

PUERTO RICO Daily Sun

Oil washes into La. marshes for 1st time
U.S. & WORLD PAGE 8

YEAR 2, NO. 574

FRIDAY, MAY 21, 2010

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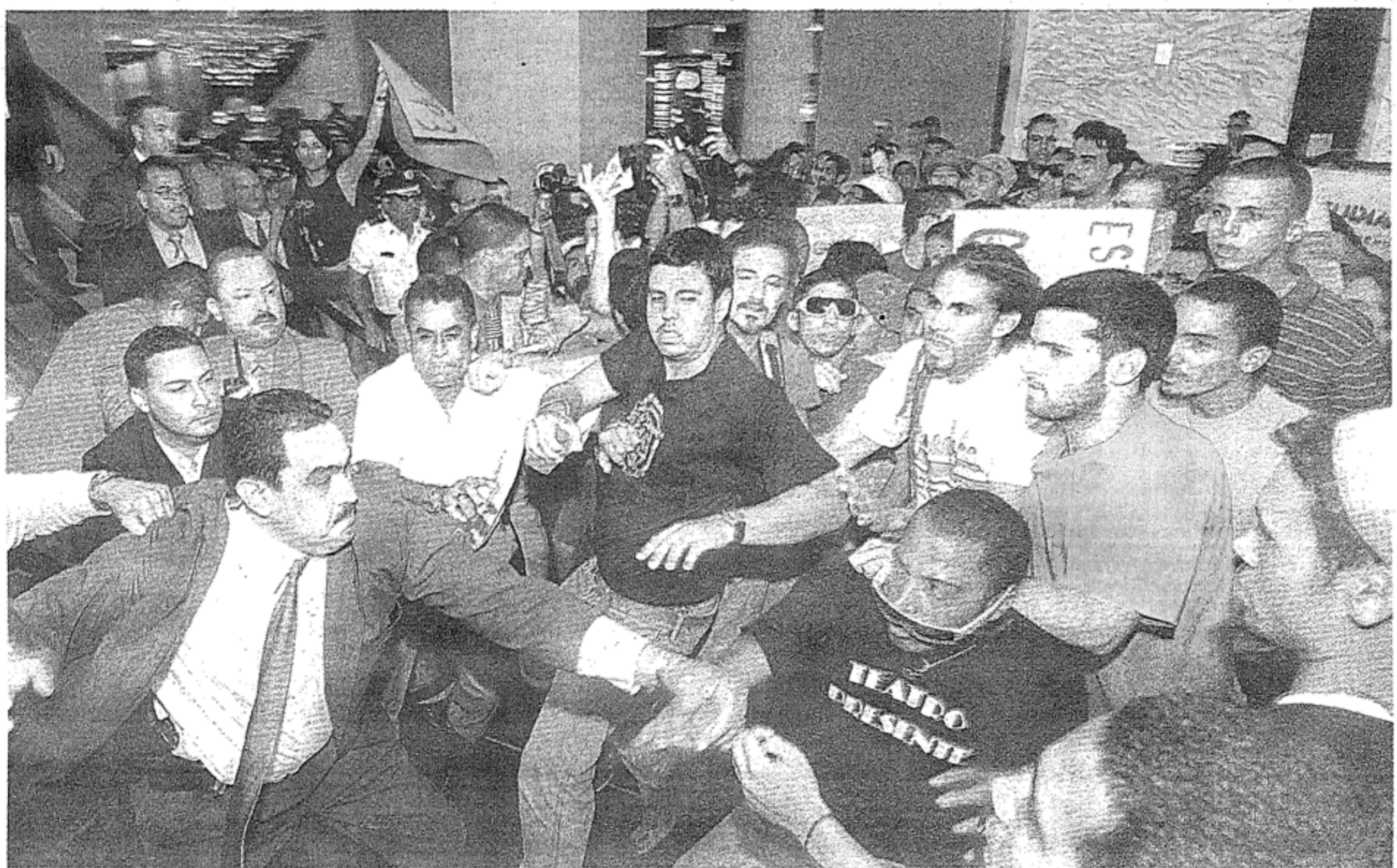
Puig being intimidated

