media frenzy could flip the buy-sell relationship used in grants: one could define the needs and ask the donors to identify how they would implement an appropriate program. While many philanthropic organizations would not be able to respond, those that do might make excellent partners.

As another contemporary and valid way to supplement the big dollar approach is the little dollar appeal reached through the internet in the form of crowd funding or crowdsourcing. The target market for solicitation includes two

groups: those that are sympathetic to the cause and those that are looking for a “premium”, some direct benefit such as honorary founder, free lodging, tee-shirt, or any number of things. Multiple appeals can have different foci.

V.A.2. Capital – Unique Vieques Funding

The income generators of commerce are critical to sustainability but are inadequate in Vieques for the transition and the short term. To the extent that the new nation lacks sufficient income driven by commerce to bridge the gap, a combination of early investment and grants will be required. The ongoing costs to operate sustainably are more predictable and routine. These are the items of normal budgets.

V.A.2.a. Transition Funding Plan

Our general plan is “10:50:350”.

- 10: *A ten-year transition into an independent, decolonized nation;*
- 50: *An annual \$50,000,000 transfer payment to Vieques for 10 years;*
[Note: the US gives a net of \$20 billion to Puerto Rico every year, which averages out to about \$5,700 per person. With 9,200 Vieques residents, that’s the equivalent of \$50M.]
- 350: *Cash payments to Vieques totaling \$350,000,000 by the US Navy over several years.*
[The Superfund cleanup of the east end bombing range is slated to require 10 more years, cost well in excess of \$250M, and leave 2% of the island unsafe and uninhabitable. The Navy

has approved this funding already for Vieques.]

While still a territorial possession of the US, it is reasonable for Vieques to expect continued economic support at the current level for the period of transition. The mechanism would need to change so that funds would come directly to the transition government rather than through PR.

It would further be reasonable for the US government to assist the decolonization effort by funding and performing many of the legal and administrative processes and negotiations required. Help with funding the establishment of many of the new responsibilities of becoming independent during the transition might be in the best interests of everyone. If the US were not to step up to help guide this process, another country might find it advantageous to fill the void. The UN also has programs to assist decolonization efforts. We expect no help from Puerto Rico given their long-term financial crisis situation.

To receive outside support, we must have people believe in our cause and take us seriously. But, how do we get credibility when we have no funding, and how do we get funding when we have no credibility? **We petition Congress to reallocate already committed Navy cleanup funds to economic development.**

V.A.2.b. Long Term Navy Cleanup vs. Liberating Cash

The US has agreed to the Navy cleanup effort to the tune of approximately \$250,000,000 although the actual cost of a proper cleanup has been estimated to be much higher – so we are using the figure of \$350,000,000. It could certainly be to our advantage to agree to the

release of the US from financial and other liabilities in exchange for a “cash” settlement that we could **allocate to infrastructure and economic development immediately**. We would continue to prohibit access to a part of the island that we have never been able to visit or use, but the upfront funding could make a huge justifiable difference. Over time, as we become increasingly wealthy as a nation, we would be able to afford to contract the resumption of cleanup of the designated areas to whatever standards we feel appropriate. An added advantage to the US would be that it would diffuse a constant aggravation and the conflict with the local population over the speed, quality, and methods of the cleanup.

Note: There are many who have fought for decades to force the Navy out, remediate the damaged land, eliminate the hazardous waste, and regain access to the formerly occupied lands. The thought of letting the Navy “buy us off with money” and not complete the cleanup may be repulsive on an emotional level. When examined on a rational basis, the tradeoff can be of a far greater benefit than the cleanup ever could be. Looking at the facts:

- 1) *The cleanup will require at least 10 more years and will be inadequate to allow use of the area.*
- 2) *Cleanup of off shore areas could require an additional decade.*
- 3) *Fish & Wildlife will continue forever to control the restricted use of the entire east end of the island.*
- 4) *Much of the land and sea that they control will remain off limits to the public. Access will not be much more than what we currently have.*
- 5) *\$350,000,000 would allow us to upgrade our educational, medical, transportation,*

and a host of other critical systems to the latest and best standards.

