

State Sen. Rene Garcia was born in his home base of Hialeah...

State Sen. Rene Garcia says the Charter Review Task Force committee, which he chaired and just completed its business, was a rousing success because of the complex and numerous issues the group tackled in a short time. The task force was formed in March, didn't meet until April 19 and held its last meeting June 26. The previous task force had 18 months to complete its work.

"We tackled a couple of big issues, one of them being incorporation and regional government that we've been talking about for years and really haven't moved on," says Sen. Garcia, who formally presents the committee's proposed amendments to the Miami-Dade commission July 17.

The District 40 Republican, whose home base is Hialeah, has a history of tackling big issues.

There was a time when single young mothers or girls who had just given birth and were in desperate straits abandoned infants just about anywhere. But in 2000 the Florida Legislature passed a law, called A Safe Haven for Newborns, that allows a mother or a father to drop off a newborn at a firehouse without penalty. Sen. Garcia was a proponent of the law who actually got involved in making sure the program got off the ground.

"After that law passed, we, the legislature, never funded it," he said. "So this gentleman by the name Nick Silverio went out and started this program... and we worked together on getting this going."

Sen. Garcia talked about his rise in public office, the issues confronting the state, and his family, at his office in Hialeah with Miami Today reporter Lou Ortiz.

Q: You just chaired the Charter Review Task Force. How did you become interested in that and how did you become chairman?

A: Last year I sponsored a bill trying to give the voters of Dade County another vehicle to amend the Dade County charter, because we saw what happened after the last charter review committee. They came up with a lot of recommendations and... the county commission maybe took up one. That was an insult to the voters of Dade County.

Commissioner Steve Bovo appointed me. I just went to meetings and someone else was nominated as chairman, I think it was H.T. Smith. He turned it down and then they offered me up and I accepted it.

Q: Everybody talked about the time frame, how short the time span you had to really do in-depth work. How will you gauge the success of the task force committee?

A: We were very successful in the short time that we had. You have a lot of members with a lot of different colorful backgrounds, from local governments, state, community college, health care backgrounds, and they all came together as part of this charter review task force to look at how we are going to make Dade County a better place to live.

With the short time frame that we had, we tackled a couple of big issues, one being incorporation and regional government that we've been talking about



Photo by Marlene Quaroni

State Sen. Rene Garcia, who recently chaired the Miami-Dade County Charter Review Task Force committee, says the county should be limited in its government functions.

The Achiever

Rene Garcia

State Senator, District 40
1490 W 68th St., Suite 201
Hialeah 33014
(305) 364-3100
garcia.rene.s40@flsenate.gov
Age: 37
Born: Hialeah
Education: University of Miami (master of business administration with a specialty in health administration); Florida International University (bachelor of science in political science)
Personal Philosophy: "I don't hold grudges, life is too short to hold any grudges. Even in politics, why are you going to hold a grudge? Just do the best job that you possibly can and try to help your neighbor as much as you possibly can and that's pretty much how I live my life."

Watch the interview

www.miamitodaynews.com

Click on Profile

for years and really haven't moved on it. The county commission, when they did that moratorium, it sent a clear message that they didn't want other areas to incorporate.

The task force, they believe in regional government, and I do too. The county needs to get out of the municipal business and just concentrate on regional government. When I say regional government, deal with the seaport, the airport, the delivery of health care, transportation, those are the types of issues that we need to be concentrating on as Miami-Dade County.

Q: You've been a public servant in elected office now for 12 years. What led you to seek office in the first place?

A: I was student government president in Hialeah High School and then after I graduated I interned with Ileana

Ros-Lehtinen.

When I first started to run for office I was 21. I ran for the city council of Hialeah. I don't like saying I lost. I just didn't win that year, and after that I ran again two years later. After I ran at 21, I was appointed to a board; got a taste for it, and at 23 got elected.

I enjoy public service. I think it's one of the most rewarding things that we as human beings can do can is give back to your community. I never expected to be here 15 years later.

Q: What was your prize achievement as a councilman in the City of Hialeah?

A: We talked about the issue of reforesting the city. We lost a lot of greenways. I wasn't there when it [finally] happened, but now when we do our streets you see that they're always incorporating areas for green areas, down the medians in the middle they're putting trees, planting trees, and it really makes a difference for the quality of life for the residents of Hialeah.

