

Science Trust morphs into watered-down body ^[1]

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By : EVA LLORENS eval@caribbeanbusinesspr.com ^[2] *Caribbean Business* ^[3] Edition: September 29, 2011 | Volume: 39 | No: 38 Legislation speeds through without hearings; now awaits governor's signature; fewer private trustees It appears to be the end for the Puerto Rico Science, Technology & Research Trust as we have known it, sources said. Senate Bill 1839, approved last week and now on its way to La Fortaleza, waters down the trust's mission, which called for it to cultivate and fund high-tech research that would lead to patents and commercial products. The new law allows for funding of other kinds of initiatives. The legislative record shows the House approved the Senate bill without first taking it to public hearings or amending it. Trust officials have declined to comment on the bill, contending there is an internal investigation into the trust's operations. Sources told CARIBBEAN BUSINESS, however, that the lower chamber's Socioeconomic Development Committee didn't receive input from trust officials before sending the legislation to a vote, even though a report on the bill says otherwise. They noted the bill is open-ended. As originally submitted, it contained definitions of science, biological sciences, development and technology projects, but its final version omitted such definitions, paving the way for a wider range of initiatives to be funded. Another change imposed by the approved bill is the trust's composition. The organization currently has 11 members, six from the private sector and five from the government. As reported exclusively in a CARIBBEAN BUSINESS special series, three of the private-sector posts sit vacant, and a struggle has ensued in recent months over efforts by the three remaining private-sector trustees to fill those seats with candidates they claim to be world-class, alleging the government's candidates weren't as qualified. The three sitting private-sector members have charged the government with hindering the organization's mission by not filling the vacancies and blocking other initiatives, to which government officials have been largely silent. Puerto Rico Economic Development & Commerce Secretary José Pérez-Riera wasn't available for comment. The new bill calls for 11 trustees: four from the government sector, four from academia and three private-sector trustees from the business and technology community. The term of two of the three existing private-sector trustees expires within weeks, and sources expect them not to be replaced. The University of Puerto Rico (UPR)

president and the four government trustees will be ex officio members, which means they can send representatives to meetings. The bill also transfers three key UPR facilities—the Comprehensive Cancer Center, Centro Médico de Río Piedras (San Juan) and the Molecular Science Building—to the proposed 69.9-cuerdas (67.8-acre) Science District, and allows for transfers of other facilities, according to the bill.

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