

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item E-1
August 29, 2017
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli
Vice Mayor Pat Keon
Commissioner Vince Lago
Commissioner Frank Quesada
Commissioner Michael Mena

City Staff

City Manager, Cathy Swanson-Rivenbark
Assistant City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Attorney, Craig E. Leen
Deputy City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman
Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Senator Jose Javier Rodriguez
Representative Daisy Baez

Agenda Item E-1 [0:00:00 p.m.]

Legislative updates by Florida State Senator Jose Javier Rodriguez.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: And, I'd like to recognize Senator Jose Javier Rodriguez, who will give us an update on the legislative session and what we can expect for the future. Welcome, Senator. I'm glad you're in our city.

Senator Rodriguez: Good morning.

Unidentified Speaker: Morning.

Senator Rodriguez: Mayor, Commissioners. I don't think I've had a chance to formally congratulate you, Mayor, and Commissioner Mena. It's nice to see you up here. Jose Javier Rodriguez, state senator, representing Coral Gables, along with Representative Nick Duran and Representative Daisy Baez is also here. I just want to -- you know, I try -- I know that you have a very busy schedule, especially today, but I try to come before and after every legislative session, so that we can have a discussion on the record about your legislative priorities and kind of put me on the hot seat or engage in a discussion, as it may be. And I just want to say thank you to your City Attorney and your staff, your able, you know, lobbying core. I know Fausto Gomez is here. I rely heavily on he and his team and on Craig Leen and others. And especially, to you all -- I know many of you all are not shy about reaching out about issues to kind of help educate me and kind of coordinate our efforts. Briefly, a couple of categories that I wanted to talk about, sort of looking backwards at this last legislative session, are, you know, one, to kind of talk about the budget and the legislative process in general. Two is to talk about preemption and, you know, three -- I'll remember what three is when I get there. But -- so, first, with respect to the budget, generally, this was a good session with respect to your items, with the exception of something that's not unique, which is the water projects. The water projects have been something that have been a very opaque process. It's been a very difficult process generally for a lot of cities in Miami-Dade. We have -- there's a group of us trying to improve the process, but we are not there yet. It's still a very random process and it's still subject to the Governor's veto pen way too often. But, when I talk about the process with respect to the budget, many of you who were following the session, I think saw probably the worst legislative session that there's been in modern times in the Florida Legislature. And, the reason for that is that a lot of things were done at the last minute without real debate using the conference process, something that's happening in Washington, as well, where things -- giant legislative projects are rocketed through and sort of hoisted on people at the last minute. There was less transparency than there has been

before. There is a high degree of remorse, particularly in the Senate, on a bipartisan basis from the leadership. And so, our hope is that that will not happen again. It was something that many of us were very vocal about, tried to fight. And, you know, it's something that has affected some of our shared legislative priorities. What I will say in terms of an overall view of the session, when we look at our public education system, I think this was a very negative session, particularly with respect to a very large education bill that was rocketed through at the last minute. I could talk more about that if you want to. With respect to the environment, I think that it was a modestly good session. And when I say modestly good, well, not a lot of things that we were hoping for, but that didn't happen. But, for those of us who care about water quality, our aquifer, the Everglades, the fact that we did move the ball forward with respect to creating a reservoir south of Lake Okeechobee to try to restore natural water flows that did happen. And so, that is a very positive thing that we're continuing to work on. And then with respect to healthcare -- and again, this kind of falls in the bucket of general overview of session -- it was a negative session. Some very deep cuts, unnecessary cuts in our public health system, honestly, to pay for some pet projects. That was something that was vigorously debated on both sides of the aisle, but ultimately, we did not have votes to defeat that. I think the last topic that I wanted to talk about was preemption. And so, for those maybe watching or listening, preemption is the idea that the state government takes away powers that you currently have and says, no, you can't do that. And, there are a couple of concrete examples that are extremely important to you. I know you all work very hard at quality of life and try to have forward-thinking policies here in Coral Gables. With respect to plastic bags -- so, your authority to regulate plastic bag use, plastic bags, I know you all moved forward courageously, I think. In the Legislature, we were able to get -- I sponsored the bill in the State Senate. We were able to kind of, you know -- kicking and screaming from many quarters, but we were able to get a full hearing in the Senate in committee on the plastic bag bill to allow local jurisdictions to regulate plastic bags. I'm gratified by that. We did not get it passed, but I'm gratified by that, because as we try to deal with other preemption efforts, polystyrene and Styrofoam, I think it's important to continue to have that conversation and, you know, increase the number of allies that we have on those issues. With respect to preemption when it comes to your ability to, you know, deal with land use and

