

## Departing MIA director Emilio González on why 'it was a good time to call it quits'

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*Emilio T. González Director/CEO, Miami-Dade Aviation Department*

[Emilio González](#) is cleaning out his desk and packing his belongings as he prepares to leave his post as the head of the county's largest economic engine, the Miami International Airport.

After a four-year tenure where the airport saw both a rise in revenues and added new airlines, González resigned as the director and CEO of the Miami-Dade Aviation Department on Nov. 1. His resignation came on the same day that the airport celebrated its first non-stop flights between Tel Aviv and Miami by the Israeli Airline El Al.

"The El Al flight was something of great interest to me personally because I had been involved in negotiating that route and it was just a good time to call it quits," González said.

As he prepared to depart from the position and take his unused vacation time, González sat down with the *Business Journal* to talk about his time at the airport and his reason for leaving a job that he enjoyed.

A former Colonel in the U.S. Army, González, 61, said he had been thinking about the decision to step down for a few months, and points to a large stand-up chart in the back of his office with a list of "to do" items. Most of the items are crossed off. They include establishing the airport as a Foreign Trade Zone (done) and getting the airport recognized as a Pharmaceutical Hub (also done).

"At some point you just have to pull the trigger and say it's time to move on." González said. "I had done just about everything I wanted to do."

González's resignation came just a few days after Miami-Dade County Mayor [Carlos Gimenez](#) removed the airport's control of its concessions operations. Gimenez appointed a county director to oversee the airport's concessions following complaints from vendors, who were seeking financial assistance due to a loss of business caused by Hurricane Irma. The move means that County Hall, rather than airport will have control over the airport's concession contracts.

Mike Hernandez, senior advisor and director of communications for the Miami-Dade County Office of the Mayor said, "Miami-Dade County is not 'taking over' concessions."

He said the the Internal Services Department will begin a procurement process for an independent concessions managing firm to oversee the procurement of services for the Miami-Dade Aviation Department. And said, with this adjustment, "the aviation department will join Miami-Dade County's 24 other departments in having a centralized procurement process."

González said, "I don't think that's probably a good model, but if you are asking me if that is why I resigned the answer is no. I had been looking to do this for a while."

He said he hasn't decided yet what he plans to do next. For now, he plans to spend time with his grandson and spend more time on his boat.

"I've been called a lot and have been presented with a few opportunities to sit on a few boards," González said. "We'll see. I'm not really in a hurry."

There's been talk that González will accept a spot as the city manger under newly elected Miami Mayor Francis Suarez, but González said he hasn't made any decisions yet on his future. Whatever his next career move is, González said ideally he would like to stay in Miami where his family lives.

"I like this community. I've lived here a long time, even though I'm not from here, this is home," González said.

The "to do" list that González points to has a few unmarked items, one of which is a non-stop flight from Miami to Asia. He said this is one of his few regrets during his time at the airport but says it will happen at some point in the future.

"This is the gateway to Latin America and my goal was to make this the gateway to the world," González said.

González, however, has successfully worked on expanding the airport's international flights to other areas of the world, including the Middle East and Europe. In total the airport has over 100 airline carriers and this year added Qatar Airways Cargo in February and WOW Air which flies to Reykjavík, Iceland in April.

Additionally, under González's tenure the airport has worked to expand and diversify its cargo business. This includes the airport's growth in pharmaceutical cargo as MIA became the first airport in the U.S. and the second in the world to be certified by the International Air Transport Association (IATA) as a pharmaceutical freight hub.

In 2016, over \$4.3 billion worth of pharmaceutical cargo was transported through MIA, an increase of 48 percent since 2015.

Prior to working at MIA, González had served as a director on the National Security Council and the director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services under President George W. Bush. He was also a 26-year veteran of the U.S. Army rising to the rank of Colonel.

In 2016, the Miami International Airport had \$33.7 billion in business revenue, supporting more than 280,000 direct and indirect jobs and handling more than 44 million passenger, according to the airport.

"We are leaving on a good note," González said. "We are very well off and we have every expectation that we will break another record at the end of the year," González said. "Business is booming."