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Fernández's party poised for big gains in Dominican Republic

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Support broadens

Unions hold general stoppage today to back striking UPR students

LOCAL PAGES 3,4,5



Athletes from different University of Puerto Rico campuses join protesters in front of the main gate of the UPR Río Piedras campus Monday to lend their presence to an ongoing student strike. Island unions are holding a general work stoppage today in support of the strike, which enters its 28th day.

Daily Sun/Mauricio Pascual

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Employees join student protests; demand talks

BY JOSE ALVARADO VEGA
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A day before an island-wide work stoppage called by unions in solidarity with University of Puerto Rico striking students, university professors and workers reiterated Monday their backing of the strike and demanded the UPR administration restart talks "in good faith" with the students.

To help pressure the administration to start such negotiations, UPR maintenance employees in the Workers Syndicate started a week-long stoppage that closed down the Medical Sciences Campus, the sole campus whose students have not approved an indefinite strike. They also blocked the entrance to the UPR Central Administration offices at the Botanical Gardens in Río Piedras.

This means all 11 UPR campuses are currently shut down, 27 days after the start of a 48-hour stoppage in the Río Piedras campus that turned into a full-blown strike, and which spread to other campuses.

Later in the morning, students representing the National Negotiating Committee — created after students in Río Piedras and other campuses ratified strike votes and agreed last week to coordinate negotiating efforts — showed up at the south gate of the Botanical Garden grounds to deliver a letter to UPR Board of Trustees Chairwoman Ygrí Rivera de Martínez demanding a meeting with Rivera and other board members to restart talks on Wednesday at 10 a.m. About 20 police stood guard outside the gate and the students were not allowed in. They handed over the letter to UPR security director Abraham Rodríguez.

"This committee is made up of students from all campuses and is the entity authorized to take part in negotiations with the university administration," reads the letter, which says that the administration may confirm the meeting with spokesman Valerie Rodríguez from Bayamón, Carlos Zayas from Humacao and Dahil R. Colón from Arecibo.

Zayas told the Daily Sun late Monday afternoon that they had yet not received a response. He said the committee would negotiate the common grievances to all campuses involving controversial Certification 98, while "respecting" local negotiations between students and campus chancellors.

While this occurred, Río Piedras General Student Council President Gabriel Laborde was joined by the leaders of the Puerto Rican Association



Daily Sun/Mauricio Pascual

Striking UPR students are joined by athletes from other UPR campuses, on Monday, including 'Super Barrio', mascot from the Bayamón campus.

tion of University Professors, the Non-Teaching Employees Brotherhood or HEEND, the Workers Syndicate and Academic Senate members in demanding that Río Piedras campus Interim Chancellor Ana Guadalupe and the Board of Trustees "immediately" order the police to leave the campus perimeter "to create an atmosphere conducive to fruitful negotiations."

During a press conference at Plaza Universitaria, across the street from the main Río Piedras campus gate, they denounced the "illegal" closing of the university by the administration as a measure of "repression" to restrict students' rights to association and free speech. They called on the administration to negotiate with the National Negotiating Committee.

"We are not going to be intimidated by the administration's seizure of our salaries with the lockout," said HEEND spokeswoman Christie Capetta Suro.

Laborde praised the participation Monday of dozens of student athletes from Río Piedras and other campuses such as Humacao, Ponce, Mayagüez and Carolina in the picket line in front of the Río Piedras campus' main gate, saying this shows how widespread is student dissatisfaction with Certification 98, which would force athletes and other talented students to choose between tuition waivers and Pell grants.

Luis Santos, an education major who plays for the Río Piedras softball and baseball teams, said the university could lose its best athletes, particularly those who come from low-income families, if they are forced to make such a choice. He said UPR athletes, who this year are the Inter-university Athletic League global champions, make up a part of the Puerto Rico team participating in this summer's Central American and Caribbean Games in Mayagüez.

