

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Puerto Rico Governor Resigns After Historic Protests; Will Leave Office August 2

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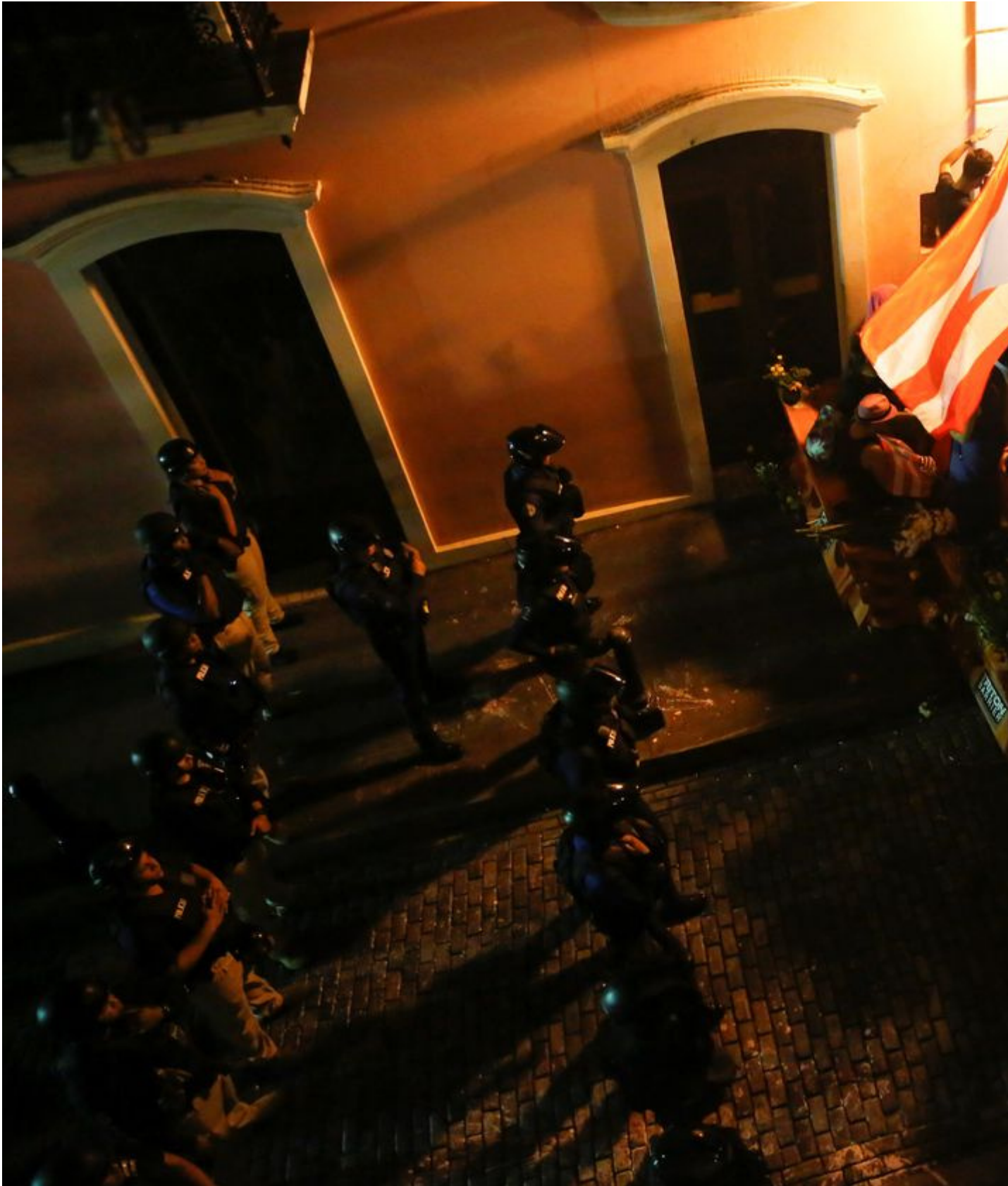


Puerto Rico Governor Ricardo Rosselló said late Wednesday he would resign effective August 2, a move that follows historic protests in the U.S. commonwealth over corruption and scandals that convulsed the island's political class.

