



Gov. Alejandro García Padilla discusses plans to create 50,000 jobs in 18 months. From left, are Environmental Quality Board President Laura Vélez, Senate President Eduardo Bhatia, García Padilla, House Speaker Jaime Perelló, Economic Development & Commerce Secretary Alberto Bacó Bagué and Trade & Exports Co. Executive Director Francisco Chévere.

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this time it was delivered by myriad college students and other youths, in a direct appeal to business leaders, who discussed their talents and hopes that their career opportunities would be met here on the island in the future.

Appearing along with the governor was former Major League slugger Edgar Martínez, a star performer for the Seattle Mariners during the 1990s. He was introduced with a video recounting his exploits during the 1995 division series against the Yankees, in which he hit a game-winning grand slam and a game-winning double that catapulted his team into the American League championships.

When Martínez addressed the crowd, however, he focused on the at-bat before the series-winning hit, which ended in a strikeout. Rather than focusing on his strikeouts, he was told to be ready for his next turn at bat, when he would get a winning hit for the team. And that is exactly what he did.

García Padilla's message to the

business leaders was similar to what the Seattle coach told Martínez.

"Now is not the time to look back or try to fix blame for previous failures. It's time to look ahead," the governor said. "You are in the batter's box, and history is making the pitch. It's up to you whether you strike out, or make a hit for the team."

"There is an urgent need to create jobs," García Padilla added, calling every job created "a hit." "My administration is clear that every effort has to be motivated by and directed toward job creation. This enormous demand for work must be filled for the well-being of our people and our country."

And he was backed up by the Economic Development & Commerce Department's (DDEC by its Spanish acronym) Alberto Bacó Bagué, who pledged action and execution. "In Puerto Rico, everything has been studied," the new DDEC chief said, quoting the architect of the island's Operation Bootstrap industrialization program, Teodoro Moscoso. "I've come here to execute."

For García Padilla and Bacó Bagué,

creating jobs isn't just about improving the economy, but about improving the quality of life across Puerto Rico, and a major way to begin is by making improvements in the social crisis on the island.

Recalling a conversation with CARIBBEAN BUSINESS Publisher & Editor in Chief Manuel Casiano, Bacó Bagué said job creation was a necessary ingredient in the fight against crime and other social ills.

"The lack of jobs is the biggest problem that Puerto Rico faces. What options do children and parents have if they can't find work? They could even fall into crime," Bacó Bagué said.

#### JOBS, JOBS, JOBS

The first results of the García Padilla administration's jobs push were also announced at last week's conference, with 10 businesses pledging to create 10,800 jobs, roughly 20% of the total he promised to create over his first 18 months in office.

Some 6,680 jobs will be in the restaurant field, with Wendco of Puerto Rico pledging 750 this year, the

Pollos Campero chain promising 180 jobs and the Puerto Rico Restaurant Association an additional combined 5,000 jobs. Other pledges came from Paciv Inc., which provides sophisticated calibration services to pharmaceuticals; the San Fermín Solar Farm; technology firm Fusionworks; and Caribe Tecno. Plaza Internacional, a new high-end shopping mall under construction, is pledging the creation of 2,000 jobs; and Supermercados Econo an additional 2,000 jobs to build and operate a new distribution center if the incentives being created by the government go through.

When questioned about the fact that many jobs are low-skill, minimum-wage jobs and not the professional jobs needed to stop the increasing "brain drain" from the island, García Padilla said all types of jobs need to be created.

"Out on the street, all sorts of people need jobs. We need jobs for highly skilled engineers, so we will create them, and we will create

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