

Argentine economy minister resigns

The Miami Herald
Jul. 16, 2007

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina --

President Nestor Kirchner's economy minister resigned Monday after a prosecutor ordered her to testify about \$64,000 in cash that was found in a bag in her office bathroom, the government said.

Kirchner accepted Felisa Miceli's resignation and appointed economist and Industry Secretary Gustavo Peirano as her replacement to be sworn in Tuesday, Chief of Staff Alberto Fernandez said.

Late last month, police conducting a routine security check found a brown paper bag containing the cash in Argentine pesos and U.S. dollars in a bathroom cabinet inside Miceli's offices.

"The publicizing of acts concerning my private life, relating them to my public activity, has caused undeserved damage to my honor which undoubtedly affects our government," Miceli said in her resignation letter.

She added that she will face justice "like any other citizen" to clarify the case.

Miceli had said earlier that her brother had loaned her most of the money so she could buy a house, and she had taken it to the office for safekeeping until she could put it in a bank. She said she broke no law, but committed a "blunder" by leaving it in her office.

But federal prosecutor Guillermo Marijuan was not satisfied with the explanation and ordered her to appear before a judge to make a declaration.

Only a week ago, Kirchner had offered a public show of support for his embattled Cabinet minister by traveling with her to Independence Day festivities in central Argentina.

Miceli had been economy minister since 2005, when she replaced Roberto Lavagna during a shake-up of Kirchner's Cabinet.

Peirano is considered a strong supporter of Kirchner's efforts to encourage industrial development and state intervention in the economy.

Kirchner recently announced that his wife, Cristina, would run for president in Argentina's Oct. 28 election. She is considered the front-runner against a divided opposition that includes Lavagna as a candidate.