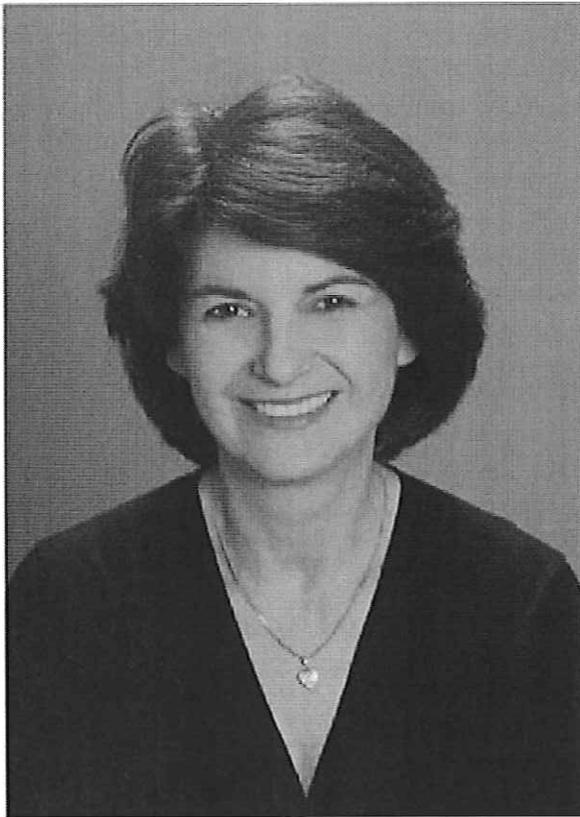


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The case for incorporation in Miami-Dade

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As a strong advocate of the people's right to vote on whether or not to incorporate their community into a new city, I reject the myths about incorporation: It does not increase the number of government employees, it does not increase taxes and the central government is not entitled to deny the people the right, given in the Miami-Dade County Charter, to vote on the issue because the people "cannot understand" incorporation.

If the people can elect the president of the United States, they can understand the incorporation of their neighborhood and vote it up or down.

Every person in Miami-Dade County lives in a city and all property owners pay city taxes. Your city is either incorporated, like Hialeah, or it is the City of UMSA, also known as unincorporated Miami-Dade County. If you live in unincorporated Miami-Dade, you pay "city" taxes, shown on your tax bill under the strange name "Unincorporated Operating." Your unincorporated area "city" taxes are 10 percent of your property tax bill.

Santa Claus does not provide your local city services. Police, building permits, zoning decisions, parks, road cleaning, recreation, etc. are provided by that model of governmental efficiency — Miami Dade County.

A new city hires employees from the county government or from other cities — it is a shift of employees, not an increase. If Miami-Dade County were out of the unincorporated city services business, county employees would shift to the new cities where their work could be focused on city priorities and residents could give reasonable feedback as to quality.

Incorporation moves unincorporated area services from Miami-Dade County to local control, where voters can attend budget meetings and spend their city tax money as they

see fit. Want a lower tax rate? Elect a city council that agrees and reduces your taxes.

As to having too many council members in Miami-Dade, well, how many layers of people do you have to go through to speak to your current county commissioner or county staff? If county commissioners didn't have to deal with "city" issues, they would need a lot fewer "community relations staff members" who serve the function of elected council members without the accountability.

The Miami-Dade County Commission has major regional issues critical to the vitality of our community. It shouldn't deal with your neighborhood rezoning fight or the barking dog next door. The commission should focus on countywide issues — all of which are now funded by countywide taxes, which are paid by everyone no matter where they live and are separate from city taxes.

The Miami-Dade County Charter — our county's constitution — guarantees residents the right to petition to incorporate and to vote on incorporation. For seven years the Board of County Commissioners has refused to allow elections — it has placed a moratorium on the voter's right to vote.

Not every incorporation election has been successful, as voters do make decisions after studying the issues. Whether one supports or opposes incorporation, the moratorium is a fundamental violation of a resident's right and must be changed. Taking the BCC out of the incorporation process is the only way — based on almost 20 years of working for incorporation — that would "let the process go."

People like diversity in a community — different neighborhoods, different street signs, city names, building codes, attitudes toward enforcement. I don't prefer centralized control at the county or one size fits all governance. Diverse cities allow people to choose the lifestyle, tax rate, and level of city services for which they want to pay. That's what keeps people attached to the community and feeling in control of their own neighborhoods and areas. It is time to allow that process to proceed.

Evelyn Langlieb Greer is a lawyer and member of the Miami-Dade Charter Review Task Force; she served as the first mayor of the Village of Pinecrest from 1996-2004.

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