

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item E-3
September 13, 2023
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago
Vice Mayor Rhonda Anderson
Commissioner Melissa Castro
Commissioner Ariel Fernandez
Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Attorney, Cristina Suárez
City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Maria Cruz
Tom Wells
Nicolas Cabrera
Venny Torre
Jim Cason
Wayne “Chip” Withers
Annie Betancourt
Samuel Lawson
Gordon Sokoloff
Ed Santamaria
Lourdes Abadin
Alicia Fernandez
Laureano Cancio
Carter Sox
Jaime Salamanca
Karelia Carbonell

City Commission Meeting
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Agenda Item E-3 - Ordinance of the City Commission amending the City Charter to change the date of the General Election from April 8, 2025 to November 5, 2024 and to change the date of all subsequent elections; providing for a 4-month reduction of existing terms of office; moving the Run-Off Election to 4 weeks after the General Election and moving the Swearing-In date to 5 weeks after the General Election, and amending the qualifying period.

Agenda Item E-3 [9:44 a.m.]

An Ordinance of the City Commission amending Section 1- “Creation, Composition, Election, Terms, Vacancies, Qualifications” and Section 1.1 “Run-Off Election” of Article 1 “City Commission and Mayor” of the City Charter to change the date of the General Election from April 08, 2025 to November 05, 2024 and to change the date of all subsequent elections; providing for a four (4) month reduction of existing terms of office; moving the Run-Off Election to four (4) weeks after the General Election and moving the Swearing-In date to five (5) weeks after the General Election; amending Section 3 “Election to Office; Commission As Judge of Qualifications, Requirements, Ballots, Canvassing, and Qualifying Periods” amending the qualifying period; adopting such Charter Amendments pursuant to Section 100.3605, 101.75, and 166.021(4), Florida Statutes; providing for a repealer provision, severability clause, codification, and providing for an effective date.

(Sponsored by Vice Mayor Anderson)

(Co-Sponsored by Mayor Lago)

Mayor Lago: Moving on to Item E-3, which is time certain for 9:30. Mr. Clerk.

City Attorney Suárez: Mayor, may...?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Yeah, please read it into the...

Commissioner Castro: May I read it into the record? E-3 is an ordinance of the City Commission amending Section 1, “Creation, Composition, Election Terms, Vacancies, Qualifications,” in Section 1.1, “Runoff Election” of Article 1, “City Commission and Mayor” of the City Charter to change the date of the general election from April 8, 2025 to November 5, 2024 and to change the date of all subsequent elections, providing for a four-month reduction of existing terms of office, moving the runoff election to four weeks after the general election, and moving the swearing in date to five weeks after the general election, amending Section 3, “Election to Office; Commission as Judge of Qualifications, Requirements, Ballots, Canvassing, and Qualifying Periods” amending the qualifying period, adopting such charter amendments pursuant to Section 100.3605, 101.75,

and 166.0214, Florida Statutes, providing for repealer provisions, severability clause, codification, and providing for an effective date. This is a public hearing item.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Madam City Attorney. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Can we hear from the public, please?

City Clerk Urquia: Okay. First speaker is Maria Cruz.

Mayor Lago: If I may ask, as a courtesy to the Commission, we have a really long agenda today, and to all of the speakers who are here today, I called for a 9:30 time certain because I wanted to make sure that it wasn't in the middle of the day and that everybody had an opportunity to speak maybe before they headed to work. So, if we could try to be as brief on both sides of the issue, whether you're in favor or you're against because I want to make sure that everybody has an opportunity to speak whatever they may want to say, and that they don't leave as a result of us going over the time. We also have a 10 o'clock time certain item and further issues that we have to address. So, thank you. Ms. Cruz.

Maria Cruz: Mrs. Maria Cruz, 1447 Miller Road, a resident of the City Beautiful since 1976. Sometimes I wonder why we promise and don't deliver. Sometimes I wonder what good is it to come to City Commission and listen to plans, and then make plans based on what you hear. And then lo and behold, emergencies happen. And we have to rush items, and we can't do what we promised we were going to do. Last time we discussed this item, I heard very clearly in this same chamber that this item was going to be brought up in October. Last time I checked, and you know I'm a little old, sometimes I get confused, but I'm looking at the agenda, it says September 13th. This is not October. And the reason for that, if I remember correctly after watching the video, was to give an opportunity for people to have -- I think they called it a sunshine meeting or some kind of town hall meeting so we could listen to the population, to the people that happen to pay the taxes in this city, the people that vote -- go to elections, the people that expect election results to have consequences. And something must have happened. I don't know whether we had an earthquake, a hurricane, or something major happened, that now we have to address it with doing what we said we were going to do. I wonder if I can do the same when I promise IRS to send a check or things like that, because obviously the elected officials do not have to follow what they say they will do. I'm sorry, but this is not what the people of Coral Gables were promised. Unless there's a major event that's going to happen in October that will keep us from doing what we promised, I think you all are out of line. Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Tom Wells.

Mayor Lago: Good morning, sir.

Tom Wells: Good morning. Hi, my name is Tom Wells. I am a resident of Coral Gables for almost 30 years and my business is located in Coral Gables. I oppose the requested move of the election of the Commission from the second Tuesday of April to be bundled with the general elections in November. I've exchanged emails with Commissioner Anderson as the reasons for my disapproval, as well as including some of those comments in a recent Gables Insider article. To summarize, I'm against the change because I'm in favor of informed voters, not quantity of voters. That was referenced in the article that you had, Mayor Lago, in your recent opinion letter. Also, secondly, it will be more difficult for Commission candidates to explain their position when they're competing with candidates in presidential, senate, congressional, state and other local elections and referendums. All the campaigning, debating, advertising, and soliciting creates partisan voting and voter fatigue. Third, why is moving an election from April into hurricane season in November a reasonable proposition? You may know that Hurricane Nicole hit Vero Beach last year on November 10th, two days after the election. For the safety of our community, it would be more prudent to prepare for hurricanes that occur in November and vote for Commissioners in April by early voting, mail-in ballots, or day of election voting. I understand that there would be no early voting for a runoff election that occurred in November, which will lower voter turnout. Secondly, if you want to change the Coral Gables City Charter, it should be done by voters. Article 1, Section 1 of the Coral Gables City Charter specifically designates that Commissioners' elections are held on the second Tuesday of April during every odd year for an office of four-year terms. Section 18.3(a) of the City Code states the following in order to change the City Charter: Required, all proposals for amendments to the City Charter shall be submitted to the qualified electors of the City and in order to become effective, shall receive the affirmative vote of a majority of those voting on such proposals. I understand the law cited in 23-6188 and the Florida Attorney General opinions that suggest the date of elections can be changed by ordinance, as well as the term. However, Section 166.03(2) of Florida Statutes titled "Charter Amendments," provides the charter can only be changed by a majority of the electors voting in referendum on such amendment. This has been addressed by Attorney General. It's never been addressed by any court. And Attorney General opinions are different from court opinions. If you truly want voters to participate in the election process, they should decide this issue moving their voting date. Finally, the voters in South Miami were given the opportunity in 2020 pursuant to a special election to determine whether to change the election day of their Commissioners from February to November and increase the term of those Commissioners by nine months. Despite assertions that there is unanimous approval or nearly unanimous approval to change the date of the election, over one third of those voters, 2,050 voted against changing the date of the election. Why is this Commission treating Coral Gables voters differently than South Miami voters? And you're literally seeking to move the election into hurricane season and shorten the terms of Commissioners. If you must change the day of elections, I would strongly prefer the right to vote with the Coral Gables residents on this important issue. Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir.

Commissioner Castro: Very informative. Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Nicolas Cabrera.

Mayor Lago: Good morning, sir.

Nicolas Cabrera: Good morning, members of the Commission. Good morning.

Commissioner Castro: Good morning.

Mr. Cabrera: For the record, my name is Nicolas Cabrera, and I reside at 45 Antilla Avenue, Coral Gables, Florida, and I am born and raised in the City of Coral Gables. I'm sure many of you already know that. Prior to the August Commission meeting, I sent each of you a letter expressing my concerns regarding Agenda Items E-8 and E-9, both of which pertain to the change of date for the Coral Gables municipal election. To be clear, my concerns do not lie with changing the date. In fact, I am unequivocally in support of moving our City's municipal election from April to November. My concerns at the time pertained to the extension of terms which would have come because of Item E-9. I applaud Vice Mayor Anderson and Mayor Lago for their leadership -- excuse me, for their leadership and for taking the charge in supporting the more ethical choice, electing to reduce their terms by four months instead of extending them by 20. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Commissioner Menendez for voting in favor of this item with his constituents. I feared at the time that some of the members of this Commission would attempt to extend their terms. This is not only an ethically wrong decision, but an undemocratic method to hold onto a position of office. I'm glad our Commission made the right choice in the end. However, over the last week, an opinion editorial has been published multiple times through different media outlets titled, "The Battle for Coral Gables: Protecting Your Voice." This letter, written by Commissioner Melissa Castro, makes the argument that by changing the election to November, our voices will not be heard. I'm curious, why won't our voices be heard? Am I wrong in my understanding that more people voting equals more democracy, or that more people voting is more voices being heard, or that more people voting equals more civic engagement? Mayor Lago said it best, voting is the cornerstone of American democracy. This is undoubtedly true. Voting is our ability to make our voices heard. It is a privilege bestowed upon us as individuals and our greatest tool for making change. Thus, I believe it is the responsibility of our elected officials to make voting a more fair and open practice. I believe it is the responsibility of our elected officials to put their personal concerns aside and make elections more accessible to all voters, not a minority that wishes to make themselves appear as the majority. Our typical April elections witnessed staggeringly low voter turnouts. Our November elections see over 20,000 voters turn out. This is compared to just over 6,905 voters who turned out for the Coral Gables election April of this year, representing only 20.92 percent of the total 33,002 voters living in Coral Gables who were registered at the time. It really appears to me that 20,000 votes are a great deal more voices than just 6,905, or even the 5,787 votes we saw on the April 28th runoff, making up only 17.55 percent of the total number of registered voters in the City. It is unfathomable that we

allow between 17 to 20 percent of registered voters to determine the future of our community, and that we allow certain Commissioners and interest groups in our community to use scare tactics and intimidations, like Castro's opinion letter, as a way to tell the rest of us that our voices aren't being heard. There are countless reasons for moving the election to coincide with the midterm and national elections in November, none of which will become a detriment to our democratic process. If the concern among Commissioners who wish to maintain the April election is their fear of not being reelected, then I have a challenge for you. Commissioner Castro, there are four years left in your term. You have four full years to demonstrate to the City voters why they should reelect you. You have four years to enact positive change and an ethical change, to be a voice for all residents, not just a select few. Then, and only then, will you have proven that you are the Commissioner for the residents. Not for 6,905 or 5,787, but for the 33,000 registered voters that live in the City Beautiful. That's when our voices will truly be heard. You have four years to make the difference. Some of you have two. But that's what true and honest democracy is built upon. Having the faith in your electorate to choose you again when the time comes, and for them to have faith in you to make the difficult choices that will create a brighter future for Coral Gables.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Mr. Cabrera: Thank you.

Commissioner Castro: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Venny Torre.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Before we move on to Mr. Torre, I'd like to be clear again, please, let's try to keep it within the three minutes. Because again, I don't want to hear that one side got more time than the other. The previous gentleman got a little bit over a minute. Mr. Cabrera got over a minute and 40 seconds. So, let's just be respectful of the resident's time. Mr. Torre, I apologize.

