

[In Hialeah, money meant to feed poor kids pays for Las Vegas trip for city officials](#)

Filed under [AI Top Story](#), [Commission on Ethics and Public Trust](#), [Miami-Dade State Attorney](#) {4 comments}

Like | 470 people like this. Sign Up to see what your friends like.

Share: [f](#) [in](#) [t](#) [G+](#) [t](#) [r](#) [digg](#) [p](#) [p](#) [e](#) [m](#)

By Francisco Alvarado, [FloridaBulldog.org](#)



Hialeah Mayor Carlos Hernandez Photo:
CBSMiami

Two years ago, Hialeah Mayor Carlos Hernandez signed off on spending \$7,621 from a \$10,000 corporate grant for feeding poor children. Instead, the money went to pay for airline tickets and posh hotel accommodations for himself, his chief of staff, a police detective and four other city employees to attend a parks and recreation conference in Las Vegas.

News of Mayor Hernandez's curious city spending surfaced in documents filed in a recently closed joint public corruption investigation by Miami-Dade's State Attorney's Office and Commission on Ethics and Public Trust.

Another strange finding: Hernandez never traveled to Las Vegas to attend the annual conference of the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) from Sept. 13-17, 2015, and his whereabouts for seven days remain a mystery.

Hernandez was the investigation's focus, but he won't face criminal charges. A close-out memo written by Assistant State Attorney Trent Reichling and obtained by *Florida Bulldog* concluded that the Sept. 13-19 trip – ending two days after the conference closed – was official city business authorized by a trio of high-ranking Hialeah bureaucrats. Further, authorities found no documentation that the grant provider, the National Recreation and Park Association, had prohibited the use of its corporate grants on travel expenses.

"The evidence contradicts any allegation that Mayor Hernandez intended to misappropriate NRPA funds for his personal benefit," Reichling wrote. "Therefore, there is no evidence of criminal conduct that would substantiate the filing of charges."

The June 26 close-out memo wasn't made public until Aug. 31, along with an investigative report by the Miami-Dade Ethics Commission, which worked in conjunction with the state attorney's public corruption task force.

Allies rewarded?

For Hernandez critics like former Hialeah Mayor Raul Martinez, the report and the memo indicate Hernandez rewarded two of his closest allies, chief of staff Arnaldo Alonso and Det. Felix Delgado with an all-expenses paid vacation while he disappeared from his official duties for seven days.



Arnaldo Alonso, the Hialeah mayor's chief of staff

"In the 24 years I ran the city, if I would have just imagined doing something like this, I would have been indicted," said Martinez. "Now, you can get away with anything." Martinez was convicted federally in 1991 for extortion and racketeering, but after a new trial in 1996 was acquitted of extortion. The jury deadlocked on five other counts, and prosecutors subsequently dropped the case.

Martinez lambasted the ethics commission and the state attorney's office for conducting what he said was a poor investigation. "The state attorney and local investigative agencies have decided that Hialeah is like *Chinatown*," Martinez said, referencing the 1974 film about a corrupt scheme involving the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. "They go in, but don't really investigate anything."

Specifically, Martinez pointed to witness statements, including testimony by Alonso and Delgado, that he contends shows they were less than forthcoming about where the mayor was during the week of the Las Vegas conference. "It is shameful of the ethics commission and the state attorney for allowing people to lie and doing nothing," Martinez said, also noting that investigators apparently made no attempt to interview Mayor Hernandez.

Alonso did not respond to three phone messages requesting an interview. Messages left for Hernandez and Delgado, who works as a liaison between the mayor's office and the police department, were not returned.

Ed Griffith, spokesman for Miami-Dade State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle, declined to specifically address Martinez's criticisms, but noted that a prosecutor cannot ethically file criminal charges unless there is sufficient evidence to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

"This matter was reviewed in great detail," Griffith said. "The conclusion of our close-out memo best indicates the reasoning involved in determining that a criminal charge could not be filed."

