

**BONSOIR, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN!**

**CHAIRMAN MONESTIME, THANK YOU FOR INCLUDING ME IN THE KICKOFF OF HAITIAN HERITAGE CULTURAL MONTH.**

**IT'S REALLY AN HONOR TO BE HERE WITH YOU ALL.**

**THIS IS THE FIFTEENTH YEAR WE'VE PROUDLY CELEBRATED THIS EVENT HERE IN MIAMI-DADE COUNTY.**

**AND WE SURE KNOW HOW TO CELEBRATE IN MIAMI-DADE, DON'T WE?**

**THE CALENDAR OF EVENTS, AND ESPECIALLY THOSE THAT THE CHAIRMAN'S OFFICE HAS ORGANIZED, PROMISES TO DELIVER PLENTY OF HAITIAN ART, CULTURE, MUSIC, AND FOOD -- MY PERSONAL FAVORITE -- FOR OUR ENTIRE COMMUNITY TO ENJOY.**

**BUT WHAT I REALLY LIKE MOST ABOUT THIS CELEBRATION IS HOW IT BRINGS US ALL TOGETHER.**

**LIKE I'VE SAID IN THE PAST, WE ARE ALL MIAMIANS.**

***NOU TOUT SE MOUN MIAMI.***

**AND AS SUCH, WE MUST CELEBRATE AND SHARE EACH OTHER'S HERITAGE.**

**THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT HAITIAN HERITAGE MONTH IS ALL ABOUT.**

**WHEN I THINK ABOUT HAITI, I REMEMBER A GREAT OPPORTUNITY I HAD A FEW YEARS AGO TO TAKE A TRIP THERE WITH CHAIRMAN MONESTIME.**

**AMONG HIS MANY TALENTS, THE CHAIRMAN IS A GREAT TOUR GUIDE, BY THE WAY.**

**AND THIS TRIP FOR ME WAS AN UNFORGETTABLE LEARNING EXPERIENCE.**

**WITH SO MANY OF OUR HAITIAN-AMERICAN FRIENDS MAKING A HOME HERE IN MIAMI-DADE, IT WAS IMPORTANT TO ME TO SEE HAITI WITH MY OWN EYES, AND EXPERIENCE THE ISLAND'S RICH CULTURE FIRSTHAND.**

**I'M NOT SURE WHAT I WAS EXPECTING BEFORE I TOOK THIS TRIP. BUT WHAT I QUICKLY REALIZED, IS THAT MY LIFE AS A CUBAN-AMERICAN IMMIGRANT ISN'T ALL THAT DIFFERENT FROM THAT OF MANY OF YOU HERE TONIGHT.**

**SURE, THERE ARE SURFACE-LEVEL SIMILARITIES IN THINGS ... LIKE THE FOOD WE EAT.**

**CUBANS HAVE LECHÓN, AND HAITIANS HAVE GRIOT -- WHICH IS DELICIOUS, BY THE WAY.**

**BUT WHAT I THINK WE REALLY SHARE, DEEP INSIDE, IS A COMMON EXPERIENCE – EXPERIENCE THAT'S SHARED BY ONLY THOSE OF US WHO'VE LEFT ALL THAT WE'VE KNOWN TO COME TO A NEW COUNTRY.**

**CUBANS AND HAITIANS, WHO'VE MADE A HOME IN THE UNITED STATES -- LIKE MANY OF US -- KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE, AT LEAST FOR SOME TIME, TO BASICALLY BE WITHOUT A COUNTRY.**

**AND IN THAT EXPERIENCE RIGHT THERE ... THAT EXPERIENCE OF BEING AN AMERICAN ... NOT BY BIRTH, BUT FOR OTHER REASONS ... IS WHAT TELLS ME THAT WHAT UNITES US, IS MUCH GREATER THAN WHAT SEPARATES US.**

**AND BECAUSE MANY OF US WEREN'T BORN HERE, I THINK WE'VE HAD TO WORK EXTRA HARD TO GET WHERE WE ARE TODAY.**

**I'M WILLING TO BET THAT EVERY SINGLE PERSON IN THIS ROOM KNOWS THE TRUE MEANING OF THE WORD "PERSEVERANCE."**

**AND I THINK WE'VE DONE PRETTY WELL FOR OURSELVES, WOULDN'T YOU SAY?**

**LOOK, YOU'VE GOT AN IMMIGRANT WHO CAME HERE AT SEVEN YEARS OLD, NOT SPEAKING ENGLISH, WHO'S NOW THE MAYOR OF THE MOST POPULOUS COUNTY IN FLORIDA.**

**THAT'S ME, BY THE WAY.**

**AND YOU'VE GOT ANOTHER IMMIGRANT WHO CAME  
HERE IN HIS TEENS, WHO'S MIAMI-DADE'S FIRST  
HAITIAN-AMERICAN CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD OF  
COUNTY COMMISSIONERS.**

**THAT'S PRETTY REMARKABLE, RIGHT?**

**LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THINK ABOUT THAT FOR  
A MOMENT.**

**THE TWO HIGHEST-RANKING OFFICIALS IN MIAMI-  
DADE COUNTY ARE A CUBAN-AMERICAN AND A  
HAITIAN-AMERICAN.**

**THAT'S SOMETHING WE ALL CAN BE PROUD OF.**

**AND IN WHAT OTHER PLACE IN THE WORLD COULD  
WE SEE THIS HAPPEN THAN RIGHT HERE IN THE  
UNITED STATES? THAT'S THE KIND OF  
OPPORTUNITY THAT ONLY AMERICA PROVIDES.**

**SO, WHILE WE CELEBRATE HAITIAN HERITAGE  
MONTH IN MIAMI-DADE COUNTY, I THINK WE'RE  
ALSO CELEBRATING THE MARK THAT ALL  
IMMIGRANTS HAVE MADE IN AMERICA.**

**AND WE -- THE CUBAN- AND HAITIAN-BORN AMERICANS -- WE'VE COME TOGETHER TO MAKE MIAMI-DADE THE DIVERSE COMMUNITY THAT WE ARE TODAY.**

**THERE'S BEAUTY AND STRENGTH IN OUR DIVERSITY. AND FOR THAT, WE MUST ALWAYS REMEMBER OUR HERITAGE.**

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, AND HAPPY HAITIAN HERITAGE MONTH!**

***KE BONDYE BENI NOU!***

**MAY GOD CONTINUE TO BLESS MIAMI-DADE COUNTY AND MAY GOD BLESS AMERICA!**

***MERCI BEAUCOUP!***