Venny Torre: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, Commissioners, City Manager, City Attorney. I think Nicolas said everything that needed to be said. His statement will be much broader, but basically, I'll be saying the same thing much more succinctly. This is a political item coming forward. And I think you guys need to, or you should, look at this as what's best for the City and what's best for the long term for the city. To have 25,000 voters never show up or be there, it's not a good thing. I think Nicolas said exactly what needed to be said. There's 7,000 people determining the outcome of every election. There's a list that's given to campaigners. You walk the same houses every year doing the same thing, trying to get the 4,000 votes. That needs to break. It's not just -- you know, it's not the best way to do this in my opinion. So, I'm in total favor of this change. I think it's a good thing. People of Cocoplum, Gables Estates, need to be addressed. People down at Snapper Creek Lakes, people in Platinum Triangle. There's a lot of people that just are never addressed because they're not needed for the votes. They're not needed for the 4,000 votes. You need to broaden that. They're smart voters. I get a lot of things on the ballot that I don't

understand. I take the time to read up on the candidates. That's just the way most people will do. And I think at the end of the day, having you guys proven yourselves will get reelected. That's the way to do it. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Jim Cason.

Mayor Lago: Mayor Cason. Welcome back.

Jim Cason: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: It was great to have you.

Mr. Cason: Good morning, Mayor, Commissioners, City Manager, Attorney, Clerk. I'm here to give wholehearted support to moving future municipal elections from April to the November general elections. I think there is no more important decision facing this Commission and the future in this city than the vote you will take on this issue today. Those of you on the dais represent the citizens who voted for you. Generally, these are but a small percentage of the electorate. We have 50,000 residents, 33,002 registered voters, and 6,900 actual voters, only 20 percent of those registered vote. When I was Mayor for six years and especially since 2017, I've heard certain citizens and elected officials claim to be speaking for the residents. There is no basis in fact for those claims. They can claim to speak for a majority of a vocal minority, but not the silent majority, the 80 percent who don't vote. We need those 80 percent to vote, to exercise their democratic rights and duty to participate in building this country and community. Today municipal leaders are winning with 12 percent of the registered voters. In other words, 88 percent of the registered voters did not choose them. That undercuts any straight-faced claims to represent the residents rather than the activist community. My view is that our residents are very educated, intelligent, and successful, regardless of their age or ethnicity. We should not assume they don't care about their city or our services or quality of life. They do, but there are several reasons they tend not to vote in April. First, they're busy and too often are unaware of election deadlines or forget that there is a local election. Many are out of town in April or busy with kids or religious activities or travel over the Easter break. Coming after presidential inaugural events and general elections, many are sick and tired of campaigns and just tune out. But if they are asked to choose all their representatives at one time in November, they will turn out to vote. Finally, I believe most residents are content, by and large, with the state of affairs of their city and may feel their vote is not crucial to keeping the city on a steady course. So, they shirk their civic duty. Shame on them for that attitude. As a former ambassador to communist Cuba and diplomat in many countries ruled by dictators over a 38-year career in foreign service officer, it embarrasses and shames me to see so few people allowing five people to decide important things affecting their future without their input. With a much larger municipal vote count in November, those of you on the dais can legitimately claim to speak for the residents, including those who are perfectly happy with the state

of our city and your leadership, and for others if they feel you have failed them in some significant way. A final thought, you can win without money from developers, as recent elections have shown. And given that half of our residents vote by mail, they're going to have plenty of time to look over the ballot, unrushed, and check the two or three boxes for the Gables candidates they like. They're not that lazy. So, I urge you to vote today to move the elections in November and commend those of you willing to cut short by four months your terms to make this change possible. It shows great self-confidence and statesmanship on your part. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Mayor.

City Clerk Urquia: Chip Withers.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Withers, good morning.

Wayne "Chip" Withers: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, City Commission, Vice Mayor, City Attorney, City Clerk, City Manager. It just seems like I was here a week ago. This issue has been debated as long as I can remember. And I just want to submit to you that I think it's very logical. I don't think even -- forget the hundreds of thousands of dollars it will save over the years, throw that logic aside. I think that 100 years ago, logic was put into play when the City designed and our forefathers designed our elections. And I point that out in the fact that the Mayor, I think originally was selected to run for two years and Commissioners for four years, which means every two years, the electorate can replace the majority. That happened once or twice during my terms. And when you look at that, and again, I don't know where the April date first came into play or why that was even selected, but I certainly believe that people support the fact that the reason the mayor runs for two years and the commissioner runs for four years is that means every two years the population will turn out to vote. It's very obvious that in the years that the mayor, you know, is really not up for re-election or runs without opposition that the turnout is very low. So, logically, I think if there's any way at all possible that -- and I go back to our forefathers again -- to increase voter turnout, whether through staggered terms, or in this case, being able to move the date to a time when we're going to have the largest voter turnout. I think that's the logic that was put into play many, many years ago. I support it. I understand the previous speaker's concern about voter fatigue. I suffered it. After the third day of receiving 4,000 pieces of mail in all different shapes and sizes and photographs, pictures of families and dogs and kids, which are great, I think after the first couple, you just kind of put in the back of your mind that those that come in the future are not the ones you're going to look at much more anyway. But I do firmly believe that the citizens of Coral Gables, the residents of Coral Gables have the intelligence, have the concern, and definitely would turn out in record numbers if we move this election to November.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, Commissioner.

Mr. Withers: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Appreciate you being here. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Annie Betancourt.

Mayor Lago: Good morning, Ms. Betancourt. Thank you for being here.

Annie Betancourt: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioners. My name is Annie Betancourt. I'm a resident of Coral Gables, and I first registered to vote here in 1972. So, this is very dear to my heart. I'm here today to present an argument in favor of moving the date of the municipal election. Coral Gables has a population of roughly 50,000 people and it enjoys a healthy and open government. Economic indicators for the City show that it has a highly educated population. According to demographics data from the American Community Survey of the U.S. Census, 72 percent of the residents have completed college degrees, college education, and the median household income is that of \$115,000 annually. Just to compare statistical data of educational attainment and income level with other cities in Miami-Dade County, this is not a banana republic. We have an educated population who understands the difference between local, state, and federal government. Do not underestimate the voters of Coral Gables. They are informed, but they forget to vote in April. There are 34 municipalities in Miami-Dade County, from Doral to Pinecrest to Homestead. Recently, the City of Doral and Miami-Lakes moved their elections to November. And to the best of my knowledge, voters have not suffered any depression or psychological trauma because of the change of dates. In speaking with the Supervisor of Elections, a change would make sense, and it would likely increase voter participation if the elections were held in November. Do not be fooled by flimsy or weak arguments. Voter turnout would increase significantly in November because there is enthusiasm to participate. The key to a healthy democracy is citizen participation. Access to the ballot box is the cornerstone of our form of government. While apathy and voter suppression denies our most basic freedom. Please facilitate access by moving the date to November. Thank you so much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much, madam. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Samuel Lawson.

Mayor Lago: Morning, sir.

Samuel Lawson: Good morning, Mayor, Vice Mayor...

Commissioner Castro: Good morning.

Mr. Lawson: And Commissioners, City Manager, City Attorney, and everyone here and online. My name is Samuel Lawson. I'm a Coral Gables citizen for over 10 years now. I reside at 450 Camilo Avenue. Some of you here know me, as I've been here to speak several times on pressing matters in the past. I represented a fairly significant consortium of homes and the church that

directly about the Coral Gables Youth Center, where I live. I've been here fighting off potential tax rate increases and advocate the opposite, a lowering of tax rates as a mechanism to increase growth and literally increase overall tax revenue to the City. A lesson I hope by now we have learned after 200 years of U.S. economic data. And now I see in your last email, Mayor, you have come out and publicly stated you advocate a millage reduction. I thank you for initiating this bold push. You are again correct and inspiring in your leadership. I've also been here fighting with Rhonda over where to build a dog park. And I didn't want it built directly across the street from my house. Rhonda and I actually bonded and became good friends over that. And I'm serious. Rhonda, you are one of the best, most dedicated people and public servants I've ever met in my life. And you'll be happy to hear the irony. My wife now has two new puppies coming in a couple of months, so I cannot thank you enough for the new dog run you pushed so hard for at Salvadore Park. But with all that said, like the other speakers recently before me who all said it in their own individual, eloquent ways, I come here today to speak on a matter far, far, far more important. In fact, it is the most important matter that could ever exist in a free society, which is the right to vote and the fairness of a clean vote. And what we always aim for under that front to nourish a strong, thriving democracy is very simple. More voters. The more voters, the better. The more voters, the greater the democratic input. What twisted argument could ever be made to reduce the number of voters brought to the ballot? In fact, what is more American than having, if we could, every single eligible citizen in the United States show up and vote for national and local elections? Let me ask you, is going to the Dolphins game and having a tailgate party more American? No. How about the Thanksgiving holiday? Is that more American? No. What about the entire American military? Is that more American than having every citizen possible come out and vote? Absolutely, unequivocally, no. A strong military not governed by a free democracy would only become a corrupt police force employed for tyranny and fascist gains as we've seen, unfortunately, all over the world. The Mayor wrote a concise on-the-money op-ed recently for the Miami Herald projecting that we could have double or more of the voter turnout if we move the local Coral Gables elections to coincide with national elections. Is there anything at all not obvious and irrefutable or irrefutable about that -- or not irrefutable about that logic? It's like asking your daughter, would she rather have pizza or broccoli? There's no question at all this would drive significantly greater voter turnout. In fact, the CGNA authorship, the Coral Gables Neighbors Association, and Commissioner Castro don't even contest that. They just offer some statements and some logic as to why it's actually better for us to have fewer voters turn out. To quote, "nonpartisan elections would turn partisan." Okay, what the heck? What kind of twisted anti-American voodoo is that? I'll tell you what it is. It's a watered-down version of election interference designed to minimize the local voter turnout and load it with those that digest the CGNA's very partisan, inflammatory propaganda. Which is exactly, by the way, what happened in the last election when Commissioners Fernandez and Castro, with almost zero political or professional résumés, got elected. But it gets worse. I wrote an email last night to the Commissioners with a copy to the City Clerk last night. My concern and adamant position that we need to take action as a community against the recent email that went out from the CGNA authorship, which asserted that Mayor Lago and the other veteran Coral Gables leaders -- so I would suppose that to be Vice Mayor Anderson, Commissioner Menendez, and whoever else, City

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Manager, who else, police -- are corrupt and dirty in trying to get more voter turnout to stay -- in order to stay in power. And I quote from the email, "This is nothing but a ploy by the already dirty to stay in power and keep the residents from having a voice." That statement reached how many people? 15,000, 20,000? How many people did it reach? In my email to the Mayor and the Commissioners last night, I wrote, under 18 United States Code, Section 1001, it is a federal crime to make false and fictitious or fraudulent statements or representations. Now, while the First Amendment protects speech criticizing public officials against even civil defamation liability, it does not protect against an actual malice and knowingly making false public statements or recklessly disregarding that a made statement was false. The efforts by the CGNA authorship and their recent email distribution associating dirty money with the idea of moving the elections to November is thus, hello, those who would promote it, Mayor Lago, as per his op-ed, is in my opinion very clearly intentional, thought out, though amateurly veiled, jab, attack directly against Mayor Lago, in effect, associating him and his team, his supporters, and his constituency with dirty money, which is harmful and reckless. So, according to the CGNA, those who are in power and who may vote yes for this pragmatic of democracy and Coral Gables are already dirty? Where's the proof that the Mayor or the Vice Mayor and all the veteran Commission -- or Commissioner Menendez or the City Manager, where's the proof in court that they're dirty? Has anything been proven? This is not speech protected by the First Amendment in my opinion, it's not. In fact, these intentional, unfounded, slanderous representations on the scale of the CGNA readership is therefore quite magnified, dangerous to the community, and its perceptions as both. So, I also ask if there were any Commissioners complicit in that message, that unfounded, unproven, and harmful statement, that they come forward. I know that Commissioner Castro's picture and statements about the election were front and center, only an inch below this attack. My question is, was Commissioner Hernandez complicit in this messaging as well? Today I'm asking all five of you to vote in favor of moving the elections to November. But in reality, Commissioner Menendez -- may I say, Kirk? -- I'm looking to you. I think it's pretty clear how the Mayor and the Vice Mayor will vote, and it seems pretty clear how the other two Commissioners will vote. So, I think you'll be the tie-breaking vote, though, I hope it's 5-0. We need you, my friend, now more than ever, to enable a true democratic process. In my opinion, this is not a ploy by you, or by Vince, or Rhonda, or anyone to corruptly stay in power. I've seen the three of you give your lives and blood to this city. In my opinion, this is a strategic move on your part to bring more voters who are out there busy as hell working every day, who pay the bills around here, and who don't have time to pay attention and to be glued to local politics but will in fact show up in droves at the national election cycle. My parting comment is this. If you have not noticed, I'm wearing today a lapel pin, a red lapel pin. I got it at the Memorial Day ceremony at the Coral Gables Youth Center a few years ago, which you've done so much to build and cause to flourish. It's called the Red Poppy or the Remembrance Poppy, and it's been a symbol of lives lost to war since World War I. I bring today their memory to bear. I don't believe for one moment they laid down their lives and died for nothing less than the complete freedom to vote and the possibility that as many people as possible could vote and should vote. Thank you for your time.