"The National Athletic Association has the UPR in its second division, but if we lose talent, we could fall to the third division and lose money from such entities as the NCAA," he said in his red and white uniform as other athletes picketing in their uniforms chanted: "Sport is my passion, I deserve the exemption."

He said Río Piedras have not been paid a \$400 allowance for food this year that is usually paid in installments every 15 days. Moreover, they must train in rock-filled and brush-strewn campus baseball fields. He said the university prefers to pay athletes to play in other fields than put their own up to date to hold home games.

Angie Troche, an accounting student and tennis player, said the Ponce Catholic University offered to pay her \$600 a month as well as tuition and room-and-board to have her as an athlete, but she opted for the UPR's prestige.

"With Certification 98, you will have to be a rich athlete to study here," she said. "The tuition exemption is an incentive to participate in UPR teams."

In the afternoon, former Puerto Rico Physicians and Surgeons Association President Eduardo Ibarra arrived at the gate to announce the intentions of the non-profit Health Rights Foundation to set up a clinic camp with voluntary doctors within campus grounds to provide emergency care for striking students, police or other protesters there. He was turned back by police, who took his petition to the UPR president asking for an authorization.

"This is a call to reason. There are more than 200 students in there," said the Mexican-born doctor, who added that he wants to aid his alma mater in a time of crisis. "Access to health, as well as education, is a human right that must be guaranteed," he said.

In fact, San Juan Superior Court Judge José Negrón Fernández decided to leave without effect his ruling Friday denying parents of striking students an injunction ordering the administration to allow the delivery of food, water and other provisions to students inside the campus, saying police were ordered to let them pass. He ordered parties to a hearing today to have them agree on the "protocol" of how such deliveries should be made.

All quiet at UPR's Bayamón campus

BY JUAN A. HERNÁNDEZ
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While the situation at the University of Puerto Rico's Río Piedras campus has heated up after university administrators decided to request the Police Department establish a perimeter around the campus to control access, police presence at the Bayamón campus is at a minimum and students have not had any problems accessing food and water.

"We have not faced any problems in terms of accessing food, water or medications. We are in good shape and the strike is still on," General Student Council president Valerie Rodríguez said.

The UPR Bayamón campus, one of the first UPR system components to join Río Piedras in their protest, has been on strike for 21 consecutive days. More than 4,000 students are enrolled in the Bayamón campus.

"We have to support this strike. The rights we enjoy today are the rights others before us fought for. I want to be part of those fighting for the rights others will enjoy tomorrow," 20-year-old geography student Reinaldo Pepin López said.

"Our Negotiating Committee is meeting today [Monday] to revise the demands presented to Chancellor Arturo Avilés," Rodríguez said.

According to the student leader, some initial agreements had been negotiated with Avilés, among them the summer session and number of courses to be offered next semester, that the chancellor is allegedly not planning to fulfill.

Sources close to campus administration said Avilés plans to reduce 66 positions from the teaching staff, while increasing administrative personnel by 77, as the budget for next fiscal year goes into effect.

Students at the Bayamón campus expect a major demonstration in front of the campus' main gates today as part of the national workers' stoppage in solidarity with their demands.

BRIEFS

Heavy rains continue to affect the island

The National Weather Service said Monday the inclement weather is expected to continue during the next few days, with continued "isolated shower activity" in the eastern and coastal areas of the island. Some shower and thunderstorm activity is also expected over the Cordillera central and western sections of Puerto Rico.

As heavy rains continued to affect several San Juan-area municipalities on Monday, the NWS issued urban flood warnings for Bayamón, Trujillo Alto, Guaynabo, Canóvanas, Carolina, Cataño, Toa Baja and San Juan.

The NWS said the heavy rains on Monday afternoon produced between one to three inches of water in an hour and cause flooding in low-level areas in the aforementioned municipalities.

Meanwhile, residents of various western municipalities are facing problems with their water supply due to heavy rains that have affected the area in recent days, reported the Puerto Rico Aqueduct and Sewer Authority's western region.