Q: In the House of Representatives what was the most memorable moment there?

A: One was trying to fight to keep Hialeah race track open. That was my first year in 2001. I went up against a whole industry.

Imagine a freshman legislator from Hialeah, a little Cuban boy from Hialeah, 26 years old and going up against the breeders, the pari-mutuels, the horsemen. I went up against the whole industry in trying to make sure that the law did not close down Hialeah race track. Unfortunately, I lost, but it was a tight vote. If that would have happened to me now, I would I have moved to reconsider it and it wouldn't have died because you live and learn.

One of the achievements that I had in the House that was really big involved health care and the kid care program, trying to streamline the process, making sure that every child in the state of Florida has access to quality health care. That was one of the programs that we worked on a bipartisan nature, Republican and Democrats coming together to make sure that no child in Florida goes without access to a doctor or primary

care.

Q: You had a sort of natural progression there from city council to state representative, and then you thought it was just time to run for the senate?

A: I ran for the city council in 1995 for the first time. I ran [again] in '97, which was when I got elected, and after that I ran again in '99; then in 2000 there was a vacant seat open because of term limits and I ran for the House. I served eight years in the House. I was termed-out in 2008.

I was out for two years and then again there was a vacant seat in the Senate. My predecessor is Rudy Garcia, and I just followed him into that seat.

Q: What did you do for those two years that you were outside of the public spotlight?

A: I am so glad that I was out of office for those two years because I've been involved in politics in one way shape or form since I was 21 and you think everyone seems to think that you're the best thing since sliced bread, since you're in office. Not until I left office for those two years did I realize that that's not the case.

Before, I would pick up the phone and call folks and they would return my calls. But for those two years, considering the fact that I was the person to beat for that Senate seat, I would pick up the phone and call folks and they wouldn't return my calls. That was very humbling, and it taught me a valuable lesson, a valuable lesson that otherwise I would have never learned.

It's a very temporary position that I have. It's not my seat. It belongs to the people of the District 40. I need to go up there [Tallahassee] and do the best job that I can and deliver the most resources that I can for my district, and that's what people are going to remember.

Q: Two-prong question: what are some of your most important achievements in the Senate and what are your goals for the next session?

A: In the Senate, I guess the issue I'm big on is health care, Medicaid reform. Some people didn't want Medicaid reform to happen.

The Medicaid budget has been increasing by double-digits every year and the more money that goes to health care and goes into the Medicaid budget, that means there's less money for education, less money for transportation and right now most importantly for economic development, training the workforce, workforce development, those are the types of programs we need to be focusing on.

We are going to get our hands around the cost of Medicaid while ensuring quality access to healthcare.

So that was one of the biggest moments that we had in the Senate or that I had in Senate, was trying to put this plan together. We brought people together and it wasn't just the insurers or consumers, the plans, the hospitals. How do we establish a program that ensures quality while giving us some budget predictability?

Q: You mentioned that one of your responsibilities is to look out for the City of Hialeah and of course the entire state, so what kinds of things will you tell the

July and August... It's Time to Spa during Miami Spa Month — enjoy a custom treatment for \$99* at Miami's premier spas.



MIAMI SPA

MiamiSpaMonth.com

ORGANIZED BY THE GREATER MIAMI CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

Visit MiamiSpaMonth.com for participants and enticing hotel packages.

Organized by:



*Tax and gratuity are not included.

...but he is also fond of the county, state and especially newborns

voters next time that you've done?

A: It's not only Hialeah; again, I'm very parochial. You know I was elected by the voters of Hialeah and District 38, District 40, and I say District 38 because we just went through reapportionment. But it's Hialeah, Miami Lakes, Doral, Sweetwater, Hialeah Gardens, Virginia Gardens, Medley and North Dade, that's what it encompasses.

The base of the district is Hialeah, the largest district in the area. But it's not just about District 40. It's about Dade County.

You know, for far too long we've been a donor community. We give a lot more money to Tallahassee than we get back. We just have to collectively come together and work as a team, as a unit regardless if you're Republican or a Democrat, because sometimes, most of the time we're going to be on the same side.

Q: Has that worked?