Commissioner Castro: Thank you.

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Mayor Lago: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Gordon Sokoloff.

Mayor Lago: Before Mr. Sokoloff -- Doctor, please come up. I ask you, everybody, to please respect the time. I'm keeping tabs up here in regards to on one side and the other and how much excess time has been granted. So, I just ask you to please -- and at the end, I'll recap so that you can't say later that we weren't fair. We try to do this as fairly as possible. So, Doctor, come on up, please. Nice to have you.

Commissioner Castro: Good morning.

Gordon Sokoloff: Hi, good morning. I'm wearing my CGA button. I hope I don't get stabbed in the back. I belong to the CGNA because I had founded the Ponce Leon Neighbors Group, which in my mind, those are grassroots efforts for neighbors and residents to coalesce around local causes. And those residents and those groups have campaigned for many of you, all of you, as a matter of fact, at one time or another, walking the blocks. And I can tell you that partisanship is not a part of community politics. It hasn't been historically. And the other thing that you're forgetting about is if we're trying to do something nefarious or covert, is no one is trying to do anything. We just want to keep things as is. You're actually looking to undo something that's been historical to Coral Gables since its inception. So, you can look at George Merrick and you can ask, why did you have these elections in April or in the spring? And perhaps the reason he would tell you, if he could talk, was so that Coral Gables, which all of you, especially you, Commissioner Menendez, who often talk about how special a place Coral Gables is, it is. And one of the things that makes it special is because our candidates, our debates, our issues are unique to Coral Gables. How many of you go to the polls in November and you're flipping through the pages and you go through the President and the Senate, and then you get to the judges, nonpartisan, and then you're wondering who the hell is this guy? And then you get to the resolutions and you say, what am I reading? And unless you're very informed and maybe you turn to the Miami Herald or Community Newspapers or wherever they publish their suggestions, which I happen to do with the Herald, I'll take that, what do they -- what do they recommend? You don't know who the hell you're voting for. But the Coral Gables elections are unique to Coral Gables because they are about our candidates, our issues, our debates, and they are distinct and separate from the other factions of our society, federal and state, so that we can focus on Coral Gables. And while other municipalities are falling into line with many others that align themselves with federal elections, Coral Gables remains distinct and it remains separate. And that is the City Beautiful. That is what makes this place special, which is why we want to simply maintain the status quo. We are not looking to do anything nefarious or sneaky, and this is not partisan, and that's the way it should be kept. I want to make sure I didn't miss anything.

Mayor Lago: Take your time.

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Mr. Sokoloff: Thank you. We all want to save money. Who doesn't? And hopefully at your upcoming budget meeting later on, you will find other ways to save money. I also agree with Mr. Wells. Most people -- it's not about the quantity of votes, it's about the quality of votes and the intelligence of the voters who are coming to speak. I thought that was an excellent point. There is, with partisanship, the influx of money, partisan money, and influence that cannot help but trickle down into partisan held elections. This is a very nuanced decision and no one is un-American and no one is looking to minimize votership. I belong to Get It When We All Vote, which was an organization started by Michelle Obama, I believe as much as anybody, that we all need to vote. And that doesn't and should not discourage the City of Coral Gables, no matter what happens today, to try to get people to get out and vote, whether it's done in November or in April. I ask you to keep them where they are. I ask you to respect Coral Gables and its historical foundings of keeping it in April. Thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir.

Commissioner Castro: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Ed Santamaria.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Santamaria, good morning.

Ed Santamaria: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, members of the Commission, Mr. Manager, City Attorney, City Clerk. Happy to be here this morning to talk on this issue. Later this morning, you will likely act on changing the date of the City's elections to align it with the date of the general elections in November. I, along with many I have spoken to, strongly support this measure. While it is true that the City will save approximately \$100,000 a year, which adds up, this is not the real thing. This is just a bonus. The real win is the increased civic engagement by way of greater participation and significantly increased voter turnout that moving the elections would generate. The principles of our representative democracy hold the vote as sacrosanct. Clearly, when more of the electorate participates, the community benefits. Greater participation in our elections means greater community input into this fundamental process. I have heard the arguments of those that stand in opposition. They say that the electorate will lose focus on issues germane to our city, that our city's political processes will degrade, that poorly informed voters will be given a voice, that monied special interests will dominate, et cetera, et cetera. These beliefs are misplaced. The Coral Gables electorate is comprised of educated individuals that have the bandwidth to focus on election cycle issues, wherever they may be on the ballot. Our political processes will only strengthen with greater civic engagement. When you make any vote undesirable, be they well-informed or uninformed, you raise the specter of voter suppression. Lastly, with greater voter participation, the potential influence of special interests is diluted. In closing, I urge you all to cast a vote in favor of November elections. It is the right thing to do. It is the right thing to do because it will

generate greater voter participation and promote community engagement, which are undoubtedly in the best interest of our great city. Thank you.

Commissioner Castro: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you, sir.

City Clerk Urquia: Lourdes Abadin.

Mayor Lago: Good morning, how are you? Thank you for being here.

Lourdes Abadin: My pleasure. Good morning, Mayor, Vice Mayor, Commissioners, Mr. Clerk and Attorney, my name is Lourdes Abadin, 55 Merrick Way. I'm here to speak on behalf of Item E-3 and moving the election to November. To not waste any of your time, I'm going to tell you that I agree with all the speakers that have been pro-moving the election, but I did want to tell you a small story. I was born in Cuba. I was a young girl and lived under a communist regime. When I came to the United States, I was very taken aback about the lack of patriotism I saw with my fellow students. While the allegiance was going on, everybody was talking, sitting, nobody was paying respect, and I was very alarmed about this. So, I think whatever we do to get voters to come out and vote is something we need to do. We need to hear from the people. Otherwise, we're going to end up, like many of the communities where we have people fleeing into Miami-Dade County to run away from places where they don't have a say in their government. There is nothing special about a city that only has a 17 percent voter turnout. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you for being here with us. Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Alicia Fernandez.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Fernandez, good morning.

Alicia Fernandez: Morning, Mayor, Commissioners...

Commissioner Castro: Good morning.

Ms. Fernandez: City Manager, everyone. My name is Alicia Fernandez. I live in -- at 6000 Granada Boulevard. I've been citizen of Coral Gables for 35 years, and I have voted in just about every single election in 30 years. I'm going to keep it short. I agree with many of the previous speakers that were in -- that are in favor for the November -- moving the elections to November. I have a few things I would say. Many residents do not even know elections are going on when held in April. The move to November elections will allow more residents to vote and will result in much more awareness that there is in the city elections going on now. I know many residents that do not vote unless there is a mayor in the ballot in the City of Coral Gables. Why are you

satisfied with fewer residents going to the ballot rather than more residents being able to vote? And that is our democracy, freedom to vote or to elect who we want. November voting will definitely bring more voters out and enthusiasm will be higher. I know I have been at the precincts and seen the difference in number of voters April versus November. Residents should be involved and more exposure to the awareness of city elections, more residents will go out to vote. Changing elections to November does not disenfranchise those that can't go and vote. They will vote in November. Who cares if someone raises more money than others? You really think that will change the outcome of an election? What are you scared about, the ones that don't want to change to November? Nothing to be scared about. Everybody deserves to be heard. And I urge you to vote for the change in the November elections. And thank you very much.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Laureano Cancio.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Cancio?

Laureano Cancio: Yes.

Mayor Lago: Good morning.

Mr. Cancio: Good morning.

Mayor Lago: Good morning, sir.

Mr. Cancio: Happy to be here. I'll be brief, although I noticed that everyone who's in favor of the proposition gets a little bit more time than the other people. This gentleman right here had the time of his life talking to you.

Mayor Lago: May I address that, sir?

Mr. Cancio: No, you have already said what it is. Oh, my name. Okay, my name...

Mayor Lago: No, no, I'm saying may I address your comment? May I?

Mr. Cancio: Well, I think usually you let someone finish their comments before you address them.

Mayor Lago: What I was going to say was you can have as much time as you like.

Mr. Cancio: Oh, okay. That sounds wonderful. I won't bore you to death because that's really quite an offer to make because I can talk for a long time. But I won't. I won't take you up on it. I would have to say that -- oh, let me tell you about myself. My name is Laureano Cancio. I live

in Bird Road. I've been affiliated with the City of Coral Gables since 1961. I came under the Peter Pan exodus. I think -- I grew up at the Youth Center. I think of all the members of the Commission, only Commissioner Menendez would go back that far. And it was a great experience for me. And I'm very thankful to the people of Coral Gables for welcoming me because I didn't live in Coral Gables at the time. I was a poor immigrant. I lived in Little Gables at the time. As a matter of fact, I used to sell bottles when I was a kid and make my own money to pay my own registration fees. In any way, it puzzles me, all the arguments that have been made here today by the various people. One of them is that the board wants to increase participation, but they haven't done that in a long time. When they were winning, they didn't want to increase participation. Now, all of a sudden, they want to increase participation. And they really want to increase participation. That's why they have the meeting at 9:30 in the morning. And I had to park five blocks away from here because there was no parking. Where were all the --? I've been only in this Commission in over 20-some odd years that I've been living at this address here in Coral Gables -- by the way, I'm also an attorney who has his office here in Coral Gables. In all the time that I've lived here, I've only been twice. The last time I came, it was the issue of development. And at that hearing, if I recall, you were very upset that people wanted to participate and you threatened the people and you told them they would be arrested. You would call the cops and take them away. You, the Mayor, the Mayor did this. I was aghast because there were a couple of members of the Commission who subsequently quit. And the reason they quit is because they weren't getting the proper respect they expected. Well, they should have run for the judiciary. Maybe as judges, they could find people in contempt for speaking in their presence and put them in jail. But unfortunately, in our system of government, the mayors don't get that respect. City commissioners don't. They're supposed to listen to the constituents. As a matter of fact, the people who were here at that time had to raise their hands to be able to talk like little children in kindergarten. Anyway, so if you want to increase participation, I don't see the connection between one and the other. In addition to that, it doesn't look good when we want to change our elections after you lose an election. Now, there's a question, two people lost their elections and so forth. There's a fallacy, a complete fallacy. The Mayor, you, Mr. Lago, you lost the election. I got your phone calls at home telling me I am your Mayor. And I'm urging you to go vote for the two people who lost. And when they lost, you stopped sending the messages. And they lost by bigger margins thereafter. And I heard that you had told someone that -- someone had said, well, there are a thousand people who are against me, against you. I said, oh, it's only a thousand people. We got thousands of people to vote. A thousand citizens are against you and you choose to ignore them. And yet, you come before -- you make a proposal that we should have more participation. Nonsense, nonsense. You don't believe any of that. You just lost the election. You want to win. You want to win again, so you want to change the rules. Maybe it's like the kid at the ballpark. You guys change the rules, maybe we'll win this time. The fact is that the people of Coral Gables are sophisticated people. They're not the regular run of the mill in Miami-Dade County. They're highly intelligent, they're highly educated. They have money. The average home in this community is worth at least one and a half million dollars. That's the average home. You know, those people are not going to be -- you know, you tell them, oh, you want to save money. This is going to save us \$100,000. I've never heard such a ridiculous argument in my whole life. You're

