

Bond Case Briefs

Municipal Finance Law Since 1971

Miami's Mayor Climbs Aboard the Trump Train.

The county may need billions in federal funds for a transit system.

He's the immigrant mayor of Miami-Dade County—where most people speak a foreign language at home and half the population was born abroad—and he voted for Hillary Clinton. Yet Mayor Carlos Gimenez is falling in line with President Trump's demands on immigration, and many of his constituents are furious.

After Trump threatened to curtail federal funds to so-called sanctuary cities that protect illegal immigrants from federal immigration laws, Gimenez quickly eliminated the policy that had landed Miami-Dade on a list of sanctuary jurisdictions. But even amid growing uproar in the community, the mayor is clear about his motive: It's all about the money.

The second-term Republican needs federal funds to make good on one of his signature campaign promises—to build an expansive mass transit system to connect downtown to Miami Beach and several suburbs. When Trump put out his order on Jan. 25, threatening to withhold funds from disobedient mayors, Gimenez got on board. "I said, 'You know what? I think this gentleman is serious,'" he told a local ABC affiliate. "Money is in jeopardy, because there is a law that says if you don't comply with federal law, you can lose." Gimenez says Miami-Dade relies on \$350 million in federal funds every year and will try to get hundreds of millions—"if not billions of dollars"—for the transit system.

Sean Foreman, a political science professor at Barry University in Miami Shores, Fla., sees parallels between the mayor's decision and moves by companies such as Ford and United Technologies, which made deferential gestures after Trump blasted offshore manufacturing. "It's political expediency," he says. "If you want to get anything done for your business or for your municipality, you have to fall in line."

That rationale hasn't appeased the scores of protesters who have shown up at county hall. The county commission is holding a special meeting on Feb. 17 to consider the mayor's memorandum rolling back the city's sanctuary status. At issue is whether jails should keep people beyond normal periods because federal immigration authorities want to question them. Since 2013, Miami-Dade had refused to do so unless it was reimbursed by the federal government, a policy that typically led to most people being let go.

Gimenez insists the move represents a minor shift in policy. Still, the change wasn't lost on Trump, who tweeted, "Miami-Dade mayor dropped sanctuary policy. Right decision. Strong!" In the first two weeks under the new policy, the mayor's office noted that Miami-Dade got 34 detainer requests from the federal government. That compares with 174 for all of 2016.

Even if Gimenez gets the federal funds, questions remain as to how he'll obtain the land for the transit project, which would cut across hundreds of acres of private property. "So yes, if we end up solving transportation issues in this community, the mayor will come out very popular," Foreman says. "But there's a low likelihood of success."

The bottom line: Miami-Dade's mayor is avoiding a clash with Trump over immigration because he needs federal money for mass transit.

Bloomberg BusinessWeek

by Jonathan Levin

February 16, 2017, 8:00 AM PST

—With Paul Murphy

Copyright © 2024 Bond Case Briefs | bondcasebriefs.com