

Name: Alert ID: TMML2024031070219 A shadowy network of South Florida properties worth tens of millions of dollars and revealed in the Panama Papers could become a campaign issue in Argentina as former president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner makes her political comeback while fighting corruption indictments. Fernández de Kirchner is running for Argentina's Senate in an Oct. 22 election but is opposed by the party of current president Mauricio Macri. Now, the nation's top anti-corruption official, Laura Alonso, has made a stunning claim on national television, saying Fernández de Kirchner owns more than 60 properties in Miami bought with "dirty money." Alonso said investigators had linked the properties to a top aide to Fernández de Kirchner's husband, Néstor Kirchner, who preceded her as president. Last year, a Miami Herald investigation found that companies linked to the aide had scooped up nearly \$70 million worth of real estate in South Florida and New York. Fernández de Kirchner's attorney told the Miami Herald she owns no properties in Miami. "Everything Laura Alonso said lacks seriousness and is also false," said Gregorio Dalbón, who called the allegations politically motivated. Alonso runs Argentina's Anti-Corruption Office, which is part of the executive branch and answers to Macri. Her staff declined to provide details that would buttress her claims, saying they could not discuss ongoing investigations, despite the fact that Alonso made the accusations on a widely watched national news program. The deals linked to the aide, Héctor Daniel Muñoz, were revealed in the massive trove of offshore documents known as the Panama Papers. The Herald did not find evidence that the Kirchners participated. And it discovered only 16 properties, ranging from Brickell condos to a CVS pharmacy in Little Havana, not 60. All of the properties have been sold, many since the Herald first reported on the story. Federal prosecutors in Argentina were already investigating the properties tied to Muñoz before Alonso's announcement. In her appearance on news channel Todo Noticias last month, Alonso indicated Argentine authorities want to seize the 60 alleged Miami properties. "We're working to recover those assets using a strategy of international collaboration," said Alonso, who described the real estate as "just the tip of the iceberg of all of the money that is likely distributed in the darkest circuits of the international financial system." She called the funds "dirty money that in reality belongs to all Argentines." In an interview Thursday, a spokeswoman for the Anti-Corruption Office, Graciela Fusco, confirmed that the agency is investigating 60 Miami properties. She said investigators believe the properties were purchased with laundered money and that they belong to Fernández de Kirchner. But Fusco clarified that the investigation is ongoing. Her boss, Alonso, had seemed to state the allegations as fact. "It still has to be proven," Fusco said. The Anti-Corruption Office will not release further information. "Until the investigation is finished, we can't share anything," Fusco said. Once the office has collected sufficient evidence, the information will be turned over to prosecutors, she said. It's unclear whether the 16 properties previously identified by the Herald are part of the investigation. Fusco said she did not know which properties the office is looking at. Argentina's major newspapers have not covered Alonso's allegations, perhaps because of her office's reluctance to provide details. Wyn Hornbuckle, a spokesman for the U.S. Department of Justice, declined to comment when asked if Argentina's government had asked the United States to seize any properties. South Florida's real estate market is known as a haven for dirty cash, sparking a federal crackdown on secretive home purchases by shell companies. Fernández de Kirchner, a populist who served as president between 2007 and 2015, faces two unrelated indictments for corruption. The charges stem from allegations of impropriety over public works contracts. She says they are political retribution. In April, an Argentine court froze \$8.5 million of her assets, the New York Times reported. Despite the charges, Fernández de Kirchner won a non-binding Senate primary last month for Buenos Aires province, just barely beating a candidate favored by Macri. The two face off again later this month. Even if she finishes second, Fernández de Kirchner will still be installed in the Senate, thanks to the nation's electoral system of proportional representation. Her bid is seen as a test of her popularity before Argentina's 2019 presidential election, when she may seek to unseat Macri, according to Reuters. Panama Papers Muñoz was Kirchner's closest aide, a "body man" and private secretary who was nearly always at the president's side. He also worked for Fernández de Kirchner's administration. Kirchner affectionately referred to his companion as el gordo, or "fatty." Both men are dead: Kirchner died of heart failure in 2010 at the age of 60, Muñoz of cancer in 2016 when he was 59. The purchases linked to Muñoz include luxury condos in Brickell and Sunny Isles Beach, apartments in Manhattan's Plaza Hotel and pricey South Florida commercial buildings leased to major banks. But his name didn't appear in deeds

or Florida corporate documents. Instead, public records listed an Argentine couple, now divorced, as the managers of the companies. One of the managers, Elizabeth Municoy, runs a realty firm in Surfside. While the deals were being closed, Municoy's husband, Sergio Todisco, served as the director of a British Virgin Islands company called Gold Black Limited. The real owners of Gold Black were Muñoz and his wife, according to one of the 11.5 million leaked files from Panamanian law firm Mossack Fonseca that were published by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists and its media partners, including the Herald. Todisco confirmed to Argentine media that Muñoz owned Gold Black. The owners of BVI companies are allowed to keep their identities hidden from public view, making them a magnet for rogues, according to U.S. law enforcement officials and advocates for corporate transparency. After the South Florida deals were revealed last year, a federal prosecutor in Argentina, Juan Manuel Pettigiani, launched an investigation to determine if Muñoz was using Todisco and Municoy to mask the laundering of stolen funds. "What motivated the investigation was a suspicion that the people who appeared as the property owners did not have the financial means to pay for them," he told the Herald recently. His investigation obtained bank records for the couple. He has since passed the probe on to a team of financial-crimes prosecutors, as required by Argentine law. Municoy declined to comment last week on Alonso's allegations. She insisted she had nothing to do with Muñoz. Macri himself has faced accusations of wrongdoing because of his family's offshore investments. But a judge ruled in September that Macri's role in his father's offshore companies did not violate Argentine law, according to Argentine newspaper La Nacion. The president's connection to the companies was also revealed in the Panama Papers. Miami Herald staff writer Patricia Mazzei contributed to this report.