Treasury Sec. to feds: Lawmakers pressuring on video lottery machine probe

Perez Reisler v. Figueroa Sancha et al

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LOCAL PAGE 5



Daily Sun/Humberto Trias

Riot in Miramar

Three people were detained Thursday night after the Police Riot Squad intervened with a group protesting against the government's economic policies and the crisis at the University of Puerto Rico. Close to 100 people protested inside the Sheraton Convention Center hotel, where Gov. Fortuño was attending a political fundraising activity along with government agency heads and business leaders.

LOCAL PAGE 3

Protesters, Police clash during Fortuño fundraiser



Daily Sun/Humberto Trias

The riot that ensued between protesters and the Police inside the Sheraton Convention Center Hotel lobby resulted in some \$8,000 in property damages, hotel officials said.

BY JUAN A. HERNÁNDEZ
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At least five protesters were arrested Thursday night during a demonstration against Gov. Fortuño's economic policies and the University of Puerto Rico crisis.

Members of the Police Riot Squad discharged their pepper spray canisters into the group of demonstrators, which included workers and students, that had gathered at the entrance of the Puerto Rico Convention Center while Fortuño participated in a political fundraiser at the Sheraton Convention Center Hotel.

The arrested demonstrators were identified as Gabriel Muriente, son of pro independence leader Julio

Muriente, Carlos Santiago and José Pérez, among others.

Several people were affected by the pepper spray, including labor leaders José Rodríguez Báez, Luisa Acevedo and Eric Sevilla.

Earlier Thursday, University of Puerto Rico administration had instructed its legal counsel in the preliminary injunction case against the striking student leadership to postpone the serving of summons for contempt to the student leaders.

"It is in our best interest to continue open and respectful negotiations to put an end to this indefinite student strike at the University of Puerto Rico, which has done so much harm to our institution," UPR president José Ramón De la Torre said in a press release issued Thursday afternoon.

