

Thank you. It is an honor to stand here before you today as Mayor of Miami-Dade County.

I'd like to acknowledge the presence of Chairman Joe Martinez, Vice-chairwoman Audrey Edmonson and all of county commissioners, as well as community and civic leaders, elected officials, and good citizens of Miami-Dade County. Thank you for being here.

I also want to thank my wife – Lourdes – and our extended family for their endless support and enthusiasm. I would not be here today without them....and the faith they placed in me. Thank you!

I want to take a moment, before anything else, to restate my position that sums up my commitment as mayor: My solemn oath to serve this office – and the people of this community – with honesty, integrity and transparency.

This is truly a defining moment – and a sobering one as well. There are many serious challenges ahead, and a lot of work to be done to reform county government.

Exactly nine days from today I am legally required to present a balanced budget to the Board of County Commissioners. As promised, this budget will roll back last year's tax increase while preserving essential services.

I believe each and every one of you as members of the county commission have a clear understanding of the importance of accomplishing this objective, and I am counting on your cooperation; and you can count on my good faith efforts to work together.

There is no doubt that the problems we inherited in this budget will require shared sacrifice throughout county government.

I have already taken a 50% cut in my own salary and benefits and while that is not the level of sacrifice I am asking of anyone else, make no mistake, there will be salary adjustments. I have also reached out to the unions in good faith and am hopeful we can work together to reach an agreement.

The taxpayers of Miami-Dade County spoke loud and clear on March 15. They demand that we use their money wisely and we are obligated to respond accordingly. We must never again forget that we work for them.

Further reductions to the cost of county government will require major reforms. This is far more complicated than eliminating redundancy here and consolidating a department there. Hundreds, if not thousands, of decisions must be made in the weeks and months ahead with great care so as not to trigger negative consequences down the line.

It is a monumental task, and I will need the support and cooperation of everyone within county government, especially the members of the Board of County Commissioners. I am confident that we will work together for the greater good of Miami-Dade County.

Among the more pressing challenges ahead is the Transit Department – restoring federal funding is only the first step. We need to find ways to reduce our operating costs and make public transportation more reliable.

We must restore Jackson Memorial Hospital – our community healthcare safety net – to financial health and stability, and work with the financial recovery board toward a permanent long-term solution.

There is an urgent need to stimulate job creation. County government must make it easier for new businesses to come on line so that new jobs and economic recovery will follow. Expanding international trade will also create long-term employment opportunities and grow our economy.

We must also attract businesses and industries that diversify our county's economic base and connect us to the future.

Additionally, there are a number of environmental issues that need our attention in order to protect our natural assets and future water quality. That includes deteriorating water and sewer infrastructure as well as the threat of salt water intrusion.

We must push for meaningful and comprehensive charter reform to be ready for voter approval during the upcoming 2012 presidential primary election. I have pledged to lead this reform effort and ask the Commission to join me to present voters with 8-year term limits along with other reforms.

Meanwhile, we must protect our ever-growing elderly population and ensure that their basic needs are met.

Throughout these far-reaching and complex challenges, our primary goal will be to restore trust in county government.

My decisions will be guided by one fundamental principle: "What is best for all of Miami-Dade County?" I will require no less of each and every government employee.

I ask my fellow citizens to join us as we work toward a better Miami-Dade County. Your participation in the important decisions that contribute to our future is essential.

There are many ways to get involved – neighborhood groups, community councils, government workshops and public meetings. We need your support and your input to create a county that we can all be proud of – a community that will allow future generations to grow and prosper.

There is no end to what we can accomplish together.

Thank you and God bless you, our County and these United States of America.