Joel Lugo, assistant director of Prasa's western region, explained that the rains that occurred over the weekend have caused obstructions in five water filtration plants, which in turn have caused a decrease in production in these facilities and service issues to subscribers.

Lugo indicated that flooding in local rivers supplying the plants have obstructed the raw water intakes.

He added that during Monday morning they would be doing clean up work in the plants, so normal production should be resumed in the afternoon.

Lugo said the situation has caused a significant reduction in the production of the Miradero and Ponce de León water filter plants in Mayagüez, the "Monte del Estado" plant in Maricao, and the Urbana and "La Máquina" plants in Sabana Grande.

Lugo also said the situation has caused interruptions in water service for subscribers living in Mayagüez, Añasco, Las Marías and parts of Hormigueros, Cabo Rojo, Maricao and Sabana Grande.

Family Dept. investigates abandoned child

The Family Department launched an investigation Monday after a 22-month child was abandoned in the Río Piedras Plaza Robles Urban Train station.

Family Secretary Yanitsia Irizarry said that about 6:45 a.m. Monday, the staff of the Urban Train station in Río Piedras informed the police about the discovery of an abandoned child.

She said that Family officials also received a phone call on the agency's adoption hotline, at 1-800-981-8333, and that its emergency social services were immediately activated.

The secretary said no minors should ever be abandoned. "A pregnant woman or parent who cannot fulfill his or her responsibility to a child may call 787-523-2323 for voluntary surrender and related information. The call is confidential," she said, adding that phone calls to both numbers could be made 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The agency did not release any details about the child's condition.

PR. receives \$668,200 from USDA for wetlands protection

Puerto Rico has been awarded \$668,200 for wetlands protection.

According to a news release from the U.S. Agriculture Department, the money is part of nearly \$175 million awarded to wetland conservation projects in 22 states and Puerto Rico.

Wetlands are areas that are saturated by water all or most of the year. They help prevent flooding and soil erosion. They also filter contaminants, preventing them from entering lakes, rivers and streams.

The new grants are expected to protect 75,000 acres across the United States by paying for conservation easements and wetland restoration on privately owned land.

By the Daily Sun staff and wire services

Fortuño confident agreements can be reached at UPR

BY XAVIRA NEGGERS CRESCIONI

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Gov. Fortuño said he did not address Puerto Rico residents Sunday in the aftermath of the 5.8 magnitude earthquake because no one was hurt, there were no significant damages and he was suffering from a fever and flu.

"I have the flu and yesterday I was in bed with a fever and flu, but if there had been an emergency I would have been there [with other emergency officials addressing residents]," Fortuño said Monday during a radio interview with WKQ station.

Nonetheless, he said that he was in constant communication with State Emergency Management Administration Executive Director Heriberto Saurí.

While thanking God the earthquake did not cause greater damage, Fortuño said it is a warning we need to be prepared for the next temblor.

Monday, Fortuño toured various local radio stations giving personal interviews prior to today's scheduled 24-hour general strike, being held in part to support demands of striking University of Puerto Rico students. In an interview with NotiUno, Fortuño avoided members of the UPR Students National Negotiating Committee who appeared at the station by leaving through a back door.

Fortuño criticized those organizing today's scheduled general strike. "This is not about unions, the Electric Industry Union Workers or 'Tito Kayak,' this is about saving education," he said, while calling on those who want to achieve political gains from the strike — if they truly support the UPR — to leave students and UPR administration alone so they can resume negotiations.

Fortuño said he was confident the university administration and students could resolve the conflict by themselves, while attributing the current impasse to the lack of negotiations and foreign elements trying to make the conflict a political issue, which it is not.

"I believe the semester has not been lost and the UPR is in time to recuperate," he said. "They should sit down and negotiate."

Students have spent 28 days on strike in their call for tuition waivers to be left untouched, tuition to remain at current rates and to have a say in any austerity measures the UPR chooses to implement to ameliorate its current fiscal woes. The UPR's deficit will top \$200 million come July



Daily Sun / Mauricio Pascual, file

Gov. Fortuño criticized those organizing today's scheduled general strike.