environmental regulations when we're talking about FPL's powerlines, you all had a victory in the courts. There was an effort to undo that and say no, you know, FPL could just, you know, quash all your local regulations. That bill was defeated, thankfully. We were able to defeat that bill. Hopefully, it's not going to come back. But, hopefully, we'll continue to retain that authority. That is -- you have my commitment to continue fighting on that and the other preemption issues. I think the third one is on vacation rentals. I honestly think that the very live property issue -- property rights issues on both sides of the vacation rentals debates are much more appropriate for you all to deal with than for the legislature of Tallahassee just to preempt your authority altogether. So, that's a topic that we'll continue battling on. I'm eager to hear any questions you have as we develop our priorities for the 2018 legislative session, but I think one thing that I did want to mention -- because it was something that one of you all invited me to mention. When we're watching what is happening in Houston, I think -- the federal government is the one that has resources for emergency response, but it is incumbent upon us, especially at the state level, to encourage planning, long-term planning. Because, when we're talking about transportation and other areas, we have 20-year plans. We have 25-year plans. But when we're talking about the effects of extreme weather events, sea level rise, there is no coordinated planning on a regional scale of that timeframe. And, I and a group of us are trying to figure out exactly what sort of policy change would help change that landscape, so that there are best practices so that cities, state agencies, counties are working together with a same set of plans, so that we're out ahead of these things as much as we can. And so, that's something I'm eager to hear your input on as we move forward on that proposal. I will be filing something. I'm not sure if it's going to be the absolute best product, but it's something we're working on, and I'm trying as quickly as I can...

Commissioner Quesada: You know what...

Senator Rodriguez: To get to something (INAUDIBLE).

Commissioner Quesada: And, thank you for addressing those points. Thank you for being here. You've been a great representative for the City for many years. When it comes to the Harvey situation, you know, any time there's a little bit of a trickle in South Florida, there's flooding somewhere. So, you know, as we've been watching this on TV, and I have some friends who live in Houston and experiencing that way, you know, makes me think if Harvey were hitting South Florida, how would Coral Gables react and the rest of South Florida, what we would do. And, I don't know if this is currently in place or not -- this is maybe just my ignorance on the topic, but I think we need to set up something with the State Legislature and the federal government and hear -- I don't know if it's with Public Works or with the Fire and Police departments, just so that we're coordinated. Just to make sure that if something like this happened in the future, we're not scrambling. I think living in South Florida, it's inevitable that something will happen, you know, eventually. Who knows when, but I just want to make sure that at least this dais is educated as to what our local plans are and that we're properly coordinated with the state and federal government. This may be happening already, I don't know. But, I just want to make sure that that exists.

Commissioner Lago: That's a great idea. Mayor, I may. Because, I mean, at the end of the day, I also have family -- I have my first cousin who lives in Houston. She's a psychiatrist over there. And they've been -- and they're under water. It's incredible. I've never seen anything quite like that and we live in a swamp. So, I hadn't given it much thought either, but that's something -- maybe we can have a conversation with...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Let's do that.

Commissioner Lago: ACM Fernandez and maybe see how we're coordinating -- but I think you're on the ball.

