

Charter reform must include our cities

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"The most dangerous time for a bad government is when it begins to reform."

— Alexis de Tocqueville

The public outcry against continued ethical lapses, inability to progress on quality of life issues and overall malaise that have plagued our county over the years has grown to a crescendo ending in this week's historic recall vote. Yet the deeper discussion, one that speaks to the solution not the person, remains to be had.



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The failure to create an effective rapid transportation system and a diverse economy not based simply on tourism and construction, among other issues, has shown that county government is not working properly. Today, a majority of the residents of Miami-Dade County live in one of the 34 municipalities in our county.

In Doral, we have started a city from scratch, provided parks, public works, code compliance and police, among other services, while never raising taxes. As we move toward reform of our county, the Miami-Dade County League of Cities will insist that we have a seat at the table when the issue of reform is discussed. The opportunity to bring about real change exists, but will be missed if our focus is simply on personalities and not on reforming the process.

Our county needs key changes to its charter that will lead to more-effective government.

- First and foremost, it needs true ethics reform. Ethics reform should bring true best practices and eliminate the gray area of commissioners holding private-sector jobs, which directly conflict with their roles as public servants.

- Second, a proposal placing term limits on commissioners and paying them a fair and adequate salary consistent with the work and effort of the office should be placed on the ballot at the same time as ethics reform.

- Third, there must be a mix of countywide and district commissioners. While single-

member districts brought fair representation to the Hispanic and African-American communities, it also created a system whereby county commissioners became parochial politicians whose only need was to provide services for a small group of voters and special interests in their districts. This has led to a failure to look at the issues of our county with long-term vision and has led to some of the short-term "fixes," such as the half-penny transportation tax, which have been abject failures.

- Additionally, the county must focus its energy on what it can do well — provide regional services. It should work with cities to streamline and help provide municipal-type services to the unincorporated areas of the county in a cost-effective manner.

- Finally, the public, in particular the business community, must be incorporated into the process. When the business community feels that it cannot weigh in on issues as important as job creation unless it uses the "right" lobbyist for each particular elected official, then it creates a chilling effect on their participation. When it comes to working with the business community, government should be there to provide the tools to help create jobs while the private sector drives the creation of the jobs.

Today, in part because of the fear of being ostracized for trying to be a part of the process in an open manner, we not only are losing our larger companies but cannot attract the national and international companies that can bring the well-paying jobs, despite being the "center of the Americas."

Miami-Dade County has a diverse population, wonderful weather and talented people who have so much to offer.

The chance to reform Miami-Dade County government can help us get back on the path to creating the community we deserve. It cannot be done by one person. It requires that we all participate and care. Let us not waste this opportunity to bring true reform — we may not get another chance.

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