

THANK YOU FOR THAT INTRODUCTION, LUCIA.

GOOD MORNING, EVERYONE. HOW'S EVERYBODY DOING TODAY?

IT'S A GREAT DAY TO BE WITH YOU ALL AT THE LILLIE M. WILLIAMS HEAD START CENTER AS WE KICK OFF OUR "BUILD ME A LIBRARY CAMPAIGN."

I WANT TO THANK EVERYONE FOR JOINING US THIS MORNING FOR THIS VERY IMPORTANT INITIATIVE THAT WILL INCREASE ACCESS TO BOOKS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES IN OUR COMMUNITY.

WE'RE IN CHAIRMAN MONESTIME'S DISTRICT THIS MORNING, AND I WANT TO RECOGNIZE HIM FOR ALL OF THE GREAT WORK HE DOES FOR OUR RESIDENTS HERE AND THROUGHOUT MIAMI-DADE COUNTY.

THANK YOU, CHAIRMAN.

IT'S NO SECRET THAT ONE OF MY GREATEST JOYS IN LIFE IS MY GRANDCHILDREN. I HAVE

SIX OF THEM NOW, AND I LOVE BEING THEIR GRANDFATHER.

AND MY WIFE, LOURDES, AND I LOVE READING TO OUR GRANDCHILDREN.

WE MADE IT A POINT TO INSTILL A LOVE OF READING IN OUR THREE CHILDREN, AND WE ARE DOING THE SAME NOW WITH OUR GRANDCHILDREN.

AND WE DID THIS, AND CONTINUE TO DO THIS, BECAUSE WE KNOW HOW IMPORTANT LITERACY IS TO LIFELONG SUCCESS.

AND THAT'S ALSO WHY MY ADMINISTRATION AND I REMAIN COMMITTED TO MAKING LIBRARIES A PRIORITY FOR ALL MIAMIANS.

IN FACT, OUR PROPOSED BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2016-17 FUNDS OPENING ALL REGIONAL LIBRARIES SEVEN DAYS A WEEK AND ADDING EXTRA HOURS AT THE MAIN LIBRARY. WE'RE ALSO PROVIDING FUNDS FOR RENOVATIONS AND REPAIRS, AS WELL AS \$4 MILLION FOR NEW MATERIALS.

SO, THIS MORNING'S KICKOFF OF "BUILD ME A LIBRARY" IS ANOTHER WAY THAT WE ARE PRIORITIZING LIBRARIES IN MIAMI-DADE – AND WE'RE PRIORITIZING THE SERVICES THAT LIBRARIES PROVIDE TO OUR YOUNGEST RESIDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES.

WHEN I WAS DISCUSSING THIS EVENT WITH DIRECTOR DAVIS-RAIFORD LAST WEEK, SHE TOLD ME THAT BY THE TIME CHILDREN FROM UNDERPRIVILEGED COMMUNITIES REACH KINDERGARTEN, THEY ARE EXPOSED TO 30-MILLION FEWER WORDS THAN CHILDREN FROM AFFLUENT COMMUNITIES.

THAT MEANS WE POTENTIALLY HAVE A 30-MILLION-WORD GAP IN OUR COMMUNITY.

THAT'S UNACCEPTABLE, AND THAT'S A GAP THAT WE ARE GOING TO WORK TOGETHER TO BRIDGE.

BECAUSE WE DON'T WANT ANY CHILD HERE IN MIAMI-DADE COUNTY TO FACE ANY SORT OF DISADVANTAGE.

WE WANT ALL CHILDREN TO HAVE THE SAME OPPORTUNITIES – AND THOSE OPPORTUNITIES START WITH A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR FUTURE LEARNING.

AND THAT’S WHY WE’RE ALL HERE THIS MORNING. THE “BUILD ME A LIBRARY” CAMPAIGN WILL HELP US BRIDGE THE VOCABULARY AND READING-COMPREHENSION GAP THAT CAN HAPPEN IF WE DO NOT READ TO OUR CHILDREN REGULARLY.