- 6) *With Roosevelt Roads and appropriate economic development there, our programs and resultant tax proceeds could provide our sustainability.*
- 7) *Employment opportunities would become abundant.*
- 8) *We would gain ownership of the entire island (almost 200% more than we now have), although the 2% or so of land area used for the bombing practice would still remain unsafe and off limits forever.*
- 9) *After a decade or two of growth and prosperity, if we decided to further the cleanup on our own, we could dedicate the funds and do it.*

The critical question citizens must answer is: “Do you want the island to prosper or would you prefer to have the Navy continue the cleanup and let everything else remain as is?” It’s an opportunity to use the Navy funds to rebuild our future rather than remediate land we can never use anyway.

The effort to oust the Navy was a hard-fought success, but the expected resultant prosperity never materialized due to a lack of vision and funding. With a Navy buyout and this new vision, the past efforts will be recognized as the initial instrument in realizing our dreams.

V.A.2.c. Capitalizing on the Opportunity

Vieques hopes to be able to capitalize on the opportunity to become a proof of concept for many areas of system infrastructure. We will be looking to the private sector for partners to consult with us and help fund the new projects.

Successful implementations of new systems for education are the pipe dreams of many philanthropists. This is an area where it is possible to find sufficient grant funding and support to create and develop a program that fits our needs well and make it operational within the transition period.

Another important transitional project is that of creating a system of democratic governance. Philanthropists are all philosophers of sorts, and many have quasi utopian visions of how they would like to see a nation function. Connection with foundations that have views consistent with ours and can help fund the implementation is our goal.

We are intending to establish cutting edge systems for universal basic income, national healthcare, national identification cards, criminal and civil law, utility infrastructure, and national information technology. We hope to find development funding through grants from individuals and foundations of like minds to foster the creation of these programs.

Commercial development of the Port of Vieques is a key element of the transition phase because in order to finalize the transition into independence, the economic engine must be running at a sustainable level. While it is tempting to adopt a “build it and they will come” attitude toward infrastructure, it is both unrealistic and unaffordable to do so. Because it is unclear exactly what commerce is going to develop, infrastructure improvements will need to proceed almost in tandem with commerce. Funding for the infrastructure will become a negotiated element of the contracts formed with new businesses and developers.

V.A.2.d. Post Transition Funding

Many decolonized nations are the recipients of subsidies of one form or another from the former host country, but it is not our goal to claim independence while continuing to expect a free lunch. There may be ongoing cleanup obligations (or some other mutually agreed upon arrangement) from the US caused by the Navy bombing, etc. There may be US facilities that continue to be left operating under a lease. Citizens who are owed social security or other payments will continue to receive them.

Some new grants may be awarded and some may continue after the completion of the transition, but these will be exceptions, not the rule. Emergency funding for natural disaster relief is not off of the table but will hopefully never be needed.

Our case for independence will probably generate significant interest from traditional and social media enabling us to raise a large amount of money from small donations. Direct donations and crowd funding are both very viable for repeated campaigns.

V.A.3. Capital - Personnel

Creation of a new country with a compelling vision could capture the attention of millions of people. Many skilled professionals with critical experience in business, politics, planning, economics, healthcare, law, government, etc. would, with a targeted recruitment plan, be eager to assist. In return for their efforts they could have one of the most incredible challenges of their lives and simultaneously enhance their stature with potential clients and with the global community in general. Additionally, they could be offered contingent citizenship. Access to the best and the brightest to help plan, negotiate, and implement

the citizens' version of a great new nation together would give the movement credibility and a greater chance of success.

The difficulty with bringing in outsiders is a legitimate fear that current citizens may lose control of their futures to them. Local voices may not be heard among the more well-educated and powerful. The key to avoiding this is to have a general plan and philosophy well thought out and available so that, as others with skills, funds, and services are vetted, everyone will have a clear, mutual understanding of the goals and the roles of each individual. The invited experts are to act as consultants to citizen decision makers, not czars.

It will be necessary to market the opportunity for both experts and interns to participate in the noble cause of decolonizing a part of the US. Organizing people for a common purpose is never easy but can be even more difficult with highly qualified experts accustomed to running their own shows. Some of these individuals will be sponsored or employed by funding sources for the respective areas. Others will be paid from other grants or donations. Some will be volunteers. Some will want to become citizens and/or relocate here.

