


The Miami Herald

3B 'MINUTES' EMERGE OF MEETING SANSOM ARRANGED

3B TRI-RAIL OFFICIALS SEEK RENTAL CAR SURCHARGE

METRO & STATE

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IN MY OPINION
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Even fading, Castro makes the headlines

I feel like a little kid in the family car on a long trip, asking once more: "Are we there yet?"

Except the question in this 50-year bumpy trip of expectations remains without a definitive answer.

Is he dead yet?

At 82, Fidel Castro has been dead for a long time in the minds of a lot of exiles. Some believe he hasn't written one word in those regime-published "Reflections" purportedly signed by the *comandante*. Others think he's dying not only from that "state secret" — likely intestinal cancer after surgery in 2006 — but struggling with the effects of Parkinson's, too.

SOUTH FLORIDA SHRUGS

Speculation has been intense in South Florida, but from Little Havana to Hialeah I find most folks really don't care to spend any time contemplating Castro's mortality.

Been there, done that — since Cuba announced Castro's surgery in June 2006.

We've had other headlines proclaiming Castro's death throughout the years, with an uptick in August of 2007. But nothing, nada, zilch.

Cuban government-controlled media produced photos and video of Castro glad-handing political pals after previous death conspiracies surfaced. This time, the last photo published of Castro with China's Hu Jintao in Cuba ran on Nov. 18, and the last "Reflections" column is a month old.

With the 50th anniversary of the revolution having come and gone, and Castro not showing up for his own party — even for one of those lovey-dovey interviews with Randy Alonso on the *Mesa Redonda* show on Cuban TV — something is up. The presidents of Ecuador and Panama visited and returned without having seen the dictator, and Spain's *El País* newspaper reported that there were security and military movements after Castro suffered a "possible heart attack."

Some speculate a coma.

VERBALLY BURIED

Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez added fuel to the mix Sunday during his weekly radio and TV address when he said, "That Fidel in his uniform who walked the streets and tormented at night

MIAMI-DADE COURTS

Ex-FBI agent's fate still unclear

■ An ex-FBI agent convicted of a Miami murder was given 40 years in prison, but his attorneys predict his conviction will be thrown out.

BY DAVID OVALLE
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Disgraced FBI agent John Connolly should serve 40 years in prison for the 1982 Miami murder of a former gambling executive, a Miami-Dade judge ruled Thursday.

Saying Connolly "tarnished the badge," Circuit Judge Stanford Blake nevertheless agreed with defense attorneys' assertion that the statute of limitations had run out for the murder charge. But he refused to throw out Connolly's conviction because the ex-agent's lawyers waited too long to file their challenge.

Blake's ruling left the door wide open for the defense team to head to an appeals court. Defense attorney **Manny Casabielle**, predicting eventual victory, optimistically proclaimed Connolly a "free man."

"There is no doubt that John has won," Casabielle said.

Miami-Dade Assistant State Attorney Michael Von Zamft disagreed with Blake's legal analysis, saying, "We believe the conviction will be upheld on appeal."

In November, jurors convicted Connolly, 68, of second-degree murder in the slaying of former World *Jai-Alai* executive John Callahan.

A star FBI agent in Boston in the 1970s and '80s, Connolly was accused of becoming corrupted by his star informants: Winter Hill gang leaders James "Whitey" Bulger and Stephen Flemmi.

The corruption saga became Boston crime lore. Bulger remains the FBI's second most wanted fugitive after Osama bin Laden. Bulger and Connolly served as loose

*TURN TO FBI AGENT, 2B



PHOTOS BY PETER ANDREW BOSCH/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

MIGHT NOT SERVE: A star FBI agent in Boston in the 1970s and '80s, John Connolly was sentenced to 40 years in prison for his role in a gang slaying.



REASSURANCE: After being allowed to change from his prison jump suit to civilian clothes for his court appearance, Connolly gets a hug from his wife Elizabeth.

BROWARD SCHOOLS

Teachers protest lack of raises

■ As teachers union and school district officials in Broward attended a hearing over an impasse in contract negotiations, hundreds of teachers protested outside.

BY HANNAH SAMPSON
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Broward public school teachers took to the sidewalk Thursday afternoon to protest a lack of raises as officials from their union and the Broward school district faced off at a hearing.

More than 200 teachers, many armed with signs and whistles, marched up and down Commercial Boulevard in Tamarac.

Dylan and Mitchell Osias held signs that said: "My mom deserves more \$\$."

Mitchell, 12, added: "Without teachers, there would be no doctors, no lawyers."

Their mother, Tami Osias, is a sixth-grade math teacher at William Dandy Middle in Fort Lauderdale.

"Everything else is going up except our salaries," she said. "It's tougher and tougher to make ends meet."

Salary increases for teachers have been stalled even though the Broward Teachers Union' and

*TURN TO TEACHERS, 2B

HOLLYWOOD

Senior housing undercut

■ A Hollywood affordable housing project for seniors was among the casualties in the state budget package approved Wednesday

MIAMI-DADE COURTS



PETER ANDREW BOSCH/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

LEGAL CONFERENCE: John Connolly, left, speaks with attorneys Manuel Casabielle, center, and Bruce Fleisher. They will appeal the 40-year sentence.

Jail sentence might not stand

*FBI AGENT, FROM 1B

inspiration for the 2006 Oscar-winning flick *The Departed*.

While Connolly's defense team was upbeat, the ex-agent did not escape harsh words from Judge Blake. He said Connolly had "become part of this criminal organization."

"For an FBI agent to go to the dark side is a sad, sad day for any judge or any society to see," Blake said.

Prosecutors say Connolly tipped the Winter Hill gangsters that Callahan might cooperate in the probe of their earlier murder of World Jai-Alai owner Roger Wheeler.

Gang hit man John Martorano responded weeks later by shooting Callahan dead, leaving his corpse in a Cadillac trunk at Miami's airport.

Connolly was charged in Miami-Dade in 2005 with first-degree murder and conspiracy to commit first-degree murder, which carry no statute of limitations. Jurors returned a second-degree murder verdict instead.

Also at issue: a gun.

In 1982, when the slaying occurred, the statute of limitations for second-degree murder without a firearm was four years. Using a gun was an "enhancement" that meant no time limit for prosecution.

The government main-

tained Connolly did use a gun because, three weeks before the slaying, he carried his FBI service weapon while slipping mobsters the information that sealed Callahan's demise.

Blake disagreed, adopting the defense position and likely shifting the final decision on the conviction to the Third District Court of Appeal.

"There is no evidence that [Connolly] had actual possession of the firearm during the commission of the crime," Blake wrote. "Possession cannot be imputed."

Connolly is already serving prison time. A federal jury convicted him of racketeering in 2002 for his role with Bulger's gang. He will complete that 10-year sentence in 2011.

If the Miami-Dade conviction stands, under 1982 law, Connolly could serve one-third of the 40-year sentence.

Boston federal prosecutor Fred Wyshak, who tried the case with Von Zamft, said after the hearing he is confident Connolly's conviction will stand.

He blasted FBI corruption that went overlooked for so long and made Bulger into Boston's criminal kingpin.

"Evil triumphs when a few good men fail to act, and that's what happened in the Boston office of the FBI," Wyshak said.