

VOICES

Assumptions: Hotels or tinglars?

The Daily Sun, March 9, describes prospective tourism developments in the area formerly The Northeastern Corridor Natural Reserve. Among these developments are 350, 250, and 150-room hotels. One might assume that these hotels would take advantage of proximity to the beaches in the area. One might also assume that these hotels, with so many rooms, would rise to more than one floor above the ground. Further, one might assume that these hotels would not be built without windows facing the sea.

These assumptions produce another, that the largest colony of endangered leather-backed sea turtles in Puerto Rico would discontinue its 200 nests per year on the adjacent beaches and abandon Puerto Rico because of the illumination from the hotel windows that has driven sea turtles from other Puerto Rican beaches. I further assume that there is no mitigation for such a loss, a result of deliberate and foreseeable destructive land use. I don't assume but expect that continual environmental penalties would prove prohibitive for the construction of hotels within sight of the sea at this location.

*Frank H. Wadsworth,
San Juan*

Sleep tight

What works for insomnia? Counting sheep is a bore and as you do it yourself it might even keep you awake. Wee-hour right-winger rantings over WOSO? Better. Reading? You might get too interested. Now nothing beats status hearings for sheer monotony and nothingness of purpose. You can use a recording, they're all verbatim reruns since Ferré and Hernández Colón begat this mother of all red herrings in the 70s. One can only groan that sleeplessness is the only distress where our pols might help us out.

*Mateo Peralta,
Guaynabo*

You want opinions?

To Sen. Fas Alzamora:

Your free association pact with the United States proposes the following: 1) Puerto Rican sovereignty; 2) the pact could only be amended by mutual agreement; 3) recognize dual citizenship; 4) issue Puerto Rican passports; 5) keep Social Security, veterans, Medicare and Medicaid benefits; 6) Puerto Rico can negotiate trade agreements; 7) repeal the Cabotage shipping laws; 8) Puerto Rican control of immigration; 9) Puerto Rican control of communications and environmental laws; 10) use of the U.S. dollar and U.S. banking laws; 11) Puerto Rican imposition of tariffs to goods from the U.S.; 12) Vieques and Culebra would receive mitigation funding; 13) U.S. money to fund programs in education, health, private sector development, nonprofit groups, the environment, and public infrastructure; 14) U.S. Mail services; 15) Puerto Rican control of public safety; 16) Puerto Rican control over its border up to 200 miles; 17) departure of the Federal court system from Puerto Rico; 18) etc., etc.

Tell me Mr. Fas Alzamora, do you take members of the U.S. Congress for stupid? How about U.S. taxpayers? What exactly do U.S. taxpayers get in return for this "wonderful" pact? Since you are so eager to hear opinions on this pact, why not start by getting one from the Congressional Budget Office? Mr. Fas Alzamora, with this proposal you try to demean the intelligence of Puerto Rican voters.

*Ricardo Goenaga,
Mayagüez*

Narcogovernance

It's in the news that some legislators are pleading for leniency for some drug dealers. Well, that's what meaty campaign contributions get you. Now it's a matter of bribing a few judges.

*Anita Roig,
Santurce*

Status Pocus

The status debate is flaring up once again but try as I might, I cannot understand the position of the commonwealth party. Why would an honorable people wish to be perpetually subsidized by a social order that they don't relate to, and have no intention of supporting? And why would those that do support the American social order, taxpayers in particular, wish to perpetuate at considerable expense such a dishonorable situation? It makes no sense, which is a reliable indication that there are hidden agendas in play. Hidden agendas generally come to a bad ending for the majority of stakeholders, and that is why they are hidden in the first place.

Citizenship is a duty more than a privilege. It is not a tax-free lotto prize, and those who perceive it as such are in for a rude awakening.

*Dennis D'Inzeo,
Aguadilla*

The black & the brown

President Jimmy Carter didn't know peanuts about foreign affairs, but he was right on target on energy. Then along came a smooth-talking not so clever actor whose first act as president was to remove the solar water heater from the roof of the White House.

As the decades go by, the sticky black stuff under the ground threatens everything humanity holds dear, as economic collapse and all the famine, disease, poverty and war it entails loom ahead ever so more menacingly. If we'd followed Jimmy, we'd be in the clear by now, I'll wager you whatever. Why is the world so stupid? Why must we not lift a pinky till the sticky brown stuff hits the fan.