Commissioner Quesada: But I mean, I think we need to have a direct contact with -- if it's...

Commissioner Lago: State level.

Commissioner Quesada: Policy at the state level as well as in the federal level. If it doesn't exist already, I think we need to aggressively implement a plan. I know we have our disaster relief plans, but I don't know to what extent it would cover what we're seeing -- you know, what we'd anticipate with, you know, the sea level rise that we've experienced.

Commissioner Lago: By the way -- Mayor -- no, no, I'm sorry. I apologize.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: No, go ahead.

Commissioner Lago: No. I just wanted to add -- and we forget, because the Mayor can -- probably has the most experience because, you know, out of sight, out of mind. When there was a light rain on the Mile, you would see flooding.

Commissioner Quesada: Yeah.

Commissioner Lago: Now, we don't see that obviously, because of our infrastructure upgrades and the monies that we have invested as a Commission on this city and on the downtown area. What ends up happening is you don't have that in your mindset, so you're not bringing it up. So, when you have a large situation, like a Harvey, and then you're like, my God, we could have potentially done something more. I'm with you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: No, I agree. And, this is a topic that we should discuss at some point, because it is a very significant...

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: We're happy to put it on the agenda. I just want you to know, Mayor that they meet -- our emergency management team meet multiple times prior to season and during season.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: And, maybe they should meet with us at our next Commission meeting then...

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: We're happy to have a full...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: We could talk about it.

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Briefing on it. That's an excellent point.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Let me get back to our topic and thank our senator being here. And the impression I have is that any time Big Industry wants something from the Legislature, they roll over and play dead and give it to them. And, forget -- I was going to use a word that I shouldn't use in public, but forget the cities, forget the local communities and they roll over and play dead, and that is wrong. And, the biggest assault that concerns me -- apart from emergency issues, of course, but the biggest one is the assault on home rule. You know, we should be able to govern ourselves regarding local matters, and the Legislature keeps trying to impose its duty on us. And, anything you can do -- and I wish to recognize Daisy Baez, our representative who's here, and maybe ask her to come over to the podium, too, if possible. And, that concerns me very much, because I don't see the Legislature being aware of our concerns. Our cities, whatever -- and I'll repeat it again for the third time. Any time Big Industry wants something; they roll over and play dead. That concerns me very much.

Senator Rodriguez: Yeah, if I may respond. So, I think -- before I turn it over to our esteemed representative. So, I think that -- I think your analysis is absolutely right. I mean, it's no accident on the issues where there's a preemption effort that there's usually an industry interest. And, I think another bill that we were actually able to hold in the Senate -- we weren't able to formally defeat it, but it never passed, I guess we did defeat it, was a bill that would have allowed FPL to spend ratepayer money on fracking at our expense. And, it was just something

that was so hard to understand why anybody would think this is a good idea to put in policy. And, one of the reasons we were able to defeat it is because we had in our hands the Wall Street analysis on how their shareholders would have benefitted immediately had that bill been signed into law by the Governor. And so, I think a lot of these efforts have preemption at, you know, attacking your ability to do forward-thinking policy are directly driven by, you know, folks who can't come get you to do what they want go to Tallahassee. So, I think that's accurate. And, with respect to the emergency issues, I'll sort of defer to you if there are -- and kind of continuing that conversation. If there are appropriations issues, et cetera, that are needed in terms of emergency response, absolutely, you can count on me. And, with respect -- but you also have my commitment that with respect to the forward-thinking policy to try to figure out how we have more planning coordination in the future, as, you know, Commissioner Lago mentioned. And you know, a lot of these things are out of sight until they happen and that's the purpose of planning is that you're ready for things that you cannot see right now, but you do know may be coming.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much.

Senator Rodriguez: Thank you for your time.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you. Representative Baez.