AND WE KNOW THAT NOT EVERY PARENT HAS THE MEANS OR ABILITY TO PURCHASE BOOKS OR GO TO THE LIBRARY EVERY WEEK. SO, THAT’S WHY WE ARE BRINGING THE BOOKS DIRECTLY TO OUR HEAD START STUDENTS AND THEIR PARENTS.

THROUGH THE “BUILD ME A LIBRARY” CAMPAIGN, OUR HEAD START PROGRAM WILL BE BUILDING SMALL, CENTER-BASED READING NOOKS ON SITE -- IN PLACES WHERE PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS COME EVERY SINGLE DAY.

BEFORE AND AFTER SCHOOL, PARENTS CAN USE THESE NOOKS TO READ A SHORT STORY TO THEIR CHILDREN, AND CAN EVEN BRING BOOKS HOME TO READ TO THEIR CHILDREN THERE.

THE “BUILD ME A LIBRARY” CAMPAIGN WAS THE BRAINCHILD OF COMMUNITY ACTION AND HUMAN SERVICES DIRECTOR LUCIA DAVIS-RAIFORD. SO, I WANT TO THANK THE DIRECTOR FOR HER INNOVATIVE IDEA, AND I WANT TO THANK MIAMI-DADE FIRE RESCUE CHIEF DAVE DOWNEY FOR PARTNERING WITH HER TO BRING THIS PROGRAM TO LIFE FOR OUR YOUNGEST LEARNERS.

CHIEF DOWNEY AND MIAMI-DADE FIRE RESCUE HAVE AGREED TO WORK WITH DIRECTOR DAVIS-RAIFORD TO RAISE FUNDS TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF 70 NEW READING NOOKS.

WE ALL KNOW WHAT GREAT ROLE MODELS FIREFIGHTERS ARE.

I WAS ONE FOR 25 YEARS, SO NO BIAS THERE.

WELL, TODAY, CHIEF DOWNEY IS FURTHER DEMONSTRATING WHAT GREAT ROLE MODELS

FIREFIGHTERS ARE ... BECAUSE ON TOP OF RAISING FUNDS TO BUILD NEW READING NOOKS, HE AND SOME OF OUR FIREFIGHTERS WILL ALSO BE MAKING FREQUENT VISITS TO HEAD START AND EARLY HEAD START CLASSROOMS TO READ TO STUDENTS AND TEACH THEM A LITTLE BIT ABOUT FIRE SAFETY.

I THINK THAT DESERVES A ROUND OF APPLAUSE.

BEFORE I TURN IT BACK OVER TO DIRECTOR DAVIS-RAIFORD, I WANT TO ENCOURAGE ALL COMMUNITY LEADERS TO NOT ONLY SUPPORT THE “BUILD ME A LIBRARY” CAMPAIGN, BUT TO ALSO VISIT THEIR LOCAL HEAD START CENTERS, SPEND TIME WITH THE CHILDREN, TALK WITH THEM AND READ TO THEM...

JUST LIKE I’M DOING HERE THIS MORNING.

AND I ENCOURAGE ALL PARENTS TO DO THE SAME.

WE ALL HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO THE CHILDREN IN OUR COMMUNITY TO GIVE THEM THE BUILDING BLOCKS FOR SUCCESS.

BECAUSE WHEN WE ARM ONE CHILD WITH THE TOOLS FOR SUCCESS, WE ARM THE NEXT GENERATION, AND THE GENERATION AFTER THAT ONE.

SO, LET'S ALL DO OUR PART TO CREATE A BETTER MIAMI-DADE COUNTY ... A MIAMI-DADE WHERE ALL CHILDREN HAVE ACCESS TO BOOKS AND SOMEONE TO READ TO THEM.

THANK YOU AGAIN, EVERYONE, FOR BEING WITH US THIS MORNING.

MAY GOD BLESS YOU ALL, AND MAY GOD CONTINUE TO BLESS MIAMI-DADE COUNTY!