

## Principle or expediency?

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During the past two weeks, we have witnessed two very different interactions between the mayors and legislators and the Fortuño administration. The first was the attendance of Fortuño at a meeting of the Mayor's Association and the reaction of the mayors to Fortuño's speech. The second was the attendance of the legislative leaders at a bipartisan legislative conference convened by Fortuño at La Fortaleza.

The outcome of the meeting between Fortuño and the mayors was positive and constructive. The governor announced the distribution of stimulus funds on a per capita basis, and the mayors enthusiastically took up the responsibility to start up the necessary projects within a short time frame.

The outcome of the meeting with the New Progressive Party's (NPP) and Popular Democratic Party's (PDP) legislative leadership was negative and political. The governor announced the government's workforce would have to be cut and taxes would have to be levied if we are to avoid the catastrophic consequences of junk-bond status. The NPP legislative leadership showed muted support. The PDP leaders announced they would fight both layoffs and taxes. To my knowledge, they have no comprehensive alternative solution to the structural deficit.

It has always been clear to me that the leaders who deal with the real world of politics—one where there is an awareness of the needs of the people and a sense of responsibility toward meeting those needs—are the mayors and leaders in the Legislature, who deal with political posturing more than problem solving.

Two other meetings dealing with the fiscal crisis were held last week at La Fortaleza. One, between the governor and Héctor O'Neill, the president of the NPP Mayors' Federation, and William "Willie" Miranda Marín, the president of the PDP Mayors' Association. The other meeting was with Chief of Staff Juan Carlos Blanco and José Rodríguez Báez, Roberto Pagán and Federico Torres Montalvo, the principal public-sector labor leaders.

The meeting with the presidents of the NPP and PDP mayors' associations was satisfactory, which was reported in the press. The meeting with the labor leaders wasn't. The labor leaders came out demanding participation in governmental decision making before decisions on measures to surmount the fiscal crisis were announced. At the same time, they shut the door to any meaningful agreements with the government by taking radical stands on the key measures the government must take to face the crisis. "We are going to keep fighting to stop the dismissal of public workers and fight for the interests of the other sectors, without imposing more taxes, and we don't accept privatizations as a solution."

The outcome of these four meetings are indicative of how the different sectors are going to align regarding the critical bills to overcome the fiscal crisis, which will come before the Legislature. The PDP legislative leadership seems intent on borrowing a page from past NPP legislative leaders.

The mayors, however, will be the leaders of a silent majority in Puerto Rico. This majority is capable of understanding that having faced three years of local recession, we are now going through a world crisis and painful but necessary decisions must be taken to overcome it and get the economy growing again. It is the leadership's responsibility to inform and educate the people about the true nature, reach and consequences of the fiscal crisis. This is no time for politics as usual because, if the measures aren't approved, we will all suffer dire consequences.

Crises afford nations and individuals opportunities for growth. When faced with maturity, dialogue, understanding, creativity and solidarity, they not only can put us on a firmer path to progress but can raise democracies to higher levels of maturity.

During a time of crisis, the government must assume responsibility for doing what must be done. The opposition must act out of principle not out of expediency. The coming weeks will reveal whether the government—the executive and legislative branches—was up to the task. They will also reveal how far the Legislature's PDP leadership is willing to go in pursuit of short-term political effects.

The PDP suffered its worst defeat ever in November. This defeat stemmed from the recession brought about by the gridlocked government we had over the past four years, presenting an indicted governor as its candidate and espousing equivocal sovereignty rhetoric as a response to the indictments against the governor.

A party in defeat must look to principles rather than expediency to find its political compass again. Political stands must stem from an objective and truthful appraisal of the situation or problems we face. Dealing in false premises, upon which to apply principles, is hypocrisy.

The PDP became the great party of Puerto Rico through its profound commitment to principle and values. One principle was honesty in government, honesty in facing the truth and honesty in proposing solutions to our problems. Muñoz Marín would tell the people: "Your best friend isn't the one who whispers the nice things in your ear that you would like to hear, but the one who tells you the unpleasant truths you wouldn't like to hear and gives you the courage and know-how to face up to and overcome the challenge."

Bowing to union, political radio-commentator or whatever pressures shows a lack of integrity, which a party can't do after a catastrophic defeat. In times like these, we must face the problem: an economy in recession and a fiscal crisis that must be overcome while we deal with that recession.

To emerge from defeat, the PDP must convince the people of Puerto Rico that it is part of the solution to the problem. Not recognizing painful measures are necessary or putting forward demagogic solutions just makes the party a part of the problem.