1, UPR President José Ramón De la Torre said this weekend.

"My wish is for [UPR] to open as soon as possible and that students don't lose their semester ... I trust that the [UPR] administration can get the job done and that students can see the [UPR's] books and sit down to understand the fiscal situation ... what is complicating the matter is that other groups such as All Puerto Rico for Puerto Rico, Electric Industry Union Workers, the Popular Party are involving themselves to politicize the conflict," Fortuño said to WKAQ.

"Crime has rocketed in the metropolitan area. I want the police to go protect the communities," said Fortuño, who added the caveat the police cannot leave the UPR's environs until foreign elements such as — political party and unions members — leave the area.

Reports the government plans to privatize the UPR are sheer nonsense, he said. "Of course not. Nobody has ever had that plan. There is no plan. It makes no sense to sell the campuses," the governor said.

The position of keeping UPR public is upheld by the fact, that he allocated an extra \$105 million in funding to the university this year from federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds this fiscal year, and will allocate another \$25 million in extra funding to the UPR next fiscal year, which begins July 1, Fortuño said.

He also rebutted claims the UPR's Board of Trustees responds to Chief of Staff Marcos Rodríguez Ema or he, saying these are pure "lies." To back up his point, Fortuño said the majority of the UPR's trustees have not been appointed by his administration, "al-

though I know many of them and I feel comfortable working with them."

Fortuño said the decision to block food and water to striking students who had been 25 days inside the Río Piedras campus was made by the university's administration, which asked Police Superintendent José Figueroa Sancha last Friday to prevent the handing over of food and water.

However, the governor added the caveat that since Sunday the food and water situation had been put in order so that food and water could be given to those who do not wish to leave the university. A San Juan Court also ruled Monday authorities could not block the provision of food and water to students.

When asked about his increased security upon his arrival to the radio station, Fortuño said the police have opted to increase his security detail, even though he did not request this, because Electric Industry Union Workers want to politicize the matter. "They want to involve me and the Police have taken measures," he said.

"I have faith the university community can reestablish negotiations by themselves," Fortuño said, adding he has not intervened out of respect for UPR's autonomy.

"It is absurd to me that the university and the campuses are closed, it is absurd there are no negotiations," said Fortuño, who underlined that last weekend the conflict seemed close to ending when the student council for UPR's Río Piedras campus reached a series of understandings with the UPR Trustees.

"What we cannot permit is foreign elements to get inside the university," he said.

Islandwide general strike today

BY EVA LLORENS VELEZ AND ROSARIO FAJARDO
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Today's general strike gained momentum with the Popular Democratic Party's announcement that they would be joining the work stoppage in support of the ongoing student strike at the University of Puerto Rico.

House Alternate Minority Leader Luis Raúl Torres urged all citizens to show solidarity with the striking students as he charged that police officers have violated their human rights by preventing the delivery of food and water to students who are inside the UPR Río Piedras campus.

"The government's answer to the peaceful expressions of the students has been disproportionate, irrational and incoherent. Destroying [and preventing the delivery of] meals for people who are not breaking the law and are not engaging in violence, is an abuse that should not be tolerated," he said.

Torres was appointed by PDP President Héctor Ferrer to coordinate the party's response to the UPR strike, which entered its 28th day today.

Students are demanding the repeal of the proposed overhaul of tuition waivers, no tuition increases and "no privatization," among other demands. UPR is facing a \$200 million deficit as it is getting fewer revenues from its budget formula. After both sides broke off talks, the students in an assembly last Thursday voted to continue the strike, a move that has resulted in the closing of the Río Piedras campus until July 31.

Torres chided the UPR administration for refusing to open up the channels of communication. He said the PDP cannot tolerate such a situation and announced it was in solidarity with the students. He then urged lawmakers, mayors and public servants to meet in front of the Burger King fast food restaurant on Gándara Avenue to show support for the students.

