

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-2
May 14, 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
Commissioner Jorge Fors

City Staff

Interim City Manager, Peter Iglesias
City Attorney, Miriam Ramos
City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Rabbi Jonathan Fisch
Gary Matzner
Jack Thompson

Agenda Item F-2 [10:04 p.m.]

A Resolution of the City Commission of the City of Coral Gables, Florida,
condemning anti-Semitism, discrimination, and bigotry against all minorities.
(Sponsored by Commissioner Keon)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: F-2, resolution of the City Commission of the City of Coral Gables, Florida,
condemning anti-Semitism, discrimination, and bigotry against all minorities. Commissioner
Keon.

Commissioner Keon: Good morning. I have to give Mr. Thompson some credit for writing on this issue and the increase in the number of hate crimes that we see around the country. You know, fortunately, we haven't seen that many within our city. But you know, when we take a stance and we speak publicly, we don't speak only for our city. We speak for our community and we speak for the world that we live in and we make a statement about our moral compass and what we believe to be problematic in the world we live in. And we want to take a stand and give voice to that stand on such issues. We have seen a very significant increase, particularly with regard to anti-Semitism, over the last few years. And the Anti-Defamation League reports that the number of incidences in 2018 alone are recorded at 1,879, which is more than double the full year for 2017. So, it is an issue that is -- it is a problem that is happening around our country. And we need to move ourselves from hate to a world where people of different faiths and different ethnicities and different races can live together in peace and with respect. And this is just an opportunity to that we, as a governing body, attempt to direct our moral compass due north. It speaks for itself. Rabbi Fisch is here. I asked him to review it to ensure that it did speak to what we wanted it to say, and would you mind if he speaks?

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yes. Yes, of course.

Commissioner Keon: Rabbi Fisch, could you join us?

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yes, of course.

Commissioner Keon: To speak please...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Please.

Commissioner Keon: About this issue and the -- what it's doing to our communities and the need to be able to protect and to generate the respect that we need for all people.

Rabbi Fisch: Thank you so much for making this a reality this morning. Sitting with my senior rabbi, Rabbi Judith Siegal of Temple Judea, in Coral Gables, one of the only real synagogues in Coral Gables, over the last two years, we have had to go to different schools and discuss with different individuals about some anti-Semitic remark that a child has said that has upset one of our members of our community. So, the up rise of anti-Semitic statements, bigotry and the xenophobia in whole is on the rise. And I think making a stand that says as a community we don't support this. In fact, on the contrary, what we do look out for is partnerships and that opportunity to communicate and that opportunity to discuss and learn from one another. So, I want to thank you again for bringing this to the forefront and making a stand that says not only do we support our Jewish brothers and sisters who have to now hire Coral Gables police officers to stand guard during our moments of prayer, but we're not the only faith-based institution that does that. Our brothers and sisters who worship in mosques and in churches are now having to have that same reality, which is a reality I'm afraid my children will also have to bear. So, this statement is a great steppingstone in the right direction to condemn any individual or movement or grassroots, whatever it may be, that only a plot is to make the world more destructive and not more sacred, or in Hebrew, filled with kadosh, holiness, which is what we're all trying to do is to make this world filled with more light and less darkness.

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

Commissioner Keon: Thank you, Rabbi.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: And I'd like to address the City Manager and the Temple Judea has asked us to allow the possibility of supplementing their one guard there with a second guard and helping them with the financing of that second guard. And I think it is a very worthwhile proposition and something that maybe we should consider doing.

City Manager Iglesias: I will look into that.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: If you look at that.

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, sir.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Please. Please...

City Manager Iglesias: Yes, Mayor.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Do that.

City Manager Iglesias: I will.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Because they're concerned, especially in High Holy Days or, you know, special occasions, special events, they are concerned that they have so many people that maybe we could help them with that second guard.

City Manager Iglesias: I believe that we've had additional guards -- additional police in the special events, but we will further...

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Please look into it.

