

Mayor Carlos A. Gimenez
Remarks: First Budget Hearing
Thursday, September 8th, 2011

GOOD EVENING, MR. CHAIRMAN, AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION.

WE HAVE HEARD FROM MANY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC, AND NOW I'D LIKE TO TAKE A FEW MOMENTS TO DISCUSS THE BUDGET PROCESS TO DATE:

HOW WE GOT HERE, WHAT MY PRIORITIES ARE, AND THE CHANGES WE'VE MADE ALONG THE WAY.

I'LL ALSO TOUCH ON MY PROPOSAL TO REORGANIZE COUNTY GOVERNMENT INTO A MORE EFFICIENT, MORE CUSTOMER-FRIENDLY *MISSION-DRIVEN* GOVERNMENT.

AS YOU KNOW, I TOOK OFFICE IN EARLY JULY AND WAS TASKED WITH PRODUCING A PROPOSED BUDGET IN THE SPACE OF LESS THAN TWO WEEKS.

I DID SO, AND MY PROPOSAL REFLECTS OUR CHALLENGING ECONOMIC REALITY AND A \$409 MILLION BUDGET GAP.

THE FACT IS, FAMILIES THROUGHOUT OUR COMMUNITY BEGAN MAKING TOUGH FINANCIAL DECISIONS AND TIGHTENING THEIR BELTS YEARS AGO, AND WE NEED TO DO THE SAME.

THE ALTERNATIVE - A CONTINUATION OF UNCHECKED GOVERNMENT SPENDING - IS NEITHER ACCEPTABLE NOR SUSTAINABLE.

MY BUDGET ALSO FULFILLS PROMISES I MADE TO THE RESIDENTS THAT WE SERVE.

I PLEDGED TO REVERSE THE PROPERTY TAX HIKE THAT WAS HEAPED ON THE BACKS OF OUR TAXPAYERS LAST YEAR.

AND WITH YOUR SUPPORT, PROPERTY TAX RATES HAVE BEEN ROLLED BACK TO 2009-10 LEVELS.

I THANK YOU FOR YOUR LEADERSHIP IN REDUCING THIS BURDEN ON OUR TAXPAYERS.

THE ROLLBACK REPRESENTS OVER \$200 MILLION IN TAX CUTS THAT OUR RESIDENTS AND BUSINESS OWNERS CAN PUT BACK INTO THE LOCAL ECONOMY.

I PLEDGED TO PRESERVE ESSENTIAL PUBLIC SERVICES TOO: MY BUDGET MAINTAINS FUNDING FOR PUBLIC SAFETY AND VITAL PROGRAMS FOR SENIORS AND CHILDREN.

I PLEDGED TO REDUCE THE SIZE OF COUNTY GOVERNMENT: MY BUDGET CALLS FOR THE ELIMINATION OF OVER 1,000 COUNTY POSITIONS, EVEN BEFORE THE REDUCTIONS THAT WILL RESULT FROM THE RECOMMENDED REORGANIZATION.

THIS BUDGET PROPOSAL ALSO CALLS ON OUR PUBLIC SERVANTS TO MAKE A SHARED SACRIFICE FOR THE GREATER GOOD OF THIS ORGANIZATION AND THE PEOPLE WE SERVE.

AS IT STANDS NOW, EMPLOYEES UNDER MY PURVIEW WILL BE TAKING AN EIGHT PERCENT SALARY REDUCTION.

I'VE ALSO BEEN WORKING WITH OUR LABOR UNIONS AND HOPE THAT NEW CONTRACTS WILL BE IN PLACE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE TO AVOID FURTHER LAYOFFS.

AS YOU KNOW, I HAVE BEEN OPEN AND CANDID WITH THE COLLECTIVE BARGAINING UNITS. IF THEY CAN PRODUCE PLANS THAT DEMONSTRATE VERIFIABLE, RECURRING SAVINGS *WITHIN* THEIR OWN UNITS, I'M WILLING TO LISTEN.

IF, HOWEVER, CONTRACTS REMAIN UNRESOLVED, THE PROCESS OF LAYING OFF COUNTY WORKERS WILL BEGIN ON NOVEMBER 1ST.

TIME IS SHORT – I WANT TO AVOID LAYOFFS, BUT I WILL NOT PUNISH OUR TAXPAYERS FOR SOMETHING THAT IS OUT OF THEIR CONTROL.

MAKE NO MISTAKE: OUR BUDGET WILL BE BALANCED AND I AM PREPARED TO MAKE THE TOUGH CHOICES.

ON ANOTHER NOTE, I'VE INCORPORATED YOUR FEEDBACK AND MADE ADJUSTMENTS TO MY ORIGINAL BUDGET PROPOSAL.

FUNDING TO RESTORE THE AGRICULTURE MANAGER POSITION AND THE COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED.

ALL LIBRARIES WILL REMAIN OPEN, TOO. AND WE'RE EXPLORING WAYS TO CONTINUE FIRE BOAT SERVICE IN A MORE COST-EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT MANNER.

WE WILL ALSO KEEP THE WOMEN'S DETENTION CENTER OPEN.

BEYOND OUR IMMEDIATE TASK OF PRODUCING A BALANCED BUDGET, I WANT TO MAKE FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES TO THE COUNTY AS AN ORGANIZATION.

SO LAST WEEK, I PRESENTED MY PLAN TO REORGANIZE COUNTY GOVERNMENT AND REDUCE THE NUMBER OF DEPARTMENTS UNDER MY PURVIEW FROM 42 TO 25.

COUNTY GOVERNMENT NEEDS TO REFOCUS ON OUR PRIMARY MISSION OF SERVING OUR CUSTOMERS, AND DOING SO MORE EFFICIENTLY AND MORE EFFECTIVELY.

I ALSO WANT THIS REORGANIZATION TO POSITION THE COUNTY AS A CATALYST FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH AND JOB CREATION, NOT AN IMPEDIMENT TO IT.

I EXPECT THE REORGANIZATION TO YIELD AT LEAST \$5 MILLION IN SAVINGS BY THE END OF THE UPCOMING FISCAL YEAR.

I DO NOT, HOWEVER, RECOMMEND THAT WE BUDGET THESE SAVINGS YET.

RATHER, WE SHOULD LET THEM ACCRUE TO HELP SUPPORT NEXT YEAR'S BUDGET AND GIVE ALL OF US THE MOST FLEXIBILITY POSSIBLE AS WE IMPLEMENT THIS SIGNIFICANT CULTURAL CHANGE IN COUNTY GOVERNMENT.

FURTHER SAVINGS SHOULD BE REALIZED OVER TIME, AS ADDITIONAL EFFICIENCIES IN THE WAY WE DELIVER AND SUPPORT SERVICES ARE IDENTIFIED.

I BELIEVE THE CHANGES THAT I'VE PROPOSED ARE LONG OVERDUE, AND I THINK THAT OUR TAXPAYERS AGREE.

I HOPE THAT YOU WILL, TOO.

I'LL WRAP UP NOW, AND JENNIFER WILL REVIEW THE DETAILS OF THE CHANGE MEMO WITH YOU.

JENNIFER...