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going to save \$100,000. Well, how about if I tell you that the educational system in this city is in the dumps and everybody in this town, including you, Mr. Mayor, send your kids to private schools. Don't you send your kids to private schools? At the most expensive city, at the most expensive educational system, that's where your children go to, right? People have to pay a total of at least between \$25,000 and \$50,000 every year for every child that gets sent there. When I was a kid, it was an honor to go to Coral Gables High School. And everyone in the city sent their kids to Coral Gables High School. And Coral Gables High School is one of the best schools in the country. And yet, what has this Commission done in regards to Coral Gables High School or the educational system? Absolutely nothing. If you go to some of the areas in the city, people cannot send their kids to public schools in this town. We have to send them outside the city limits because there's no capacity in the city school system. You have to send them out, including yourself, because you're not sending your kids to public schools in the city. No one in their right mind would. You go check, see your friends and see where they go to school, all right? Now, there's a section here that goes between Bird Road and the University Drive and 37th Avenue and Le Jeune Road, that whole area there. What do you think is happening there? The kids -- the parents in that area cannot send their kids to public school in the City of Coral Gables. They've been designated by the Board of Education that those kids have to go to Coconut Grove. And not to Carver, the other school in Coconut Grove. And so they designated a charter school down by the Youth Center where they would be taken. That charter school has now notified the parents that they can't send their kids there anymore because they've got too many kids going there. And yet we're talking about development. We're talking about building more buildings to bring more people to the city. We can't even take care of the ones we have. And yet anywhere in this country you go to -- which I've been everywhere, okay? I've lived in New York City. I've lived in New Jersey. I've lived in Michigan. I've lived here. Everywhere you go, if people pay a million and a half dollars for housing, they want good educational systems. And you say, what's the thing we can do? It's a county issue, right? It is not a county issue. If you go to Key Biscayne, you will find that they have their own elementary school, they have their own middle school, and they have their own high school. And those people living in Key Biscayne have first -- you know, first try at -- you know, first option to go there. Now, if they have any vacancies, maybe they'll take somebody from outside. We don't do that in the City. In the City, what we do is we open it up. My wife exercises at the gym here. Everybody from outside Coral Gables comes in and crowds the place. This past month she couldn't register. Somebody from outside of town came in. I registered at the Youth Center and they have the same thing. People go in from outside of the city. The pool, my wife went to the pool, they stole her telephone at the pool. She was just swimming there and she came back and somebody stole it. Why? Because they let anybody come in. It's not restricted to Coral Gables. Yes, we pay the taxes. We pay the taxes. And we -- they assume we're stupid because we're going to believe that just because somebody has money, they're going to vote for them. The last election was lost not because of participation. It was lost because they were bad candidates that you submitted to the people of the City and the ones we got were much better.

Commissioner Castro: Thank you.

Mr. Cancio: And I talk about Ms. Castro and Mr. Fernandez. They're excellent people and they stand by the issues and they support their represent -- the people who elected you, and I'm proud to be associated with you guys. And Mr. Menendez, I'm proud of you because of the Youth Center connection. So, let's think about the other -- let's talk about the septic tanks. That's another issue that Ms. Anderson has proposed. This one about changing the election dates, that's a wonderful one. Let's talk about the one that you want to propose about septic tanks. You know why they want to build septic tanks? Because Coral Gables has protected itself since it was founded by septic tanks. That has saved this community because the septic tank prevents those big developers from coming in. If you have a septic tank, you can't build a huge building and have a little septic tank to take care of you. And yet, I bet you that area that we're talking about between Bird Road and University Drive, those are the first ones that are going to go with the septic tanks. You know why? Because the big developers want to move in there. They want to move in there. And as soon as they put -- they take away the septic tanks, that's where they're heading. That's where they're heading. And they want this election because as soon as we -- they replace the Commissioners, they're going to come in and they're going to continue their development. So, I think the issues -- I think it's always been that, you know, people confuse the issues and the issues are really -- they talk about democracy and electing people, which is nonsense. It is nonsense. Because for years and years and years, when the people in power -- because in the Miami Herald, if you read it, it tells you that the issue here is that the fact it was the first time ever that the people of this community have stood up and fought back and said, we're not going to take the people you nominate for us. We're going to take our own people. We're going to take people who believe in us. We're going to take people who believe in our issues. And the people who gave the money, I don't really know this, but I mean, realistically speaking, Mr. Lago, you're a vice president of a good company, right? You make good money. Why would you want to sit here and listen to me tell you all these things? Why would you want to listen to put up with all this nonsense that goes on? You can make a lot more money. Why are you here? What's the motivation? I'm a 72 year old guy. Hey, I'm an old guy. Who cares? I mean, I'm retired. You know, who cares? I work part time. I shouldn't say I'm retired. I work part time. So, I can afford to do something like that as a hobby. But why would anybody be interested? Because there's lots of money here. Because this is the last frontier. Because there's no place to build. And this is where you build something and you know it is going to make a lot of money for you and everybody wants to get into the money. The construction companies, they fly by my -- you know, Bird Road, you know, the cars fly, fly, fly all over the place. And they say we have policemen protecting me. What? Sleeping policemen you might mean because nobody -- they don't stop. They go 60 miles an hour by there. And who are they? Trucks. I run on the streets. I run by your house. Every day I run by your house, by UM. And you have all these cars running. I feel I'm going to get killed one of these days. Is anybody stopping? No, and who are they? Trucks, they're building, building America, building more money. Downtown, there's a survey that came out. Who uses downtown? Nobody from Coral Gables uses downtown. You have all these outsiders coming in. Okay, so in a nutshell, this issue about the elections, it's not real, come on, it's not real. Stop lying to yourself. All these people come in, you know, when you're mayor, you can convince people, come in, we need you to come. We're going to have it at 9:30, but not anybody else, because we're going to have it at a

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time that nobody else is going to be able to show up. Not a good way to go. And lastly, but really the most important one of all, this community is divided. We all know it's divided. We got the people in favor of development; we got the people against development. We have them, right? And instead of bringing us together, this whole thing of annihilating the competition, annihilating the people who oppose us, change the elections. No, you lost. Be a man, just get together with the other side. Work out a deal. Let's work together instead of in a separate, you know, you go your way, we go our way. And let's -- no, no, no, no, no. That's not the way America is about. That's the real American way. That's the America I discovered when I came here in 1961. It's not an America of killing the other side. It's an America of working together. And I think that's what we ought to do. And that's -- thank you so much for hearing me.

Commissioner Castro: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker is going to be on Zoom.

Mayor Lago: If I may, just want to address one point.

Mr. Cancio: Oh sure, yes, yes, absolutely.

Mayor Lago: Very simple. The previous gentleman who spoke got seven minutes and five seconds extra. You got nine minutes and a third.

Mr. Cancio: Yes, but you told everyone else they only had three minutes.

Mayor Lago: I know, but I asked -- but I was respectful and let everybody finish. I didn't want to interrupt anybody. But I want to say one thing to you. Thank you for being here and having your voice heard. It was very nice. I appreciate that. Thank you for everything you said to me.

Mr. Cancio: Well, you know, I had a political science professor once, and you know what he said? In America, there's freedom...

Mayor Lago: Of course.

Mr. Cancio: To speech. Unfortunately, if your words have power, and if people listen to you, all of a sudden, they crack down on you, baby. They crack down on you, and they don't want you to speak anymore. I just hope I'm not the tree that falls in the forest and no one hears me.

Mayor Lago: They heard you today for 9 -- for over 12 minutes.

Mr. Cancio: Well, I hope that...

Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Mr. Cancio: I hope it convinces some of you regarding your positions. I mean...

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. I appreciate that. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker is going to be on Zoom. It's going to be Carter Sox.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Sox, the floor is yours.

City Clerk Urquia: Go ahead, ma'am.

Carter Sox: Good morning. Can everybody hear me?

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes.

Ms. Sox: Thank you so much. Good morning, Mr. Mayor, Vice Mayor, and Commissioners. I appreciate you taking the time to hear from me. I just wanted to chime in. I am sort of here to speak, I think, on behalf of myself and other people who are not always able to attend every Commission meeting and cannot follow every neighborhood association email and every single thing that happens in the Commission, but this issue came to my attention and I wanted to just speak out about it as sort of an average person, an average citizen. I'm a mom of two, a two and a four-year-old. I work full-time. My husband works full-time. We live in Gables at 1407 El Rado Street. We love the Gables. We love being part of the community. And moving the elections would make my life so much easier. And I just wanted to voice that opinion just as a practical matter. I know there are all these issues of freedom of speech and democracy and all of these other things as a practical matter, as a citizen of Coral Gables. Did I vote last April? Absolutely, I did. I took the time to make sure I understood what was going on. But as a practical matter, if the elections were in November, that would make my life a lot easier. We all have a lot going on with our families and our jobs, and as much as I care about our local politics and what is going on, I don't have the time to be as fully invested as some of the prior speakers here and some of the people who I think regularly speak before the Commission. So, I just wanted to come on and just speak to the very practical nature of this. I, to be honest, can't even believe this is really an issue. But for those of us who just live in the Gables and are trying to support our families and do what's right for the community and be involved, moving the elections to November would be a huge help in that we could go one time on the way back from school drop-off and get all of our voting done at one time. Obviously, saving money for the City is an added bonus. My kids will be going to the public schools here in Coral Gables, the A-rated public school down the street from us. So, I appreciate the money saved, the practicality, and just as a, again, as a mom, as a working mom, as a working parent, any practical solution like this just seems like an obvious win for everyone in

the community. So, thank you so much for considering and I urge you to vote to move the election to November. Thank you.

Commissioner Fernandez: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker, I only have a first name and it's James.

Mayor Lago: James, the floor is yours.

Jaime Salamanca: Hi. My name is Jaime Salamanca, living in Monaco Street, Coral Gables. I love the last participation. I'm a regular resident here. I'm fully supporting moving the elections to November. Actually, I also want to make a personal comment, and I think it's pretty arrogant to say that quantity -- quality over quantity. That is the most arrogant thing I've heard today. That is -- I can't express how offended I was for our democracy. And listen to anyone saying that publicly is pretty offensive. Again, I think everything has been said already. I fully support the speakers and I agree with all of them that are in favor of moving the elections to November. And I hope those people who are just bringing some issues that actually just sort of for the sake of speaking more time are not even related to this, just to create confusion and chaos and whatever it was. Septic tanks and traffic -- and that is not the purpose of the meeting. So, let's focus, be on topic, and that's all. I love the latest participant. I totally relate to her, and I think it's very practical and going to be better for everyone. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Mr. Clerk.

City Clerk Urquia: Next speaker is Karelia Carbonell.

Mayor Lago: Ms. Carbonell, good morning.

Karelia Carbonell: Good morning, everyone. Can you all hear me?

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes.

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, ma'am, go ahead.