The National Student Negotiat-

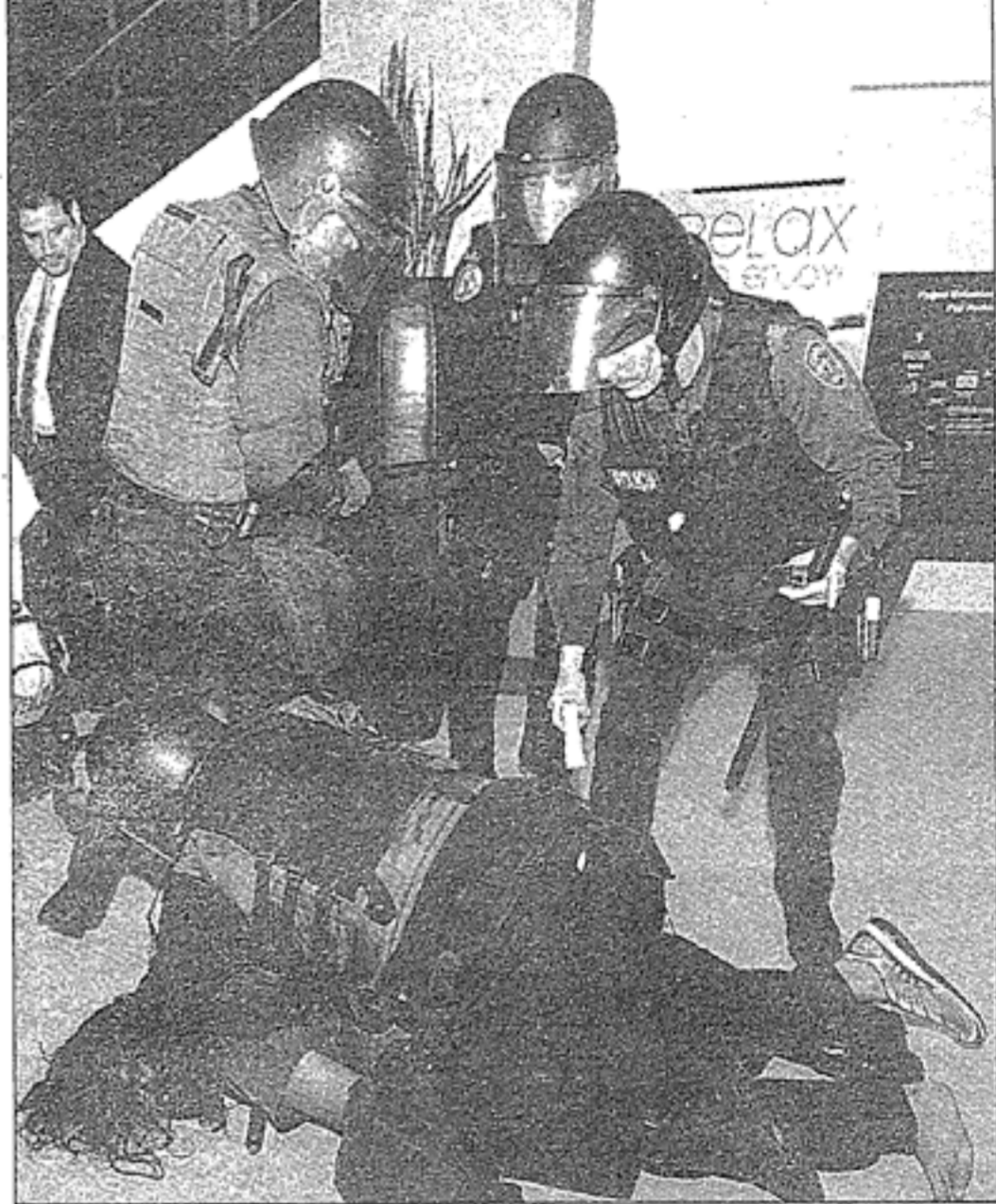
ing Committee met with UPR administrators Thursday and demanded the injunction against several of its members be dropped before negotiations could continue.

Nevertheless, De la Torre, Board of Trustees Chairwoman Ygrí Rivera and Río Piedras campus interim Chancellor Ana R. Guadalupe conditioned the postponement on the students showing up to a meeting today at 8:30 a.m. at the president's office to resume negotiations.

The press release also includes an unexpected comment from De la Torre.

"It is our duty to put our own particular interests ahead for [sic] the welfare of the University and the people of Puerto Rico," De la Torre said.

University administrators pre-



Daily Sun/Humberto Trias

A University of Puerto Rico student known as "Osito" is Tasered and arrested Thursday following a protest that unleashed a riot at the Sheraton Convention Center Hotel lobby, when Police used pepper spray to break up the crowd.

sented an injunction on April 21, the first day of the academic strike, requesting General Student Council (GSC) president Gabriel Laborde and three other student leaders desist from controlling university gates and from "committing acts of vandalism" on campus. The recourse did not explain, or present any evidence regarding the "acts of vandalism."

The UPR lawyers requested

Wednesday an amendment to their injunction to include several other student leaders bringing the total to 21. Among the students now subject to the injunction are GSC vice-president Santiago Velázquez Lamela, Arturo Ríos Escribano, Giovanni Roberto Cález, Aníbal Núñez González and Waldemiro Vélez Soto from the Río Piedras Negotiating Committee, among several others.

Courts Administrator: Law 7 causes delays in Family court cases

BY EVA LLORENS VELEZ
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Of the Daily Sun staff

The island's courts have been forced to sanction an undetermined amount of Family Department lawyers for failing to show up for court hearings, a situation that has caused a backlog in the resolution of family cases, officials said Thursday.

