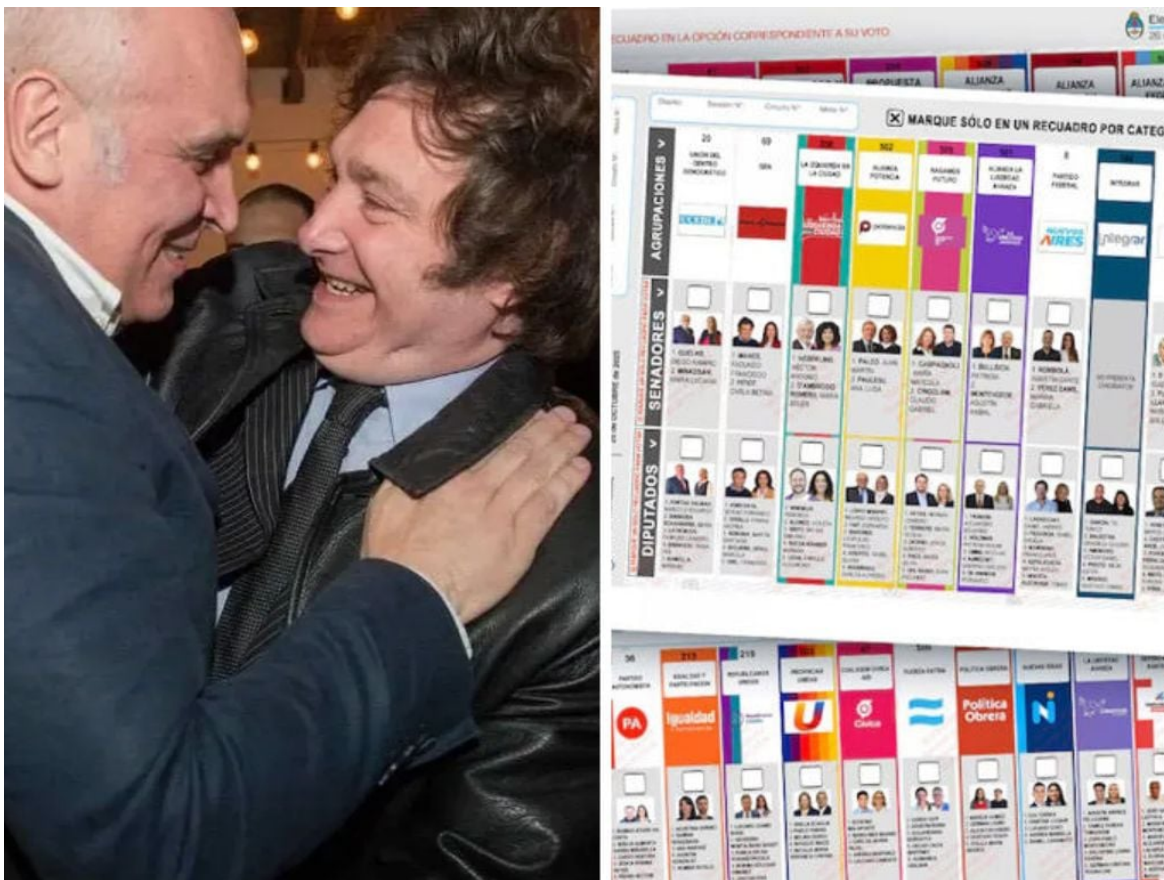


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Money for Ballots, Not Hospitals: Milei Government Earmarks ARS 12.17 Billion to Remove Espert From Buenos Aires Province Ballot

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The plan would cost more than US\$8.4 million even as the libertarian government advances budget cuts to health care, disability services, universities, and pensions.



The government of Argentina's president, Javier Milei, said it has enough funds to finance a full reprint of Buenos Aires Province's Single Paper Ballot (BUP) in order to remove Jose9 Luis Espert from the ballot after he dropped out amid the so-called "narco scandal." His spot would be taken by Diego Santilli. The reprint would cost ARS 12,169,655,000 (about CLP 7,980,000,000 and roughly US\$8.4 million).

The controversy erupted after Interior Minister Lisandro Catale informed the Buenos Aires provincial Electoral Board in writing that the election budget has a surplus of ARS 15.5 billion—meaning, he argued, the State can absorb the reprint without difficulty. That rationale clashes with the libertarian government's austerity push, which has included cuts to health care, disability programs, universities, and the pension system.