Ms. Carbonell: Hi. I'm here -- yes, I -- my name is Karelia Martinez Carbonell. And I'm a resident of Coral Gables for over 30 years. I live on Altara Avenue. And I'd like to read my statement. The first -- I guess my first observation, though, after listening to everyone is, you know, are we all now saying that over 100 years of election history or close to 100 years of election history, our elections are illegitimate because they were in April, and there was only a certain amount of turnout, voter turnout. And never have I heard that we're benchmarking to the national

turnout. So, you know, that's just an observation because, you know, elections are what they are, and people exercise their right to vote or not to vote. But here's my comment. First, why is this item coming back on second reading? And I know people have asked this because the official record shows that at the August Commission meeting, Commissioner Menendez voted yes with the condition that the second reading would not occur before October meeting. This stipulation was in exchange for his initial approval of the motion, and that was to have time for some type of Sunshine meeting, allowing the discussion of this issue with residents. But however, the second reading is on the agenda for today. Why was his stipulation ignored? Second, please consider my personal observation. There are two reasons, among probably others, given to justify changing the traditional election date: money and voter turnout. And in my opinion, they're both weak arguments. Number one, considering changing a time-proven historical tradition solely on the monetary cost is short-sighted and short-changes a priceless historical heritage. Why tinker with a 100-year-old election cycle that goes back to the wisdom of the founding fathers? Mr. Withers, I know he asked why April. This is the answer. Coral Gables' election history was initiated in April 1925 when the fledgling city was incorporated, with Edward "Doc" Dammers elected as its first mayor of Coral Gables. He served a three-year term. However, historical heritage -- I'm sorry, he served a three-year term. Yes, money can be a driving force. However, historical heritage is priceless. Coral Gables has always taken pride in its historical uniqueness and independent spirit. Please keep it that way. Number two, guaranteeing that changing the election date will increase voter turnout is flawed in today's date and age. In today's election, time and date have become irrelevant. Irrelevant. People can vote weeks in advance. They can vote by mail. They can vote by drop box. They can vote in person. No one has to experience voter fatigue or voter disenfranchisement -- disenfranchising, because people can vote at their convenience. People who choose not to exercise their vote or their right to vote basically DO NOT WANT TO VOTE. And that's in capital letters. And number three, and my last point, merging our local election with the national schedule adversely affects us, the Coral Gables residents, by, number one, disenfranchising votes due to changing the terms that we, as residents, voted on. We voted for you as the terms indicated. Number two, it would insert partisan politics in the mix. We would be losing home rule. We would be rejecting the founder's purposeful plan, and most importantly, most importantly, giving elected officials the power to create their own election rules should not be accepted by the electorate. Please consider all of the above. Respectfully, thank you for listening. Bye-bye.

Commissioner Castro: Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you so much.

City Clerk Urquia: That's it, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. We'll close the public comment. Thank you for everyone's input and guidance. It's been refreshing and appreciated. I asked the Clerk very briefly for his background

and if he had a little bit of information or maybe he could recall if I had ever thrown somebody out of a meeting here in the Commission. And Mr. Clerk?

City Clerk Urquia: Not to my knowledge, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Lago: So, not as of yet, hopefully, that'll never happen, God willing. So, moving on, I'd like to hear from the Commission, their guidance, what they would like to talk about this issue. Maybe we can start with Commissioner Castro.

Commissioner Castro: Well, the Vice Mayor was the one sponsoring this item, right?

Vice Mayor Anderson: Well, the Mayor runs the meetings, so I was asked...

Commissioner Castro: Okay.

Vice Mayor Anderson: For you to speak first.

Commissioner Castro: I would pass. I would -- if it's okay with you.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Commissioner Castro: I would love to hear you because obviously...

Vice Mayor Anderson: Mayor, your direction, what do you want to do?

Mayor Lago: Colleagues, I put my points very clear on the record in regards to my op-ed. I can speak, but I don't want to take up the entire meeting. I'd like to hear from my colleagues to see what they would like to say and what their intent of -- in regards to this legislation that we're proposing.

Commissioner Fernandez: Well, I think the Vice Mayor sponsored the item so she should be the first to speak.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'm glad to be the first one to speak. I've noticed, Ms. Castro, you have a stack of emails in front of you.

Mayor Lago: Oh, may I interject? I'd like to enter that into the record, to request the Clerk -- I have the emails here, both pro and against the legislation, so I'll enter it into the record for -- to review and for consideration.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, those are all the emails received by my office up until 8 o'clock this morning. I've kept on receiving emails throughout the meeting, so I'll continue to put those into the record after the fact.

Mayor Lago: Thank you for reminding me, Commissioner -- Vice Mayor, excuse me.

Vice Mayor Anderson: So, I'll start on a few comments before I do the comparison here on the emails received. I provided the CGNA my email list, 13,000 folks that received emails from me during the election, and I shared that list with them. And it's been built upon afterwards to be a bigger list. In order to put things in perspective, I see you have a stack that's about a half an inch tall, that's 500, 1,000, 1,500. To say that that stack of emails that is a half inch tall represents the will of the people would be inaccurate. Because of out of 13,000, I have 1,500 pieces of paper here, you have maybe 100 sheets of paper. That would not be true. I brought this item and first wrote about it to the residents on June 21st. It was in the letter that I sent out to the residents covering a myriad of issues, and on page one at the bottom on June 21st -- and I've gotten responses from many residents on many issues -- is moving the general elections to November of even years is now under consideration. By moving the general election, the Commission could save approximately \$125,000 per election cycle or \$625,000 over 10 years. These savings could be used to improve our city. That was put in this letter back on June 21st to make the residents aware that we are discussing the item and we since discussed the item in June and in July and every single member of this Commission was in favor. And I brought this after the most recent folks were elected not to, you know -- number one, I had a lot to accomplish the first election. It was refreshing to see your willingness to try to get more voters to the polls, because no matter what I did, in a way of trying to get people out to vote, we still had a dismal result. And when something is not working, you don't keep doing it. So, let's go back in time and look at history. I pulled the census from 1925, when this city was incorporated. And of course, naturally, you incorporate a city, you need to have an election right away to select your mayor and commissioners. That's April of 1925. At the time, we had 991 individuals that were white that could vote, at voting age, and 48 that were black. Our total population at the time of voting age was 1,039 people. That is a very small number. It doesn't take much to get folks together. You didn't have the conflict at that time between television and radio and everything else that was the myriad of things for folks to deal with. It doesn't really cost that much to reach all these people today. The CGNA has proven that through the email blasts. You don't have to send out the mailers. My first mailer went out when the run-off -- when the ballot went out. The timing was exact. I sent out four. I had two very well-financed candidates -- you know, I meant to pass this out too -- that were in my election. We had a senator's daughter-in-law, Tanya Cruz Jimenez. I had the former mayor's brother. Both had much deeper pockets than I did. I was still able to reach residents. I was still able, with volunteers, knock about 8,000 doors, so people could see what the difference was and what I did before I decided to run and why I decided to run. So, in answer to some of your questions about why would someone choose to do this, at 60 years old, I had to make a decision because I was getting tired of coming here and asking for things. I decided I either needed to shut up or run to get some of these things done. I'm 63 right now. I haven't decided whether I'm going to run yet

again, but I do want to leave as part of my legacy that we improve voter engagement. So, we've covered the census. We also need to cover some facts. So, I did some research on voter fatigue, and I found out that both parties try to suppress voter turnout in order to try to have their interests heard and get their voters out. That's not what I'm interested in. I'm not interested in trying to just bring out the elite voters or the most informed voters. I'm trying to bring out all voters. I've practiced as a trial lawyer for over 37 years now. I know what it's like to be in trial and make time from your busy schedule when the judge is telling you you have to have a memo on the desk the next morning or your draft jury instructions the next morning. I'm aware of my colleagues that I try to urge to go to the polls and vote, how busy they are, and when they say they're sorry because they missed it. But my letter went out to every single resident that voted. And every single resident that voted in this last election knew that this was an issue when they received that letter. The calls I got didn't even relate to that. People were interested in the FPL, the burying of the lines, septic tanks going in. They were very, very interested in that because they've been out on the waterway, they've seen the dead fish, they've seen the algae growing, they've seen the decline in our tourism industry because of those types of things. And I've also seen the water quality tests from FIU that shows that once you get past the golf course, the human fecal count in our waterway climbs. We need to do things about it. I was a young woman in Hialeah living there when my father dug the trench for a septic tank to be put in -- the septic to sewer to be connected. That was between 1965 and 1970, and it didn't result in overdevelopment. If you're concerned about overdevelopment, you need to pay attention to some of the things happening in the state legislature that preempt our zoning code. It would behoove folks to be learning about these things at the same time they're selecting their commissioners because their commissioners can knock on the doors and have an intelligent conversation with them at the time. So, let's go to some writings and let's see why people want to have elections one way or another. This was in The New York Times, "Why Does No One Vote in Local Elections," October 22, 2018. "America is facing a crisis on which for once Democrats and Republicans can agree. Lower voter turnout in local elections nationwide. Only 27 percent of eligible voters vote in a typical municipal election." And I'll footnote that. Our turnouts are less. Why would we want to continue doing things the same old way when it doesn't work? The result, The Times writes, "is that an extraordinarily unrepresentative set of residents determines how local governments distribute service and spend almost \$2 trillion that local governments control. In some places, that means politically active, conservative, wealthy, older, white voters have a disproportionate sway over the local government. In others, it means that organized and energetic unions can move policy their way. Seldom is that control shared across the spectrum, and democracy suffers as a result. Fortunately, there's a fairly equally simple solution, and it comes at little cost. Move the dates of local elections to coincide with statewide and national contests." And I could go on to read here, but I'm going to go to the bottom of the article and I'll give the rest of these to you all. "Remarkably, in these days of partisan polarization, Democrats and Republicans both overwhelmingly favor the same solution. The only national survey done on this subject shows that 73 percent of Democrats and 61 percent of Republicans favor on-cycle over off-cycle elections." And despite the obvious gains to our democracy, many do not want change. Incumbents, these people up here, who have one office under the old low-turnout system, often shift -- fight the shift. And interest groups that have been allowed to

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dominate sparsely populated elections won't want to give up their power. That's what we have here. So, why 9:30 in the morning? And I've been to this Commission, I've been to the County Commission speaking on items, having to wait a long time, taking my computer, trying to get some work done in the meantime, whether it's jury instructions, motions, et cetera, that I have to comply with for my clientele, or paying my rent for my office. 9:30 is a convenient time because you don't have to wait around all day to the afternoon, and I've done that before while here. This was out of courtesy. And why did we bring it now? Because the reason there was a delay was to give staff an opportunity to run a poll. Upon further research, I was advised that we can't do that without disclosing someone's date of birth, their name, their demographics, where they live. It's because we have this thing called the Freedom of Information Act that doesn't apply to other types of polls. I'll talk to you briefly about education. Sorry, I'm jumping around a little bit, but since you brought it up, I thought I'd bring it up too. I was born and raised in South Florida. I'm a product of public schools. My children are products of public schools. One is an air traffic controller and one's a water quality scientist. So, it doesn't keep -- take a leap of logic to understand why I care so much about our waterways. You do not have to go to an elite, expensive, public -- private school to get a good education. What you have to have is the dedication and desire to work hard. I put myself through school. There was no golden spoon that helped me get there. And history has told us that this doesn't work. So, why should we keep doing it? We'll look at history here a little more and we'll talk a little bit more about what some people had written in the past. History of this country has gone through various stages of voter suppression, whether it's literacy tests, poll taxes, and other means to restrict voting. It is clear, based upon the statistics of the voter turnout in this city, that having the elections in April has operated as a poll tax, has operated as a literacy test, has deprived people of the ability to vote. When I'm employing people, I make sure they have the right to vote and get out in November. But when Coral Gables has it, their election's in April, some other city has it in March, and whatever month another city wants to have it in, employers aren't able to accommodate these schedules for folks. Ms. Castro, I did look at your memo. I had asked you for the articles you cited. I never got them. So, I looked at the abstracts of these articles. This was -- these are a great segue to many of the points that Mr. Holmes has brought up, "Rip" Holmes, in the past about Citizens United, and how, you know, First Amendment rights clash now with people's ability to buy votes. We have a very intelligent electorate here. And these economic papers are not political science studies. They're basically making the case that we need to regulate campaign donations. You have one from 1996. You have one from 1994. You have another one from 2001. An underlying principle of all this and something that's infected our elections is that people print false information, assumptions that every elected official up here is corrupt, therefore, I'm the one that's going to save the day. That type of campaigning, I would hope, would stop. It doesn't work with our electorate. The prayer that we had this morning spoke about what it took to be a good leader. Do not mislead. Do not distort. Be honest and tell the truth. Don't tell the voters that we're going to get bad leaders if only the most elite of us get to vote. Why on earth would you want to suppress voter turnout, is my question to you. You were in favor of this in June. You were in favor of this in July. You're an elected leader. You do a good job. Your people can vote for you again. You use your record. It's best for democracy, it's best for voter turnout, that we move these elections. I've received

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some nasty emails, one calling me a Nazi for trying to do this. I looked up the definition just to refresh my memory. This is not discrimination based on race. It is not discrimination based on religion. It's not discrimination at all. But if we leave them in April, it is discrimination on those who have children, that have busy lives, that have jobs and need to be able to get out there and vote for their leaders while they're making selection of their state leaders, so they understand what's happening to our zoning code, so they understand how preemption works from the state and select the leaders that can best lead them in Tallahassee as well as here. Another couple of other emails I'm going to put in the record. Ed Williamson wrote he was not able to come today. He had wanted to come today, but he had a medical appointment. Jose Pepe Cancio from Cocoplum urged you all to be thoughtful and to move the election to April. That came in 8:41 p.m. If you haven't had a chance to read the letter that was sent by Albert Rodriguez, president and CEO of Spanish Broadcasting System, he responded directly to a lot of the claims that were made by the CGNA. In response to those statements, "that it fails to identify the mechanism by which national partisan politics contaminates the civic will. It conveniently ignores the hundreds of thousands of cities who have their elections held in November and do not encounter any of these problems. There may be a drop-off from the top of the ballot, but you still expect at least double the number of votes is more successful than an April election, and placing local questions on the same ballot than in a November election is and will be an easy way to increase civic engagement and reach voters when they are most politically motivated or informed." So, those are my closing comments. I think you all know where I stand on this item. I hope that this one in my bucket list can get done.

