

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item D-1
July 15, 2008
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Donald D. Slesnick, II
Vice Mayor William H. Kerdyk, Jr.
Commissioner Maria Anderson
Commissioner Rafael “Ralph” Cabrera, Jr.
Commissioner Wayne “Chip” Withers

City Staff

City Manager, David Brown
City Attorney, Elizabeth Hernandez
City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman

Public Speaker(s)

David Lawrence, Jr., President of The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation

D-1 [Start: 9:06:26 a.m.]

David Lawrence, Jr., President of The Early Childhood Initiative Foundation, on behalf of the Children’s Trust, urging support of a ballot question on August 26, 2008.

Mayor Slesnick: Thank you, it is our custom to spend our first... part of our time today together in doing some recognitions of employees, of citizens, and of special causes and events. We are going to move two of our special presentations to the front; and we have David Lawrence with us today, and David is here to talk with us about something that is very important to our community, that’s coming up. David is president of the Early Childhood Initiative Foundation, and he is here on behalf of the Children’s Trust today, to talk about a decision which the citizens of Dade County are going to make later this summer. David welcome; David, by the way, as you all know is well known to most everyone watching this program, former publisher of the Miami Herald and a tremendous community servant, and a citizen of Coral Gables, so.

Mr. Lawrence: And what did I miss, the newspaper business now, it’s a lot tougher.

Mayor Slesnick: And I think Chip wanted me to add...

Commissioner Withers: And one more thing.

Mr. Lawrence: And a Florida Gator.

LAUGHTER

Mr. Lawrence: I'm grateful for you taking the time Mr. Mayor and Commissioners; I think this is really fundamental to the future of this community. In 2002 we passed 2-1 the Children's Trust; there are eight counties in Florida that do this – Hillsborough, Pinellas, Broward, Palm Beach, Miami-Dade, Martin, St. Lucie, and Okeechobee; because five of the counties are very big, it covers two-thirds of the population of this State. Essentially, voters are asked to raise their taxes, if they want, a half mil or a mil, in Miami-Dade where we voted to do it a half mil. The median assessed value homeowner pays fifty-seven dollars and eighty-eight cents (\$57.88) a year for this; because we are a very big place with lots of commercial construction and so forth, it aggregates a hundred million a year. And you'd say, well that's a lot of money, and it is, but we are in a County whose County budget is seven and-a-half billion dollars (\$7.5B) a year, and you could flitter away a hundred million fairly easily in this community, it would be sort of lost in the vapors, which would be sad and tragic. When we passed it in 2002, we passed with the "sunset" in my life and I'm older than maybe all of you; I've never voted on a tax that had a "sunset", so folks have had a chance for five plus years to see how it works and what it means; here's what it means – its an Independent Special Taxing District; it's a thirty-three member board; it has not had, I think you'll agree with me, one whip, one taint of any scandal about one nickel being spent; that's fairly unusual in our larger community. What's it pay for? We campaign on the basis that we'd do something – some things that wouldn't be done otherwise. For instance, I am a full product of public school; graduated from High School in this State, and public college in this State. When I went to school there was always a school nurse. It was part of the fundamental of American society. In the last twenty-five years people have taken away art, gym, music, recess, school nurses from lots of the schools. Two school years ago in Miami-Dade County, we had a total of nineteen (19) nurses and twenty-four (24) health clinics for three hundred and thirty-five (335) public schools and the fourth biggest system in America. Despite the fact that we know about autism, obesity, asthma, social and emotional behavioral problems; because of the Children's Trust and a partnership with the Health Department, School System, by this August a hundred and sixty-five (165) public schools have school health teams including, not only a nurse or nurse practitioner, but also someone with a Master's in social work because many of these youths are behavioral, social and so forth. That couldn't happen without the Children's Trust. Second example: greatest spike in crime in the United States of America occurs about three o'clock on school week days. Young people have something to do, or they have something else to do. The Children's Trust pays for forty-five thousand (45,000) children in this community to have higher quality after school and summer camp. Third example: each year all of the time, one out of every five children in America in this community is a special needs child; could be autism, it could be ADHD, could be cerebral palsy, it could be a plethora of other challenges. The Children's Trust is spending fifteen million dollars (\$15M) in this community on this. We are investing twelve million (\$12M) in higher quality child care. Most child care in America is storage and warehousing; you wouldn't want your children or grandchildren in there, why would you want somebody else's children or grandchildren in there. So this is practical work, it is also in my view moral work. On August 26 this will either go on and on and on, way past my life time and frankly the life time of everyone in this room, or it will simply be gone. We live in a State now which is in economic turmoil; the minister spoke of this. The challenge next year in our State is going to be worse than this year. There is an incipient banking crisis that we have been reading about in the last several days. The County Commission is about to cut two hundred million dollars (\$200M); the School System is having a blood bath over two hundred and eighty-four million dollars (\$284M) in cuts; the State has cut five billion dollars this past year and may

well cut more next year; it would be just tragic for this community if it were to lose this. This is August 26th; it is a recipe for a low turnout election, if you know who is running, not a lot of barn burner races, a few legislators, a little Commission, the Mayor of Miami-Dade County who does seem to be substantially challenged, and the judicial races, and the Children's Trust; it's a recipe for eight, nine, ten percent of the people coming out. This will either be passed on that day or it will be simply gone. It's very hard to get this done; this was first tried in 1988 and good people whom you know, Janet Reno, the State Attorney and others worked hard to pass it and it failed 2-1. We passed it in a very different way in 2002. In 2008, it's either with us passed our life times, or it is simply gone from this community. The support for this, the Honorary Steering Committee includes all the usual suspects on the progressive side, you may argue whether if its progressive or not, so don't get me into a problem here, but it also includes people like Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and Jeb Bush and Marco Rubio. This isn't a Democrat or Republican thing; this is about the children of our community. We read in the paper every single day immense challenges, somebody is doing something about it and we need your support. Thank you and God Bless you.

Mayor Slesnick: Thank you David for what you've done for this community and your continued service, and the League of Cities at its recent meeting adopted a resolution supporting the reinstitution of the Children's Trust money and urging the citizens of Dade County to support it by their vote, and I'd entertain a motion from the Commission if we so desire to pass a similar resolution.

Commissioner Cabrera: So moved.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Second.

Mayor Slesnick: It's been moved by Mr. Cabrera and seconded by Mr. Kerdyk. Any other discussion? Well, all those in favor please say aye.

All: Aye.

Mayor Slesnick: Opposed like sign. Well, David at least it's unanimously and let it so be enrolled in the annals of this Commission that we have unanimously passed the resolution supporting the Children's Trust and your efforts to help the children of this community.

Mr. Lawrence: ...[Inaudible – off mike]...thank you very much.

Mayor Slesnick: Well thank you very much, thank you.

[End: 9:15:29 a.m.]