

Sun-Sentinel

SOUTH FLORIDA • THURSDAY • MARCH 5, 1998

"I feel like I'm the mayor, but it's not up to me to decide."
—Xavier Suarez

WHO'S IN CHARGE?



Joe Carollo, center left, and attorney Kendall Coffey address the media. Carollo accused the Suarez campaign of cheating. Suarez, above, was forced to leave office Wednesday after a judge's ruling. The City Commission meets today to

Judge orders new election; commission to choose interim Miami mayor

By JAY WEAVER, JOY BENJAMIN and DEBORAH RAMIREZ
MIAMI — Corruption at City Hall. Bankruptcy knocking at the door. Politicians starving for respect. And now a city without a mayor. Florida's most famous — and troubled — city became leaderless on Wednesday when a judge threw out the results of the Nov. 4 mayoral

election because of absentee voter fraud. Miami-Dade Circuit Judge Thomas S. Wilson Jr. ordered a new election within 60 days. It likely will be conducted in late April, and will be open to the five candidates who competed in the first mayoral election. The big question for now is: Who will replace Mayor Xavier Suarez in the meantime? He was forced to leave office on Wednesday after the judge's verdict.

Today will be a busy day for Suarez. He could be in court, or he could be in the office. He could be in the office, or he could be in court. He could be in the office, or he could be in court. He could be in the office, or he could be in court.

USA TODAY



Mayor is confident in eye of Miami's latest storm

By Deborah Sharp
MIAMI — A rising feud in the latest blow to the battered image of the tropical city, where political chaos now is central to the process. "Mayor Suarez knows more and understands the more he says in court," said one observer who has been involved in the case. "He is confident in his own ability to handle the situation. He is confident in his own ability to handle the situation. He is confident in his own ability to handle the situation."

The Boston Globe

Carollo reinstated as mayor of Miami

By Teresa Moses
LEADS REINSTATEMENT

MIAMI — Just when Miami residents thought they had seen everything in city government, they got another surprise yesterday. Joe Carollo, who left the mayor's post four months ago, was ordered returned to office by a court that declared him the winner of the November election over Xavier Suarez.

A three-judge panel of the 11th District Court of Appeal agreed with a lower court that the Nov. 4 election had been tainted by an "extensive pattern of fraudulent, intentional, and criminal conduct" in absentee ballots. But the panel threw out the lower court decision ordering a new election, saying a new election would reward those who engaged in ballot fraud.

"We're not to approve a new election as the proper remedy following extensive voter fraud, we would be sending out the message that the worst that would happen in the face of voter fraud would be another election," the judges wrote.

The ruling left Carollo, a 43-year-old businessman, in place. In a hastily convened news conference in front of Miami City Hall, he promised to bring stability back to Miami, which has been buffeted by a serious financial crisis, criminal indictments of several officials, and municipal chairs at City Hall.

The last four months have been tumultuous as Suarez — who lost Carollo in a Nov. 11 runoff — replaced Carollo's staff with his own appointees and declared war with the state board appointed to oversee the city's finances.

I am not going to be doing the kind of things that you saw going on in the last four months," Carollo said yesterday. "This is one of the greatest cities and it didn't deserve what it got in the last four months."

The appeals court agreed with Carollo that the runoff should never have been held. It threw out all the absentee ballots cast on Nov. 4, saying the election should be decided by the votes cast in person that day. That gave the victory to Carollo, who received 31,411



JOE CAROLLO Vows to restore stability

The court decision may end the four-month fight over who should be the first "strong" mayor of Miami, a position that carries a salary of \$97,000 a year. Kendall Coffey, a former federal prosecutor who led Carollo's legal team, said he thought it unlikely that Florida's Supreme Court would consider the case.

The Washington Post

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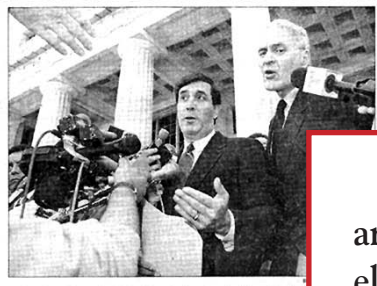
New Mayoral Election Is Ordered for Miami

'Fraud and Abuse' Prevalent, Judge Says

By DONALD P. BAKER
Washington Post Staff Writer
MIAMI, March 4 — A judge threw out the results of Miami's bitterly contested mayoral race today, saying he found "extensive fraud and abuse" in absentee ballots that lifted Xavier L. Suarez to victory in a runoff last November against incumbent Joe Carollo. The decision by Circuit Court Judge Thomas S. Wilson Jr. included an order for a runoff within 60 days. But it left this tumultuous and scandal-ridden city without a mayor for the time being, marking another in a series of crises that have brought the bay-side city hall to the edge of chaos. The five-member City Commission called a special meeting for Thursday afternoon, at which it could name an interim chief executive. The city's charter requires a vacancy to be filled within 10 days. Carollo, 43, came within 155 votes of winning a plurality in a field of five in the Nov. 4 election.



Miami Mayor Xavier Suarez, above, speaks at news conference after judge ordered new mayoral election. At right, former mayor Joe Carollo, center, accompanied by attorney Kendall Coffey, said, "It's a great day for Miami."



the idea that Carollo should or could be reinstated. But in a city conditioned to chaos—the governor has imposed a financial control board similar to the one in Washington, D.C.—this latest fiasco was greeted with glee. "There is no mayor in the city of Miami," declared City Commissioner Tomas Ropolo, who added, "I don't know what we'll do if Albania declares war on us."

te and, after an interview with an out-of-town reporter, declared, "I'm going home." After listening to 60 witnesses—21 of whom invoked their Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination—and examining 106 exhibits, the judge said the abuses, many of which were uncovered by the Herald, were "not isolated incidents. . . . The evidence shows a pattern of fraud—intentional

laid by Cuban immigrants and represented by Commission Chairman Hernandez, "was the center of a massive, well conceived and well orchestrated absentee ballot voter fraud scheme," according to the judge. Suarez, who like Carollo and the majority of Miami voters is Cuban-American, noted that irregularities in Little Havana could be the vestige of fraud.

But Coffey, Carollo's lawyer, argued that to throw out the entire election and send the voters to the polls again would disenfranchise everyone who voted in the first round.

The court decision may end the four-month fight over who should be the first "strong" mayor of Miami, a position that carries a salary of \$97,000 a year. Kendall Coffey, a former federal prosecutor who led Carollo's legal team, said he thought it unlikely that Florida's Supreme Court would consider the case.

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