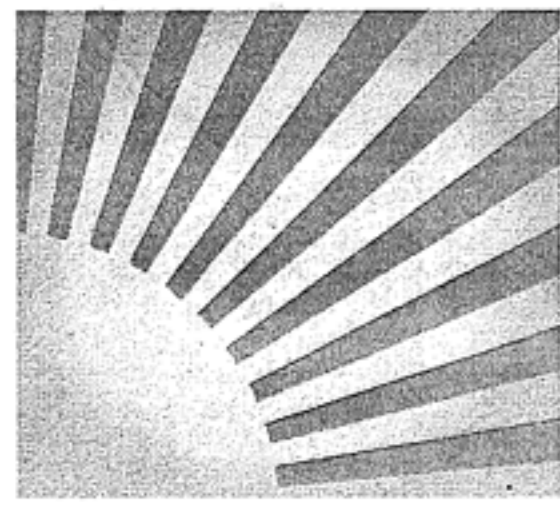




Execs grilled on oil spill 'cascade of failures' U.S. & WORLD PAGE 3



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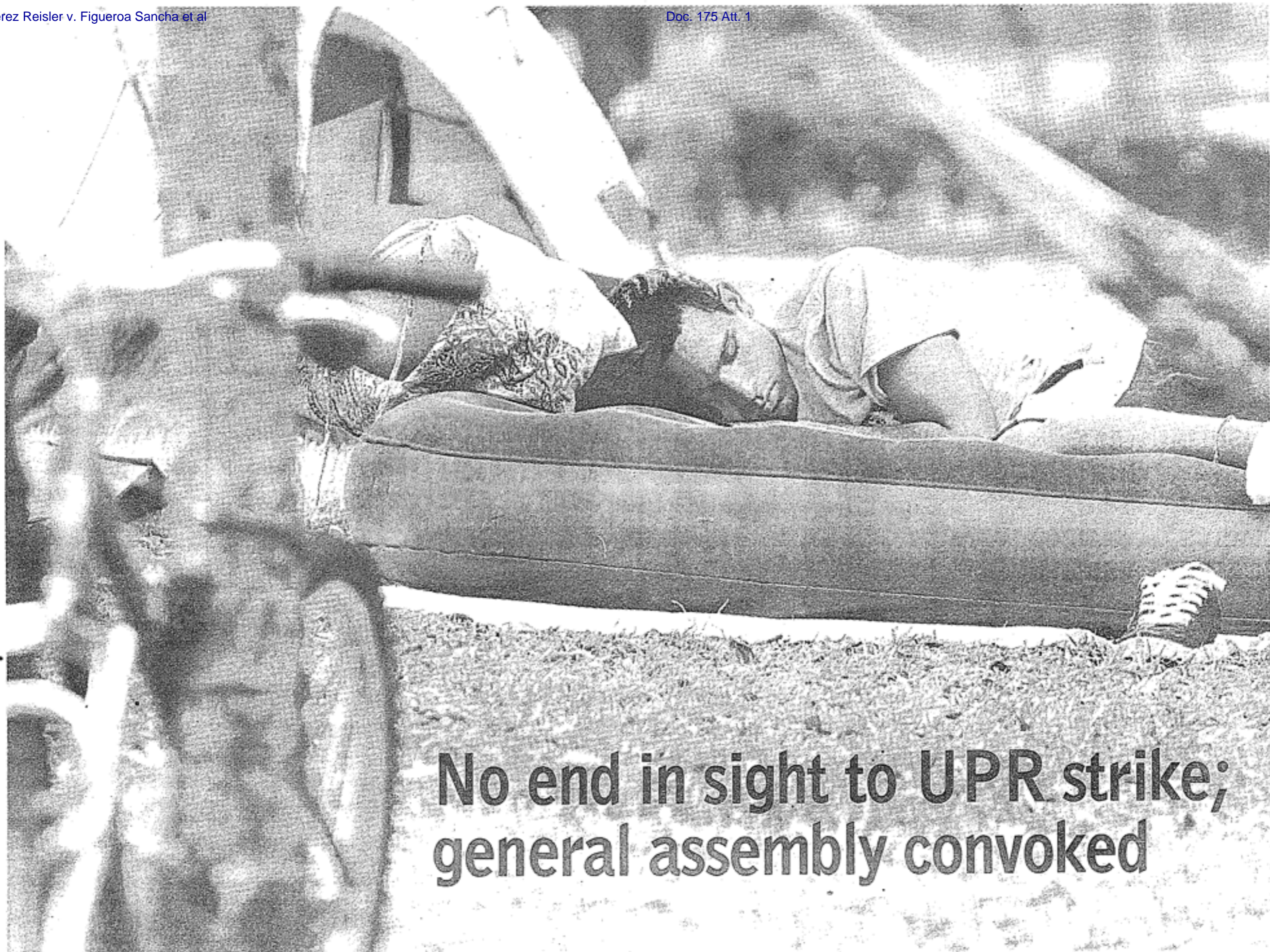
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Student schism widens

