Livin’ la Vida Loca

Puerto Rico officials ran wild with AIDS funds

August 1, 1999 By Jay Blotcher

Ricky Martin’s hips ranked a distant second when it came to shaking up Puerto Rico in April. The real shocker in this U.S. commonwealth was news of federal-AIDS-funds embezzlement by high-ranking officials. The allegations spurred three Republican Reps in the House to demand an audit of federal AIDS programs, and made strange bedfellows of activists and conservatives in the name of AIDS accountability.

Three officials of the now-defunct San Juan AIDS Institute were accused of funneling 2.2 million government dollars into personal accounts and political coffers. The trial, which began in March after six years of investigations, is expected to drag through the fall. It has implicated both of Puerto Rico’s major political parties, including former San Juan mayor Hector Luis Acevedo and current governor Pedro Rosello, who also serves as the local manager of Al Gore’s presidential campaign. (Though some are gawking at Gore’s choice, Rosello became his man in San Juan before the scandal broke.)

Pacientes de SIDA pro Politica Sana (PSPS), an activist group pushing for prosecution of the defendants, has maintained a vigil outside the courthouse. The group’s leader, José Colón, said 26 people plan to file a class-action suit against the defendants. “We’re going to be watchdogs,” he said.

Colón’s sentiments were repeated by unlikely allies: In April, citing the San Juan scandal as an example of systemic mismanagement, House Majority Leader Dick Armey (R-Texas), Rep. Thomas Bliley Jr. (R-Virginia) and Rep. Thomas Coburn (R-Oklahoma) asked the U.S. General Accounting Office (GOA) to audit all government-funded AIDS programs. Advocates fear that the trio has an ulterior motive—to wipe out billions of federal AIDS dollars.

But the audit sits well with PWA activist Michael Petrelis, who made enemies of some HIVers last year when he tapped Coburn to support his own AIDS accountability crusade. Although “Coburn is no Jesse Helms,” said Washington, DC, ACT UPer Wayne Turner, who supports PSPS and the GOA audit, to date no Democrats have signed on.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/Livin-la-Vida-Loca-11291-5220