Mayor Lago: Commissioner Castro.

Commissioner Castro: I respect 100 percent your opinion and I respect everyone who was here speaking on behalf of moving the elections to November -- can everybody hear me? -- to November. I was elected -- I could see a lot of the establishment was here in this past election, really it was establishment against residents. And as much as I like the establishment, I'm here to represent the residents, okay? Therefore, let me go ahead and show you the amount of emails that I've got, which is 136 emails that want the elections to stay in April. And these are the emails that I got. I mean, you can compare them. Let me go ahead and just show the difference. Can you see the difference? This is 34 emails that I received. And sadly, I didn't request anybody to come here and speak on my behalf as probably some other people did. But I think this is pretty clear, right? Everybody can see this. I'll go ahead, and since I do represent the residents, I'll read some of them into the record. I have to say I agree with you. I was all for it at first, changing the election. But after careful consideration, I say the risk to having resident representation on the Commission rather than bought seats is simply too great. Why do I say this? During a partisan election, the loudest voice always wins. Who is the loudest voice? The one with the deepest pockets. How do pockets get so deep? That's my concern. Having our election separate from the noise of national elections will allow candidates' voices to be heard as there will not be distractions of national elections and the noise they bring. Okay, standalone elections in general are better focused on local issues, and I have to agree 100 percent with that. Democracy is not what's at

stake, it's most local elections. Local elections are based on hometown issues and that's what's paramount. And I have to agree 100 percent with that too. History and statistics will tell you that. Let's face it, beyond the local residents, what happens in Coral Gables? Wrapping them with large state national elections tend to dilute what is needed locally and every voter gets wrapped into bigger issues, political aspects, and ignores or forgets about local needs. And I could continue, but I'll just -- as you can see, they're pretty long and extensive emails. National elections have a unique importance and should not be mixed with the most local of all elections as citizens of Coral Gables. Having the City elections separate from other political races allows us to focus on the candidates and the issues affecting our city. It also keeps the possibility of unfortunate, decisive, rhetorical that has become too commonplace away from the selection of our city commissioners. The cost savings are an important consideration, however, we have chosen to live in Coral Gables and have already accepted and embraced higher costs for our services. And then it goes into stating examples of what we pay for or not. Please allow our elections to remain our elections. We spend \$3 million on parking garage design, \$100,000 on police tests, and keep millions in sidewalk bonds that have not returned to the residents. We can afford to keep having our own elections. I could agree with that, too. Your proposal to change the election date is unreasonable and unthoughtful. In November, the entire nation is focused on general elections through the country, and yet you want residents of Coral Gables to focus on local matters? No logic to your proposal. I say no to Item E-3. Listen to the people. Listen to the residents who place you where you are today. And then I come to really think about this because I think a strong point here is we need to focus on local matters, okay? And I'm pretty sure everybody read the Miami Herald, the Community Newspaper, and all other articles. I'm not sure if everybody understands how campaigns work, okay? And when you're going to campaign on a November election, you're going to need a lot of money because there's so many elected -- there's so many mailers and thousands of things that are happening during the campaign and we're not focusing on what local elections really are, okay, on the local matters. And in order to at least stand out when you're running on a November, you're going to need a lot of money. And a grassroots campaign, you're not going to get seen. You're not going to get seen at all. We're not going to be choosing the correct candidate according to their qualifications and skills. We're going to be choosing the candidate that has the best -- that has the most money because has the most money to send out mailers, to be on magazines, to send mailers to their counterparties. So, I ask myself, what is the rush? Why was this moved to today instead of October as we had agreed to? Can somebody please give me that answer?

Mayor Lago: Yes. Mr. Manager, can you --? If you'll be so kind, can you discuss a little bit about what we inquired with several pollsters to try to get a poll done and what the findings were? And then I will address the issue of putting this on the agenda today.

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, Mayor. We looked at the polling issue, and as a city, we have a problem polling in that we cannot keep that information private. Whatever we poll, whether it's through a phone call or through email, everything that we poll must be made available through the Freedom of Information. And so it becomes very ineffective for the City to poll. Something like this is better run through the private sector where these issues are not involved, that we would have

to disclose that your vote or how you think would be available to all. So, it's really not effective -- polling is not effective for a municipality.

Mayor Lago: So, Mr. Manager, in response to that -- and I want you to keep going, please take your time. This becomes a privacy matter. And each one of us received a phone call from the Manager explaining the issue of the poll.

Commissioner Fernandez: No.

Commissioner Castro: I didn't.

Commissioner Fernandez: There was no call.

Mayor Lago: Mr. Manager.

Commissioner Castro: Me neither.

Mayor Lago: Did you have a chance to notify the Commission in regards to the poll?

City Manager Iglesias: The...

Mayor Lago: The poll.

City Manager Iglesias: We discussed...

Commissioner Castro: I didn't even know there was a poll.

Mayor Lago: No, there wasn't a poll. It was the findings of whether we...

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, I think we discussed the issues of the problems involved in polling for the City. And...

Commissioner Castro: Not with me.

City Manager Iglesias: Well...

Commissioner Castro: Sorry.

Mayor Lago: So...

Commissioner Fernandez: And mine was at the agenda review yesterday. So, this information did not come to us prior to the agenda even being drafted.

Mayor Lago: The only issue that was outstanding of making a decision and bringing it back for second reading was whether we were going to poll yes or no. So, at the end of the day, we have - we're going to listen to the Commission. The Commission has heard from the residents, and we're going to make a decision whether we keep the elections in April, we move them to November, we defer the item, but it'll be a decision made by the Commission today. We now know that polling is a privacy issue in regards to our residents. And the last thing we want is for us to produce a poll, spend that money, and then have several entities do a public records request and have all that information out in the public, which is not, in my opinion, and I think in the opinion of the Commission, in the best interest of this community, because people's votes are sacred. Imagine somebody pulling that information and then publishing it or doing something with it. I don't want to be behind that. So, please continue.

Commissioner Castro: Okay.

City Manager Iglesias: If I can say, Mayor, the fact that we cannot have a poll brings this up for a discussion. Any Commissioner can bring up whatever they wish as far as a Commission item. And this is better discussed now because I do believe that polling is not what the -- what we can do effectively. So, if the Commission in the future wishes to poll, this takes care of that issue. We cannot effectively poll. The Commissioner really is there to vote and polling is not an effective means for any other issue. So, this is a good discussion to have because, in the future, we really can't do polling unless we want to discuss all the privacy issues from our electorate, which I think is a very poor idea.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. Madam Commissioner.

Commissioner Castro: Okay. In my opinion, this is not just about changing dates. I would say this is something more personal, right? This is something that may be a loophole, something going on in the background. When I was doing my research, I realized, okay, this makes sense. How do you get contributions that are significant enough to be able to stand out in a November election? I could tell you that residents are not going to raise 7, \$800,000 for you. Where is this money coming from? I don't know for how many elections the first thing we're facing is overdevelopment, okay? And as much as I love development, they should not be giving contributions to candidates on a city that's facing overdevelopment. That's the only way, lobbyists, developers, PACs. And coming down to that, Mr. Mayor...

Mayor Lago: Yes, ma'am.

Commissioner Castro: Did you not say that you were not going to run for mayor here?

Mayor Lago: I was considering it, and then after speaking with a lot of residents, as I represent the residents, many came out and had conversations with me. We went out to breakfast, we went

out to lunch, and we had a nice conversation about whether I should run again or not. And I felt motivated to continue representing this great city, which has done so much for me, and I'm blessed to serve.

Commissioner Castro: Well, it happens that all of this is happening so soon because you just filed to run for mayor on August 28, 2023, when all of this is coming about. And it also happens that this is aligning so perfect.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Ms. Castro, it was my decision to put this back on.

Commissioner Castro: But he's the one pushing it.

Commissioner Fernandez: If I may, Madam Vice Mayor, we do follow Robert's Rules. Under Robert's Rules and our City Charter, we are not allowed to interrupt each other.

Vice Mayor Anderson: No, I understand.

Commissioner Fernandez: We are not allowed to interrupt each other. If you want, I would like to...

Vice Mayor Anderson: Go right ahead.

Commissioner Castro: Right before you do that, let me just -- let me just...

Mayor Lago: If I may, if I may.

Commissioner Castro: I'm so sorry, let me finish, I'm sorry. Not today. Coral Gables First, what is that? That is -- do you want to say what that is, Mayor?

Mayor Lago: That is my PAC.

Commissioner Castro: Okay, that has right now \$685,229.63. I mean, I think, point proven right here, what's happening. You can continue. Or I'm sorry, you run the meeting. Tell him to read Robert's Rules.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much, Commissioner, I appreciate that. Commissioner Fernandez, what would you like to say?

Commissioner Fernandez: So, just following up on that last point, under Robert's Rules and under our City Code, under Section 281, Section 2, a member once recognized should not be interrupted when speaking unless said member is being called to order. So, we cannot interrupt each other. And that was part of what the Mayor provided to us at the May Commission meeting. So, just

wanted to bring that up. In addition to that, I have brought copies I personally purchased of Robert's Rules for every member of the Commission, for the Clerk, and for the Manager. These are the same copies that are provided to the board members when they first start serving on boards.

Mayor Lago: If I may, if I may, Commissioner. I don't -- I'm giving it to whoever wants one because this was already given...

Commissioner Castro: There's nobody else up here.

Mayor Lago: You can give it to someone in the...

Commissioner Fernandez: I think the City Attorney doesn't have one.

Mayor Lago: I already have a...

City Attorney Suárez: I have a copy of Robert's Rules, thank you.

Mayor Lago: I already have a copy of this that was given to me by Jeannett Slesnick. So, I have...

Commissioner Fernandez: Great.

Mayor Lago: And I have that -- also, that pamphlet from parliamentary rules.