Perez Reisler v. Figueroa Sancha et al

Doc. 175 Att. 1



No end in sight to UPR strike; general assembly convoked

Daily Sun/Mauricio Pascual

A student sleeps on an air mattress on the grounds of the University of Puerto Rico's Río Piedras campus Tuesday morning. Ten of the 11 campuses in the UPR system have joined in the Río Piedras strike, which enters its fourth week today. LOCAL PAGE 3

Division grows among striking UPR students

BY JUAN A. HERNÁNDEZ
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Signs of division within the student leadership of the University of Puerto Rico Río Piedras campus seemed to reach schism levels Tuesday when General Student Council President Gabriel Laborde decided to call a general student assembly on his own after the council had decided the assembly should have been coordinated with the Student Negotiating Committee.

"Taking into consideration the students' best interest, which is to inform them what has been happening at the negotiating table, not through the press or any other voices ... I have taken the difficult decision of calling for a general student assembly for next Thursday May 13 — 30 days after the April 13 student assembly — at 9 a.m. in the Roberto Clemente Coliseum," Laborde said.

"I knew that regardless of my decision a downpour of criticism would fall over me ... I'm aware of that and when I took office as president I also took this responsibility," added Laborde during an improvised press conference in the lobby of Plaza Universitaria, across the street from the Río Piedras campus.

Nevertheless, the San Juan municipal government stated in a press release issued later Tuesday that the UPR student meeting will not take place at the Roberto Clemente Coliseum.

"The Roberto Clemente Coliseum is not available. We do not know who has made this announcement," municipal Sports and Recreation director María Batista said.

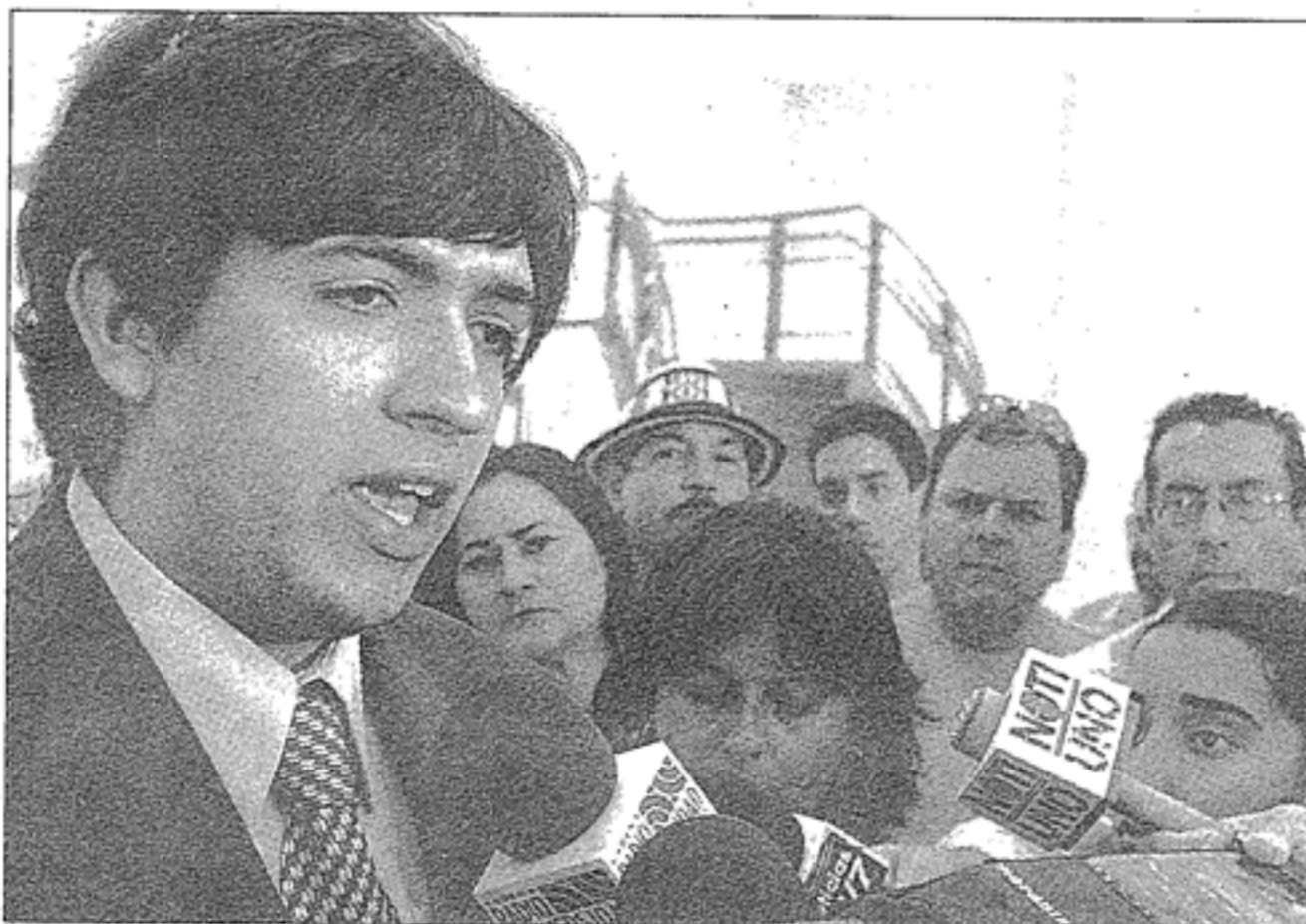
Laborde's decision was considered "unilateral and undemocratic" by several students present during the press conference, who reminded him the General Student Council had decided the date for the assembly was to be coordinated with the Student Negotiating Committee.

