

New political party blasts economic development plan

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The current pattern of "so-called economic development" of Puerto Rico is not planned, contaminates the air, water and land, and creates few jobs, while making the island increasingly unlivable, Rogelio Figueroa, head of the fledgling party Puerto Ricans for Puerto Rico, said Saturday.

"We have to change habits and create economic development patterns that assure us a future of health, security and happiness," he said in a news conference at party headquarters in Santurce.

Political leaders' constant claim that the construction industry is a keystone of the economy is "a lie" because it represents less than 1 percent of Puerto Rico's gross domestic product, he said. The constant development of housing and urban sprawl far outpaces population growth and a tiny fraction of workers are employed in the construction industry, he said.

A "restoration economy" based on recovering and protecting natural resources would produce more benefits, jobs and services than destroying green spaces to build, he said.

The party has no position on Puerto Rico's status and focuses instead on citizen participation in government affairs, sustainable development, quality of life and an effective administration "that does more with less."

The culture of consumption and the generation of waste are "out of control," he said.

"There is very simple technology for recycling and we're not using it," he said.

Unchecked development, deforestation and "excessive topographical modifications" for projects flood reservoirs with sediment and impact water quality, he said, and rivers are choked with trash.

"Water is life, but it's constantly under attack," Figueroa said.

The island's urban centers are in a state of decay, worsening quality of life and increasing crime, he said.

There are "thousands and thousands and thousands" of empty urban lots and houses that could be redeveloped for housing and businesses, rejuvenating cities while putting a halt to sprawl, he said.

The party supports developing long-term development strate-

gies that protect the environment, rather than short-term growth that hurts quality of life; developing the market for local products; and making small and medium businesses the foundation of the economy.

It also proposes the creation of a team of public and private entities to "rescue," repair and optimize the natural resources and infrastructure related to water, as well as growing the agriculture industry and creating a Collective Transportation Authority as an umbrella agency for buses, the Urban Train, the

metrobus, taxis, minivans and ferries, which are all under the control of different agencies.

Puerto Ricans for Puerto Rico has only 5,000 of the 100,000 endorsement signatures it needs to be able to participate in November's elections.

"We have a long way to go," said party co-founder Gloriela Muñoz, granddaughter of the late statesman Luis Muñoz Marín. "But we're already participating and making changes. This is for life."