

Miami Herald

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MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

To erase Dixie Highway, Miami-Dade might turn to Harriet Tubman for help

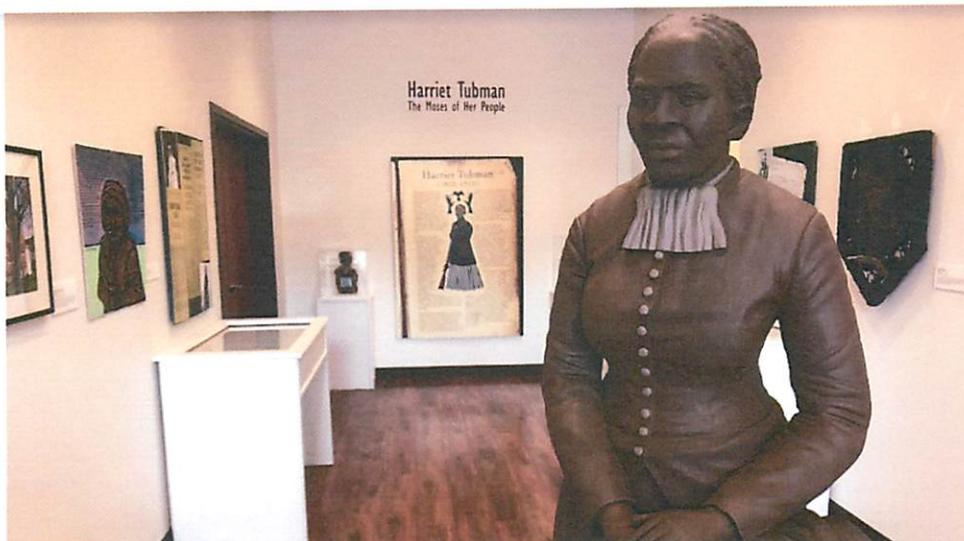
BY DOUGLAS HANKS

NOVEMBER 27, 2019 06:15 AM



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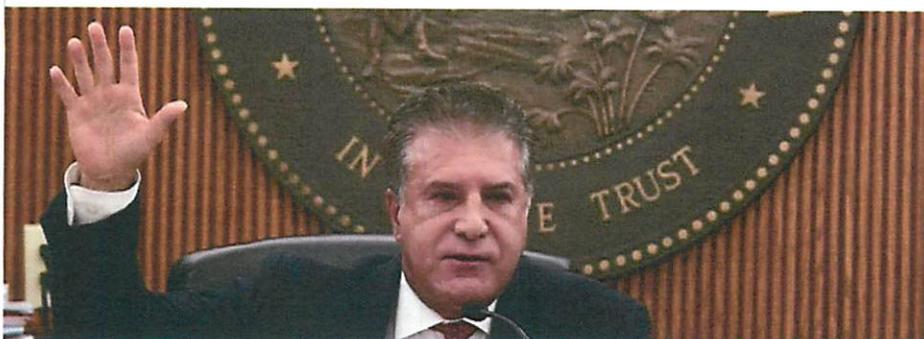
A museum in Macon, Georgia, displays a statue of Harriet Tubman, a Civil War hero and famed “conductor” of the Underground Railroad, a network of safe houses that helped slaves escape to freedom. A Miami-Dade commissioner wants to rename portions of Dixie Highway after Tubman in the Miami area. KENNETH LEMOINE KLEMOINE@MACON.COM

The senior African-American member of the Miami-Dade County Commission wants “Dixie Highway” removed from road signs across the county and replaced with the name of history’s most famous “conductor” for slaves escaping slavery in the South along the Underground Railroad.

Commissioner Dennis Moss [plans an effort early next year](#) to persuade Florida to have the Harriet Tubman Highway replace Dixie Highway in Miami-Dade, with the county acting on its own to enact the same swap in areas where Miami-Dade has authority over the roadways carrying the Dixie name.

“She is the antithesis of Dixie,” said Moss, first elected to the commission in 1993 and now preparing [to leave office in late 2020](#) because of term-limit rules. Dixie “is something that’s symbolic of our inhumane institution of slavery. The complete opposite would be to rename these stretches [of highway] after Harriet Tubman.”

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The local legislative push by Moss promises to eventually bring Miami-Dade into a national debate over tributes to the Confederacy, Civil War leaders and the pre-war South.