Note:

Logistics for housing, transportation, and facilitating small groups will become an ongoing function and should be organized especially well to keep the experts and the helpers

motivated and not frustrated. At the very beginning of the transition period, development should begin to create small apartments that can initially be used by the government to house the consultants. Ultimately the units could become vacation or full-time rentals on the regular market. Planning and details should be done well and not rushed through, though speed of construction should be rapid.

One very important element of our approach is retraining the existing staff. The intent is not to begin new programs by firing everyone. We don't want new staff hired from abroad to replace us. We recognize that our expertise is limited, so we want to grow with the new systems. When local top managers for new departments and ventures are not available, they will come from all over the globe initially; however, their missions will be to organize, train, and equip our people and facilities for the purpose of making us self-sufficient and allowing us to carry on independently after the transition. Critical skills that can't be trained locally (doctor, architect, engineer....) will need to be recruited for some time from other countries until our own citizens become adequately educated abroad. Some existing workers will be displaced due to their inability to adapt, unproductive attitudes, or lack of the appropriate skills/work habits. Other employment and/or educational opportunities will be offered to those displaced.

VI. NATIONAL TRAPPINGS & OTHER ISSUES

Tradition and ceremonial events are not enjoyed or deemed important by everyone, but on the world stage, they flourish. While technically voluntary, the international political theater pretty much demands some attention to a few activities and protocols. These can include a variety of things:

- A. A NAME – formal, informal, and demonym
- B. A flag
- C. A national anthem
- D. Formal costumes
- E. Postage
- F. Coins and currency
- G. Passports
- H. Embassies
- I. Titles
- J. Memberships in international organizations for common interests with other countries

Sports and Pageantry

With the status of evolving into a new country, comes the privilege of entering the world arena of sports, beauty, and other opportunities for competition and pageantry. While not without significant costs, the ability to become small players on the world stage would appeal to many and would enhance the feelings of self-worth and pride that could be instrumental in raising the prospects of those who have suffered the ills of oppression.

The Summer Olympics offers 16 categories and 306 events in which to compete and the Winter Olympics 15 and 102, respectively. Not all of the athletes and other entrants or participants on national teams would need to have been born in Vieques, so outside talent could be enlisted to become more competitive. Merely being able to compete is an enormous ego boost for the participants, their fans, and the country.

There are 4 primary (and dozens of lesser known) international beauty contests, the biggest being the Miss Universe. The entourage included with pageantry events expands the participation and exposure for many more citizens than just the main competitors.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

One profound learning I took from him [husband, Steve Jobs] was that we don't have to accept the world that we're born into as something that is fixed and impermeable. When you zoom in, it's just atoms just like us. And they move all the time. And through energy and force of will and intention and focus, we can actually change it. Move it.

Laurene Powell Jobs, as quoted by the New York Times
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/27/business/laurene-powell-jobs-corner-office.html>

Living in Vieques presents the residents with a paradox: “Are we in paradise or have we been institutionalized?” The answer is: “Yes.”

Few residents would disagree with the following statements:

- A. Vieques is a colony of a colony.
- B. We suffer from significant debilitating poverty.
- C. US/PR support is diluted and inadequate by the time it reaches us.
- D. The schools in Vieques are the worst in PR.
- E. Healthcare in Vieques is the worst in PR.
- F. Transportation and access to the main island services and commerce are horrible.
- G. Crime is high (worst per capita murder rates in PR), and the justice system is horrible.
- H. Electrical service is ancient, non-standardized, fragile, and plans to make Vieques a FEMA funded showcase of renewable and sustainable power were thrown out by PREPA.
- I. Water and sanitation (sewer) services are old, poorly maintained and operated, vulnerable to disruption, delicate, and of suspicious quality due to no longer being tested.
- J. Land title procurement and registry are obstructed and agencies are incompetent and unrealistic.
- K. Economic development is not just non-existent; it's actually suppressed through denying reliable access to the main island via the ferry system and through the enormously difficult permitting process.

In establishing our goals and developing the structure of our government and our economy, we have come to the conclusion that the unique composition of our population and the available physical resources of our island dictate a different approach than those that form the foundations of other nations. While the official unemployment rates are around 10%, they present a distorted reality since so many not working don't technically qualify as unemployed. We are fundamentally impoverished, only 38% of the adult population is employed, and many who are not in the workforce are unemployable. While our citizens are as intelligent as anywhere else, we suffer from an inadequate and dysfunctional educational system which has left us without the skills and work experience required in most employment and business categories.

