

**Mayor Carlos Alvarez**  
**State of the County – 2009 Address**

As I stand before you today, our nation is in the most serious economic crisis since the Great Depression. Call it a recession, a downturn, a slump or a collapse. No matter what you call it, there's no doubt, the economy is in turmoil. People are losing their jobs, businesses are struggling, homes are in foreclosure, and consumer confidence is waning. In my 32 years of public service, I cannot remember another time where the challenges facing our nation and our community were so great.

I will tell you right here... right now... and up front. I don't have all the answers. No one does. But I will tell you what Miami-Dade County government is not going to do. We're not going to panic. We are not going to feel sorry for ourselves. We are not going to deprive our

residents of vital services.... and we certainly are not going to try to resolve the challenges we face on the backs of our employees.

We are going to support the people who call Miami-Dade County home in every way we can. We are going to continue to apply basic and time-tested business principles that will see us through these difficult days... and help us emerge from this crisis better and stronger. After all, we are Americans. Failure is not in our D-N-A.

## **Budget**

We have a plan. Departments are trimming their budgets appropriately, and we will take whatever steps are necessary to meet the challenges that face us.

Two years ago, we saw the writing on the wall and took the necessary actions. We have closed a budget gap of \$400 million. We have eliminated 1,300 positions from

our table of organization, with only minimal impact on our employees. We have increased our emergency reserves to \$74 million. We must continue on this path. The coming year will test us further. We are bracing for revenue shortfalls. Demands for social services are increasing. We are prepared to do more with less in order to cushion the impact this downturn is having on our residents and businesses.

Make no mistake, we are in for some tough times. We are all in this together. We know from experience, we are extremely resilient. We have faced worse and have rebounded. We will again because when the going gets tough, we dig in, tighten our grip on reality, sharpen our determination, grit our teeth, stare adversity in the eye and address whatever problem faces us head-on.

People step up when the situation demands vigilance and tenacity. Commissioner Joe Martinez did so last year when he dedicated himself to the budget process. We can expect no less from Commissioner Katy Sorenson who will tackle our fiscal limitations in these most difficult times.

Together with County Manager George Burgess, Budget Director Jennifer Glazer-Moon, new Finance Director Carter Hammer and Chief Economist, Dr. Robert Cruz, we have a team poised to tackle the challenges we face.

Let's give them a hand. **(Applause)**

## **Economic Stimulus**

Business as usual doesn't work in hard times. We must look to do things differently... and stress innovation.

Inventive and cooperative thinking helped us launch an Economic Stimulus Package last summer, way before

economic stimulus was popular in Washington. Nearly \$300 million dollars worth of infrastructure work has been expedited. Because our Commissioners put their faith in this administration, important road repairs and water and sewer projects have been fast-tracked and people are working. The expedite provision is scheduled to sunset in July. Let's keep it going.

As Chairman Dennis Moss proposed... we are going to partner with our cities in a unified effort to bring federal economic stimulus dollars directly to our region. We have the challenges of aging infrastructure that all metropolitan areas face... and ready-to-go projects that need attention. We are poised to move forward as soon as adequate financing is available. Believe me, we won't wait until next year to prime our economic engine. We are ready to put those dollars to work – right now.

## **Miami River**

Partnerships and alliances will be key as we move forward. We know how to do it. The Miami River Dredging project is being called a model one for its local, state and federal cooperation. We were at the table. Now our community can begin to reap the rewards. The channel is ripe for new commerce. Shipping vessels can now load more cargo... increasing international trade and local jobs. This is the kind of cooperation we need more of.

## **Seaport**

We are also ready to partner on the Port of Miami Tunnel project to keep our seaport competitive. Members of our legislative delegation stood beside me late last year when Port Tunnel Project was in extreme jeopardy. Senator Alex Diaz de la Portilla, Representative David

Rivera and Miami-Dade Delegation Chairman Juan Zapata... are leading the charge for us in Tallahassee... to revitalize our plans. They are with us today. Let's recognize them. **(Applause)** Ladies and gentleman... without a Port Tunnel... we cannot keep up with other ports, both domestic and international, that are investing in their infrastructure. The seaport generates \$17 billion dollars a year for our economy. The construction of the Port Tunnel will create over 600 well-paying jobs... and infuse millions of dollars into our local and state economies. Governor Charlie Crist assured me the project is alive – and I believe him. Governor... if you are listening... this is the right project... right now... and we are depending on you. Under the leadership of Port Director Bill Johnson, we've strengthened the Port's

finances... improved customer service... and enhanced security. It's time to take the next step.

## **Miami International Airport**

While we are on the subject of ports, let me talk about our main economic engine in Miami-Dade County – Miami International Airport.