City Manager Iglesias: Look into it, Mayor, yes.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: I have Gary Matzner, who wishes to speak. Good morning, sir.

Gary Matzner: Good morning. Good morning, Mayor, honorable Commissioners. My name is Gary Matzner. I'm president of Temple Judea. I'm also the former mayor of the Village of Pinecrest, Florida. I'm here today to thank you for standing up against bigotry, hate, racism. I can't tell you how important it is for elected officials to lead and stand up for what's good, what's

right in this country. I just wanted to bring that to your attention. I also wanted to mention about Temple Judea. We have over 600 families. We've been part of this community for -- we just celebrated our 70th anniversary as part of Coral Gables. So, for that, we thank you very much.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you, sir. Jack Thompson.

Jack Thompson: Thank you. I rise to speak on behalf of this resolution. On August 17, 1790, the rabbi of the Hebrew congregation of Newport, Rhode Island penned an epistle to George Washington welcoming the newly-elected first president of the United States to the city. Newport had historically been a good home to its Jewish residents who numbered fewer than 500 at the time of Washington's visit. The Newport Christian community's acceptance of Jewish worship was exemplary. The Jews of Newport looked to the new national government, and particularly, to the enlightened president of the United States to remove any remaining barriers to religious liberty and civil equality confronting Jewish Americans. The Newport congregation's letter to Washington expressed the Jewish community's esteem for the president, expressing their pleasure that the God of Israel who had protected King David had also protected General Washington. Washington responded, "The citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for giving to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy, a policy worthy of imitation. All possess liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that mere toleration is spoken of as if it were by the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights and religious liberty. For happily, the government of the United States gives to bigotry no sanction, no persecution no assistance and requires only that they who live under its protection be good citizens. May the children of the

stock of Abraham who dwell in this land continue to enjoy the good will of the other inhabitants while everyone shall sit under its own vine and fig tree and there should be none to make him afraid.” So, 230 years ago, the president of the United States took a stand against anti-Semitism. Washington’s letter is now read every year by the Newport synagogue. Europe’s leaders, in the 1930s, remained silent as anti-Semitism grew. Europe has now given us the most popular video game in the world, and in it you practice killing orthodox Jews simply because they are orthodox Jews. And the CEO of this company is a Jew. Finally, Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel, the indispensable chronicler of the Holocaust said this, “If Auschwitz hasn’t cured the world of Anti-Semitism, what can and what will?” And unfortunately, we don’t know how to eradicate it. Will the world ever learn? It will not because it has not. Had the world learned, there would be no Darfur, no Rwanda, and no Cambodia. “But we,” Wiesel continues, “live in a democracy in America. Here, our voices can be heard. Even if we cannot cure hatred universally, we can make people in this country aware.” So, I thank you and I commend the Commission for considering this resolution. If you vote for it, you will become national leaders against this evil. Thank you.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you, sir.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Commissioner Mena: I just want to thank Mr. Thompson really for his leadership on this and bringing this to our attention...

Commissioner Keon: Yes.

Commissioner Mena: And his eloquent words just now, which I think speak for themselves. So, thank you for bringing this to us. I think it’s a great thing for our city, and obviously, for the wonderful community at Temple Judea, who are such great partners with the City.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you.

Commissioner Mena: And I think it's really a privilege to be able to support your resolution, Commissioner Keon. So, thank you...

Commissioner Keon: Thank you.

Commissioner Mena: For bringing it.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Do I hear a motion?

Vice Mayor Lago: Ditto.

Commissioner Keon: I'll move it.

Vice Mayor Lago: Second.

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

Vice Mayor Lago: I take back my second. Commissioner Fors, why don't you second your own -- your own...

Commissioner Fors: Second.

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

Vice Mayor Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Mena: Yes.

Commissioner Fors: Yes.

Commissioner Keon: Yes.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yes.

(Vote: 5-0)

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you for being here.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Alright, next...

Mr. Thompson: Bless you and thank you.

Commissioner Mena: Thank you.

Commissioner Keon: Thank you.