



Three sides to the story

I often say there are three sides to a story. Everyone has a natural bias when telling their side. You have one view, the opposing view, and you have the truth usually somewhere in the middle. Recently, GQ Magazine released an article two days before the anniversary of Hurricane Maria (which devastated our island) that highlights the tax acts (specifically Acts 20 and 22), and how Puerto Rico became a tax haven for the “Super Rich”. While almost all the facts in the article were accurate (sans what is truly exempt as PR sourced income), they were mostly presented in a disappointing way. Moreover, it was unfortunate to see how the facts that did not support Jesse Barron’s (the author) controversial angle were glossed over or omitted entirely from the article.

I’m used to getting requests from left-leaning reporters, so it has become easy to suss out if someone is truly looking to learn about one of the only facets of economic growth on the island, or if they are looking to push an agenda. Sometimes, it’s both and it works both ways. We honor such requests to communicate what the island is doing for its economic development and to convey how the 20/22 community contributes to the economy beyond just the money we spend here.

Jesse Barron, the GQ author, was invited and given full access to our annual Cocktails and Compliance event last May, to see how the 20/22 Act Society was trying to ensure compliance for members and general recipients with local and federal tax rules. He was also allowed to interview about 30 members and non-members (if they consented, and some would later regret such consent), for insights into the growing local expat community that has been built around the tax acts. Unfortunately, Mr. Barron chose to quote the most scandalous comments primarily for purposes of inciting outrage and supporting a negative view of the “Super Rich”, which we have been fighting from the day we got here.

Mr. Barron chose to highlight that Sangria was poured to welcome guests (who presumably got drunk) and highlighted a question regarding a member's tax deduction for jets. He chose not to mention that the same jet was used to ferry indigent care patients off the island and bring back supplies. He chose to highlight the thousands of dollars spent by someone at a pool club on drinks, but not the million dollars raised in a week for over a dozen local charities right after Maria hit. Nor did he highlight the thirteen relief missions led by Society members, where food and water was delivered to towns like Ciales and Morovis, which had not even been visited by FEMA at that time. Mr. Barron chose to minimize the 12,000 direct jobs created by the acts as paltry, and not highlight the fact that none of those jobs created were gardeners for the rich, as he alluded to, but rather the thousands of high-paying professional jobs created mainly in the financial service sector.

Most residents only see the stereotype that is perpetuated in articles like those, and they see no benefit to themselves or to our island. There is one more recent example of our attempts to break that stereotype. Last week House Bill 1645 was approved by both the House and Senate, and it's waiting to be signed into law. That law, created and introduced by Ricky Patel and Wes Farrell (from Farrell Patel Jomarron & Lopez Trial Attorneys), will provide protections and remedies to those insured households whose properties were significantly damaged by Hurricane Maria. Without Act 20/22 recipients and members like them, that would likely not have happened.

At the end of the GQ article, we were compared to the invasive species of the Iguana. A non-native species introduced that has taken over, growing unchecked and now encouraged by the government for meat consumption to curb its population. While I'm not clear if the Iguana brought any benefits to the island when introduced a 100 years ago, I can ascertain the benefits our "species" have contributed to make our island better for all, not just for the "Super Rich".