

# LIN-MANUEL MIRANDA

## Making Lemonade from Lemons

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Collaboration is essential to creating an evening of theater: many art forms coalesce to create a singular experience. From *In The Heights* to *Bring it On*, to *Hamilton*, I have always relied on a village of trusted collaborators to bring new work to life. In theater, you cannot go it alone.

Grappling with the issue of Puerto Rico's debt crisis is no different. I seek advice from those who know more about the topic than I do. I listen to opinions different than my own. I ask questions. I read. I reflect. I write.

It is agonizing to write about Puerto Rico today, and the latest developments in its debt crisis. Many leaders I admire, people who know and care deeply about the island, have conflicting opinions.

Here I share my own opinion, with all due respect to the many leaders whose knowledge and experience I have drawn upon, including Congresswoman Nydia Velázquez and New York City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito. Congresswoman Velázquez, in particular, has carried the baton in this struggle. She has truly been “in the room where it happens” every time – and flung and kicked doors open when necessary. She has been nothing short of ferocious in her defense of the island, and her insights have been invaluable.

I have also had many conversations with my father who, despite having spent nearly all of his life in New York City, is as concerned with Puerto Rico as if the island was his neighborhood. I'll admit to more than one imaginary conversation with my Abuelo Wisin, who taught me to love ‘mi islita’ since I was a child.

The good news is that Speaker Paul Ryan has fulfilled his promise: he worked together with Republicans and Democrats, and has created a bill that will determine the immediate future of Puerto Rico.

In a Congress known for its gridlock on any number of important issues, any legislation that deals with Puerto Rico's debt restructuring by July 1st, must be perceived as a glimmer of hope -a faint hope, but hope nonetheless.

Many people say that the legislation does not do enough. I agree.

Many are concerned that the creation of a fiscal board is essentially an unelected government parallel to the one democratically elected by voters on the island. I share their concern.

I do know that we must ensure that the legislation will allow for the restructuring of debt; that it will grant Puerto Rico a bit of breathing room; and that it will yield the critical, basic services that its residents so desperately need – and are not currently receiving (like functioning hospitals and open schools).

We must make sure that Puerto Rico is not consumed by lawsuits, defending itself against claims from hedge-fund shareholders.

We must ensure that the powers granted to the Governor of Puerto Rico actually nurture a new generation of young workers. Capping their earnings to half of the minimum wage—a mere \$4.25 dollars an hour—would do the opposite.

My cousins in Puerto Rico are barely out of their teens. They love the island and wish to stay, but cutting wages for those under 25 (as the legislation currently proposes) will result in an entire generation leaving the island for the U.S. mainland. How can Puerto Rico prosper if it creates a financial environment hostile to the well-being of its youth, its next generation of homeowners, teachers, doctors and artists?

In spite of its many shortcomings, the legislation proposed is the only option that Congress is currently willing to pass. That is the sad reality.

In Spanish, there is an expression: “*haciendo de tripas corazones*.” It literally means “making hearts out of tripe”. Its nearest English equivalent is “making lemonade from lemons.” The idiom speaks to a resolute conviction to make the best of a less-than-ideal lot.

So we strive for hearts. We continue to shine a light on Puerto Rico. We listen. We write. We work. We make our voices heard. *De corazón* (from our heart), we must. We cannot go it alone.

*Lin-Manuel Miranda is Pulitzer Prize, MacArthur Grant, Tony, Grammy, Emmy, Olivier, Drama Desk and Lucille Lortel award-winning actor, writer and composer. His new musical, “Hamilton”, is currently running on Broadway.*