Calling the situation an "alarming" one, Courts Administrator Sonia Ivette Vélez said Law 7, the Fiscal Emergency Law, has resulted in a cut in the number of Family Department lawyers handling family cases and, as a result, court cases are being affected.

"This has caused delays in hearings, which have to be postponed," she said during a House, Treasury Committee hearing.

Vélez said she has received complaints from judges because the situation has caused delays in the resolution of cases. Nonetheless, she said that for the past month she has not received any further complaints.

In March, the Family Department issued 145 layoff notices in the Administration for Families and Children, 130 layoff notices in the Family Secretariat office, 289 layoff notices in the Administration for the Socioeconomic Development and Family Administration, and 22 layoff notices in the Administration for the Care and Integrated Development of Childhood.

Popular Democratic Party Rep. Luis Vega Ramos said Vélez's remarks are disastrous example of the effects of Law 7. "This is affecting children and the elderly," he said.

An immediate reaction from the Family agency could not be obtained.

On the other hand, Vélez said that although the courts' budget has remained the same for the past three years, she expects to end the fiscal year with a balanced budget.

The judicial branch's proposed consolidated budget is \$351.8 million, of which \$347.9 million is money from the general fund that it gets from its budget formula.

Vélez said the \$347.9 million is the same amount in revenues it obtained last year. The courts' budget formula, which was enacted in 2002, calls for the judicial branch to get a percentage of the average of the government's revenues, which was 3.3 percent in 2004 and is now 4 percent.

Unlike the revenues obtained by the University of Puerto Rico, which can change depending on the amount of revenues collected, the law that created the judicial

branch's budget formula states that even if the average of the total annual revenues goes down, the amount of money given to the courts will remain the same. "That is why we have had the same amount of revenues for the past few years," Vélez said, noting that the courts' budget for the next fiscal year has not been affected by the loss in revenues to the general fund resulting from various dispositions in Law 7.

However, she called upon lawmakers to deal with the situation of the Judicial Branch Retirement System's deficit. While she said she did not have specific numbers, she noted that lawmakers have to protect it because it is the only retirement system that was created because of a constitutional mandate reaffirming the constitutional separation of powers. "The magnitude of the problem exceeds our capacity," she said.

BRIEFS

More than 5,000 traffic deaths in past 10 years

More than 5,000 people have died on the roads of Puerto Rico in the last 10 years, according to the executive director of the Commission for Traffic Safety, Miguel Santini, when he released on Thursday the statistics for traffic fatalities caused by not wearing a seat belt.

According to the Commission's statistics, of the 5,318 people who have died in the past 10 years, 1,652 of them, or 31 percent, were not wearing their seat belts at the time of the traffic accident.

Santini said that among the most relevant data on deaths from not wearing a seat belt are that 34 percent of victims were young people between the ages of 16 to 24 years old and 19 percent were between 25 to 34 years old.

According to the Commission's executive director, 60 percent of the traffic deaths were reported during the period from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m., and 78 percent of those fatalities occurred from Thursday to Sunday.

Santini announced the statistics during the launch of an educational campaign called "Amárrate o Pagas," or "Buckle up or Pay" in English, which will be presented from May 29 to June 6, and will integrate presentations on television, radio, print media and the Internet.

The campaign has the support of the State Police and municipal police forces islandwide, who will be stopping drivers and passengers without seat belts on the streets.

"The fine for not wearing a belt amounts to \$50 dollars per passenger and \$100 dollars for not using a car seat," Santini said.

According to Santini, the public educational campaign is aimed at preventing deaths on the roads caused by not wearing a seat belt and is being implemented simultaneously throughout the United States.

"Safety belts are the most effective way of protection a vehicle has. It is essential that both the driver and each passenger use their seat belts. It is shown that they save lives and prevent serious injuries," Santini said.