Perjury prosecutions 'very rare'

Miami-Dade Ethics Commission executive director Joe Centorino, a former chief of the state attorney's public corruption unit, defended his agency's work.

"I think the inconsistent statements by the chief of staff are pretty well laid out in our report," Centorino said. "Yet prosecutions for perjury are very rare because it is difficult to prove. Of course, the decision to pursue it as a criminal matter is made by the state attorney."



Joe Centorino

The inquiry into the Las Vegas trip began March 1, 2016 when NRPA chief financial officer Anna Amselle told an ethics investigator that the conference concluded on Thursday, Sept. 17, 2015, and could not account for why the Hialeah delegation stayed an extra two days. She also said "nobody on the internal staff actually saw the mayor" and that the city's NRPA grants, which are funded by corporate sponsors like Walmart, were intended solely for feeding children at Hialeah parks.

Moreover, Amselle said travel expenses to the annual conference would be an "inconsistent use" of grant funds, the investigative report states. "We would have never agreed that this is an allowable use of these funds," she added. The Hialeah contingent stayed at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas, where the room rate was \$219.52 per night.

On May 11, 2016, Hialeah parks and recreation director Joseph Dziedzic, one of the four other employees who went to Las Vegas, told investigators that Hernandez was expected to attend the NRPA conference because the department was "up for a big award," but that the mayor canceled his participation in the trip prior to leaving. Dziedzic did not know why and that he was also unaware of any prohibition against using NRPA funds for travel expenses to the annual conferences, according to the investigative report.

Misspent money

Indeed, investigators discovered the city had misspent an additional \$11,114 in NRPA funds to cover employees' travel expenses for the organization's conferences in 2012, 2013 and 2014. Another \$3,541 in grant money for hungry kids was spent on two desktop scanners, an L-shaped workstation, three desks, six folding carts and a healthy-eating presentation at Milander Park.

A month after speaking to Dziedzic, investigators questioned Glenn Rice, an ex-Hialeah cop who was one of Hernandez's most trusted political operatives until they had a falling out shortly after the Las Vegas trip. Rice said he drove Alonso to Fort Lauderdale International Airport on Sept. 13, 2015, according to the investigative report. "He said [Alonso] told him the mayor was going, but was vague as to any particulars of the trip," the report states.

According to an Oct. 25, 2016 sworn statement, Delgado — whom Dziedzic described as the mayor's bodyguard — said he only found out Hernandez was staying behind when he boarded their JetBlue flight. "He said Alonso told him that the mayor would not be going to Las Vegas but did not say why," the report states. "Delgado said he normally speaks to the mayor on a daily basis at work. Delgado said the mayor did not call him during the week he was in Las Vegas and that he did not call the mayor."

Delgado also explained that Hernandez had requested he go to Las Vegas in order to “keep everybody out of trouble” and that the mayor was particularly concerned that Alonso “might have too much to drink and do something to embarrass the city.” He noted that the chief of staff “did have a couple of drinks, vodka,” the report states.

Lisette Franco, Hernandez’s administrative assistant at the time of the Las Vegas trip, told investigators on March 30 that Alonso and the mayor are “extremely close” and that he “would be privy” to the Hernandez’s whereabouts when he was scheduled to be at the 2015 NRPA conference.

“I like to party”

On June 12, after being subpoenaed by the state attorney’s office and with his lawyer present for his sworn statement, Alonso said he had no direct knowledge of Hernandez’s whereabouts after the mayor decided not to go to Las Vegas. The chief of staff also said he could not recall any communication with Hernandez during those seven days. As far as Delgado’s claim about Hernandez’s concerns that Alonso had a drinking problem, the chief of staff said: “Listen, I like to party. I’m 38 and single.”

Investigators subsequently obtained text messages from Alonso’s city-issued phone which appeared to show him covering for Hernandez when City Attorney Lorena Bravo asked to have the mayor call her. “Okay, I will let him know,” Alonso wrote back. “Remember we are both out of town.”