His decision marks the first time in history that a Puerto Rico governor has resigned, and it comes after a 32-count federal indictment that charged former top government officials and BDO Puerto Rico/USVI president Fernando Scherrer on multiple counts of fraud. But the more explosive scandal that served as the springboard for the massive and persistent protests was the leak of nearly 900 pages of private conversations on the app Telegram between Mr. Rosselló and his advisors. Mr. Rosselló was also the admin of the chat. The

governor said he would leave office at 5:00 p.m. on the aforementioned date.

According to the [Wall Street Journal](#), in Puerto Rico the governorship would typically be passed to the secretary of state, but he was among several officials who recently resigned. Secretary of Justice Wanda Vázquez is next in the line of succession and Mr. Rosselló said she would replace him. He said he would help facilitate an orderly transition.



"I gave the maximum, dedicating day and night, weekends and holidays to meet the needs of my people," Mr. Rosselló said. "I feel that to continue in this position presents difficulty for the success that we have achieved to endure."

His announcement came after 11:30 p.m., hours after it was expected -- a delay that left many in Puerto Rico anxious and wondering whether they would have to wait longer for the governor to relinquish office.

A member of Puerto Rico's pro-statehood New Progressive Party and a Democrat, Mr. Rosselló was elected in 2016, with promises to lift the island of over 3 million out of economic contraction -- Puerto Rico has been in a protracted recession that has lasted more than a decade.



The U.S. territory has also struggled to recover from the devastation wrought by Hurricane Maria in 2017, and its finances continue to be monitored by a federal-appointed board overseeing its bankruptcy restructuring efforts.

According to WSJ, Ms. Vázquez said Mr. Rosselló made “the right decision, for the good of both his family and for Puerto Rico, as I let him know.” She said she would assume the governor’s office “if necessary,” leaving open the possibility that another politician from the New Progressive Party could be elevated to the role.

Ms. Vázquez is a former prosecutor and used to lead an office that addressed discrimination and violence against women.

In 2018, she faced allegations of potential ethics violations over alleged interference in a burglary case involving her daughter's home, though it was later cleared by a judge. Senate President Thomas Rivera Schatz called for her resignation as a result—which could be a source of tension while she is governor, WSJ said.



Puerto Rico Gov. Ricardo Rosselló

WSJ said a roar erupted in Old San Juan Wednesday night when thousands of demonstrators who packed the streets near La Fortaleza heard news of Mr. Rosselló's resignation.

"This is the people's victory," said Jessica Torres, a 34-year-old housekeeper from the eastern town of Fajardo. "When the people come together, we prevail."

"This is historic," said Tomás Carrera, a 43-year-old publicist who said he attended the protests outside La Fortaleza "every single day."

"My whole life, I've heard of corruption," he said. "But it had never been proven the way it's been proven now. This chat confirmed what people already knew."

Mr. Rosselló's government sunk into political crisis after federal authorities [unveiled a corruption probe](#) that reached deep into the government and indicted two former high-ranking officials. Then, text messages between the governor and top aides were leaked online, containing sexist and antigay comments and remarks dismissive of the public and of deaths tied to the hurricane.

Mr. Rosselló's successor will have to work to restore Washington's trust in the local government. The federal government controls tens of billions of dollars of disaster aid for Puerto Rico, but Washington has been leery of PR's handling of the funds and President

Donald Trump has been vocal about his distrust of the island's leaders handling of federal dollars.

According to WSJ, on Wednesday, Jenniffer González-Colón, Puerto Rico's nonvoting delegate in Congress and Mr. Rosselló's former running mate, urged Mr. Trump in a letter to install a federal coordinator to oversee the spending of reconstruction funds in light of the recent scandals.

"Greater efficiency and transparency in disbursement of funds is needed so that the people of Puerto Rico, U.S. taxpayers and the federal government can be confident in the results," she wrote.

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