

VIEQUES: FOR SALE BY OWNERS

At various times throughout history, events trigger conditions that foment enormous opportunity, and we are clearly witnessing such an occurrence. Our Commonwealth government says it just needs more money to solve all of its problems. So to balance the budget, we consider selling our receivables, leasing our lottery, selling government buildings, leasing the toll bridges.... These ideas are trivial thoughts of small thinkers. Get Real: How about selling Vieques? No, seriously, why don't we allow one of the 50 states to annex it. Transfer it to Florida, Texas, Montana....

The Commonwealth desperately needs money, and Vieques is a much undervalued asset lying fallow. I propose that the island be sold, put out for competitive bid.

Now there must be conditions:

1. Only states of the United States are allowed to annex this special territory and make it a full, homogeneous, integral part of their own constitutionally founded state. This would be similar to a state on the Mississippi River "owning" an island in the river, the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, or the Keys being part of Florida. Bids would be joint ventures of sorts between a state and a developer.
2. The minimum bid must be \$4,100,000,000. The Commonwealth government would receive one billion dollars per year for four years and the citizens of Vieques would receive a one time payment of \$100,000,000 - directly payable to each man, woman, and child (10,000 people at about \$10,000 each).
3. Additional funds from the winning bid go to the municipality.
4. The bid must include a development plan for the island as an eco-tourism destination without the standard array of tinsel town highlights, big hotels, casinos, and golf courses. Some or all of the municipality's properties could be sold or leased according to the plan and the profits shared by the developers and the municipality. The culture, heritage, and languages must not only be preserved, but showcased.
5. The winning bid is selected by registered voters of Vieques. The basis of the vote would reflect the perceived advantages of the specific state, plus it would include the quality of the proposed development plan, the value of the annuities, and the sale price.
6. A new municipal government is to be formed according to the laws of the state of annexation.

Truly a win-win-win-win situation

This would theoretically allow the government four years to get its house in order. With this influx of cash, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico will finally be able to:

1. Balance the bloated budget.

2. Educate our kids.
3. Plan and implement a thoughtful land use plan.
4. Administer a fair and efficient construction and use permit system.
5. Operate and maintain a reasonable transportation systems (ferry, bus, or train);
6. Oversee or operate an energy delivery system that serves the people.
7. Provide security and peace with a competent police force and a fair judicial system.
8. Provide adequate health care.
9. Plan and manage the development and maintenance of our natural resources.
10. Get rid of a cash drain and a huge pain in the neck.

Vieques will earn a future. The island's 10,000 inhabitants will gain:

1. The resources to develop the island intelligently and fund basic services and infrastructure currently missing, dismal, and/or incompetent (transportation, healthcare, energy, security, justice, education...).
2. A transparent form of island government elected, not bought, and controlled by the people.
3. Direct access to stateside services and privileges.

The annexing state will gain a Caribbean component for multiple purposes and develop the expanding tax base:

1. Surf & Turf vacations from Western states.
2. Wind and solar labs for research and development of local natural resources to power Vieques, Culebra, and parts of the main island.
3. Small port for access to an expanded world of different economic opportunities.
4. University branches, research centers, and remote campuses.

The developer makes money with high quality sustainable development: It's the developer's proposal that he or she defines that is accepted by the community and therein approved.

In the global economy we're finding investors all over the world buying government assets and leasing them back or leasing and operating other assets that governments are ill equipped to manage. We know that the Commonwealth can't manage Vieques (or much of anything else, but that's for a different day), so why not solve several problems at once?

It will no doubt take an act of Congress, but that's not as tough as it may seem if the support is there – remember the “bridge to nowhere”? And, if things go well, four years later it could be copied with Culebra or Rincon or....