Commissioner Fernandez: But again, you're interrupting me once again. So, it's against our own charter. This is also Parliamentary Procedure, as given to me by the Florida League of Cities. It's a helpful guide that is presented to newly elected officials on how to observe Robert's Rules. And since we're on the topic of interruption, if you go to page 111, it enumerates the role of the presiding officer. And I think it's important to bring it up here following the last incident. "The presiding officer should never refer to himself as -- should always refer to himself as the chair and never in the terms of I or me. The chair cannot take part in debate or interrupt members who are not violating a rule. Therefore, the presiding officer must not comment or motion during the course of debate unless he first vacates the chair, although he may respond to factual questions when asked vacating the chair. If he vacates the chair, he should not return until the assembly has disposed of the motion at hand. A presiding officer should rarely, if ever, vacate the chair to take part in debate, and nothing can justify it in a case where much feeling is shown and there is a liability that there will be a difficulty in preserving order. The unfortunate habit many chairmen have of constantly speaking on questions before the assembly, even interrupting the members who have the floor without vacating the chair is unjustified and cannot be condemned strongly enough. A person who express -- who expects a debate should not accept the chairmanship. The presiding officer should not only be familiar with parliamentary rules, but also set an example of conformity to the rules. A chairman requires exceptional ability, and most of that ability must be in the nature of controlling. But to control others, the chairman must show he can control himself." And I want

to thank Mayor Cason, who's here today, because during his time as mayor, I don't think he ever interrupted one of his colleagues. He always served with distinction, sat up here, he was the last one to speak, and he always allowed for the discourse and the dialogue to continue without antagonizing other members of the Commission or without talking down to other members of the Commission. So, I wanted to thank you for that. To the issue at hand, I want to start by thanking all of those who have come here today to express their opinions on this issue. I know how important it is for you to be here today and I appreciate you taking the time. Same goes for the over 200 people who have sent emails, text messages, phone calls, advising on their opinion regarding this issue. For over nine decades, the City Beautiful has held elections that have been specific to Coral Gables voters, with the goal of ensuring that Coral Gables issues are at the center of the discussion. I myself have been a proponent of changing our municipal elections to August. However, over the last few weeks, it has become evident that the residents of our city wish to keep the elections in April. Over the last few weeks, the number of emails, calls, and messages from residents have been overwhelming, and they are overwhelmingly in favor of keeping the elections in April. There have been many reasons stated, but I also wanted to make it clear here today. This has nothing to do with higher turnout and everything to do with the establishment seeking ways to cancel the results of the last election. But residents took a stand and elected us to be here. This has been a pattern by the establishment going back a few years. When residents elected a mayor to a four-year term the establishment was not in favor of, they changed the terms to two years. When residents elected Jeannett Slesnick to serve on this Commission as a commissioner, they changed the rules once again to ensure there was a runoff so that somebody like Jeannett Slesnick was not elected again. Here we are today. Residents once again took a stand and they elected Commissioner Melissa Castro and Commissioner Ariel Fernandez to represent their interests on this body. We cannot continue questioning the results of every single election, what is inconvenient to the establishment. Voters elected us, and they didn't just elect Melissa Castro and myself, they elected all five of us. And our role and our responsibility is not to continue bickering, is not to continue chastising each other, is not to continue to put each other down. It is to work together as a body that leads the City Beautiful for the next two years. That is our responsibility. It's not about placing items on an agenda just to make a point. We are the City Beautiful. Let's act like it. Enough with the grandstanding, enough with making things so hyper-political where, Mr. Mayor, you don't even acknowledge us when we walk into the room. The lack of respect that you have for your colleagues is, quite frankly, just something that should come with censorship. A change to the November election might increase turnout in the general election, but using the definition by those in favor of the change, suppressing votes in the deciding election, Miami-Dade County Elections has informed our Clerk that there will be no access to early voting in the December election. So, while we will increase the number of voters for the November election, the December election, which would be the one that ultimately decides who sits on this body, will probably have less voters because the only options to voters will be vote by mail and election day. With all this in mind, I wish to place this item for further consideration and input. Much as my colleague, Commissioner Menendez, had asked for at the last meeting, his request was ignored by those wishing to rush this through. There may not have been an item, a poll or a survey done, but the fact that Commissioner Castro and I -- and I don't know if Commissioner Menendez was

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informed prior to this meeting -- but the fact that we were not informed of what the status was shows that the establishment is not those outside, it's within our City Hall. And it's controlling the information that's getting to the duly elected members of this Commission by residents. And that is not a disrespect to Melissa Castro and myself, it is a disrespect to the 50,000 residents of the City of Coral Gables. We received an email from former Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli. And it reminded me at the last time this question was considered and that there is a process in place to consider such changes, a Charter Review Committee. Last time this item was considered was eight years ago. There was a Charter Review Committee that was convened and they made the recommendation to the Commission that a change to the election was not necessary. They considered other options because at the time there was also a discussion on voter participation. Sitting in this same seat, the Vice Mayor Frank Quesada recommended that we consider a Saturday election to see if that motivated voters to come out and vote in April. Yet here we are today trying to change the process. Today I have an item on this agenda for the City to begin a Charter Review Committee. This is in preparation for the City's centennial, and it is a promise that I had made to residents over the last few months. The committee will consider this and other resident posed questions for consideration, which will come in the form of two town hall meetings where residents can bring up questions for consideration by the Charter Review Committee. Each member of the Commission will appoint one resident to serve on this committee and the committee's recommendations will be brought back to us upon completion of the committee's work for us to take action. I'm going to reserve my time at this point to yield to Commissioner Menendez for his comments.

Commissioner Menendez: I don't have any comments at this moment.

Commissioner Fernandez: So, with that said...

Commissioner Castro: I could go ahead and say something.

Mayor Lago: So, can I run the meeting, or no?

Commissioner Castro: I apologize.

Mayor Lago: You just told me...

Commissioner Fernandez: I have reserved my time, so I yield...

Mayor Lago: You want to run the meeting, or tell me what you would like to do?

Commissioner Fernandez: I've reserved my time, so I can yield to whoever, to other members.

Commissioner Castro: I would love to run the meeting, but I can't. So, I'm sorry for interrupting your (INAUDIBLE).

Mayor Lago: No, I just want to follow Robert's Rules?

Commissioner Castro: One hundred percent.

Mayor Lago: Okay, so moving forward, I'd like to put a few of my concerns and a few things that I believe are important and why I co-sponsored this item. So, I wrote an op-ed to the Herald, and first off, I'd like to thank everybody for their opinions, their guidance. Everything, I think, is exceptionally welcome, and it's exactly what we need here. We need a robust discussion. And that's why this item is on the Commission. I've been in favor of doing this, not for this past six months, this past month, for years now. And this is something that was discussed at the last charter review, which should happen about every 10 years. And I think it's important for us to have that process come back before the Commission and come back before the voters and really understand and digest the charter. Like my Commissioner Fernandez said, Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli did sit on the Charter Review at that point, and he was opposed to a November election. He wrote an op-ed in the Herald saying that his position had changed, that he was now in favor of a November election. So, opinions change. I wrote an op-ed that I'd like to put on the record to the Herald that was published, and it goes as follows. "Voting is a cornerstone of American democracy. And when it comes to local elections, voter turnout is often shockingly low. In the last Coral Gables municipal election, only 20.92 percent of the electorate cast a ballot. One easy reform, however, can significantly increase voter participation. This fall, the Coral Gables Commission will decide whether to move the timing of its municipal elections from April to November to coincide with national and statewide elections. I wholeheartedly endorse this effort. Currently, the Gables holds municipal elections every two years on the second Tuesday of April in odd numbered years. An ordinance proposed by the Vice Mayor, Rhonda Anderson, shifts these elections to the second Tuesday of November, a change that limits repeated trips to the polls. There are several compelling reasons for this reform. First and foremost, national research consistently shows that consolidating elections with November presidential, congressional, and gubernatorial races more than doubles the turnout. For Coral Gables, this would be even more so. In November 2022 elections, 22,262 eligible Gables voters cast ballots compared to 6,905 who voted in April of 2023, our most recent municipal elections. And if looking at a presidential year, the number of voters would more than quadruple since, for example, we had 29,204 voters turn out in November 2022. The differences are staggering. Low voter turnout is a serious roadblock to true democracy. A spring election not only means fewer voters, but the composition of those voting can be quite different from the more visible November elections. I think it's important --" and I'm just going to stop here. This is an actual study. So, we talk a lot about studies, we talk about reputable organizations providing information. This is a study from MIT, from a very reputable organization, university who's well respected. So, I really tried to find actual studies that digest how -- what would happen if you move the elections. This overwhelmingly states the case for why a November election makes sense. Studies by the MIT Election Data and Science Lab in Massachusetts Institute of Technology Project that analyzes voting patterns shows that not aligning local elections with national and statewide races benefits large, well-organized interest groups. Increased voter participation

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ensures a more diverse and representative electorate, voicing a broader range of views on local issues, one that have a direct impact on the quality of life for our city. So, this is not my opinion, this is MIT stating, the larger the election, the more difficult it is for special interests to grab a foothold in these elections. So, a simple date change strengthens local democracy, and it also would save local taxpayers at least \$100,000 each election cycle by eliminating the need for additional staffing and resources that year. Piggybacking on November contests makes local voting almost without cost to the City, since those casting ballots for higher level offices need only to check off a few more boxes further down the ballot. There are other good clear-cut reasons for this change, not the least of which is voter fatigue. As a candidate who campaigned door-to-door for city office in the spring, I often heard, what, another election? Several elections within a few months are tiring. Voters need to learn the data of their local contests, find their polling place, find time to go out there or arrange for a mail-in ballot. As evidenced by the numbers, too many citizens just aren't bothering during April, a time when many families are vacationing and enjoying spring break. Their mindset is just not on politics. Changing the timing of municipal elections would necessitate trimming those currently in elected office in Coral Gables, including shortening my own term by four to five months, but it is the right thing to do. Reform is already occurring in dozens of cities across the nation and locally. South Miami and Pinecrest have made the shift, for instance. It's time for Coral Gables to act. We have a well-educated, highly aware electorate. We must do better than 20 percent voter turnout when selecting our elected leaders. So, just a few more points because I know -- I think we've talked a lot about this already. When you talk about there's 34 municipalities in Miami-Dade County, I did a lot of research on that to find out who does elections and how they do it. 27 of those cities have a November election, and they're transitioning to -- and some are even more considering it. So, we could see a change to having all 34 municipalities in the near future. Like I mentioned, 2023 was the lowest voter turnout in over a decade. That's pretty significant, our August election. And for those who mentioned partisan politics, I could show you examples of how partisan politics already exists in August elections. We all go and speak to the Democrat Party, Coral Gables Democrat Party, we go and speak in front of Young Republicans, seeking their engagement. I'm about to speak at the Young Republicans at University of Miami, along with the Democrats, talking a little bit about what the City is doing and how they can get involved in politics. Because as we know, at the University of Miami, these young students, they just don't get engaged. So, we're always trying to find ways to bring them in. So, I think, in my opinion, if we move things to November, we'll see not only a significant amount of individuals who will be engaged, but you'll see less engagement from special interest groups because they can't control the elections. I think also when they talk about donations, before in an August election, you're chasing after voters that are ranked four and five. In November elections, due to the fact that it's a presidential and a governor's race, you have to chase every single voter, ones, twos, threes, fours, and fives. So, it's not about the issue of money. It's the issue about getting out there and touching hands and making sure people know what you've done. I'm proud of my record. I'm proud of what I've done here in the City. I'm proud of the legislation that I passed. I'm proud of Open Door Fridays for the last 10 years, town hall meetings, engaging on a million different things. I'm proud to put what I've accomplished in the City before the voters. My voting record speaks for itself. And I think that moving forward, we have to

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remember a few things. Democracy is not conditional. We want the most Coral Gables voters to come out. Since the founding of the United States of America, since our country was founded, we have been doing everything in our power to bring more and more people into our democracy. Amendments 15, 19, and the Voting Act of 1965 are clear examples of how we've done everything in our power through the Constitution to bring more people of all diverse backgrounds to come in and engage in voting. So, I think we need to take a step back, think about this. And it also pains me to say this because the idea of a low-informed voter is a clear dog whistle. We're better than that. We're much better than that as a city. Every vote counts. Quality over quantity. I've never thought about it that way. Especially most of us on this dais are of Cuban background. We have immigrant family members and friends who have been clear to us and have told us over and over again what a privilege it is to vote. Never take it for granted. So, the more people that we can bring into this tent, the more people that we can get engaged, I welcome it. It's not an issue that I frown upon, and it's an issue that I've been supporting since the last discussion that we had on our charter review. So, does anybody else have any other comments you'd like to make?