You would think the world's largest airport construction project would negatively impact operations. Just the opposite. We are getting noticed for all the right reasons. The Transportation Security Administration named MIA "Airport of the Year" and gave us \$54 million dollars to complete a state-of-the-art baggage system. The readers of Global Traveler named us one of the 10 Best Airports in North America. And a J.D. Power survey of passengers ranked MIA among the leaders in customer satisfaction. Despite record high fuel prices and industry

cutbacks, MIA remains one of the top 10 airports worldwide in international cargo.

Here's what's on the horizon. In addition to the five gates that opened in the North Terminal in 2008, we expect to open another seven this year. Believe me when I tell you, there are literally thousands of employees on site every day engaged in these construction projects.

And less than two weeks ago, we learned the airport's main access roadway, Central Boulevard, will be reconstructed to improve access in and out of the airport. This \$100 million project is being paid for by the State and the Miami-Dade Expressway Authority.

Together with the new South Terminal -- our airport will remain a premier gateway to North America and beyond.

All these accomplishments would not have been possible without the leadership provided by Vice Chairman Pepe Diaz who served as Chairman of our Airport and Seaport Committee... and we are looking forward to the oversight of Commissioner Dorrin Rolle who is now in the captain's seat and taking us forward, along with co-pilot Airport Director Jose Abreu whose leadership has been instrumental in all of these accomplishments. Except for the crew that landed that plane in the Hudson River, we have the most dynamic team in aviation in the country. **(Laughter/Applause)** Let's give them a hand.

## **Transit**

Of primary concern to our residents and visitors is getting to and from MIA. We are about to break ground on the first phase of the Orange Line which will connect the airport to Downtown Miami. This is an important first step

in an expanded Metrorail system that we hope to extend as financing becomes available.

We continue to look for affordable expansion opportunities to further extend the Orange Line. We want things we can't afford. I have been disappointed with many aspects of transit funding and our ability to expand the system in a timely manner. The challenge is finding something that works that we can afford. We are looking for options.

Our existing transit system is working well in nearly every respect. However, when compared to the great transit systems across this country, it's very limited. I think I can speak for the majority of the Commission when I say that one of our top priorities is implementing a workable plan that provides for a first-class transit system that

serves the people who need it most as soon as possible. I pledge to do all I can do to make this happen.

## **Public Safety**

I also pledge to continue to draw on my public safety background to keep crime in check. I know I don't have to tell anyone here that combating crime in our community is a constant challenge. No sooner do we get a handle on one aspect of criminal activity than another arises.

Just in the past month, we saw carnage in our community that stunned even the most veteran law enforcement officers and community activists. Commissioner Audrey Edmonson – who went door to door in an effort to build awareness and try and bring whoever was involved in this terrible crime to justice -- can tell you firsthand how devastated residents are.

We all know that high profile police enforcement and community outreach are effective tools in reducing crime. In the coming weeks, we will address both of these areas with the deployment of seven mobile storefront vehicles throughout the county... bringing police services closer to neighborhoods... to engage the community and hopefully enhance our relationship with residents.

With stories like the one in Liberty City, the fact that violent crime is down is overshadowed. But in the three areas where a police presence has the highest impact – robberies, burglaries and auto theft – we saw reductions. A tougher pill to swallow is that homicides are up. We can all theorize as to the reasons for this, but I have to think that assault weapons are one of the main contributing factors. While I am by no means an advocate of total gun control, for the life of me, I cannot understand why we

condone the widespread sale and distribution of weapons meant for nothing else than killing other human beings. I've heard all the arguments – pro and con – regarding this issue and I'm not convinced of the necessity to allow the general public to possess assault weapons. Commissioner Barbara Jordan, I know you are with me, as is Police Director Robert Parker. This is a federal issue and hopefully with the new administration in Washington, common sense on this matter will prevail. Barbara, thank you for taking the lead on this. **(Applause)**

On a separate front, we're promoting cohesion between all levels of law enforcement. Five days ago, I had the honor of speaking to the first Corrections class to graduate from our own Miami-Dade Public Safety Training Institute.

The value of having our public safety officials unite and train under one roof is priceless. It will ensure our public safety professionals are better prepared for the dangers they will certainly face. It will enhance camaraderie and communication between officers on the street and officers in our jails.

For those of you who have been in county government for a while, you might remember that before 1973, the Police and Correctional departments were one entity of the former Public Safety Department. It was customary after graduating from the academy for police to serve their first assignment as correctional officers at the old Dade County Jail.