18,000 pounds of trash, 100 tires removed from La Plata reservoir

The Department of Natural and Environmental Resources announced Thursday that 18,000 pounds of trash were removed from the La Plata dam, as well as more than 100 car and truck tires in a recent clean-up activity.

In the activity, that counted on the support of members of the La Plata Fishing Club, the agency pulled out of the water around 192 garbage bags of garbage, the equivalent of 18,000 pounds of plastic and glass items.

"In addition to plastic and glass collected, we removed a family-sized fridge and more than 100 tires, many of them still with its metal rim," said DNER Secretary Daniel Galán Kercado.

He said it was important "to raise awareness of the importance of keeping our waterways clean and preventing future damage to ecosystems. By throwing garbage we contaminate the water that we will consume at some time."

The Toa Alta municipality and Environmental Sciences students from the University of Puerto Rico's Bayamón campus also participated in the clean-up.

Funeral for Elba Vilá, AAV's mother, at 1 p.m. today

The funeral for Elba Vilá Salas, the deceased mother of former Gov. Aníbal Acevedo Vilá will be held today at 1 p.m. at the San Juan municipal cemetery, her family announced.

The wake, originally scheduled to begin Thursday afternoon at Ehret Funeral Home in Río Piedras, was rescheduled to begin at 7:30 p.m. after the flight bringing Doña Elba's remains back to Puerto Rico was delayed.

The former governor's mother died May 7 at the age of 79 while she was on a cruise ship to Spain that left San Juan May 2.

By the Daily Sun staff and wire services

Misinformed Fortuño says talks are under way at UPR

BY JOSE ALVARADO VEGA

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An apparently misinformed Gov. Fortuño insisted Thursday that his call earlier this week for "dialogue" between striking students and the University of Puerto Rico administration had finally led them to sit down and negotiate — even though no such talks were held.

During a press conference at the commonwealth Justice Department, reporters asked the governor whether the UPR administration acted wisely by including members of the National Student Negotiating Committee as defendants in an injunction lawsuit that seeks to force the striking student leadership to end the month-long strike and respond to "vandalism" on campus grounds.

Committee members, after being stood up Wednesday by UPR President José Ramón De la Torre, said Thursday that the lawsuit must be withdrawn before any talks can be restarted with the administration.

"Many times in my practice I have seen how lawyers sue both parties to force them to sit down and negotiate. And the result has been in this case that [both sides in the UPR conflict] are negotiating at the table as we speak," said Fortuño, who, when told no such talks were being held, insisted he had been informed just minutes

before that representatives from "all campuses except Río Piedras" were meeting at an undisclosed location.

Student leaders said no such talks had been held.

"Notice that since I called on outside forces to leave the campus, and the police presence [at the Río Piedras campus] has dropped dramatically, as I said would occur. That's what we need — to leave the university community alone to solve this problem ... as they have done in the past," said the governor, who added that the "climate has changed" since his call Monday resulted in "outside forces leaving the campus and a majority of police leaving also."

The governor also rejected criticism that a New Progressive Party fundraiser held Thursday night at the Sheraton Convention Center Hotel in Miramar sought to pair cabinet members with business executives. The event was marred by a clash between police and union members and UPR striking students who tried to break in.

"To pay for the rent, electricity, water, telephone and NPP employees, we undertake legal activities," Fortuño said of the fundraiser, for which \$500 and \$1,000 tickets were sold. "Here we don't handle cash like the previous governor did. We do what the law requires."

When asked about threats made against Treasury Secretary Juan Carlos Puig Thursday due to his video lottery plans, Fortuño said that local

police and federal law-enforcement officials were working together to ensure his safety.

"We will not allow any one to interfere in an inappropriate way in any regulation or legislative process," he said.

The governor, moreover, first denied but then conceded that Health Secretary Lorenzo González was operating a health clinic near his home in Pennsylvania, as Cybernews reported, saying he was given the required dispensation for a practice in which González just gave "second opinions."

