

The Miami Miracle

An Interview with The Honorable Francis X. Suarez, Mayor of Miami

EDITORS' NOTE Francis Suarez is the 43rd Mayor of Miami. As the first Miami-born mayor, he is committed to building a Miami that lasts forever and that welcomes everyone. First elected with a mandate of 86 percent and then re-elected with a mandate of nearly 79 percent, Mayor Suarez has championed the integration of climate adaptive policies, Web 3.0 technology, and a free-market approach to all facets of government as part of his Miami Forever agenda. Under his leadership, Miami has cut crime and cut taxes to one of their lowest points in more than 50 years, spurring a broad-based economic expansion across Miami. Mayor Suarez has also pursued a package of affordable housing reforms – Miami For Everyone – that leverages federal opportunity zones with the activation of underutilized land to the supply and overall access to affordable housing for working people and communities of color. Most recently, Mayor Suarez has championed the development of Miami's tech economy through Venture Miami along with initiatives that connect education and job training to Miami's new emerging economic sectors such as Fintech, Medtech, and Greentech. As the son of former Miami Mayor, Xavier L. Suarez, Mayor Suarez learned the values of inclusive, servant-leadership to drive economic prosperity, personal opportunity, fairness, equal rights, and reconciliation for all. Mayor Suarez was recently selected to serve as an Aspen Institute Rodell Fellow and was also named as a Time Future 100 Leader. He was named the 20th Greatest Leader in the World by Forbes Top 50. Mayor Suarez currently serves as President of the U.S. Conference of Mayors. He also practices law as Of Counsel for Quinn Emmanuel LLP, an international law firm. Mayor Suarez earned his bachelor's degree in finance from Florida International University, graduating in the top ten percent of his class, and then received his law degree from the University of Florida Levin College of Law, where he graduated cum laude.



The Hon. Francis X. Suarez

was a cornerstone value, I almost had no choice but to embark on my own journey as a public servant, although that does not necessarily mean becoming a politician.

During my teenage years, my dad served as Mayor and I spent a lot of time around him. The devotion he had towards public service had a profound impact on me, and I absorbed from an early age what it meant to do something for the good of your community. Seeing my dad serve for eight years showed me the nobility of the profes-

sion, of being a public servant, and, in today's leaders, one can argue that it is something that is gradually being lost – so there is a sense of responsibility to try to bring that back to the extent that I can.

Before serving as a commissioner, I was a small business owner and realized it was time for a new generation of leaders to emerge, ones that followed in my dad's footsteps and are truly connected to their community, have a vision of a city that works for everyone, and work towards building a city that is here for our

children and grandchildren. I decided to run and got elected by a very small margin – by 262 votes. So, if 262 people would have voted for the other candidate, perhaps my career as a public servant would have never happened.

As commissioner, among other things, I helped Miami come out of the financial crisis, and when 2017 was coming around, I thought I could be in a good position to help lead the city into the next generation. At that point, I already loved to serve, and I was very blessed to be elected mayor by 86 percent – something I'll never forget.

What have been the keys to the growth of Miami and how do you define Miami's strengths?

Miami's strength lies in its community. We are the world's most diverse, hard-working, and grittiest city in the world. We are a community that has fled communism and witnessed the atrocities of a totalitarian regime which promised to make everyone the same, but it only succeeded in making everyone equally miserable.

Miami is fundamentally an American City, one that opens the door to the American Spirit

What attracted you to public service and did you know at an early age that you had the interest and desire to serve?

Giving back and serving this community has been in my blood since I was born. Being raised in a household where public service



Mayor Suarez at the opening of The Beautiful Game Project Soccer League at Little Haiti Soccer Park



Mayor Suarez visits with students at Superblue art studio in Miami

of hard work, of dreamers and doers. Our city is built around a common desire: to create a community where opportunity is plentiful and a path to prosperity is possible, unlike what they lived before fleeing oppressive, murderous regimes. We understand that true growth can only arise from freedom: freedom to keep what you earn; freedom to invest what you save; freedom to say what you think; and freedom to own what you build.

