

Navarro: Who will be Miami Dade College's next president?

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When Miami Dade College President Eduardo Padrón shared with me his decision to retire, it had a sobering effect.

As a man who transcends civic leadership, his upcoming exit from Miami Dade College will leave a seismic void in our community. Eduardo transformed public higher education in South Florida and beyond, and on his righteous crusade he uplifted the lives of thousands across every pocket of Miami.

Reflecting on the void Eduardo will leave, I am confronted by the reality that our next generation of civic leaders has yet to stand up to the task; and as one who is among this new generation, I say our time is now!



Eduardo Padron, 74, announced his retirement in February. He has been MDC's president since 1995. Miami Herald

A new era of civic leaders must uphold the social contract with our community that demands our service as a fourth leg of government. Many times, our leaders function in silos and often discuss the same problem with no concerted and focused effort to solve it.

Strong civic leader engagement will embolden our leaders to work in unison for the greater good of our community. We must be vigilant of the rapid changes that our city's skyline is undergoing and the socio-economic implications they generate. The reality is that while Miami has changed in a positive way for many, it has also created an economic divide that has made our city unaffordable for a large portion of our population, many of whom have moved to more affordable areas, taking their skills and culture with them.

As civic leaders, it is essential that we take ownership of the issues and face them head-on and with urgency. There is a massive civic vacuum that must be filled. We must create an economic and entrepreneurial ecosystem that yields opportunities for future generations.

We must also commit to protecting our local institutions that for so long have served as pathways for success. In addition, we must demand from our elected representatives at the local, state and federal levels that the existence of these institutions is non-negotiable. These pillars of our community — Miami Dade College, Florida International University, Jackson Health System, Miami-Dade County Public Schools and others — are the foundation of the future success of our community. The unfortunate dichotomy is that while Miami-Dade is the largest donor county in our state, our county does not always get its fair share and in many ways, we lack the pragmatic leadership commitment to truly flex our home rule charter.

When the education of thousands of immigrants and low-income children in our community seemed like a challenge without a solution, individuals such as Padrón selflessly tackled the problem full force with ideas and actions. His departure and that of others like him, along with the diminishing role of the media, will only foster an atmosphere filled with dogmatic political rhetoric driven by self-preservation, where empty and bombastic promises rule the day.

Miami Herald

Yet some of our most pressing issues remain unsolved — gun violence, affordable housing, transportation, vocational education, resiliency, preserving the environment and economic diversity — and the solutions offered by those in power are often a retread of old ideas. If our character is truly defined by what we do and how we act when no one is watching, our time to do and act is now. While many may look the other way or dismiss our issues, our children are watching and more importantly, they are depending on us.

I ask that you let your voices be heard and join me as we advocate for a renewed commitment to civic engagement for the future of the Magic City.

And, the first critical step is naming the next President of MDC, democracy's college.

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