

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item D
July 13, 2021
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Vince Lago

Vice Mayor Michael Mena

Commissioner Rhonda Anderson

Commissioner Jorge Fors, Jr.

Commissioner Kirk Menendez

City Staff

City Manager, Peter Iglesias (Absent)

Assistant City Manager, Ed Santamaria

City Attorney, Miriam Ramos

City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Agenda Item D [4:33 p.m.]

Mayor's Comments

Mayor Lago: So, I have two points that I'd like to just take a few moments of your time to address. The first one is Surfside. Before we begin, I think its important to reflect on the recent events in Surfside. Our hearts go out to all the loved ones suffering as a result of this unimaginable tragedy. During these difficult times, we are heartened by how people have come together to help support these families and pray. I want to offer my most heartfelt thanks to Mary Snow and the leadership of the Coral Gables Community Foundation for their hard work and hands-on assistance in directly helping those affected. To our First Responders, who have worked at this site where so many lives were lost, I will ask all of them to join us at our next Commission meeting so that we can personally recognize their hard work and dedication on behalf of this entire community. Many of the lives lost has strong ties to Coral Gables, like Gamora and Guerra families. Maggie Vasquez Bayo, Enrosa _____, who worked at local travel agency Express Travel. Everyone in our community is

City Commission Meeting

July 13, 2021

saddened by the loss of life. So, let's please, take a moment of silence to reflect on and pray for all of the victims and may God provide their families with strength during these incredibly difficult times.

[Moment of Silence]

Thank you and God bless. On a second note, I want to bring up the issue that we've been seeing over the last three days in regard to the island of Cuba. We are all concerned with the events happening in both Haiti and Cuba. To our Haitian neighbors and friends, our hearts are heavy, and our thoughts are with you during these incredibly difficult times, and we wish a speedy recovery to Ms. Moise, God speed. In regard to Cuba, for more than six decades, protests like the ones that we saw this past weekend in Cuba have never occurred. Thousands of Cubans from different towns, cities and provinces organized themselves to peacefully protest in pursuit of basic human rights. It was especially horrific to witness the Cuban security apparatus beating peaceful protesters. These goons went as far as to block the opportunity for the people to organize and access social media. We've seen priests beaten to a pulp. We've seen women and young children taken out of their homes as they are being videotaped with no mercy. This is not civilized society. This is Tierney. Many times, here in the United States we take our freedoms for granted. For many, the idea of living in a country that does not guarantee basic human rights, such as the ones that are afforded in the U.S. Constitution is hard to imagine. Although, I know many of our fellow residents, like my parents that had to flee their countries and under-aged unaccompanied minors well understand the reality of totalitarian régimes. My father came to this country as "Peter Pan," came to this country with nothing. Locally that is not a strange story. This country embraced my father. My father embraced this country. My father loves this country more than he loves Cuba, but our roots are in Cuba. But our passion and our love are for this country. Since 1959, the people of Cuba have lived under a system that denies them basic rights, such as the freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom to assemble. Freedoms and rights define us as Americans. As Cuban patriot and poet, Jose Marti said, "liberty is the right of every man to be honest, to think and to speak without hypocrisy." Yesterday President Joe Biden issued a statement that the U.S. stands with the Cuban people in their call for freedom. Relief from the tragic grip of the pandemic and from the decades of repression, economic suffering to which they have been subjected to by the Castro and Cuban regime. It is incredible to think, as our distinguished Senator Marco Rubio said, that the only country on this planet where Cubans are not successful is in Cuba. Sometimes we get off in a tangent of partisanship; some people may not be fans of Marco Rubio, perfectly fine, but his comments and thoughts that Cubans are not successful in their own native country is one that really affected me incredibly yesterday. Together we must send a strong unified message and join the voices of the Cuban people demanding liberty and freedom. So, today I urge my fellow Commissioners to join me and stand in support with the protesters in Cuba who demand their freedom by way of a resolution supporting this cause. In addition, please join me in the Miami-Dade League of Cities, First Vice President Mayor J.C. Bermudez of Doral, who is requesting the

City Commission Meeting
July 13, 2021

support of all municipal Mayors. I would like for the City Commission to join me in signing a letter in support of the Cuban people's pursuit of freedom. I hope to count on a unanimous support of this Commission. So, thank you and God bless. If anybody has any other comments, please, the floor is yours.

Commissioner Menendez: Everyone regardless of your background, having lived in South Florida, one way or another your life has been touched by the tyrannical government right in my own south of Florida. You have friends and families; people have lost their family members executed. People have lost their lives at sea. The tragedy continues on. Before the Commission meeting, I had a great discussion with Maria Cruz. We shared notes, we shared histories, and it's a common history that permeates throughout our community. Its one about freedom and democracy, doesn't matter, as the Mayor said, what Party you belong to, what your background is, we all share that common love and that common struggle to preserve freedom and to make sure that everyone has the opportunity to live in a life in a system that we have where you can feel free to speak, and feel free to assemble, and you are not going to get beaten up or thrown in prison or killed. I would like to read, as I was reflecting this weekend what's been happening and what continues to happen, and I think we are at a point in history where I think after so many years, so many decades, I think change is indeed right around the corner, but it requires all of us in this community and around the country to help move it forward. So, I'd like to read the following that came from my heart. We as a nation can no longer look away. We as a nation defend our most basic human rights every single day. We as a nation stand at the doorstep of freedom for the long-standing suffering of an entire nation. We as a nation must help the Cuban people and all people push the door of freedom open never to be closed again. Thank you.

Mayor Lago: Thank you. I'll entertain a motion in support of the cause and what we are seeing currently and in support of the dissidents and freedom in Cuba for many of my colleagues on the Commission.

Vice Mayor Mena: I'd be proud to make the motion and I want to thank you for your comments, Mayor, very poignant.

Commissioner Anderson: And I second it.

Commissioner Fors: Likewise.

Mayor Lago: And I also want to make a comment really quickly after we take the roll.

Commissioner Anderson: Yes

Commissioner Fors: Yes

Vice Mayor Mena: Yes

*City Commission Meeting
July 13, 2021*

Commissioner Menendez: Yes

Mayor Lago: Yes

Mayor Lago: I also want to thank Commissioner Fors and his brother who joined myself and I know Commissioner Mena was going to be there, but he was out of town working, join myself and my father and a few others, close to 100 individuals who made a very strong stand two weeks ago in Coral Gables in regard to certain things that were occurring here in our community. And I want to be clear, everyone is welcome to speak in our community, we welcome free speech. I welcome even speech that I'm going to disagree with, that's how beautiful this county is. But what I don't welcome is violence. What I don't welcome is the destruction of private property. And there are people in this country that believe that socialism and communism work, it doesn't work. My parents came to this country in search of freedom. This is the greatest country in the world. We are far, far, far from perfect, but there is nothing quite like this anywhere else. So, when I use the words God Bless America, I use it with the intent of always reminding myself of how special this place is. So, with that being said, I have the privilege of today, I asked the Senator to show up and give us a few words. The Senator has taken a really big position in the State of Florida, not only as our Senator, which is a prestigious position to have and represent this community, but she has decided to go above and beyond. She has implemented office hours here in the City of Coral Gables in our first-floor conference room and she's really been an advocate on behalf of the City of Coral Gables. So, I want her to come up and just talk a little bit about what she's been working on and kind of give us a little bit of a report card on her incredible efforts in Tallahassee representing this community. So, thank you for being here Senator.

[Go to item G-1 – Appearance by Senator Ileana Garcia]