Commissioner Castro: Yes.

Mayor Lago: You're welcome. Go ahead, Commissioner.

Commissioner Castro: In my personal opinion, I think it is unethical to change our own terms. I'm pretty sure if we wanted to change them, I guess it should be after our terms are done. We got elected for these terms, we should finish them. But I'm pretty sure you wouldn't agree with that, right? Number two, it's...

Mayor Lago: Is that a -- are you asking me a question?

Commissioner Castro: I mean, it's kind of rhetorical.

Mayor Lago: No, but I mean, but you're asking -- would you like for me...?

Commissioner Castro: You could go ahead.

Mayor Lago: I would...

Commissioner Castro: Let me finish. Give me one second, thank you. We need to do a better -- I think it's evident that we need to do a better job at marketing our April elections to get more people out there. If people don't know, we can definitely work a lot harder on that. And as a closing, for me, it's a very, very sad day today. This is a day that my mom passed, and I'm here serving the residents in the City of Coral Gables. Let's not make this a sad day for Coral Gables. I'm done.

Mayor Lago: Thank you very much. Anything else? Commissioner?

Mayor Lago: I guess, just recovering my time for a second. There was one point that I did miss, which was the point of voter suppression. Every time I hear that a vote against the changing of the election is voter suppression, it makes it seem as if the 33,000 registered voters in the City of Coral Gables did not have an opportunity to vote in April. This City and the past Commission under the leadership of the three of you actually expanded early voting last election to ensure higher participation because it fell on the holiday weekend. So, when I hear that not changing the election has to do with voter suppression, it can't be further from the truth. I mean, we cannot force people to go out and vote. They have an opportunity. They're presented with an opportunity. Voter suppression would be changing the election to November with a December runoff that does not give them an opportunity to go out and early vote if they're traveling, getting ready for the holidays, returning from a holiday trip for Thanksgiving, because this would fall the weekend after or the week after Thanksgiving, according to the 2025 calendar. So, that was just my final point. With that, I would like to make a motion to defer this item and immediately call up Item F-17 for consideration.

Vice Mayor Anderson: May I...?

Commissioner Castro: I sec...

Mayor Lago: Yes.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Okay, because we haven't even had time to discuss the other. So, let's stay on the item that is before us. We talk about trying to encourage people to vote and other cities have tried to do that too. If you look at the article that I gave you just a few moments ago, New York City was typical in 2017 and had 25 percent of the city's registered voters participate in a mayoral contest. Los Angeles turnout has been so low, 20 percent of registered voters in 2017, more like our city. That city council even used cash prizes to encourage voting. The numbers even get worse as you go down the ladder to county, school board, and special elections. So, you can use cash prizes. You can post -- we put out signs. I posted it on Instagram. Everybody else here posted it on Instagram. We put it out in the e-news. I don't know how much more we can do other than to take into account that people have busy lives. And April is not convenient. In April, I literally had to think about going out to Miami-Dade Elections Department to go get my absentee ballot because I needed to get on a plane to go visit my daughter. My kids are not here locally. Other people have children and they want to travel, go see their grandkids and so forth. April is not convenient. It is spring break. That's when the kids are off. There are other issues in April such as religious holidays and that -- that make April an unrealistic time because families are getting together. Everybody knows when the national elections are. Everybody knows and makes some time for it. The statistics speak for themselves. If it's broken, it would not be wise to keep doing it the same way. And, Commissioner Fernandez, I will invite you and agree with you that we should stop chastising each other, posting negative stuff, criticizing each other, like you did to me the last meeting. Posting false information to incense the public, okay? Spread by

CGNA, it ends up being a situation where it is not nice to do this job anymore, okay? You might enjoy doing that, but I don't. So, I'm going to challenge you to be consistent with the prayer that was there this morning. Be truthful. Be honest. Do what's good for this city, not just good for yourself. I'm the one that brought this item. Ms. Castro, I'm sorry I interrupted you, but I do have a problem when people make false statements. This had nothing to do with the Mayor running, it has nothing to do with me running. It's about having a better democracy here and allowing people to vote. We should not ever, ever take the attitude that only the smart voters should vote or only the elite voters can vote, only the ones that have the time to vote should vote, okay, in April, and not go visit their families and interrupt their days because they're busy working, whether they're doctors, surgeons, lawyers, or other professions. It doesn't make it easy for them to get to the polls. So, I don't know why you have a problem with this. You're sitting here now on this side of the table. I was hopeful that we could join forces in bringing this community together and bringing voters to the ballot box and making it much easier for them to participate. So, on that, I close.

Commissioner Fernandez: I recover my time.

Mayor Lago: May I -- I just want...

Commissioner Fernandez: I'll yield to you.

Mayor Lago: Just one second. Hold on one second. Madam City Attorney, can we discuss a little bit about yielding time, recovering, because I'm --? I'd like for you to clarify that for us.

City Attorney Suárez: So, Mayor, as a general matter, this Commission has a history of collegiality and the Commission meetings have generally run very smoothly and in order. A strict application of Robert's Rules sometimes leads to a little bit of inefficiency. And so traditionally, as you all know, we have not followed Robert's Rules in a very strict manner because it has worked, right? It has worked and I think it has led to more efficient meetings. So, that being said, you know, we -- this is like a new thing that's come up. In our city though, the Mayor does run the meetings, and you know, speakers are recognized through the Mayor, so you know, if you have a specific question, we can...

Mayor Lago: Yes, I don't have an issue with anybody...

City Attorney Suárez: Yeah.

Mayor Lago: Who would like to speak, but is the Commission yielding me time, or are they are they going to decide whether I run the meeting or not? I just want to kind of understand -- you tell me, Madam City Attorney. You're the one that's in charge.

City Attorney Suárez: Yes, Mayor. So, I'll -- let me get go back to the code one moment. So, the Mayor, as chairperson, shall recognize all Commissioners, City Managers, City Attorney, and City Clerk who seek the floor and to correct procedure. All questions and comments are to be directed through the chairperson and restated by the chairperson, and the chairperson declares all votes. Of course, you preserve decorum and order. You call to order any member of the Commission who violates any of these rules. And generally, yes, you preside over the meetings and you run the meetings.

Mayor Lago: Perfect. So, moving forward, moving forward, if the Commission has nothing else they'd like to say on this issue, we have a motion on the floor that was made by the Commissioner. Would somebody like to second that motion?

Commissioner Castro: I seconded it.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Clerk.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I haven't had a chance to look at the language on that. We could go ahead...

Commissioner Fernandez: Just for clarification, it's just to discuss F-17.

Mayor Lago: But...

Commissioner Fernandez: So, this is to defer this item to dis -- in order to discuss F-17. We're not able to talk -- take both of them up together because they were not linked.

City Attorney Suárez: Correct.

Vice Mayor Anderson: No.

Commissioner Castro: Yes.

Commissioner Fernandez: Yes.

Commissioner Menendez: Yes.

Mayor Lago: No.

(Vote: 3-2)

Mayor Lago: I was hoping that we would have to finish this conversation before we moved on to the next item. When would you like to defer this to, tell me?

Commissioner Fernandez: No, it was to call up this -- F-17 right now.

Mayor Lago: No, I'm saying when would you like to defer the item that we just...

Commissioner Fernandez: Until...

City Attorney Suárez: I think, Mayor -- I think the motion was to defer it -- you know, in the short term...

Commissioner Fernandez: Right.

City Attorney Suárez: Is my understanding.

Commissioner Fernandez: In order to discuss F-17, which is the item on the charter review.

Mayor Lago: But what's F-17?

Commissioner Castro: It was a resolution, I think.

Commissioner Fernandez: Right.

[Later...]

Mayor Lago: So, are we moving back now to the previous discussion? I think that's -- we don't -- we don't want to have a vote on this at this moment. That's from my understanding from Commissioner Menendez and the Vice Mayor.

Commissioner Menendez: I think we should take it up in the order that we addressed each item.

Mayor Lago: All right, so we will then go back to the time certain item, which was E-3. All right so what is the will of the Commission? Do you want to have further discussion? It's 12:15. We have a pretty long agenda today. I know that we have to have a budget hearing at 3 o'clock. What is the will of the Commission? Yes, Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I'll make a suggestion that I think will satisfy all the parties here. We vote on E-3. If it passes and the Charter Review Committee disagrees with us, we can bring it back. I would like to get this done because we know that from speaking earlier this summer with the City Attorney that we need to let the Elections Department know sooner rather than later. Second option is we can move it, and if it doesn't work, we can always and always change it back.

Mayor Lago: Okay.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Any other thoughts on that?

Mayor Lago: Would you like to make...?

Commissioner Fernandez: I do have a thought on that. The cutoff is July. So, we technically have nine months. June/July is by the time we have to actually give them the information. So, eight or nine months.

Vice Mayor Anderson: Well, you also have to take into consideration if candidates want to run...

Mayor Lago: Yeah.

Vice Mayor Anderson: The way this is drafted, they need to be ready by June to file.

Mayor Lago: It's just like the example you said. You know, we have nine months. We have two years until the supposed next charter review, which is done every 10 years. If you want to call it two years in advance, we'll call it two years in advance. I think the biggest issue here is what the Vice Mayor said. If we're going to move the elections, the candidates have to work harder because they're going to be shaving back five months from their term. So, it just tightens it even more. The time is to make a decision up or down now, whatever is the will of the Commission. Yes, Commissioner.

Commissioner Castro: I disagree. I think I've made it obvious. I don't want the election to move to November. If anybody has any other compromise or any other idea, this is not something that needs to be decided right now unless you're running for election in the next two years.

Vice Mayor Anderson: You know, I can't ignore -- and I'm sorry.

Mayor Lago: Go ahead, Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Anderson: I can't ignore what the studies show throughout the country, that voter turnout consistently is so low on offseason elections that if what we're trying to do is suppress voters, then we leave it in April. If you want voters out there and you want them to give an opinion on something, whether we keep run-offs or continue to do elections in November, then you need to put it on a November ballot. That's the only way you're going to get a true representation from the City's residents. So, I'm going to move E-3 to pass to...

Mayor Lago: So, we have a motion on the floor. Do we have a second? I will pass the gavel.

Commissioner Fernandez: You don't have to.

City Attorney Suárez: You can make -- you can second, Mayor.

Mayor Lago: I got it. We have a first and a second. Mr. Clerk.

Commissioner Castro: Absolutely not.

Commissioner Fernandez: No.

Commissioner Menendez: I'd like to make a comment before I vote.

Mayor Lago: Of course.

Commissioner Menendez: On first reading, I was the third vote in support of this item, but with the stipulation that the item would not come back for second reading until October to allow our community, our residents, the opportunity to ask questions, get answers, and share their views on this important matter. The stipulation that garnered my initial support was completely disregarded when the item was placed on this agenda, the first Commission meeting in September. This rush to action denies our residents the right and the opportunity to be truly heard on a matter of great historic significance. And since this rush to action says no to our residents, no to our history, and no to the basic democratic principle of government of the people, by the people, and for the people, therefore, my vote is no.

Vice Mayor Anderson: The stipulation, Mr. Menen -- Commissioner Menendez, was for the purpose of conducting the poll you requested. It can't be done. I'll vote yes to ensure that all residents can vote, not just those who are -- view themselves as the politically active, conservative, wealthy, older, white voters who disproportionately sway over local government. History has spoken that this is not the way to run elections. And yes, I vote yes on this. It's a sad day in Coral Gables. That's what I can say.

Mayor Lago: Yes.
(Vote: 2-3)