

## Tallahassee Wants MIA and PortMiami

Written by Nancy Lee, BT Contributor  
November 2019

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### Did José Oliva sell us out for his speaker role?



The speaker of Florida's House of Representatives, Republican José R. Oliva, is flawed, just like his twin in the U.S. Senate, Moscow Mitch McConnell. Three examples: (1) portraying women as birth pods; (2) using his position in Trump-like fashion to retaliate against his enemies; and (3) helping the State of Florida gobble up the county he represents.

This "sperm producer" repeatedly referred to pregnant women as "host bodies" on a talk show. Seriously, so offensive! When called out on the insulting phrase by host Jim DeFede, Oliva doubled down.

Oliva also wouldn't meet with representatives of Florida firefighters for more than three months, stalling a popular bill that had multiple Florida House sponsors. Why? A Miami-Dade firefighters union ran a candidate against his BFF in the state Senate, the equally flawed Manny Diaz. Oliva's obstruction of the bill was political payback against all firefighters.

Oliva, whose family's wealth comes from producing cigars, represents Hialeah and Miami Lakes. Oddly, though, he is compliantly continuing Tallahassee's relentless efforts to whittle away at Miami-Dade's autonomy -- political death by a thousand cuts.

Republicans say they stand for local control, but in Florida, state Republicans want to seize Miami-Dade's power. For example, if rock mining explosions are trembling your home's foundation, you don't air your grievance to local officials any longer. You now must go through the state. Tree removal, plastic straws, sanctuary cities, vegetable gardens? The state now has control.

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Why shouldn't we have to go through the state, you ask? In 1956 Florida's Constitution was amended to make us a "home rule" county. As a result, Miami-Dade County is the only municipal jurisdiction in the state with control over much of its destiny. The Home Rule Charter benefits all Miami-Dade citizens, and it has worked just fine. With all its flaws, home rule gives us independence and freedom -- Republican virtues.

But state politicians hate the autonomy we have under the Home Rule Charter. They tried to repeal it with a ballot amendment a few years ago and lost. This Tallahassee-led assault on our Home Rule Charter really irks me -- and now, with Oliva's help, Republicans want to ruin us financially.

More egregious than all the previous assaults on our power, the state, hungry for more, wants control over the county's most valuable economic engines: the airport and the seaport. With Oliva's blessing, the state is floating the idea of governing them with authorities or boards. Who would appoint members of those authorities? The state. That would effectively remove our ability to govern ourselves.

The county now has an excellent credit rating, based on a portfolio topped by MIA and PortMiami. Our county government doesn't actually make money off either the seaport or airport. They are almost entirely self-funded and don't rely on support from local property taxes. (The airport does get state and federal funding for capital projects.)

It's the economic value of our seaport and airport that gives the county good rates for future bonds and makes it an attractive area for investors. MIA and PortMiami are the county's financial muscle. We need these entities to be locally run for our financial well-being. If these assets are stripped away, we would pay an extra cost for short-term financing and for long-term bonds. That would have a ripple effect, punishing local taxpayers.

Why would Oliva give away Miami-Dade County's power of self-rule? Is that what he promised Republican House members in order to secure his leadership role?

I have little love for many of the 13 county commissioners and the mayor -- or the mayor's choice for aviation director: Peter Principle graduate Lester Sola, who was supervisor of elections during the Bush-Gore recount fiasco. But I care for state government even less.

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I spoke to former Hialeah Mayor Raul Martinez. He definitely is not a fan of Oliva, and says he bought his way into office. Martinez also says Oliva is unresponsive to his constituents, a point on which I concur. His legislative aide still has not returned my call, and it's been more than a week.

What's next? The state House and Senate could produce a bill neutering local control of our major economic engines, leaving us like Orlando International Airport, which is governed by the Greater Orlando Aviation Authority. Five of the authority's seven board members are appointed by the governor.

If all goes bad for us (and doesn't it always?), I believe the next legislative session will be trouble. A bill to have the state take control of MIA and PortMiami will try to skirt the language of our Home Rule Charter so it can pass. Anticipating such a coup, Mayor Carlos Gimenez added \$2 million to the county's budget to mount an educational campaign about our Home Rule Charter.

Not only "host bodies" should be infuriated at Oliva's staging of this invasion by Tallahassee. We all should.

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