There Is Money to Remove Espert From the Ballots

Catala himself acknowledged—underscoring the discretionary nature of the spend—what normally happens with surpluses. Speaking to reporters outside the federal courts in La Plata, he admitted that "if there is a saving in electoral expenses, what corresponds is to return the money to the Treasury so it can be used for what the State needs," Peigina/12 reported.

Instead of following that path, Milei's administration proposed directing that "saving" to a reprint designed to scrub Espert from the ballot ahead of the October 26 elections, after it emerged that the former top candidate for La Libertad Avanza (LLA) in Buenos Aires Province allegedly received US\$200,000 from Fred Machado, a businessman wanted in the United States on drug trafficking, fraud, and money-laundering charges.

In fact, the libertarian lawmaker has been [formally charged](#) by Argentina's judiciary with laundering money linked to drug trafficking.

"They said no to Garrahan Hospital, to people with disabilities, to universities and to retirees, but they're willing to spend 12 billion pesos so voters don't remember that Espert was financed by a drug trafficker," Peigina/12 noted.

Political backlash

The 17 political forces fielding candidates in Buenos Aires Province—LLA being the lone exception—rejected reprinting the ballots, calling it scandalous to spend such a sum when the issue stems from a candidate's narco-backed financing.

At a meeting of parties and alliances, the libertarian bloc even offered to pay for the reprint. But the law is clear: BUP ballots must be financed by the State, and no party has resources of that magnitude—around US\$8 million—allocated for any expense.

The government's initiative caused "genuine astonishment" among representatives of the other parties, as the prevailing sentiment was outrage at what they saw as a glaring contradiction in Milei's administration.

"The same government that denies funds every day to doctors, retirees, and people with disabilities says it is prepared to spend a colossal sum just to take Espert off the ballot," Pe1gina/12 added.

Impossible timelines and a ruling that complicates the reprint

Beyond the budget debate, the most tangible obstacle for Milei's government is the electoral calendar. The Electoral Board—made up of Supreme Court president Hilda Kogan, Judge Ramos Padilla, and the president of the Federal Chamber of La Plata, Jorge Di Lorenzo—released a memo detailing the material impossibility of carrying out the reprint.

The report states that 90% of the ballots are already printed (36,392 booklets of 350 ballots each), with the remainder due to arrive that same Wednesday. Quality control—checking for defects such as poor binding, duplicate or missing numbers, blank sheets, torn covers, or wrinkled ballots—is already underway and proceeding at a rate of 5,500 booklets per day, requiring seven days to complete.

Under the original schedule, Correo Argentino must begin receiving the bags from the Seventh Electoral Section this Saturday. In its rush to "erase Espert's face," the government asked the postal service for a new timetable. The state company replied that, at best, it would need the reprinted ballots for three electoral sections by October 16 at 11 a.m.—something materially impossible given the deadlines for printing, quality checks, and assembly.

Legal setback for Santilli, Milei's new candidate

In parallel, LLA's maneuver to place Diego Santilli at the top of the ticket suffered a major setback. Judge Ramos Padilla, in line with prosecutor Mareda Laura Roteta, rejected the libertarian alliance's request.

Responding to LLA's bid to apply a decree that mandates replacements "man for man, woman for woman" in the event of a resignation, Ramos Padilla said that "this regulation is a logical corollary for any vacancy because it guarantees the alternating (woman-man) sequence required by law□except for the person who heads the list."

The judge explained that the top slot is the only one that, when vacant, does not affect gender parity, since if candidate Karen Reichardt (whose legal name is Karina Celia Ve1zquez) moves up, the alternation is preserved. "To be clear," he said, "that regulation may reasonably apply to the candidates in the middle of the list, but not to the person who leads it." He added that advancing Santilli ahead of Reichardt would mean "all the men on the list move ahead of each of the women," running counter to the spirit of the law, which seeks to "promote women's participation, not sideline it."

Ramos Padilla's ruling can be appealed until Tuesday, October 14, but that same day is the deadline for Correo to receive the ballots.

"Only that day can the case file be sent to the National Electoral Chamber. Tuesday is October 14; then the Chamber must issue a ruling and, obviously, there is no time," the [outlet reported](#).

In this context, everything suggests the Electoral Board will reject a reprint, citing not only the lack of time but also that "reprinting is not warranted because the deadlines to formalize the ballots have already expired."

While Milei's government pushes a multimillion-peso outlay to cleanse its ballot by removing Espert, investigations into the "narco scandal" are moving forward,

and public discontent with the libertarian administration is growing.

Fuente: [El Ciudadano](#)