In short, Miami was built by people who came to pursue the American Dream, but it wasn't as if they just found it – they built it. Not only for themselves, but for future generations. That's our biggest strength and our key for success. Our city is a beacon for hope and opportunity, and I am proud to be living in Miami and serving as Mayor of this amazing community.

Your administration has been a leader in climate adaptive policies. Will you discuss these policies?

In Miami, climate change is not theoretical – it is real. When Hurricane Andrew hit Miami back in 1992, it was a wake-up call as we saw how much damage winds could cause, so we invested our resources to become the most wind-resilient city in America. Last year, with Hurricane Ian, we witnessed the increasing threat of storm surge and its devastating power. That is why our community is coming together to tackle this challenge to become the most water-resilient city in the world.

We have passed the Miami Forever Bond, which will invest \$400 million in five key categories which align with the city's most pressing needs including sea level rise and flood prevention, roadways, parks and cultural facilities, public safety, and affordable housing.

Initiatives like Miami Forever Bond, Miami Forever Carbon Neutral, our updated Stormwater

Master Plan, and Heat Resilience will ensure that Miami is here forever and is the shining example of a climate-adaptive city as well as a sustainable, forward-thinking capital of capital.

We've also created a new drainage system through our comprehensive stormwater master plan which will protect us from floods and rising sea levels. In fact, FEMA has lowered our flooding risk profile, which is a clear sign that we are on the right track and are leaders in climate-adaptive policies.

How is your administration leading in Web 3.0 technology?

Our economy is transitioning from being driven by the industrial era to one that is fueled by technology. For our city to thrive, it was clear we had to embrace innovation – including the new iteration of the internet, Web 3.0.

Miami is at the forefront of innovation because we know where the world is heading – we are empowering the world's brightest that are building powerful technologies to help us solve our biggest challenges, from leveraging technology to reach our carbon neutrality goals to being one of the first cities to explore urban air mobility, we are setting the standard of what the city of the future should look like.

The results of embracing innovation speak for themselves: Miami is number one in tech job growth, we have seen blockchain deals grow 2061 percent, venture capital deal volumes have skyrocketed to a 260 percent year-over-year increase, and \$838 million dollars were invested into Miami Web3 startups between 2021 and 2022.

Miami is becoming the gravitational center for innovation and disruption because we understand that the future of the economy is tied up with technology, and rather than shying away from this, we are embracing it.

Will you highlight the free-market approach to government of your administration and what you see as the benefits to this approach?

Government does not – and simply cannot – solve all our problems. True innovation and progress only come from having a free-market economy, one that allows creatives and innovators to explore their ideas and solve society's biggest challenges. Our role as policymakers should be to empower these individuals so they are able to identify our biggest weaknesses and provide a feasible solution for them.



Mayor Suarez at an Amigos For Kids back to school giveaway

While it may seem paradoxical for some, this approach towards our economy – which includes lowering taxes to their lowest levels in recorded history – has enabled us to enjoy a 12 percent increase in our city’s budget last year – the second largest in our history.

So, by allowing our residents to keep more of what they earn, our economy grows larger through substitution effects as they have better incentives to be more productive, save more, and deploy their earnings within our community.

Do you feel that Republican policies are resonating with the Hispanic community?

The Hispanic community is an ever-increasing demographic. They want to elect leaders who prioritize their personal freedom and empower them to provide for their families.

Hispanics are sick and tired of being compared to “breakfast tacos,” or to be referred to as “Latinx.” We are done being talked to in a condescending and outright disrespectful manner.

Democrats have not figured out that Hispanics are not monolithic. We are a broad and diverse community, not one single “bucket.” Democrats have failed to connect effectively with Hispanics’ true desires and concerns which are essentially the same concerns that every other American has: they want access to high-quality services – including education, they want to be able to afford their groceries, and desire to live in safe cities.

Hispanics seek to elect leaders who prioritize their safety, who reward their hard work, and who provide high-quality, high-paying jobs for them. We have a deep Pro-American mindset. We are proud of our country as it opened the doors for us to realize our American dream.

