

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Item E-1**  
**October 22, 2019**  
**City Commission Chambers**  
**405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

**City Commission**

**Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli**

**Vice Mayor Vince Lago**

**Commissioner Pat Keon**

**Commissioner Michael Mena (Appeared by phone)**

**Commissioner Jorge Fors**

**City Staff**

**City Manager, Peter Iglesias**

**City Attorney, Miriam Ramos**

**City Clerk, Billy Urquia**

**Public Speaker(s)**

**Carlos de la Cruz, Jr.**

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Agenda Item E-1 [10:00 a.m.]

Personal Appearance by Chairman of the Board of Director of The Everglades Foundation, Carlos de la Cruz, Jr. who will discuss the importance of reoccurring Everglades restoration funding.

(Sponsored by Vice Mayor Lago).

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay, next item is a time certain, E-1, personal appearance by Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Everglades Foundation, Carlos de la Cruz, Jr., who will discuss the importance of reoccurring Everglades restoration funding.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you, Mayor. I just want to say thank you for allowing me the privilege to place this item on the agenda. I've known Mr. De La Cruz's family, especially his parents, for some time. To say that they're...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: I went to grammar school with...

Vice Mayor Lago: I know.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: His father.

Vice Mayor Lago: Then you have a great -- then you have a much longer relationship. But to say that they that they haven't been -- that they are not committed not only to the arts but committed to this community is -- your family has done a lot for this community. So, I wanted to say thank you. Mr. De La Cruz and I met and, you know, it's been a privilege. We've had Eric Eichenberg speak here at the Commission and also speak at one of my town hall meetings. And I personally donated to your great cause. And I wanted him to come in and just speak for a few moments because we wanted to present a resolution. And I don't -- I didn't put the resolution on the agenda because we were working on it until the last minute. And I'm giving you -- all of you a copy. I know Commissioner Mena can't see it, but I'm giving you a copy of this resolution, which Mr. De La Cruz will be explaining in greater detail what it is. Good morning, sir.

Carlos De La Cruz, Jr.: Well, thank you. Thank you, Vice Mayor Lago. Thank you, Mayor Raul for -- and yes, we have been family. Commissioner Keon, also.

Commissioner Keon: (INAUDIBLE).

Mr. De La Cruz: Our families know each other. And we have not met, so I...

Commissioner Fors: Nice to meet you.

Mr. De La Cruz: I look forward to doing that. Let me -- so, the Everglades Foundation has been around for 30 years. It was started when people -- some fishermen down in the Florida Keys started noticing some significant problems. And ten years ago, they were able to get the Central Everglades Planning Process to be approved by -- in Washington. Twenty years later, very little has been done. I would say that the biggest problem that we've had with Everglades restoration is inaction and a lot of diversions for it not to happen. There's a very clear plan. The plan has been in place for 20 years. It's the largest ecosystem restoration project in the world. We, as an organization, are also taking on the issue of phosphorus in water, which is the largest issue with pollution in water in the world, in fresh water pollution. So, we're taking on two world-class problems that we're trying to fix. And frankly, we're very fortunate that here in Florida we're going to have the ability to complete this most significant project. And it has a great impact on all Floridians, and particularly, here in Coral Gables. The number one impact about Everglades restoration is about drinking water. Everglades is the source for drinking water for all Floridians. Number two really has to do with how water is moved. Everybody thinks about Everglades restoration and we all think about the blue green algae and the red tide. And that's just symptomatic. And believe it or not, that's just a small part of the problem. The biggest issue is that the way Florida was plumbed when, you know, the state was developed, South Florida, it was plumbed in a way where we're dumping half a trillion gallons a year of fresh water into the ocean. We're just wasting it, just throwing it away. So, Everglades restoration is as much about cleaning that water because right now we have an issue where Lake Okeechobee is massively polluted and that water has to be cleaned. But it's about redirecting the water and getting it to go in the direction it has to go. So, right now, water -- instead of flowing south down the Everglades, it's flowing east and west down the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie rivers. The lake is massively polluted. Even if zero pollution goes into Lake Okeechobee, we will continue to have this issue because the amount of pollution that has been into Lake Okeechobee over the last 50 years, we have basically accumulated -- the equivalent in today's pollution levels that we see, we have enough pollution accumulated for 150 years. There's 400 tons of -- 400 metric tons of phosphorus that go into Lake Okeechobee. And that's the pollution that -- the new pollution, let's say. Inside the Lake, we have

