

## Energy Week in Review

It has been an exciting and eventful week for those following the saga of Puerto Rico and electrical power. Two major hearings/conferences were held:

- May 8<sup>th</sup>: The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee Hearing on Puerto Rico's Electric Grid, Washington, DC
- May 8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup>: Puerto Rico Grid Revitalization & Investment Forum, Carolina, PR

Concerned citizens had the opportunity to meet with government officials, utility consultants, contractors, system providers, and other stakeholders for the purpose of information exchange. For those who elected to attend or view these forums, they learned about the current status of the PR grid, the challenges facing us in the near future, and the competing plans for upgrading our services. Hopefully, all who attended from Vieques were able to make solid contacts within the government and industry for the purposes of keeping the needs of our island in the minds of the decision makers and service organizations.

Both conferences allowed the public to meet Walter Higgins, the new CEO of PREPA. We learned that he:

- Is a very experienced high-level utility executive who is fully intent on modernizing the PR electrical industry through utilization of the RUS (Rural Utility Systems) standards common throughout the US;
- Is the first head of PREPA to be hired on merit through head-hunters and is NOT a political appointee;
- Was hired with total exclusive discretion to fire any management personnel who are not performing up to his standards;
- Feels that the PR Energy Commission is a vital component of the system to protect consumer interests and help focus PREPA efforts to become a better service company; and,
- He appears to support Sen. Murkowski's comment on the possibility of making Vieques a pilot project for microgrid implementation.

In the very interesting and informative Senate hearings (<https://www.c-span.org/video/?445196-1/senate-committee-examines-state-puerto-ricos-electric-grid&start=309>) one can meet another new face to most of us, Jose H. Roman Morales, Interim President of the PR Energy Commission (PREC). He has an excellent handle on the regulatory side of the utility company and clearly articulates the priorities with which most citizens would heartily agree.

A recurring theme at both forums was: **"Who's in charge?"** With the complex structure of authorities, it is very difficult to determine who approves what. In many cases, one entity can kill or delay almost any initiative, but no agency or organization can unilaterally approve it. Senator Eduardo Bhatia-Gautier created a slide that lists the parties who believe they have some degree of control over the electrical systems in Puerto Rico, which includes:

- PREPA
- FEMA
- USACE
- US Congress
- US Dept of Energy
- FOMB (Junta)
- Restructuring Officer – Noel Zamot
- PR Energy Commission (PREC)
- Governor Rossello
- PR Legislature
- Southern States Energy Board
- Judge Taylor Swayne
- Bondholders



The senators at the DC hearing expressed the same concern, recognizing the complexities of the situation. Christian Sobrino-Vega, President of the Government Development Bank (GDB) fielded budget questions. He indicated that once a budget is approved by the Fiscal Control Board, it is good to go. PREPA's initial budget has been approved, but work remains on the Integrated Resource Plan (IRP), discussed below. Mr. Higgins explained that policy decisions come from the governor's office and the legislature, while his job is to provide the implementation.

Both events included discussions of an Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) being developed with input from many entities to guide the redesign of the new grid, microgrids, and power generation schemes. While presentations were intended to share information with the public and private parties, the ensuing dialogue served to inform the creators of these plans with both community and expert opinions and concerns. Personal contact and interaction allowed relationships and networking to the benefit of all.

I attended the grid revitalization conference in Carolina and met government elected officials, PREPA personnel, consultants, and industry service providers. While I learned a tremendous amount, I had the opportunity to educate many on the situation in Vieques. While most attendees had heard of Vieques, few knew anything about our needs and desires. I pitched my views and was able to generate interest in the minds of several service providers sufficient to have them take a good look at us. I wish more residents from here had participated. Those who traveled to Washington seem to have been successful at getting high level support for Vieques and establishing relationships. We now must determine how to leverage these efforts into meaningful progress toward meeting our goals. But, what are OUR goals?

A majority of the discussions focused on semi-technical aspects that require a bit of study to follow, but this is NOT rocket science. What we need right now in Vieques is a means to involve more of the community in identifying issues that are critical to all of us. We need a forum that allows respectful dialogue with the purpose of bringing the best ideas forward to formulate and articulate our goals. How should we proceed to obtain more community involvement?

We can make a difference, but the window of opportunity is open only a short time. Feel the urgency!

Paul H. Lutton, Arq.

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