Accompanied by Justice Secretary Guillermo Somoza, Fortuño announced the distribution of \$21.7 million in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds for municipal and nonprofit programs to prevent and fight crime.

The money, allocated by a joint committee with representation of the nonprofit United Way and the Municipal Affairs Office, was distributed to 37 municipalities and 19 non-profit organizations, mostly youth and women's shelters, in a competitive process, the governor said during the activity, in which he handed out checks to mayors and organization officials. He said that \$6.6 million were assigned to municipalities, \$1.9 million to non-profit organizations and \$5.9 million to police. Another \$7.9 million were assigned to joint crime-prevention programs between municipalities and commonwealth agencies.

New Cataño ferry ready in 2 years

BY THE DAILY SUN STAFF

Maritime Transport Authority officials inspected on Thursday construction on a \$22.5 million ferry terminal in Cataño, which should be inaugurated in two years, touted as the first green building in Puerto Rico certified by the U.S. Building Council.

The facility's green construction will help reduce electricity consumption by 25 percent and water by 52 percent, said Transportation and Public Works Secretary Rubén Hernández Gregorat.

The Federal Transit Administration will pay for 80 percent of the project and the rest will be earmarked from Commonwealth funds.

"One of our greatest satisfactions is the beginning of the construction of this new ferry terminal in Cataño, with which we will make history again in the Puerto Rican maritime transportation," said Ibsen Santiago, MTA executive director. "This new [terminal] will replace the existing terminal, which has been in opera-



Daily Sun/Mauricio Pascual

Maritime Transportation Authority officials on Thursday announced the groundbreaking of the new terminal in Cataño.

tion for 35 years."

The ferry currently serves 4,600 passengers daily.

The new terminal will measure 240 feet deep and 312 feet wide and will

have two waiting rooms for passengers bound for San Juan and Hato Rey, four business stands, a mechanic shop, bathrooms and a breast-feeding area.

VOICES

The strike!

As of May 14th, the critical issue for the striking students has been tuition waivers for those with the intelligence to earn good grades and to those with other talents useful to the university community.

These waivers have come to be regarded over the course of time as entitlements implicitly guaranteed by the administration of the university, specifically by its board of trustees, and underwritten, as it were, by the central government of Puerto Rico, specifically by its ability to award a percentage of its take from the licensed gambling industries on the island to the university.

In effect, then, the student strike is motivated chiefly by a need to hold the university accountable for honoring those waivers as it has in the past, as it should in the present, and forever afterwards, for as long as waves shall tumble onto the shores.

Strangely, but predictably, the students most stridently interested in shutting the university down, until their demands are met, have said little if anything about holding the board of trustees accountable for even explaining how the University of Puerto Rico's budget has a \$250 million deficit, the initial cause of all the woe. This lack of interest in knowing how a phenomenon like a deficit occurs follows the pattern of disinterest set by the Puerto Rican electorate in general, specifically by people like the parents and grandparents of the strikers, about how the deficits of the central government have come to be, most ominously in the public pension system (over \$10 billion in arrears, and projected to go bust in less than 10 years), and most dramatically in the \$3.2 billion to \$3.4 billion operational deficit of the central government that has led to massive layoffs of public workers and, inevitably, to a recalibration of the formula that funds the university, to cutbacks which do not by themselves satisfactorily account for all or even most of that \$250 million UPR deficit.

But, is this lack of interest real in the sense that it materially contributes to the deficits themselves, allowing authorities — whether in the vast, interminable agencies of the central government, or in the more modestly redundant, overlapping bureaucracies of UPR — to act without any fear of accountability ever being demanded of them by an irate electorate whose income and property taxes are skyrocketing? Or, is this lack of interest irrelevant because everyone is fully aware there is a larger scheme of things that is outside of the will and rationality, the control, of the Puerto Rican electorate?