A: Yes. When it comes to education funding, we've gotten better returns on our monies for Dade County, and funds for transportation. In particular I've been heavily involved in health care, making sure that Jackson receives the proper funding from Tallahassee, making sure that our senior centers are funded. That's always a huge battle in Tallahassee.

I'm proud to say that our delegation has matured throughout the last couple of years because early on, before I was in the legislature, there was a lot of infighting with our delegation, and I can tell you that now since we have matured and we've grown politically, you're seeing that coming together.

We're the largest delegation in the state. Why not use our power and numbers to influence legislations and policy that's going to benefit the people of Dade County?

Q: What do you see in the future for this region and for the state?

A: We've gone through a tough time as the housing bubble burst, jobs disappeared. But I think the state of Florida is turning the corner.

And although I say I'm parochial and I try to help Dade County, we have to look at the greater picture and that's the state of Florida and how do we get emphasis on retraining our workforce. We can stop talking about attracting new businesses to the state of Florida if we don't talk about how we're going to retrain our workforce. Those people have lost those jobs. What are we going to do?

Q: What do you see in your political future as you survey the landscape?

A: I just got reelected. Some people have talked to me about Washington DC, and going to Congress. The truth of the matter is that I love Florida. I love the state of Florida. If I decide to do something in the future, it will be something within the state.

There's no better state to live in. There's no better area. Even with all the problems that we have, the diversity that we have in Florida from the Panhandle to Jacksonville to the Orlando area, Central Florida, Southwest and Southeast Florida, we're such a diverse state, but yet it works and I don't want to go to Washington.

Q: Your resume mentioned that you served as or currently serving as vice president of community relations for Dade Medical College.

A: Correct.

Q: How long have you've been there and what are your responsibilities?

A: I've been there four or five years already, and my responsibilities are to make sure that we have the affiliations with our different health care providers so our students can do their rotations, do their internships. That's my number one job there and also be a troubleshooter and try to work on some of our contract negotiations.

It's great because my background has always been health care and I have a passion for health care. When the economy went south, I wasn't immune to losing my job. I was working at Mercy Hospital and I lost my job at that time and that's how I ended up with Dade Medical College.

Q: What were you doing at Mercy Hospital?

A: I was vice president of external affairs at Mercy Hospital. It's so funny because I was at a job that I thought I was going to be there the rest of my life. My predecessor was there 40 years and I thought I was going to be. I really truly enjoyed working there.

But you know the economy went south and I too as some of the executive team left, for a lack of a better word.

Q: Are you involved in other civic organizations in the area?

A: I serve on the board for Camillus House and on the board for A Safe Haven for Newborns. Those are the two that I really have a deep passion for. Camillus House is always helping the homeless.

I think one of my crowning moments was making sure that A Safe Haven for Newborns got off the ground because in 2000 legislation passed creating the safe haven law in the state of Florida. What the law does is that it allows a mother or father — but it's usually the mother — to abandon or surrender her child to a hospital or to a fire department without questions.

Before this law was passed, you saw that a lot of babies were being placed in dumpsters and canals. After that law passed, we, the legislature never funded it.

So this gentleman by the name Nick Silverio went out and started this program and I helped him. He brought it to me and we worked together on getting this going and as a result, as of today, there's over 200 children, babies, that have been saved... because of Nick Silverio's insistence on making sure that people are aware of this law.

Q: So you're one of the founders of this movement?

A: I was there from the beginning, from the inception. It was Nick Silverio's idea and brainchild, and it goes to show you what one person can do when they put their mind to it. I'm a big fan of his.

Q: How about your family? Tell us about your parents and your home life,

how you grew up?

A: I come from a working-class family. Born and raised here in Hialeah. Went to public schools: Palm Springs Elementary, Hialeah Middle School — back then it was Hialeah Junior High — and Hialeah High. I graduated and went to college, stayed here locally. My parents are very apolitical.

It's funny, because the first time I ran for office my mother thought I was crazy. She goes, what are you doing? She just never liked politics and she went as far as to tell me that if I ran, she was going to visit my brother in Maryland and stay with him until the elections were over. So I had to convince my father to talk to her. [Now] she's my number-one fan — when campaigns come around, she's always making phone calls.

My father is 81. I'm not going to mention my mother's because she'll have a heart attack if she heard this.

