

The Good, the Bad, and the Dung Heap

Written by Jack King, BT Contributor
March 2019

One local pol stands out among the worst



I don't know about you, but my life has been continually changing. Most of the change is minimal, something like 10 percent good, 5 percent bad, and 85 percent doesn't make a difference. And that's pretty much the way I've worked in the journalism business. Most people I have interviewed fall into those percentages.

There are few in the in "bad" column, and sometimes even they are "iffy." With that said, let me nominate Joe Carollo as the politician most likely to sit atop the Miami dung heap for the longest time.

Yes, Carollo has longevity. He has made returns to the Miami political scene at least six times, each time coming back with a better handle on how to game the system. He's not a quick learner, but he gets it done. Let me give a few examples where he has done well in the past 40-odd years.

"Crazy Joe" as he was known around city hall, was the youngest Metro-Dade police officer in 1973 and was let go for his inability to get along with his colleagues.

In the 1990s he ran for the Miami City Commission and won, but the election was fraught with

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fraud and cheating. There were three elections, and people went in and out of commission seats (and the mayor's seat) for about three years.

Carollo was elected mayor in 1998, but it was a hollow victory. He was on the commission, but he only had one vote. And even worse, he had limited powers because the city was effectively being controlled by the State of Florida. And Carollo being Carollo, he berated Don Warshaw, the city manager, and others because he wasn't getting enough media exposure.

Then came Carollo's greatest moment. Elián González, the young Cuban boy who escaped from Cuba on a raft. His mother died, but Elián, floating on an inner tube, was rescued and taken in by Miami relatives. The story made headlines around the world. Carollo, as the mayor of Miami, became the spokesperson. Only Crazy Joe had a mouth big enough to become the spokesman for Miami and Elián to handle the task -- even though he did it with a spin on it just for himself.

He was on national TV almost every night, on every channel.

Not everyone thought he was the right man for the job. His ability to speak coherently was limited, and the more he spoke, the worse he sounded. It was really a pretty bad scene.

"What Carollo is doing is terrible for Miami, terrible for the Cuban community," said former Miami Mayor Maurice Ferré. "This fool goes out there where angels fear to tread."

Carollo left office in 1990 and decided that he wanted to get into the investment business.

Lawyer Robert Macaulay helped Carollo to start investing. After several years he lost his investment in a restaurant. He tried another investment in a restaurant called Shogun Joe's. He lost his butt and ended up owing Macaulay thousands in legal fees. "He told me he didn't have a penny to his name. He said he has a \$6000 car and is considering bankruptcy." It turns out that Carollo was behind in his child support payments.

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In 1997, Xavier Suarez beat Carollo in the mayor's race. He sued Suarez, alleging massive voter fraud. He won and was installed as mayor. He served until 2001.

It was about this time that I had had enough of Crazy Joe. Too many lies. Too many sleazy deals. Too many sleazy people. Too much bad stuff. I was on the way out of the newspaper business. It wasn't my choice. It was being made for me. Newspapers were dropping like flies, and it hurt. Possibly the Internet-based news system would work. It did, but it paid nothing. The good thing for me was, there were no Crazy Joe stories. I'd had enough.

Even though I still had news in my brain, ten tears was plenty, and it was time for a change. Thanks to Jim Mullin, our esteemed editor and publisher, I was offered a slot at *Biscayne Times*.
And
Crazy Joe was nowhere around.

And then several months later, a Freddy Krueger moment happened. There he was, making crude comments on just about just about everything. Two moments stood out.

The first one was between Crazy Joe and Bill Fuller, the owner of Ball & Chain, a bistro bar on Calle Ocho (SW 8th Street). Crazy Joe was stalking the place, looking for code violations and making smarmy comments to the electronic media.

Fuller claims Crazy Joe is a man with a 2017 municipal election grudge who is trying to misuse his position and target him. Carollo claims code enforcers need to punish Fuller and are giving him preferential treatment. Carollo has been at Ball & Chain numerous times, acting like a code enforcement officer.

Stay tuned.

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