Representative Baez: Good morning, everyone, Mayor, Commissioners, Manager. It's really an honor and a privilege to be here today, to be invited here. I represent District 114, which includes this beautiful city, and I'm really proud to represent it in Tallahassee. It was, as has been said, a tough session for cities and localities, but we did mount a very strong fight, a lot of the same things that Senator Garcia has alluded to, so I am not going to repeat that. But, I can tell you this much. I met with then-Mayor -- your predecessor, and we sat down and talked about your priorities as a city, and we worked very closely along the entire session with him and with your lobbyist, Fausto Gomez, to make sure that we got the items that were a priority for you

in the budget or in other legislative priorities. And, I intend to -- and I'm here today before session to reiterate my same commitment to you that we -- that is our job to be your voice. As the word representative says, I am here to represent you in Tallahassee, not other interests, but the things that you determine are your priorities. So, we -- I look forward to meeting with you to continue to have that dialog. But, in spite of everything that happened, in spite of it being a really tough session, especially for cities, I can tell you that we did accomplish a few things that were important for the city. We did help secure over a million -- \$138,000 of improvements in -- for transportation in the area. We also secured \$1,284,000 for other construction in Department of Transportation priorities. We helped secure \$4,876,000 for the improvements to the Ponce de Leon/37th/US 1 construction project. Additionally, there were many grants secured for cultural and other community events and organizations, including \$25,000 for Congregational Church, \$48,000 for Actor's Playhouse, \$40,000 for Gables Stage, \$48,000 for Fairchild Gardens, \$24,000 for Coral Gables Cinematheque, \$1,870 for Alhambra Music, \$4,560 for Arca Images, \$23,000 for Aria Performance Gallery and other projects. So, we will continue to fight for you to bring money back to the City. And, the other thing that I can tell you is that I -- because I sat on three healthcare committees, I was very, very strong and a real, real voice pushing for our healthcare industry. And, I was very dismayed to see that the final budget had a cut of almost \$600 billion to healthcare -- million dollars to healthcare. And, many of the folks here that are representing healthcare know that we put it -- we put up a real, real fight, because healthcare provides some of the best-paying jobs that we have in our city, jobs that allow people to participate in the economy, because they're better paying jobs that generally require degree or certificate training, actual, you know, experience. And therefore, those are the kinds of jobs that allow people to buy houses, get a new car, go out to dinner, you know, upgrade their vehicle. And so, it's an industry that deserves to be supported. So, I look forward to working with all of you. I will entertain any questions.

Commissioner Quesada: Yeah, I have...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much.

Commissioner Quesada: One question.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Go ahead.

Commissioner Quesada: I'm sorry.

Representative Baez: Sure.

Commissioner Quesada: If you don't mind.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Go ahead.

Commissioner Quesada: And Mr. Senator, I need you back up here, as well. The question is for both of you. I said I wasn't -- I told Jose Javier that I was not going to bring this up, but with Mr. Ruvin, our esteemed clerk here, I have to bring it up, because it's got me infuriated. And, I'll just set the stage a little bit here. The State Legislature has recently cut funding to the County Clerk. So, the County Clerk is the entity that manages the records and provides critical services for the judiciary, as well as all residents of Miami-Dade County. We're uniquely suited in Coral Gables, because we have a Coral Gables Courthouse that's going to affect us here. But really, it affects everyone. If you look at the traffic into the Coral Gables Courthouse, it's individuals from all over the County. So, my concern is we're not in a recession and I feel like the State Legislature is gutting the state judicial branch. That's my feeling. Now, I'm an attorney. I'm in court all the time. And, Mr. Ruvin and his team do a spectacular job. But, the problem is, when you start taking away millions of dollars of their funding, you know, it makes it incredibly difficult for someone to pay a parking ticket, for someone to get a marriage license. You know when you're in the unfortunate situation that you have to sue someone or are being sued, it just delays everything. And, as a fellow litigator understands, justice delayed is justice denied. It's

unfortunate what's happening, you know, as -- I mean, we have three attorneys up here, and I'm sure others that understand the legal process and our esteemed...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Don't hold that against us.