Believe it or not, the lore of the jail is still part of the police culture and correctional officers will always have the respect and admiration of those of us who know what you

have to go through every day. Hopefully, the new training program will give our police officers a new appreciation of the rigors of being a corrections officer. The corrections graduates have reunited today for our benefit. Please stand and be recognized. **(Applause)**

### **Surtax Program**

While I'm reminiscing about the old times, we all know how long and how tough a battle it has been to provide quality housing in this community. A Surtax Program which has been in effect for almost 20 years has allowed thousands of our residents to realize the dream of homeownership. People like 34-year-old Odette Gurerra who purchased her home more than 10 years ago, and 54-year-old Brenda Colston who became a homeowner in 2003. They are with us today. Please stand. These are the faces of those who benefited from our Surtax Program

– a program which will expire in 2011 if we don't act. Commissioner Rebeca Sosa who will be leading our legislative efforts in Tallahassee knows the obstacles we have faced advocating for this issue. When we head to the capital in the coming months... let's tell them how far our housing programs have come. Let's remind them about the nearly 10,000 rental units that have already been built... and the 5,700 others that are under construction. Let's not close the door on those who need affordable housing. While many of us take a roof over our heads for granted, believe me, there is nothing more empowering than having a place to call your own. Nobody knows this better than our new Director of the Office of Community and Economic Development, Shalley Jones-Horn, and our new Housing Agency Director, Jose Cintron. Please stand and be recognized. **(Applause)**

## Initiatives

While we have made great strides in longstanding programs that we are trying to invigorate, we have also taken on a number of initiatives. Let's talk about three of them.

We're "going green" in ways some never imagined... and we didn't just jump on the bandwagon. Our hybrid fleet is the third largest in the nation. Hybrid buses are coming online later this year... along with plant-based biodiesel. We're turning waste into electricity. All our traffic signals are being fitted with energy-friendly LED lights. We've eliminated harmful chemicals in our printing process... and our water reuse efforts will have us recycling nearly half the water we use.

It's making heads turn, but even County Commissioner Natacha Seijas is embracing her "greener"

side. **(Laughter)** She was instrumental in bringing the Environmental Protection Agency to our community to take a closer look at our land use policies. Let's hear what the EPA has to say – how we might do things better -- because land use – as we all know -- continues to be a contentious issue in our community.

## **Wireless**

Another initiative is finding innovative ways to utilize wireless technology. Pilot projects at three of our County parks proved to be a tremendous success. Senator Javier Souto was with me when Tropical Park went wireless... and to date more than 2,000 park visitors have logged on. Now, our County is taking wireless to the next level... for free. We are working with AT&T to test Wi-Fi on select Metrorail cars. Let's see how our residents react... and

consider this technology for our future. If it works...Express Buses could be next in line.

### **“V” Volunteer Initiative**

Our third and by no means least important initiative is something I am pleased to announce today. It is a proposal that draws on the collective efforts of government, business and the community. This initiative is how we, as a people, can take responsibility for the place we call home.

The essence of our new program is not simply to start a conversation, but to spur action to solve persistent problems in our community. We will engage youth, corporations, families, faith-based organizations, our universities, and our seniors in being part of building a more caring community. Our main focus will be to make

our residents part of the solution to solving our community's challenges.

Let's make volunteering integral part of our lives. Through an initiative dubbed "V", we will stir generations, propel a movement and demonstrate how rewarding helping others can be.

Volunteerism was on display today when Hands On Miami's Disaster Youth Council led our Pledge of Allegiance. Together, these students have contributed more than 100 volunteer hours to our community. Please stand. **(Applause)** These young men and women are setting an example we can all follow. Let's all get involved in building a better, more caring Miami-Dade through volunteerism. It's time to give back and get on board.

**Baseball**

While we are talking about getting on board, I would like to talk about getting on base. Of course, I mean the Miami Marlins and the new baseball stadium. This is a once-in-a-lifetime, now or never issue, concerning the preservation of Major League Baseball in our community. You all know where I stand. In spite of the economy, we have the financial wherewithal to proceed with this project in a timely and cost-effective manner.

With every investment, there is risk. In three days, our Commissioners will vote on whether to move forward with a stadium. After years of talking... we have forged a partnership with the City of Miami and the Team. Miami-Dade County has negotiated the best possible deal for our taxpayers. At this time, there is no better use for these tourist dollars than to build a world-class baseball facility

that will be the envy of the nation. These are dollars that can't be used for affordable housing or education.

I understand that stimulus was not a priority when we first envisioned the new stadium. However, it has become an issue. How better to stimulate our economy than to provide 2,000 well-paying construction jobs in our community over the next three years?

We are not building a stadium to the *exclusion* of all else. We are building a stadium *along* with everything else. Let's make another investment, put people to work right now, and emerge from this economic downturn better and stronger. Let's keep the Marlins in Miami-Dade County for the next 35 years. Let's consider the things that make a community a world class destination. Commissioners... I humbly ask for your vote.

