

Evelyn and Goliath

As reported in *Vieques Events* during the summer of 2010, Mayor Evelyn Delorme Comacho had become very frustrated trying to fight for better ferry services for Vieques due to the arrogance and aggressive ignorance of the ATM Board. She had reached a point where she thought that a lawsuit was the only way to achieve any justice for our island. Through the intervention of the Governor and certain legislators, she backed off to give them a chance to set things right.

Well, a new director was put in place and, with the help of the Federal Transportation Administration (FTA), a more professional (and long term) approach was adopted and consultants were hired to assist. Unfortunately, the systemic problems at the ATM are so severe that the operations have disintegrated. After 4 months of unspeakably horrible cargo ferry service, the mayor filed suit against the ATM claiming a failure to perform their contracted services and asking at this time for damages of \$1,000,000.

The ferry system is supposed to operate for the benefit of Vieques and Culebra. But, the ATM management continues to ignore the real needs of Vieques. They squander the millions of dollars provided by both the federal and PR governments. They buy passenger boats instead of combination cargo / passenger boats. They operate on schedules that favor their employees instead of their clients (even cutting needed holiday service to allow employees more time with their families). They base themselves in Fajardo instead of Vieques so that they employ mostly main island people. They allocate 12 ferries per week to Culebra (1800 people) and 15 to Vieques (9300). They won't make any effort to use the short route (Ceiba) because the mayor of Fajardo fights it, and the staff doesn't want any changes.

In the meantime, our businesses can't get product, equipment, or materials because the system is so constrained. Vendors on the main island won't send their trucks and employees over here due to the lack of reliability of the scheduled service leading to extreme overtime and added expenses. Reservations ahead of time have become impossible and every trip is a gamble. Even our phone service (PRT/Claro) is suffering because installers and linemen can't get here reliably. Anything requiring running new wires from the poles has been on hold for months and months.

When businesses can't get the materials they need for construction or installation, they lay off their workers. When shoppers can't get product, they don't buy. The economy just spirals down more and more. Vieques suffers! The real damages are more than \$1,000,000.

We are the tail of the dog; the colony of the colony. Our representatives pay lip service to us. They never read their emails. They represent huge areas on the main island and couldn't care less about the few votes that we offer at election time. Let's hope that the lawsuit works some magic.