Guanica Mayor Martín Vargas also announced that the southern town's City Hall would be closed in solidarity with the students.

For his part, Caguas Mayor William Miranda Marín took time off from his cancer treatment to urge the people to support the national strike.

"Puerto Ricans must defend the existence and viability of a public university education that is accessible to all. Education is a right not a privilege and anyone wanting to be a statesman must understand that and take the courageous measures to

protect that space of public formation," he said.

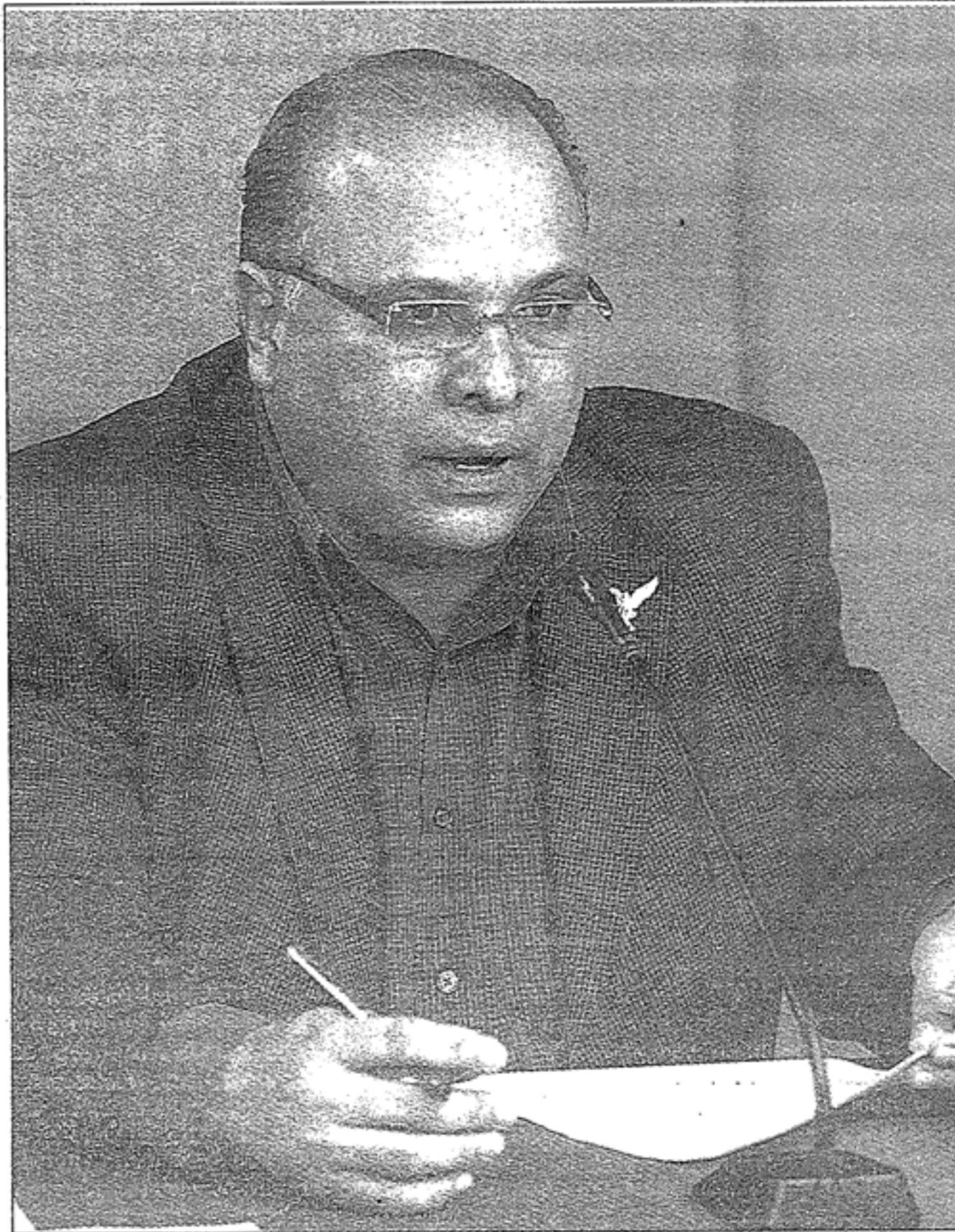
The League of Cooperatives and the teachers' group Educamos, headed by Eva Ayala, are also urging Puerto Ricans to join the national work stoppage convened by unions and civic organizations.