If Puerto Ricans have learned to believe they are not accountable as productive workers, as entrepreneurs, for the basic energy that has created and continues to upgrade the infrastructure of the island, including a virtual cradle-to-grave array of entitlements, then why should Puerto Ricans hold themselves accountable for knowing the difference between what the American economy is responsible for providing, and what the Puerto Rican economy is supposed to be providing?

This situation is, I think you'll agree, eminently confusing even to adults. Imagine what your perspective on the UPR deficit might be if you have learned to think of yourself in terms of being a child who is still dependent on your mother for comfort and security although, biologically, you are an aging adolescent, a freshman at the university, a senior or a professor? The infinitely caring, infinitely unproblematic mother, always available and lactating, never disappointing, is the role in which striking students and their advisers implore their critics and obstructionists to cast themselves.

"Step into the shoes of a mother whose son or daughter studies here and someone is blocking their access to food and water. Or into the shoes of a mother whose child is being evicted from his or her home" (General Student Council President Gabriel Laborde, Local News, May 15, page 7).

Statements like this have contributed to the Boob Theory of delayed development manifested by so many in Puerto Rico, especially in politics. And where do the politicians come from?

Why, of course, from mommy and alma mater. The national motto of Puerto Rico may be, "The Enchanted Isle," but the effective motto is something more like, "Sweets to the sweet." Competitive alternatives are,

"Brother, can't you spare a billion?"

"More! We need more of everything, and don't you dare deny us!"

"If the world changes, and with it our economic circumstances, please remember we're not responsible for anything. We're innocent, I tell you, innocent, like Jesus!"

The cry of suffering issued by the strikers has gone out to international communities, to organizations like Mothers without Borders, "Help! Send more mommies!"

Won't you please contribute?

Steven Greenia
Rio Piedras

Bingo!

What may you not call a politician in Puerto Rico? What epithet would be so offensive as to be inappropriate? No, I can't list them, obscenities are unpublishable. But if we call them all those things, why the [expletive] do we vote for them every single time? It has to be nothing other than Puerto Rican *presentamiento*, unwelcome insistent busibodiness, insofar as the expression is translatable.

That and our uneducation, that the pols themselves make sure of, yes, the Education Department, that used to be the Public Instruction Department and next year will be the Intellectual Orientation Department or some other idiotic pomposity.

And we've all been whining for libraries for decades, we've particularly begged the *peripeistas* because they monkey-see, monkey-do every wink and grimace on Uncle Sam's wizened mug. Except for that, like God before them, they'd rather we didn't eat of the fruit of the tree of the science of good and evil. To them we're just cogs in their warped vision of self-aggrandizement.

Might we not turn guerrillas, saboteurs or terrorists? Drive them nuts by dint of civil disobedience a la Ghandi? Or are we simply too indolent and lazy for any of the above?

Julián Acevedo
Ocean Park

Eye of the beholder

I was just given a CD from Finland. It's vocal and instrumental folk music from the north and the kantele, Finland's national instrument, is prominent.

The cover features a cute little blond girl — stark naked — emerging from a misty lake, a gorgeous photograph. I can't but lament that had the recording with its cover been released anywhere under the United States flag, the producer, the artists and their agent, the distributor, the store and the buyer and the little girl's parents would've ended up on the evening news, in the slammer for a long stretch and on the sex-offender registry for life. We're the sickies.

Agustín Manzano
San Juan

Confronting humiliation

In the movie "From Russia With Love," SPECTRE's Number One mutters disappointment that his little cyanide injector failed to cause death within 13 seconds as promised.

Did University of Puerto Rico President de la Torre and Dean Ana Guadalupe fear negotiating students had concealed such devices in ballpoint pens? Or did they think student negotiators would lose it and attack with them nevertheless? Or perhaps the young people would be at a disadvantage if they couldn't take notes, psyched out even.

The shabbiness of these two vacuous bureaucrats continues to shame our island polity and to evince what the Fortuño administration is all about, not even the likes of Benito Mussolini.