**Customer Satisfaction Survey**

While we are talking about a world-class destination, there's nothing wrong with being boastful about some things that went right over the past year. A survey we just received -- conducted by an independent research firm with expertise in government affairs -- was so positive that the firm was scurrying to re-check their numbers.

While the survey was quite extensive, it all boils down to this: Miami-Dade County ratings improved in 93 of 102 areas examined. While the rest of the cities and counties surveyed dropped nationally, Miami-Dade County showed a significant increase in overall resident satisfaction. This is not just another survey, but a fair and impartial indicator that we are making a difference in the eyes of our residents.

Commissioner Carlos Gimenez will continue to watchdog our operations from the dais as the new Chair of the Governmental Operations Committee.

Here's some of our more recent accomplishments.

## **Elections**

We pulled off a near flawless primary and general election – with the eyes of the world watching. We did it utilizing an entirely new voting system. Thousands of skilled poll workers greeted a record number of registered voters. Elections Director Lester Sola and his team... please stand and be recognized. **(Applause)** Well done!

## **Recycling**

Curbside recycling is being met with fantastic results. In December... recyclables were up 121% from the year before. An easier, more convenient single bin recycling

system is responsible. Director Kathy Woods Richardson and her team deserve credit. Please stand. **(Applause)**

### **Animal Services**

A record number of pets found loving homes in 2008. We are close to striking a deal for a new animal shelter and taking a close look at additional programs that could increase adoptions even more. Let's recognize two stalwart supporters of our four-legged friends, Commissioner Sally Heyman... and Animal Services Director, Dr. Sara Pizano. **(Applause)**

### **Libraries**

It's not often that a library system receives recognition from the White House, but ours certainly did. In fact, we received the nation's highest award for museums and library's because of our excellent customer service and

available resources. Director Ray Santiago, please stand.

## **(Applause)**

### **Water**

According to Forbes magazine, Miami-Dade County tap water is some of the best in the nation. If we gave it a French name and bottled it, we could sell it on the open market.

### **Parks**

We've just completed our most successful year of capital improvements at our parks – the granddaddy of which is the new Amazon & Beyond Exhibit at Metrozoo. The fact is, we are bringing more people into our parks and they are enjoying every minute of it.

Elections, recycling, animal adoptions, libraries, water, parks – no wonder our customer satisfaction survey was so positive! I could go on and on. Every department

in our County government has a story to tell. Let's tell it. Let's share it. We should all be proud, especially County Manager George Burgess who is responsible for the day to day oversight of all the departments. Thank you, George.

### **New Directors**

Of the new directors who came onboard in 2008, only Devesh Nirmul, Office of Sustainability; Marc LaFerrier, Planning and Zoning; and Dan Wall, Office of Grants Coordination have not been publicly acknowledged. Could you please stand and be recognized? **(Applause)**

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, we know that there is no such thing as a foolproof economy. We know the days ahead will test our resolve. Thankfully, our economy is not solely dependent on large manufacturing, industrial, or high-tech

industries. Our most important industry is tourism. The last time I looked, the sun is still shining and our beaches are as pristine as ever. We have a lot to be thankful for. We are perfectly positioned to weather this downturn and emerge from these challenging times better off than the rest of the nation... and the world.

Our new Commission Chairman Dennis Moss is as committed as I am to facing our tremendous challenges head-on. While we don't know what the future will bring, we do know that Chairman Moss is the right person for the job in these trying times. I am deeply committed to working with him. After all, as one of our most long-serving Commissioners, he knows County government and this community inside out.

He was by my side when Miami-Dade Police Officer Jose Somohano was killed in the line-of-duty... when our

housing programs were threatened... when the Port Tunnel was in jeopardy... and when the hard truth about our transit system had to be addressed. Together we will give our all to lead the people of Miami-Dade County... and address their concerns.

At least three events coming up in the next year, the Super Bowl, the Pro Bowl, and Pow-Wow -- the tourist industry's premier gathering -- will help cushion the impact of this economic downturn. As political leaders, it is up to us to do more.

We must look for ways to further spur the economy... create jobs... and keep investing for our future. We must prioritize services, eliminate waste and do more with less. In the coming year, we will all be forced to make tough decisions and I know that we are up to the task. We must refuse to be brought to our knees by this economic crisis.

We will not succumb to adversity. We cannot allow our spirit to be diminished. We are a great nation and a great County. We must steel ourselves to push forward. Through our efforts, we can see this thing through. Hopefully, next year at this time, we can all breathe a collective sigh of relief and look forward to more prosperous times. God Bless.