A sizable portion of the island receives government entitlements of various sorts. According to the 2019 Census Estimates, 83% of the population has some or all of their healthcare supplied by Medicare, Medicaid, and/or the Veterans Administration. With 49.2% of the population living below the poverty line, over 40% of our residents receive SNAP (food stamp) benefits.

Vieques is not economically sustainable in its current condition, and it will take many years to wean the dependent population off of outside assistance. Because basic healthcare is already provided for a large majority of the island, and food stamps (along with other supplemental supports) are available to half of the residents, it makes sense to acknowledge these factors and design an economic system that addresses our future in a realistic way. Unlike other locations with a strong middle class and wealthy taxpayers, we are striving to become an emerging economy and cannot afford to be encumbered by a byzantine welfare system to support our poor. We need a system that is fair, simple, efficient, and scalable. We need a healthcare system that provides basic care for all of our citizens. We need a Universal Basic Income program to ensure that every citizen can afford basic subsistence at minimal expense to the government.

Please note that there are other “island colonies” – physical and figurative – that could follow a similar path if it is successful for us. However, the programs outlined in Chapters III & IV are suited for Vieques and do not specifically fit any other location. One size does not fit all.

What we need and what we can sustain are miles apart. Our history as a colony of a colony has left us exploited by both of our masters, and we have no expectations that this will improve. In fact, we have many indications that our freedom and local sovereignty are being squeezed even more.

Neither Vieques nor Culebra can truly become economically sustainable without significant economic development. While under the control of our two masters, this will never happen. Because we are an island without a deep-water port, a suitable airport, or control of our access to the main island, our economy is under the thumb of the Central Government. The international credibility of the Puerto Rican government is negative, and its reputation in the US is not much better. Combined with the financial meltdown, economic development in PR has been rendered a nonstarter. We must get out from under the yoke of oppression if we are ever going to raise ourselves off the bottom of the economic ladder.

We have a unique opportunity to accomplish our goals, but it requires formal approval from the US Congress (and the practical agreement of Puerto Rico) to decolonize and become independent. We require the **10:50:350** financing to pay for the transition. Our succession must also include Roosevelt Roads (the Port of Vieques) in order to provide us the transportation hub and surrounding infrastructure that will be critical to our economic viability. As with previous decolonization events in the history of the US, it will take a transition period of 10 to 15 years and continued economic support during this period to develop the infrastructure and economy to allow us to emerge sustainably.

While some in Puerto Rico and the US may see our succession as a small loss to their empires, a careful examination of the decolonization will show the economic long-term benefits greatly outweigh the changes to the political map. It's time for our masters to quit treating us like inmates and grant us the freedom to chart our own course to the future we envision.

As has been mentioned before, this is a community effort. We must unite, educate ourselves, and become active. Please ask questions, be involved in those areas in which you have expertise and/or interest, voice your opinions & support, and volunteer your time to benefit yourself, your family, and the island.

USEFUL LINKS

Websites

1. <http://viequesverde.biz/commentary.htm> Vieques commentary archive
2. <http://freevieques.com> Freedom blog with emphasis on Vieques
3. <http://vieques-libre.com> Open discussion on sovereignty for Vieques
4. <http://vieques-libre.org> (Spanish) Open discussion on sovereignty for Vieques
5. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pIEP-IJ5MWk> 90 Second video of Grant application
6. <https://www.vieques-libre.com/essays/>

[The Vieques Renaissance](#)
[Supplemental Discussion Guide](#)

VIEQUES NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

There are many excellent charities on Vieques helping the community in many ways. The following are listed on online pages of the US and Puerto Rico governments. Faith-based and other community charitable organizations abound.

Festival de los Reyes Magos en Vieques	https://reyesmagosdevieques.org/about/
Juntos Vieques, Inc.	https://juntosvieques.com/
The Vieques Conservation Historical Trust	https://vcht.org/
Vieques Concert Society Corp	http://viequesconcertsociety.org/
Vieques Island Animal Sanctuary Inc	https://viequesanimalsanctuary.org/
Vieques Rotary Club Inc	https://facebook.com/RotaryClubOfVieques/
Vieques Vive Inc	https://facebook.com/viequesviveorg/
ViequesLove Inc	https://viequeslove.org/