In an Aug. 22 email to Reichling, ethics commission investigator Karl Ross broaches the possibility of subpoenaing cell tower data for the mayor’s phone during the week he was supposed to be in Las Vegas based on Alonso’s text messages. “I don’t know whether this rises to the level of possible perjury,” Ross wrote. “But it seems to suggest Alonso was not being truthful or forthcoming or whatever you want to call it while he was under oath.”

In his response to Ross, Reichling didn’t think there was enough to proceed with a perjury investigation against Alonso. “He certainly was not specific or forthcoming with his responses, but that is not a crime that I am aware of,” Reichling wrote, adding that the mayor’s cell phone location data would also not help proving a crime had been committed.

“With regards to an order for historic cell site data, our office’s policy is that there be probable cause to believe the cell site data would lead to evidence of a crime,” Reichling wrote. “Unless I am missing something, I do not believe I could proceed with charging Alonso with a crime, or applying for a cellular site order on the Mayor’s phone.”

Related posts:


1. [Hialeah’s mayor, a former crony, an off-the-books city gig and an ethics investigation](#)
2. [Fort Lauderdale to use “poor people’s money” to subsidize transit for affluent?](#)
3. [More students heading to charter schools; officials brace for a bigger money drain on public education](#)
4. [Hallandale city manager’s going away gift of public money to departing commissioner](#)
5. [Lobbyists, lawmakers hit jackpot as Mardi Gras Casino pays out big to shed greyhound racing](#)

[← Next post](#) [Previous post →](#)

Related posts:

1. [Hialeah’s mayor, a former crony, an off-the-books city gig and an ethics investigation](#)
2. [Fort Lauderdale to use “poor people’s money” to subsidize transit for affluent?](#)
3. [More students heading to charter schools; officials brace for a bigger money drain on public education](#)
4. [Hallandale city manager’s going away gift of public money to departing commissioner](#)
5. [Lobbyists, lawmakers hit jackpot as Mardi Gras Casino pays out big to shed greyhound racing](#)

Francisco Alvarado tagged this post with: [Anna Amselle](#), [Araldo Alonso](#), [Ed Griffith](#), [Felix Delgado](#), [Glenn Rice](#), [Hialeah](#), [Joe Centorino](#), [Joseph Dzedzic](#), [Karl Ross](#), [Las Vegas](#), [Lisette Franco](#), [Lorena Bravo](#), [Mayor Carlos Hernandez](#), [Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics](#), [Miami-Dade State Attorney’s Office](#), [National Recreation and Park Association](#), [Raul Martinez](#), [Trent Reichling](#) Read 53 articles by [Francisco Alvarado](#)
4 Comments [Post a Comment](#)


1.  *Glenn rice* says:
[September 21, 2017 at 11:54 am](#)

This proves my theory i have been professing alllll along that Carlos Hernandez was and his a “protected “ and valued Government “information” provider, leaker! That he will be obsolved of any wrongdoings for life!

Also called “Queen for a day” by the FBI And State- BUT- Carlos Hernandez is such a commendable informant (per Kathy Rundle)-Filipito & Julio Robaina trial now defrauding a Grant earmarked for the poor, the needy, hungry underprivileged children lunch program to fund a wild week in Vegas, OH and where ever Mayor went!

The government has given Carlos Hernandez the Honorary title of “Queen for Life” because he is such a credible facilitator of political gossip and conspiracies to his good friends in the FBI!!!!

I agree with Mayor Martinez that if that would have been him just conspiring to misappropriate monies from a Grant earmarked for those hungry, needy children of Hialeah to fund a boys week out of town supposedly to get an award they never got – Mayor Martinez would have gotten life in prison WITHOUT Parole!

2.  *Astrogal* says:
[September 21, 2017 at 2:29 pm](#)