Commissioner Quesada: And, we understand the importance of this, you know. And, I feel that it's -- again, I feel very strongly about this, that I feel like it's one arm of government gutting another arm of government. You know, I don't know how you guys voted for it or against it. But, I guess what I'm telling you today is it's important for our residents to ensure that the courthouse that we have in our backyard is effective and it still is an amenity for anyone who lives in the City or nearby. It's a necessity. It's actually a necessity. So, whether you voted for it or against it, it doesn't matter at this point. It's happened. What I want to see from you guys is -- I am challenging you -- I'm demanding of you to ensure that when you go back to Tallahassee, to make sure that we get those funds instituted or at least try to help us get to that point.

Representative Baez: Commissioner Quesada, I share your sentiment. I agree with it. And I can tell you publicly know and it's on the record that I voted against that budget for that particular -- not that particular reason, but many like that. It was -- I felt in my opinion that that budget was basically an assault on localities and it was an assault on healthcare, and with no particular reason because we -- the State does not have a budget crisis right now. It does not have a fiscal crisis. So, it was really hard to understand why the Legislature went in that direction, real significant cuts that were not, in my opinion, necessary and that I -- and just like you said, really delay services for residents and are not in the best interest of our cities and our counties and our municipalities. So, I can assure you that I will go back and we'll work with the senator and with other -- your government representatives to look at ways that we can try to reinstitute some of those funds, so...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

Representative Baez: Thank you for bringing that up.

Senator Rodriguez: Yeah, if I could say a few words. So, thank you for being so forceful on the topic. This is not a new issue. I know that our Clerk is here and, at some point, we'll have -- presumably, when the resolution comes up, we'll have a chance to talk about the very good work that his office has done in spite of a budget crisis that, as you said, 2009, the Clerk's monies -- if I'm not mistaken, I think it was 2009 -- were basically taken away from the clerks, sent up to Tallahassee, and then Tallahassee would send back some portion of it. I wasn't around at that time. I don't know if that was necessary at that time, but that has not changed. And so, what you've seen with one of the absolute most critical things that our state does, which is fund the -- make sure that the courts are functioning for family law, business issues and criminal justice system. It's absolutely critical. But, it's the same thing that has happened with, for example, the gas tax that we all pay, with affordable housing trust funds. These trust funds are continually raided. And, what it comes down to -- and I think the reason why it's so important you're talking about it publicly, it comes down to political will. There's not a bill we can pass that says these funds have to go here, because each legislature can appropriate how it wants to. So, I think that we will continue that message of making sure that our critical state functions are funded by the funds that, you know, state statute says these are your funds, not to take them away. The funds are there. The crisis was created by Tallahassee not stepping back up to the plate. And, I will say one bill that I filed with -- it was somewhat quixotic in the sense it didn't have a high likelihood of success, but I filed it to make a point, and it was specific to our jury pool, right. Part of our democracy that's unique in this country is the fact that we have a trial by jury, and that's an absolute, you know, important thing to honor, people who are serving on juries and the juror "pay" is miserable, right. Most people cannot -- you know, it's awful. And, part of the bill was basically making sure that clerks were held harmless for that jury pool. And, that -- those types of things, I think, there are probably many different places in our civic -- on our -- excuse me, our justice funding mechanisms where we can make sure and move the needle in terms of making sure that our courts are funded. And one statistic, which the Florida Bar repeats every year, 0.7 percent of the budget goes to the third branch of government, right. Absolutely critical

that our courts are functioning to make sure that people are treated fairly, disputes are resolved, and it's a tiny, tiny part of our budget that we should at least respect that budget. So, anyway -- I'm sorry. We could talk probably all day about this.

Commissioner Quesada: I know. I just...