I couldn't have asked for a better set of parents. My father's work ethic is what I've always followed and I try to emulate. Even though that they're not involved in politics or public service, they've done nothing but help people their whole lives.

We have a big extended Cuban family. I have a brother; he's 47. He lives in Maryland. He has three children, Matthew, Emily and Emmanuel.

Q: What's your brother's name?

A: Carlos Garcia. My father was the only boy out of eight sisters and I'm the youngest of all the cousins. We have about 26, 27 cousins and some live in New York; we're just very, very close.

Q: What are your parents' names?

A: My father's name is Eocelio Rene Garcia but everyone calls him Rene; my mom is Gregoria Magdalena Garcia but everyone calls her Magda.

Q: What does a state senator do to unwind? How do you relax?

A: I've been working a lot, but I really love the ocean. That's why I couldn't live anywhere else but here in Miami or in Florida. I like boating. I like the beach. I like to sit by the pool and read a book.



TARGET AUDIENCES DON'T THINK OF THEMSELVES AS TARGETS

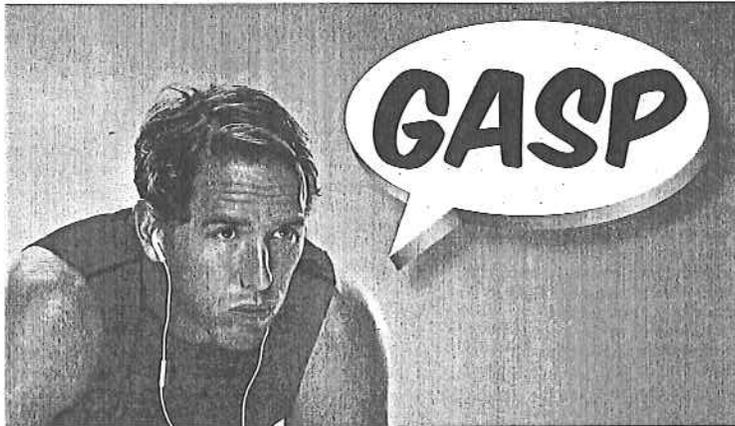


The true measure of good advertising is not the headline, picture or script — but how well it captures the hearts and minds of your audience.

Green Dot creates marketing and advertising campaigns that hit straight and shake the walls. In the process, our clients land interested responses — and less duds.

green DOT Advertising and Marketing Solutions

Call us at 305-674-8406 or visit www.greendotonline.net



We'll put the warrior back in your weekend.

Keeping a healthy lifestyle can sometimes lead to injury. That's why at Baptist Medical Plazas, our team of urgent care doctors and nurses is ready to treat your sprains and strains—and other minor ailments—7 days a week. We also can fill your prescription on your way out, saving you valuable time. Next door, our diagnostic imaging center is equipped with the most advanced digital technology and staffed with Board-certified, specialized radiologists. **Know Better. Know Baptist Medical Plazas.** For more information or to find a location near you, call 786-596-0000 or visit IknowBaptist.com.

The facility charges at our urgent care centers are less than the facility charges at Baptist Health hospitals.

Baptist Medical Plaza at Brickell
URGENT CARE | DIAGNOSTIC IMAGING
BAPTIST HEALTH SOUTH FLORIDA

Now Open: 2660 Brickell Avenue

Committed to our faith-based charitable mission of medical excellence

Connect BaptistHealth5F     

Brickell • Coral Gables • Coral Springs • Country Walk • Davie • Doral • Miami Lakes • Palmetto Bay • Pembroke Pines • Tamiara Trail • Westchester

Charter review task force may cling to longer life

By LOU KRIZ

recommendations that garner two-thirds vote in the committee to go directly on the ballot, bypassing the county commission.

In the resolution creating the task force, the commission expressed the intent of placing on the ballot any recommendations approved by two-thirds task force and rushed," said Lawrence Percival, who was appointed to the task force by county Mayor Carlos A. Gimenez. "We can do more and we owe it to the residents of Miami-Dade County."

Under the Home Rule Charter, which was adopted in 1957 and allows voters to determine their form of government, the county commission is required to review the charter every five years to decide whether changes or revisions are necessary. If so, the commission appoints a 20-member task force to recommend charter amendments.