60,000 tons of phosphorus inside. So, here in Dade County, you will be the first City Commission to basically support us. In the past, we have gone -- we went to Miami-Dade -- you know, to their Commission, and we were not able to pass a resolution supporting us. And we really feel like we need support from local communities and Coral Gables is a very respected organization. I think that you could be leaders. And this is the 800-pound gorilla in Florida. This is the one thing that we can do in Florida that really impacts our planet is it. A lot of people very often tell me, oh, you know, so if we just run out of water, we just can -- we can just desalinate. Well, desalination -- the cost of it would be prohibitive, number one. And number two, it would be contrary to what everybody says about, you know, this whole issue with global warming.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: And it tastes bad.

Mr. De La Cruz: It tastes bad. No, and it consumes more fuel.

Vice Mayor Lago: Yeah.

Mr. De La Cruz: So, you know, it would be more energy. And why do we need to desalinate when we're dumping half a trillion gallons already? So, we just have to keep the water on our land. Get these projects moving forward. We finally have a governor in Tallahassee that has made this his number one priority. He's still in a minority in some ways because there are a lot of forces fighting this. And, you know, I just thank you. I just thank you. I thank Vince Lago, Mayor -- you know, Vice Mayor Lago for meeting with us and having this initiative. And we look forward to coming back to you in the future for additional support.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: This is a wonderful initiative. And I thank Vice Mayor Lago and you for -- especially you for everything you're doing for us. And I'm glad that Coral Gables can be one of the first cities to support your effort. And do I hear a motion about this?

Vice Mayor Lago: I would like to make a motion.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay. Is there a second?

Commissioner Keon: I'll second it.

Vice Mayor Lago: And this is -- I want to echo the sentiments of the Mayor. And the Chairman doesn't need to be doing this. And, you know, like we've talked about in our meeting, this is a labor of love. This is a commitment, but not today. This is a commitment to our children.

Mr. De La Cruz: It is.

Vice Mayor Lago: And I say that with all humility because when you talk about -- I think you said it very well. This is a resolution which is going to send a very, very strong message and I want to be very clear about this. This is putting the environment above everything. And we, as elected officials here in South Florida, people say, you know, let's deal with Coral Gables issues only. This is a Coral Gables issue.

Mr. De La Cruz: Yes, it is.

Vice Mayor Lago: This is a -- having clean water and restoring the flow of the Everglades is a Coral Gables issue. It is a municipality issue. It is a local issue. If we do not have clean air and clean water, I promise you, we don't have South Florida.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: That's right.

Vice Mayor Lago: So, when we talk about being the first city, this is one of the proudest legislations that I brought before the City. I know this is a resolution and not an ordinance, but this is -- I am proud of bringing this forward. And I hope that once -- if we pass this today, I hope that we submit this -- and I ask that our Clerk submit this to all municipalities in Miami-Dade

County, Palm Beach, you know, the Keys and upstate Florida to send a message to our Governor, which our Governor -- which I support our Governor's efforts. I'm very impressed about what he's doing in regards to Everglades restoration and putting the environment first. I would like to see every municipality in Miami-Dade County -- I'll be presenting it as a League of Cities representative for the City of Coral Gables. I will be pushing this forward in an effort to send a strong message from Miami-Dade County's coalition of cities that we support the Ever -- the work that you and the Everglades restoration are do -- excuse me, the Everglades Foundation are doing on behalf of Everglades restoration.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you. Thank you, Vice Mayor.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Will you call the roll, please?

Mr. De La Cruz: Thank you.

Commissioner Mena: Yes.

Commissioner Fors: Yes.

Commissioner Keon: Yes.

Vice Mayor Lago: Yes.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yes.

(Vote: 5-0)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much. And thank you for all your efforts...

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: And everything you're doing.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you.

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