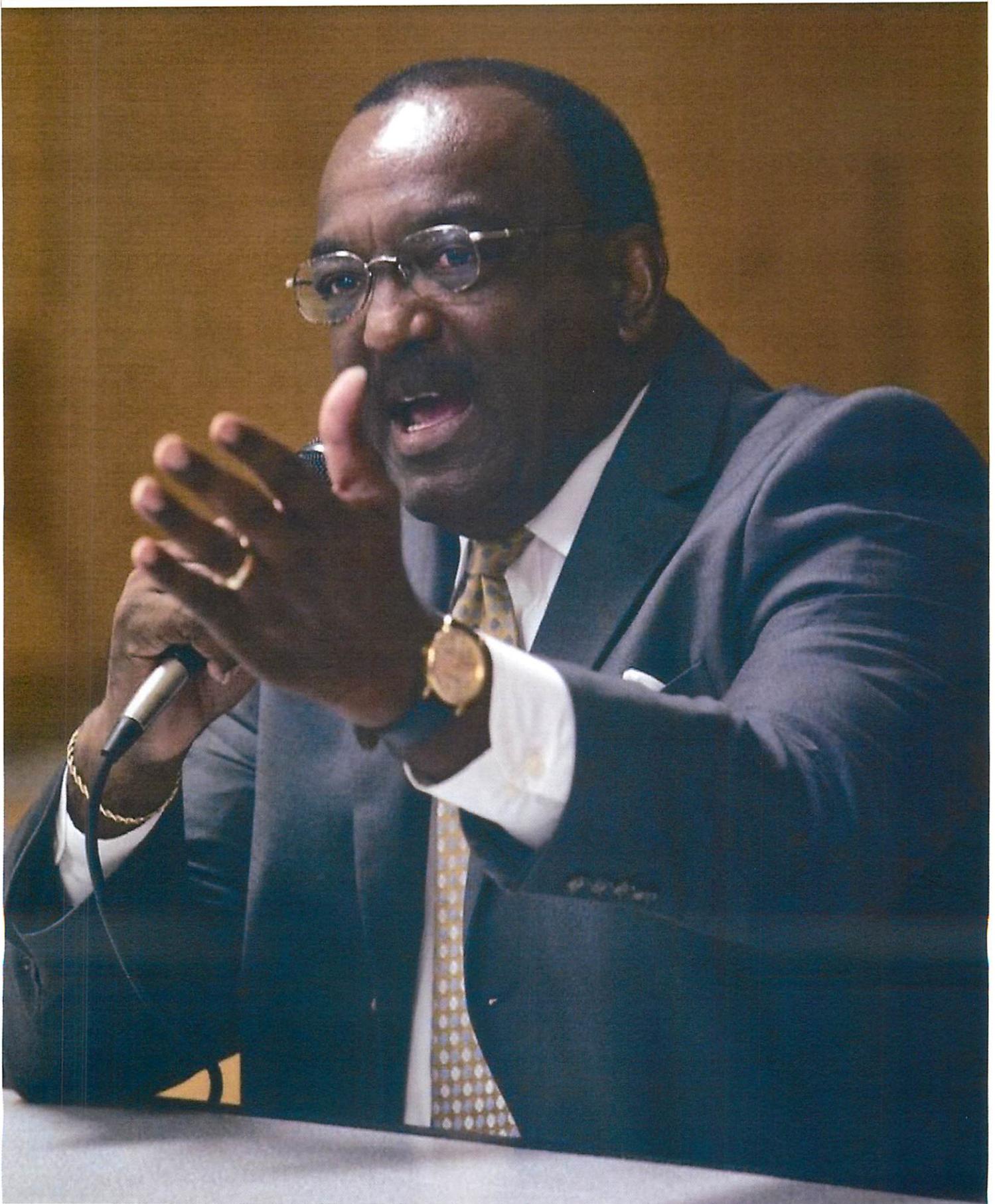
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Miami Dade Commissioner Dennis Moss wants to replace the name Dixie Highway on county roads with Harriet Tubman Highway. www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/miami-dade/article237790084.html

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through Miami-Dade largely avoided the spotlight.

Steven Losner, Homestead's [newly elected mayor](#), said he recalled during the 2017 statue debate getting ready for the controversy to land on U.S. 1, a state road that carries the name "South Dixie Highway" from Miami to Monroe County.

"I'm really not surprised," he said of the proposal from Moss, whose district includes Homestead. "But I am surprised the effort didn't start a few years earlier."

Launched in the 1910s after a campaign by Carl Fisher, the hotelier who put Miami Beach on the tourism map, the original [6,000-mile Dixie Highway](#) connected Chicago with Miami.

The name has since become an overlay with more generic — and often more recognizable — road designations, such as U.S. 1 where Interstate 95 ends in Miami. Sensitivity over Confederate icons and tributes have helped chip away at the Dixie label along Florida highways. In 2015, [Riviera Beach renamed a stretch of Old Dixie Highway](#) running through the Palm Beach County city after Barack Obama. In 2017, Hollywood in Broward County [changed the names of streets](#) named after Robert E. Lee and two other Confederate generals into Freedom Street, Freedom Drive and Hope Street.

Old Dixie is a highway that runs alongside Dixie Highway in some Florida counties, including Miami-Dade. In the Homestead area, the city controls portions of Old Dixie Highway while the county controls the rest. West Dixie Highway, in Northeast Miami-Dade, is a mix of state and county control, said Karla Damian, a spokeswoman for Miami-Dade Transportation and Public Works Department.

Moss said his plan is to introduce legislation to change Dixie to Harriet Tubman on county roads, and then urge both Florida and local governments to change names under their control. "I hope people will receive it in the right way," he said.

Born a slave in Maryland around 1820, Tubman escaped to Pennsylvania in 1849 and then returned to the state [more than a dozen times](#) to help slaves escape through a network of safe houses and hideaways known as the Underground Railroad. She served in the Union Army during the Civil War, and one of her deployments brought her as far south as Florida, according to a timeline posted on [harriet-tubman.org](#).

Losner, the Homestead mayor, said a name change shouldn't be taken lightly, given the investments businesses have already made using the Dixie Highway address. But he also considered an eventual dropping of Dixie as "inevitable" given developments in recent years. "It's only a matter of time," he said.

Rep. Shevrin Jones, D-Hollywood, said he supports the Tubman Highway idea, and would back legislation to do that in the Florida Legislature.

"Dixie Highway is a very well traveled road," Jones said. Changing it to the Harriet Tubman Highway "would give our children, and our children's children, the opportunity to ask questions about who this person is."

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