Meanwhile, the All Puerto Rico for Puerto Rico Coalition called on the public to convene today at the Government Centers in Minillas, Aguadilla, Arecibo, Manati, Caguas, Carolina, Humacao, Ponce, Guayama and Mayagüez. They also called for a general strike at all 78 municipal governments, as well as all government agencies, commercial and private companies.

Starting at noon, the coalition called on the people to mobilize at UPR's Río Piedras campus to support students and reject the "human rights violations" allegedly committed by the Fortuño administration during the strike process.

Amnesty International, "Movimiento Amplio de Mujeres," the Council of Churches, One Solo Movement, the Puerto Rican Workers Union and other trade unions; the Puerto Rico Bar Association, the Teachers Federation, and the Teachers Association, are among the groups participating in today's general strike.

Members of the Puerto Rico Symphony Orchestra, singers Danny Rivera and Tego Calderón, and the singing duo Calle 13 have also expressed their support.



House Alternate Minority Leader Luis Raúl Torres

Daily Sun, file

Comptroller seeks \$3.9M budget hike

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Commonwealth Comptroller Manuel Díaz Saldaña requested Monday a \$3.9 million hike for his entity's budget for the next fiscal year to increase the frequency and number of audits conducted, saying that an increase in the number of public workers being laid off, coupled with the enactment of public-private partnerships could hinder internal controls at government agencies.

The Environmental Quality Board, meanwhile, also unveiled its budget for the next fiscal year to the House Treasury Committee, which showed that the entity is planning job cuts over the next two years, even though the government has denied there would be more layoffs.

Monday's hearings were chaired by New Progressive Party Rep. Waldemar Quiles because the current chairman, Antonio Silva, was at the hospital tending to his son, Anthony Silva, who suffered an accident and was in need of blood donations.

Quiles chided Díaz Saldaña for requesting a hike for his agency in the middle of a fiscal crisis. The agency has been operating with the same \$43 million budget for four years. "I am in shock that the Comptroller's Office is asking for a \$3.9 million hike," Quiles said.

Díaz Saldaña said that at a time of economic crisis, agencies cut payroll while the government is seeking other mechanisms to op-

erate, such as PPPs. "That is going to bring a lot of activity in terms of involvement with private entities in the government. There is also a cut in staff and a lot of times when staff is cut, internal controls are affected during operations," he said.

He showed lawmakers a study titled "Occupational Fraud: A Study of the Impact of an Economic Recession," which concluded that in an economic crisis, agencies have to be more vigilant to prevent fraud because a cut in personnel affects internal controls.

With the additional funds he requested, Díaz Saldaña said he wanted to create 70 new positions for auditors, 10 administrative jobs, and recruit 30 student interns. He also wants to cover utility bills and per diems for the new auditors.

He said that the reality is that the Comptroller's Office needs to make more visits to government entities, especially the 1,535 public schools to train local School Boards. Quiles said the Treasury Committee would evaluate the comptroller's petitions.

Job cuts on the way at EQB

Environmental Quality Board President Pedro Nieves Miranda unveiled his budget for the next fiscal year, which at \$34.2 million is \$3.2 million less than the current budget. While Nieves provided a list of goals he wants to accomplish with the proposed budget, the numbers show that he plans to cut 46 positions at the agency by 2011. Most of the cuts would take place in the unit of managerial affairs, regionalized services, and quality improvement, according to EQB data.