Senator Rodriguez: Appreciate your (INAUDIBLE)

Commissioner Quesada: You know, honestly, I really wanted the public to be aware of it, and I want you to know how strongly I feel about it.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: We all do.

Commissioner Quesada: Yeah.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: You speak for us. Thank you very much.

Senator Rodriguez: Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: And before you go, plastic bags. You mentioned that. I have here a newspaper article. A ban on plastic bags came into force on Monday in Kenya. And, those found violating the new regulations could receive maximum fines of \$38,000 and a four-year prison term. We're not that far away from that yet, but you know, that -- if the Legislature acts that way on our home rule powers, maybe we should enact something like this.

Commissioner Lago: Mr. Mayor, may I just ask one last question of the senator? Senator, just -- I would like a little bit of just a quick synopsis in regards to what was the thought process behind Senate Bill 80 in regards to medicinal marijuana? I think it puts us legislators here in this -- you know, at the local level in a very tough position, very, very tough position. I am 110 percent --

and I want to say it very clearly -- in favor of medicinal marijuana. But, what this issue does -- and it goes -- it dovetails into the comments by the Mayor. It's an assault on home rule. We, as legislators who are put in place by the residents of this community should be able to dictate where a dispensary should be located. If I want to put a dispensary as far away from a residential neighborhood or I'm -- we're in the process, between first and second reading, of what we're going to have to do in reference to banning dispensaries, which is not what we want to head. And, what I've done now is I've slowed that process down, because I'm meeting with activists. I'm meeting with community leaders. I'm meeting with residents who have sick children who are in dire need of this medicinal marijuana. What I'm planning is proposing a new bill, a new piece of legislation, which will hopefully place medicinal marijuana -- which it is medicine, correct? It is medicine -- as inside a pharmacy, where you go and get medicine. My father's a physician. My father writes scripts when you are his patient. So, to me, I find -- you put us in a -- the State House, the Senate, has put us in a position where we're kind of -- we're boxed in. And, the decisions that we're making right now and you're seeing other municipalities -- I hate to say this -- kick the can down the curb with moratoriums -- we don't want to put a moratorium. We want to do what's right by the residents. We want to do what's right by this community. But, I just want to understand why is it that the State knows better than the local officials that were elected by the residents here?

Senator Rodriguez: If I may. So, you're absolutely right that it is medicine. I supported the constitutional amendment and properly implementing it. It happens to be...

Commissioner Lago: But, you do -- and I'm sorry -- I just want to say one last thing, and I'm sorry to interrupt. But, you do understand where it puts me. And I talk to residents that say, okay, you're trying to control via your Zoning Code -- which, again, by the way, our Zoning Code has been very effective. Look how great the City of Coral Gables has turned out over 90 years. It's not that we don't want medicinal marijuana, but we're in a position where if we don't take action, you know, you're going to see a proliferation of these dispensaries, and you know where we're headed after medicinal marijuana.

Senator Rodriguez: And Commissioner, the reason why preemption is a bad idea is because exactly the way you have described your thinking process. That -- local government is the appropriate level where those decisions are made. And, I'm not a zoning or land use expert or attorney, but my understanding is that the existing system is in place to mediate those exact issues. And so, I look forward to continuing talking with you if there are legislative fixes that need to be made.

Commissioner Lago: We need to find something...

Senator Rodriguez: Yeah.

Commissioner Lago: Because if you read the intricacies of the law, it ties our hands saying that we can't even place these dispensaries in certain locations. We have to abide by the state law. Correct, Craig?

City Attorney Leen: Yes.

Commissioner Lago: And, if we do not abide by the state law, obviously, we're...

City Attorney Leen: Well, see, we put together -- the City Commission -- an elaborate set of regulations...

Commissioner Lago: Yeah.

City Attorney Leen: That address this concern. And we had a provision, which still is the law in Coral Gables, that we will not allow these until they're allowed by federal law, because of the supremacy clause. However, now with this change, if the Commission -- there's an item on second reading that's coming up in a future meeting, because Commissioner Lago...

