



State MARCH 27, 2014

# Another resignation rocks Rick Scott campaign

## HIGHLIGHTS

Miami-Dade Expressway Authority board member Gonzalo Sanabria left his appointed post because of Gov. Rick Scott's treatment of former co-finance chairman Mike Fernandez.

BY SERGIO R. BUSTOS



Gonzalo Sanabria, a longtime Miami-Dade Expressway Authority board member, resigned Thursday from his post to protest the “disparaging and disrespectful” treatment of Mike Fernandez, the former co-finance chairman of Gov. Rick Scott’s campaign.

“Since he has been treated in such a disparaging and disrespectful manner by your [campaign] staff and ignored in his advice, it is obvious that there is a great deal of dysfunction and disconnection of which I want to have no part nor can I render my support any longer as you are governing from a weak and flawed

platform,” Sanabria wrote in an email he sent to Scott’s staff and shared with the Miami Herald.

Sanabria, who also quit his leadership post with the Republican Party of Miami-Dade, said his resignation was “mostly due to your perceived insensitivity to loyal supporters and our Hispanic community in Florida.”

Fernandez quit his position as top fundraiser for Scott’s campaign last week. Three of his emails, obtained by the Herald/Times and Politico, showed Fernandez repeatedly questioned the judgment of Scott’s advisers and the quality of his campaign ads and his Hispanic outreach.

He also complained about a lack of access to Scott and accused unidentified campaign aides of mimicking a Mexican accent in front of his business partner, a charge the campaign denies but will not discuss in detail.

Fernandez, who lives in Coral Gables, is a highly successful health care billionaire entrepreneur who came to the United States as a poor young boy from Cuba — an ideal symbol of a successful pro-businessman who could help Scott court Hispanic votes.

The political tit-for-tat with Sanabria began Thursday morning when Sanabria, 65, a real estate broker and investor who lives in Coral Gables, announced his resignation in an email that he sent to the Herald.

Scott’s office, without mentioning Sanabria’s resignation, then issued a short press release announcing that Javier Vasquez, a 50-year-old attorney from Miami Lakes, would be appointed to the MDX board.

Later, Scott spokesman Frank Collins issued a terse and blunt statement saying that Sanabria was upset at the governor’s decision earlier that morning to not reappoint him.

“We called Mr. Sanabria just after 11 a.m. today to let him know that he would not be reappointed to the MDX Board due to his votes to raise toll fees on the people of Miami-Dade,” said Collins. “Mr. Sanabria, an appointee of the previous administration, later sent an email upset about not being reappointed.”

Sanabria rejected the explanation, saying he resigned first and that the governor’s office then told him they were going to appoint Vasquez. “I had told them I was resigning this morning due to the events I stated,” Sanabria told the Herald.

Sanabria, who has served on the MDX board under former governors Charlie Crist and Jeb Bush, said Fernandez had recommended Scott re-appoint him to the 13-member board. Board members are unpaid advisors for the MDX, which manages several major highways, including the Airport Expressway, the Dolphin Expressway and the Gratigny Expressway.

According to the MDX website, Sanabria’s term on the MDX board expired more than a year ago on Feb. 7, 2013. It shows he was first appointed in 2005.

Florida Democrats seized on the expiration date of Sanabria’s term and record as a MDX board member to slam Scott.

“Rick Scott claims Gonzalo Sanabria’s dismissal was due to his vote to raise toll fees,” said Florida Democratic Party spokesman Joshua Karp in a statement. “What the Governor fails to mention is that Sanabria has been serving in a vacant seat since February 2013, and the tolls vote took place on March

19th, 2013.

“So for 373 days Rick Scott didn’t have a problem with Sanabria, and expects Floridians to believe that his resignation today is completely unrelated to Sanabria’s concerns over the handling of the racism scandal within the reelection campaign?”

At the Herald’s request, the governor’s office provided emails late Thursday that show Scott interviewed Vasquez last November for the vacant MDX position. The interview took place in response to calls from some lawmakers, including state Rep. Jeanette Nuñez, R-Miami, who complained about the increase in MDX tolls.

Sanabria told the Herald that he was also stepping down from a leadership post within the Republican Party of Miami-Dade County. In 2012, Republican voters in 28 precincts elected him to serve as a Republican Committeeman.

“I resigned today from that post sending my resignation effective immediately to Nelson Diaz, Dade GOP Chair, stating that I could not support the governor,” Sanabria told the Herald.

Diaz said he contacted the governor’s office Thursday about Sanabria’s resignation and was told the departure “had nothing to do with Mike Fernandez.”

“He was just upset that he was not being reappointed,” Diaz told the Herald. “I welcome Mr. Vasquez to the MDX board and I hope that unlike his predecessor he does not vote to increase tolls.”

In closing his resignation email to Scott, Sanabria reminded the governor of the influence of the state’s Hispanic voters, especially those in South Florida.

“The Hispanic Community of South Florida is a key component of this great State’s vibrant socio-political fabric and treating us as you have is a grave mistake as it pains me to tell you what you will find out to the chagrin of us loyal Republicans,” wrote Sanabria. “Good Luck Governor, I’m not a fan any longer.”

*Sergio R. Bustos is the State/Politics editor at the Miami Herald.*

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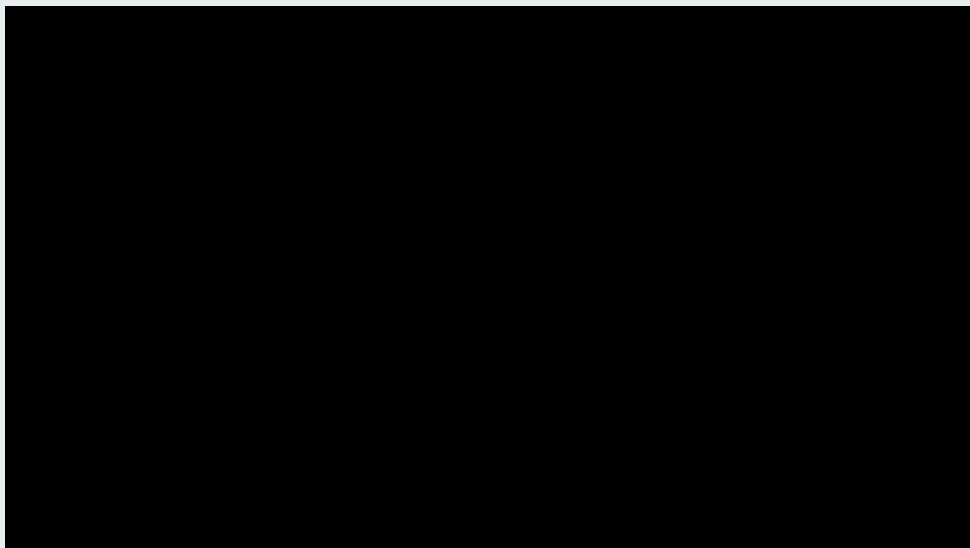
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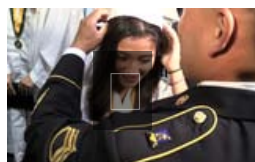
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