



Posted on Tue, Jun. 13, 2006

## MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

# Poll finds support for strong Miami-Dade mayor

**A new poll shows most voters support a strong-mayor form of government -- assuming it gets on the ballot in September.**

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A majority of registered voters in Miami-Dade County support a so-called strong mayor form of government that could appear on the ballot this year, according to a poll released Monday by a Florida International University think tank.

Miami-Dade Mayor Carlos Alvarez has made the campaign to add more authority to the mayoral office a central part of his term, touching off a feud with the County Commission and allegations from some corners that the proposed overhaul is a power grab.

A poll released this week by FIU's Metropolitan Center found that 62 percent of surveyed voters supported the strong mayor form of government. The poll of 805 was conducted June 5-8 and has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percent.

## POPULARITY FACTOR

The center's survey also polled voters on several other questions, including the popularity of Alvarez and the commission -- numbers the center's director says have increased since similar polling 13 months ago.

Alvarez got "excellent" or "satisfactory" ratings from a little over 73 percent of voters polled.

The 13-member commission received just under 50 percent.

There was no breakdown for individual commissioners.

Supporters of the strong-mayor plan hope to put the question before voters in September -- although a second round to an ongoing legal fight could emerge this week.

A political action committee opposed to the plan, along with unions representing the majority of the county's 30,000 employees, challenged the constitutionality of the proposal earlier this year. The Third District Court of Appeals ultimately gave Alvarez's strong mayor plan the all-clear, but opponents have until Thursday to request another review by the appellate court and the Florida Supreme Court.

## NOT SURPRISED

Alvarez said he wasn't surprised by the poll results and expects to begin campaigning in earnest in coming weeks -- unless there are more legal hold-ups.

"I believe there is a strong feeling in the community to change the way things are done," he said.

But critics say the plan would put too much power into the office of mayor.

Under the plan, the mayor would assume much of the powers that now rest with the county manager -- like hiring and firing department heads -- giving the mayor broad sway over day-to-day operations in the county.

"There is no check and no balance," said attorney Stephen Cody, who is representing the local transportation workers union in its challenge to the Alvarez plan. Right now, the commission has the ability to overrule and fire the manager.

Alvarez said the debate has been wrongly painted as ``me versus the commission. That's not what this is about."

The results marked an uptick in support for the mayor's plan, said Dario Moreno, the center's director.

A little over a year ago, Alvarez's plan received approval from 58 percent of those polled by the center. A previous incarnation of the strong-mayor proposal backed by state Rep. Carlos Lacasa in 2002 got a 50 percent approval rating.

The commission's approval rating, although considerably less than the mayor's, "is not that bad," said Moreno. ``You have a body of 13 people, and [at least] one of them is going to be unpopular."

**SEPARATE POLL**

Another poll, jointly sponsored by Bendixen & Associates and The Miami Herald news partner WFOR-CBS4, asked similar questions of voters in March.

The result: The commission received a 36 percent approval rating while Alvarez received a favorable response from 63 percent.

Moreno says the difference in the numbers suggests the commission's popularity is on the rebound following the fight over the urban development boundary, which saw the commission reject all but one of developers' requests to build on off-limit land.

But more than half of voters, according to the poll, are opposed to increasing commissioners' salaries to nearly \$89,000 -- another question that will be put to voters in the fall.

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