The student leader said the council he presides had approved the student assembly but hesitated when asked about the terms of the assembly.

"The council approved the assembly ... ahem ... I don't know if they'll approve of the way I'm calling it, but I'm going forward on this," Laborde said.

Student José Juan Pérez Velázquez questioned Laborde on the vote at the council meeting Monday night and the agreement on how the assembly was to be called, but Laborde insisted he would go on with the assembly.

Laborde said he had consulted with several other student leaders on his decision, including members of the Negotiating Committee, of which he only mentioned the Student Trustee — presumably René Vargas, who is the elected Student Trustee — and others. He admitted that the current student regulations' lack of specificity in



General Student Council President Gabriel Laborde offers a news conference at the UPR Río Piedras campus on Tuesday about his decision to call a general assembly on Thursday.



The Riot Squad has not left their post in front of the UPR's main gates on Ponce de León Avenue, where they have been since the strike began.

terms of how a student general assembly can be convoked allowed him to call for the assembly.

"My main interest is that the Río Piedras students get to know first hand what has been happening at the negotiating table. My interest is to decide there [at the assembly] and then go to the Board of Trustees to inform [them] whatever the students decide and that we will continue negotiating. I would expect the assembly will not be the end of the negotiations but another stimulus to continue," Laborde said.

Questioned if he was in any way dissatisfied with the Negotiating Committee's actions, Laborde praised the committee and its members for an "excellent job."

Río Piedras students have occupied the

university campus since April 21 after the UPR administration refused to meet and negotiate alternatives with them to the budget cutbacks that will be implemented. The students' main demands are the repeal of Certification 98, which limits and in some cases eliminates tuition waivers for students, guarantees there will be no tuition increases and no privatization of services and/or campuses.

After two weeks of a student strike the UPR Board of Trustees met last week with the Student Negotiating Committee to discuss their demands. While the Trustees have been adamant about not calling the meetings "a negotiation" and the "understandings" agreed upon "agreements," many students consider them so, and a step

forward towards the end of the three week strike.

Nevertheless, there are students who do not consider these "understandings" relevant to their demands and advocate for the continuation of the strike.

10 of 11 campuses on strike

In the meantime, 10 of the 11 campuses in the UPR system have joined in the Río Piedras strike, Aguadilla being the last one joining on Tuesday. Only the Medical Sciences campus remains operating, though students there have expressed their support with a 24-hour stoppage and their participation in last Friday's massive demonstration in front of the Río Piedras Botanical Gardens.

Laborde has declined to say whether or not he supports the continuation of a student strike.

"I [believe] negotiations should continue. Whether they continue with open gates or not, that is for the assembly to decide," Laborde said.

For Social Sciences student Ian Camilo Cintrón, it is important to comply with what has been agreed within student organizations, particularly the General Student Council, but said he is willing to attend the assembly Laborde called for.

"Members of the university community and the people of Puerto Rico must be clear in that no striking student is against a general student assembly. We are clear about our demands and we are capable of explaining to our fellow students that the understandings and agreements we have reached [with the Board of Trustees] are not satisfactory, so far," Cintrón said.

According to Cintrón, "the problem here is the comrade's decision [Laborde's]" to convoke the assembly without having discussed the subject first with the Negotiating Committee.

Cintrón expressed his surprised with Laborde's decision and admitted that "up until today [Tuesday] he had had a significant participation in this process."

"Unfortunately, as of today I cannot say that," Cintrón said.

But for Student Negotiating Committee member Adriana Mulero, Laborde is only thinking of himself.

"I personally think this is an act of cowardice on his part," said Mulero about Laborde's action.

"But despite my disagreement with the way he has convened the assembly, we are going to participate and we call upon all students to ratify the student strike," she added.

Mulero is convinced Laborde must have been intimidated by the motion presented by university lawyers against him for being in contempt for not complying with the preliminary injunction ordering him to cease and desist from the strike and from committing any illegal acts.