*Rocco Sastre,
Ponce*

Only divine intervention

To God:

Lord we beseech Thee. Come down to Puerto Rico and bring our eternal torment to a close. Blast out a lightning bolt at whoever so much as mentions status. Allow us to once again breathe and think and live and deliver us from red herrings. Amen.

*Joaquín Serrano,
Condado*

Re: The commonwealth option

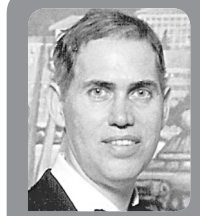
I can't, for the life of me, see why there should be a commonwealth option on any ballot aimed at solving the Puerto Rico status problem; the commonwealth is the present status and IT IS THE PROBLEM. You can't solve this or any other problem by choosing the underlying problem as a solution.

Something else must be attempted. And it is unfair to say that Puerto Rico is too poor or too ignorant or too immoral or too uneducated or too anything for something else to be tried. It is the commonwealth itself that keeps Puerto Rico too poor, too ignorant, too immoral, too uneducated or too anything else to allow it become a state of the Union. The commonwealth simply does not work beyond a certain level of development. It will be observed that none of the states of the Union have remained stagnant after statehood. Moreover, federal income taxes as an obstacle for statehood will not be a factor because until Puerto Rico reaches a threshold income amount to be able to pay those taxes they will not be imposed.

*Sebastián Pérez,
San Juan*

The opinions expressed herein do not represent the views of the Daily Sun.

German POWs in Florida



José L. Bolívar
Commentary

During one of few and memorable times my dad and I visited the abbey in what is now St. Leo University, Father Gregory, a German-born Benedictine monk that taught at the time my father attended St. Leo, talked to us about the time German prisoners of war, or POWs, would come from nearby Date City to attend Roman Catholic mass at the abbey. My father studied at St. Leo College Preparatory School during the World War II. Founded in 1889 as St. Leo College by Benedictine Order monks, by 1920, it had been transformed into a preparatory school. It was here, with the Benedictine monks, that my dad spent his elementary and high school years.

As Father Gregory was fluent in German, he was able to converse with the POWs. He and the rest of the Benedictine community made them feel welcome at St. Leo. Given that the war was still going on, it seemed that this situation caused some discomfort among some of the residents of the neighboring communities. According to what Father Gregory recounted, the student center, a structure that dated from the time the school was founded, was burnt during this time. An investigation revealed that the fire was a result of arson. Though the monks suspected that it was related to the relationship between the POWs and the abbey, no one was found responsible. Father Gregory's personal account of this story motivated me to further research these events.

German POWs came to Florida as part of an international migration of captives that began to arrive almost since the United States became involved in the war. The first POWs were from German Navy U-boats sunk off the coast of North Carolina; then from Rommel's Afrika Korps — captured in North Africa in 1943; and finally from the Italian and French campaigns of 1944 and 1945. By the end of the war, 378,000 German POWs were held in the United States. Of these, 10,000 were in Florida; most of which were at two major wartime base camps: Camp Blading, near Starke and Camp Gordon Johnson, near Carrabelle. Others were stationed at such diverse places as: Date City, which is near St. Leo, Daytona Beach, Homestead, Jacksonville, Kendall, Leesburg, Melbourne, Orlando, and Winter Haven.

Though repatriation began while the war still raged, most of the prisoners were repatriated between May 1945 and July 1946. Of the 378,000 German POWs in the U.S., about 200,000 were returned back to Germany while the remainder was sent to labor camps in Britain and France for another year or more.

Little is known about the POW experience in the U.S., and even less about personal experiences such as Father Gregory's. This was not only due to the fact that the POWs were spaced through small rural camps, but also because American military authorities at the time, in accordance to the provision of the 1929 Geneva Convention regarding the handling of POWs, limited information on the POW program. There was also real concern that public awareness would bring either public fear or criticism of the handling of the POWs, and inhibit the most efficient use of this inexpensive labor pool. Officially sanctioned press coverage was relatively sparse. Therefore, personal experiences, such as that of Father Gregory are so important to conserve and understand this important chapter of our history.

Sadly, Father Gregory passed away a few years ago, and this story is all that remains of his experience with the German POWs. Hopefully, others will come forward and share their experiences with generations far removed from these events.

José L. Bolívar holds a doctorate in history and is completing a book on the economic impact of World War II on Puerto Rico. He may be reached at jbolivarpr@prtc.net.