Commissioner Lago: I'm working on potentially morphing that law to make a little bit more sense.

City Attorney Leen: Asked for more time. But the problem is that those regulations, which we spent a lot of time and, you know, City resources putting together, they're going to be superseded by the statute and whatever the Commission adopts. But I want to be clear, the current position of Coral Gables -- unless the Commission changes it -- is that these are -- regardless of what state law says or city law, they're not allowed in Coral Gables until they're allowed under federal law. We're respecting federal law, as we believe every city should.

Commissioner Lago: But, it just puts us in a very tough situation, because it deems us as being -- you know, insensitive to people who need this type of care.

Representative Baez: Commissioner Lago, let me just add that a lot of what we saw happening with the marijuana -- there is no marijuana bills. It's exactly what happened with the budget and what happened in other issues. There was a real lack of transparency, a real lack of involvement of everybody on developing this legislation. It was all of -- sort of like a surprise. It was -- remember that when we were called back for a special session, it wasn't even on that -- on the agenda, then it was added later. So, the way the whole thing went down, it was not really what we would have hoped for. So, we look forward to going back to the Legislature and addressing that again.

Commissioner Lago: And, one last comment -- and I -- if I may.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: We have to go.

Commissioner Lago: It's a completely different topic. But, the issue is a double-edged sword that no city's really addressing right now is the issue of the increased homestead exemption,

which, again, in many points, it makes a lot of sense, especially for the elderly who are going to seek that relief. We want to give everybody a little bit of relief. But, I have a feeling -- and I know that staff and I know the Manager and our fine Finance Department is working on the numbers, but this is going to bring some serious...

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: One point four million, sir.

Commissioner Lago: Some serious...

Representative Baez: And I just want...

Commissioner Lago: Gaping wounds that we're -- throughout, you know, 34 cities, Miami-Dade County, all these municipalities that, yeah, I guess we're not in a recession, but we have a fiduciary responsibility to the residents here. Now, we've got to find that one point...

City Manager Swanson-Rivenbark: Four.

Commissioner Lago: One point four million dollars. It's significant.

Representative Baez: I have to tell you, Commissioner that I voted against that bill for that same reason. I felt like it was really -- it was selling something to the residents in a way when the reality is that taking that exemption -- or adding that exemption is now going to take away money from you guys to provide services for those same residents. So, I think it looks -- it sounds good and it looks good. It's terrible for cities and municipalities.

Commissioner Lago: I'm not saying I'm against it. But what I'm saying is that, let's not rob Peter to pay Paul, you understand?

Representative Baez: I'm against it.

Commissioner Lago: You think you're getting a tax rebate in regards to homestead exemption, but then at the other end, you know, we have to find a way to pay for it. So, it's either...

Representative Baez: Absolutely.

Commissioner Lago: Increasing fees, hoping that our property values keep going up and we don't have to raise fees or anything like that, because we've lowered the millage rate here five years running -- in the last six years, excuse me, so thank you for your time.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much.

Vice Mayor Keon: Can I ask...?

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you, Senator, thank you.

Vice Mayor Keon: Can I ask one question with regard to the education bill?

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yes. Let's go on. Go ahead.

Vice Mayor Keon: Just one...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Go ahead, go ahead.

Vice Mayor Keon: With regard to the education bill and the lack of transparency when it was passed. And, I know that there were some good items that were included in it, but also included in it was -- created tremendous problems for the local public school systems. Why does the school system seem to be -- the public school system seem to be constantly under attack by the Legislature?

Senator Rodriguez: I think -- and this is my analysis and I think it's borne out by what you see. I think that they're -- I'm a supporter of -- I'm not against charter schools. There are many charter schools that fulfill the mission of the charter school movement...

Vice Mayor Keon: Right.