One must admire and respect the students, who after having been all but strip-searched, stoically endured and sat down to do what they'd come for. I would've been out of there in such a hurry. It seems the younger generation has more of the right stuff in them.

Emilio Santiago
Summit Hills

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Our best investment

BY RIMA BRUSI, PH.D.

Commentary

In his budget address a few weeks ago, Gov. Fortuño referred to public, affordable higher education as a "privilege" that Puerto Rico provides to its students at no small cost to its citizens. To reinforce the message, he compared University of Puerto Rico tuition prices to the much higher ones of other, private, higher education institutions in the island, and of colleges and universities in the United States.

In an "us vs. them" move seemingly designed to conceptually place responsible tax payers against protesting students, he stated that "tuition paid by students, when they do pay, is but a 3 percent of the university's budget ... the rest is paid by us taxpayers. Which is why our people, just and noble, yes, but also democratic and respectful of law and order, get upset when they see what we have all seen in the university these past two days." As the strike grew bigger and more complicated, involving all of the 11 campuses, a number of public and private citizens have echoed the governor's general message, portraying the students as selfish, privileged, disorderly, and "ideologically" driven. As I write this column, the president of the UPR's Board of Regents is stating, on the radio, that the striking students are "breaking down the institution."

At the heart of this image is the idea that the university is too inexpensive for the individual students and too expensive for the state, thus rendering student complaints about the elimination of tuition waivers, and their insistence that tuition rates stay low, as shallow. I propose we examine this notion. Is the university really "too cheap?" Is it a "cost" to the state? "Cheap" and "expensive" are relative terms, and they arise from comparing the costs of the UPR with other institutions. However, is the comparison with private institutions in the island, and with public and private universities in the U.S., an appropriate comparison?

Private institutions in the island have helped the country meet an increasing demand for higher education degrees, but in terms of efficiency and value, economic studies have shown that the UPR, with double the graduation rate, and producing 95 percent of the island's research output, represents the best return on investment for public funds.

Universities across the U.S., a country traditionally known for its excellence in higher education, are experiencing problems that the states are concerned

with. Two related ones are access issues faced by minorities and low-income students and the production of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math, or STEM, degrees. Access problems are in great part due precisely to increasing tuition costs in four-year colleges and universities. STEM degrees hover around 20 percent of U.S. degrees, at a time when the country desperately needs to increase the domestic STEM workforce. Mainland universities have an average of only 14 percent of their student body qualifying for need-based Pell Grants. A number of efforts in the U.S., including the intensive use of federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds, are directed at increasing the number of underrepresented students and of STEM degrees.

In contrast, at the UPR, 40 percent of the degrees are STEM, and two-thirds of its student body qualifies for need-based aid. The UPR produces 16 percent of the Hispanic STEM workforce in the U.S. Historically, the people of Puerto Rico have viewed their public university not as a cost or as a burden but as an investment — the kind of investment most needed in times of economic crisis.

The governor is fond of the "family" metaphor. He often compares Puerto Rico and its current fiscal crisis with a family that needs to make hard choices to face periods of economic crisis, and wonders out loud about why the UPR cannot seem to be able to "tighten its belt" like so many families have done around the island. But even within the metaphor, choosing to take resources away from the public university in times of fiscal crisis would be akin to taking away children's educational opportunities. Few families would agree with this choice.

The Constitution of Puerto Rico (section 5, art.2) provides for a free public education system, covering first-grade through 12th grade. This was in 1952, when a high school diploma brought a certain amount of prestige and a number of job opportunities. It could easily be argued that what a high school diploma meant in the '50s, the college degree means today.

Affordable, public higher education cannot be seen as a cost or expense, but as value. It is one of those things where Puerto Rico consistently "lo hace mejor," or "does it better." It is one of the best investments we have made as a collectivity, as a society. Let us protect it.

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