If the commission agrees with the recommendations, the proposed amendments are placed before voters on the general election ballot.

The 20-member task force was created by county commission resolution March 8 by a narrow 7-6 vote. The committee is required to submit recommendations to the commission by July 17, 120 days after its creation. The 2008 task force had 18 months to complete its work.

The current committee first met April 19 met 13 times — the last June 26 — including five public hearings. The task force approved more than a dozen charter amendment recommendations, including that the charter be reviewed every eight years, beginning in 2013. The proposal would also require

Sen. Garcia said he considers the task force a success. "With the short time frame that we had, we tackled a couple of big issues, one being incorporation," he said.

He agreed with Mr. Percival about asking the commission to extend the life of the task force. But "the county commission needs to approve it," he said.

Meanwhile, a proposed charter amendment on regional government by Mr. Percival did not make it out of the task force. "We ran out of time and it [the proposal] died," he said.

Mr. Percival said the proposal recommended that county government be limited to running healthcare, the jail, transportation, the port and airport. "It would reduce the size of county government and reduce the big overhead and employees," he said.

Mr. Murphy said the committee did not agree with the provision in the proposed amendment that would have forced unincorporated enclaves or pockets of areas to be incorporated after a 10-year period. And, if you have pockets of unincorporated area, he said, the county must still provide services.

Mr. Percival said when the county eventually goes forward with the incorporation process — a moratorium is in place — small pockets of unincorporated areas will have to determine how to sustain themselves.

"Commissioners need to be involved in the incorporation process," he said. "But at the end, the citizens have to vote."

The members of the task force were chosen by different entities. The county commission ap-

Miami Today captures 4 state awards

Miami Today last week received four journalism awards in the annual competition of the Florida Press Association.

The industry association awarded Miami Today first place in editorial writing, second in sports columns, and third in both business and education reporting.

Reporter Scott Blake received his business writing award for this November report on American Airlines' battle through bank-

ruptcy. "Mirror image: American flying high here, suffers elsewhere."

Mr. Blake's award for education writing was for a September article on the University of Miami. "Sports scandal blenish could hamper university fundraising."

Awards were presented Saturday at the Southeastern Press Convention at the Sandestin Golf & Beach Resort in Destin.

LASIK
\$999/eye

Espejillo

305.545.9393
www.miamilasikvision.com

Ross Report
on Real Estate
by *Ariehy Ross*

CHEAT THE SYSTEM: BUYING LUXURY HOMES IN A RECESSION

People say that the recession has led to a deflation of the real estate market. In other words, the price of real estate is dropping. But the market is not as simple as that. In fact, the market is still hot. For professional advice on all aspects of buying or selling real estate, please contact me at 305.960.2575. My office is at 355 Alhambra Circle, 9th Floor, in Coral Gables.

P.O.V.
AN INSIDER'S LOOK AT THE

LOCAL KIDS SOAR AT AILEYCAMP MIAMI

Point of View:
Adrienne Arisht Center
www.arishtcenter.org

For more information about the Center's onstage presentations and education and outreach programs, visit www.arishtcenter.org

OPENS THIS WEEK!

the DONKEY SHOW

ARRIVES JULY 13

305.949.6722 • arishtcenter.org

pointed 13, one by each commissioner. The mayor also made an appointment along with each of the largest cities: Miami, Hialeah, Miami Gardens and Miami Beach. The Miami-Dade League of Cities appointed two members.



Most buyers are fearful of large commissions and want to avoid them. However, the deal is not as simple as that. In fact, the market is still hot. For professional advice on all aspects of buying or selling real estate, please contact me at 305.960.2575. My office is at 355 Alhambra Circle, 9th Floor, in Coral Gables.

Going into its fourth year, Aileycamp Miami, an education partnership between the Adrienne Arisht Center and Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, is already a deep-rooted cultural and educational summer ritual in Miami-Dade County. The full scholarship camp for at-risk youth provides instruction and discipline through professional dance training for more than 100 South Florida young people each summer, while putting to work more than a dozen dance and personal development instructors, music accompanists, and group leaders — all of them chosen locally from the best experts in their fields.

For more information about the Center's onstage presentations and education and outreach programs, visit www.arishtcenter.org