That is why the Republican principles are resonating with the Hispanic community. We are delivering results that have as their foundation the shared values that Hispanics cherish the most – we support law enforcement, not lawbreakers; we want safe cities and safe schools; we believe in faith and family; and we value freedom above all else.

What needs to be done to break the polarization in politics today?

Our nation is less powerful when we are divided. We are spending too much time arguing about the twenty percent of things we disagree on rather than focusing on the eighty percent of things that unite us which boil to three essential values we all share: we all want to live in a world where we all have access to prosperity, where our children can flourish and reach their potential, and we want our tomorrows to be better than our yesterdays.

Our message as leaders must switch from hateful and divisive rhetoric to focus on what makes our nation great, and how we can use our platform to build pathways for more Americans to realize their dreams.

My role as the President of the U.S. Conference of Mayors is to work hand-to-hand with mayors across the country to build cities that work for everyone. Rather than leading in a partisan manner, I am looking for solutions to our most pressing challenges: the economy, safety, access to education and prosperity.



Mayor Suarez goes to the La Salle championship game to represent his alma mater

I’m a solution-oriented person and it’s my job here to deliver solutions to the residents of my community. This is what we need from our leaders if we are to overcome our greatest challenges – not bickering and blaming the other side of the aisle for our problems.

What do you see as the keys to effective leadership and how do you describe your management style?

My passion, my driving force, comes from knowing that I can serve as a force for good and bring results for my residents while opening new opportunities for them to flourish. I subscribe to a servant-leader methodology of leadership, of cooperation, and of pragmatism – always trying my best to inspire others as a positive, aspirational leader.

Most of our leaders are investing their energy in divisive politics and rhetoric. Instead, I choose to focus my efforts in delivering tangible results for my residents. That’s how the Miami Movement emerged, out of a sincere desire to build people up and walk with them towards a better future for all, one that promises prosperity for generations to come.

Our leaders must be aspirational and inspirational, not divisive and toxic – they must want us to do better individually and as a nation, who seek to have a record of results with positive leadership.

There has been much conversation about the possibility that you will run for President. Is this an opportunity that you are considering?

Right now, I am focusing my efforts in building a city that works for everyone and is here forever while leading all mayors across the nation as the President of the U.S. Conference of Mayors. My goal is to push forward the Miami Miracle across all urban America so more cities enjoy the prosperity that we have in Miami that emerged from us following a simple formula: keep our city safe, embrace innovation, and lower taxes.

One thing that is important to underline is that Miami’s success can be replicated and scaled nationally, and if more opportunities emerge in the future to continue building

upon our momentum, I’ll consider them in their proper time with due diligence.

Your administration has achieved strong results for Miami. Are you able to take moments to celebrate the wins?

I always knew the true potential of what Miami had to offer, and being able to witness it come to fruition in real time is a true blessing. Seeing my city reach its highest feats in recorded history cannot be put into words. As Mayor, my job is to deliver the Miami Miracle to my residents, and it comes naturally to me because I love my city and my community, and I am glad to see all of our hard work paying off.

What’s impressive, however, is that we are just getting started – this is only the first inning of the Miami Miracle. What the future holds for our city will not only improve our lives in the present, but will ensure that our future generations – our children and grandchildren – can live in a city that is beautiful, diverse, and continues to serve as a beacon of freedom and hope for all the nation – and the entire world.

What do you tell young people about a career in public service?

Public service has an immense potential to improve the lives of all our loved ones. Even though it may be a very demanding career, the rewards that come from it are impossible to put into words. Leadership that is based on positivity and optimism can have a ripple effect in our community for the better.

When we have leaders who invest their energy into seeing all of us reach our true potential, enjoy high levels of quality of life and prosperity, special things happen – which is what we’re seeing in Miami: we are the happiest and healthiest city in America, we are enjoying the lowest homicide rates since the 1940s, and we are number one in wage growth.

We need a new generation of leaders to emerge, public officials who know where our world is heading towards and how we can leverage the tools at our disposal, such as technology, to build a world that better serves everyone and in which there’s a clear path towards prosperity for all. ●