Senator Rodriguez: When it started. There is a component of the charter school industry that is driven by profit. And...

Vice Mayor Keon: Yes.

Senator Rodriguez: I honestly think that that is driving part of the conversation more than it is about ideology. Because, when you look at where charter schools have been successful and where public school - -the traditional public schools continue to be successful, it doesn't make a whole lot of sense to do the things that this very sweeping Bill 7069 did. So, in my view, there has been a trajectory of trying to privatize public education. And, there is already ample choice in the system, but what this bill did, 7069, which we could probably have a, you know, weeklong workshop on...

Vice Mayor Keon: Right.

Senator Rodriguez: Is it rocketed forward that privatization and that was what's so objectionable. And, it's going to cost South Florida school districts heavily in terms of what they have, you know, to do. And it just makes very little sense. As you said, there were some positive things included, which many of us supported, recess, other things, but they could not make up for the huge...

Vice Mayor Keon: Not for the huge -- not for the negative things.

Senator Rodriguez: Correct, yeah.

Vice Mayor Keon: But, do you feel that the state government is moving toward privatization of the public schools...

Senator Rodriguez: Absolutely.

Vice Mayor Keon: For education in the state of Florida?

Senator Rodriguez: Commissioner, unfortunately, yes, if you look at the legislation that was passed this last legislative session. And, that's something that I think is very negative.

Vice Mayor Keon: I have one more question. I know that they are -- that the charter schools can now access funds for construction of their school -- those buildings and whatever. When they receive public money to build a facility, does that facility remain a private facility under the business model of the charter school? Or does that building become an asset of the public school system?

Senator Rodriguez: Commissioner, thank you. So, whether it's a for-profit or non-profit, a private entity can go bankrupt, can close, can go belly up, and that's one of the criticisms of sharing capital outlay dollars with charter schools, particularly where the property is privately owned, because those improvements are not on public land. Those do not belong to the public that we're spending public money to improve it.

Vice Mayor Keon: So, when they...

Senator Rodriguez: That's one of the problems.

Vice Mayor Keon: Okay, so when they access money to build a charter school, that school and that land, it does not -- no longer belongs -- it doesn't belong to the public, as they do in the public-school system. It belongs to the private entity that is -- whether it's a for-profit or non-profit -- that is accessing those dollars. Is that right?

Senator Rodriguez: That's correct.

Vice Mayor Keon: It became -- becomes...

Senator Rodriguez: That's correct.

Vice Mayor Keon: An asset of that private entity.

Senator Rodriguez: That's correct. And that's one of the chief criticisms -- again, we're funding public education. Charter schools are a part of that model. But, when we talk about putting dollars into capital improvement, it makes no sense.

Vice Mayor Keon: Will there be any move in the next legislative session to begin to address some of those issues?

Senator Rodriguez: Oh, you'd better bet. Every year, that's a big fight that we have, and especially after how horrendous this last legislative session was for public education, how much remorse there is on both sides of the aisle, especially in the Senate. There's already talk on both sides of the aisle about trying to undo a lot of those effects, and I hope we go further (INAUDIBLE)...

Vice Mayor Keon: It is a tremendous problem here in South Florida, in Miami-Dade County. In this morning's paper, there was an article with the problems in Venezuela, the number of families that are coming here and the number of children that are being enrolled in our public

schools to be able to get out of Venezuela and whatever. And they're not going into charter schools. They're not going into private schools. They're going into the public schools, and we have to find room for them and teachers for them and, you know, thankfully, the public school system has the ability to absorb those, but it's at everybody else's expense. Thank you.

Senator Rodriguez: Yeah. Commissioner, that's a good segue to excuse myself. I'm heading downtown to...

Vice Mayor Keon: Thank you.

Senator Rodriguez: A press conference on TBS.

Representative Baez: Thank you, everyone.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very, very much.

Senator Rodriguez: Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you for coming and informing us. Thank you. Good luck.