



State of the District Address
“A Year of Service, Commitment, and Vision”
The Honorable Lynda G. Bell
Thursday, January 12, 2012
South Miami-Dade Cultural Arts Center

- Mayors, Commissioners, Council members, distinguished members of our community, and my fellow residents of District 8, it is a great pleasure to stand before you today to deliver the State of the District - Welcome!
- I want to recognize my family, my husband Mark, my daughters, and my grandchildren.
- Tonight, we are joined by members of the armed forces, members of the Miami-Dade law enforcement community, and dedicated public servants, who through their service, allow us to be seated here tonight - we recognize your sacrifice.
- We gather tonight, in a momentous time in Miami-Dade County's history.
- Tonight, we take account of where our beloved community has been during the past year, where we are today, and where we are going, as we strive for a better tomorrow.
- Although much has been accomplished during this relatively short time, there are still many objectives to be met and much work needs to be done before they come to fruition. My friends, we are on the heels of bold reform and change in our County.

- Just over a year ago, our community, like most communities throughout the nation, underwent a great transition as a result of significant citizen frustration over how their government and their elected representatives - at all levels - conducted themselves.
- The people resoundingly spoke and demanded that their government be administered in a way that reflects the new economic and social realities that now govern their lives each and every day.
- They sought a more efficient government that was responsible, transparent, and responsive, all while living within its means. The people wanted a government that no longer made excuses for its actions, but accepted responsibility for them. In short, they demanded honest governance from their leaders – or else!
- Tonight, I am pleased to report that we are well on our way to realizing these goals and making them a permanent addition to the way our local government functions and responds to every resident.
- My work may not always make me the “Most popular” on the County Commission, but I am determined to be the “Most effective”.
- As you can very well imagine, moving forward on these critically important issues has not been easy, to say the least. Time is a commodity that is in very short supply as our electorate demand immediate changes to the way their local government conducts itself.
- During my first 2 months, I set out to meet with every County department director, which was about 60 at the time, and learn about how the County does its business and how to improve on the principle that you, the residents, are the bosses.

- Being appointed Chair of the Commission's Internal Management and Fiscal Responsibility Committee, that is the Budget Committee, positioned me to better serve my residents and bring about the bold reforms that they wanted. Spending every penny wisely and not wastefully has been on the top of my list.
- In one of my first acts as Commissioner, I began to work with the Board to create a line-item budget that is easy to read and accessible to all of our residents on the County's website.
- For the first time, residents can now assess every penny the County takes in and review all government expenses that are made in their name – from employee salaries to procurement in a format that is readable and easy to understand.
- In an effort to streamline the County's workforce and allow for cost-effective operations, I authored legislation that - for the first time - requires County departments to recommend better workforce strategies and identify unnecessary spending practices to be used for cost cutting during contract negotiations with labor unions.
- Why should it be acceptable to use taxpayer money on a workplace that is riddled with antiquated work rules? Why should many job sites require more supervisors than actual workers or policies that don't allow you to move an employee from one job site to the next without paying them extra?

- These efforts ensure that the taxpayer receives the best possible value for every County expense. By adopting these new measures, the County saved \$32 million this year alone.
- Along the lines of being good stewards of public money, our office spearheaded efforts mandating that when Community Based Organizations receive donated surplus property from the County, they must use the property for its intended purpose and not sell it without authorization.
- We must cut with a purpose, but remember that our residents deserve the best service we can afford.
- This is why when it was recommended to gut and virtually eliminate funding of Miami-Dade County's Agricultural industry resources, I took a stand. Working with the Mayor, we found ways to continue funding those services. By doing so, we incentivize positive growth in an industry that employs over 20,000 residents and garners a \$2.7 billion economic impact.
- I have found that we must start being creative with less. In an effort to bring relief to the tax payers and incentivize greener spaces, I created the Sponsor-A-Road program which provides for and encourages businesses and non-profit organizations to sponsor right-of-ways and take over the greening, maintenance, and beautification of those areas.
- After receiving many calls from my constituents, I co-sponsored and passed legislation that grants the Director of the Water and Sewer Department the discretion to issue a one-time billing adjustment when extreme economic hardship and irregular water bills warrant such a modification.

- As part of my commitment to restore the public's trust in their local government, I set out to bring about an ethics reform package that will be revolutionary to some and disappointing for others. I recently announced 4 legislative items that will change the way County Hall operates.
- The first requires every County employee to receive ethics training. The second requires that every lobbyist which lobbies a county elected official, first take ethics training, which includes gift restrictions and Sunshine requirements. The third legislative item will double the time which County elected officials are not allowed to lobby their peers from 2 years to now 4 years after they leave public service. Finally, the fourth will require that any elected county leader first solicit an ethics opinion if they are an employee or receive and any form of payment from any organization which gets County funding.
- On your behalf, I voted in the minority to dramatically reduce County spending on lobbyist contracts, worked to shed light on the misclassification of environmentally sensitive lands, and stood with the Mayor when I voted to not have a single police officer fired by imposing a 5 percent healthcare contribution. By doing this, I reaffirmed my commitment to keep your taxes low while providing you with the best service possible.
- We must choose to stand with courage and do what is right over what is easy.
- Now, it takes much more than legislative initiatives to be an effective public servant. As I went door-to-door during the campaign, I listened closely to the needs of our residents.
- I took notes on their concerns and pledged that if elected, I would be as accessible as possible to them and be proactive in the affairs of our community.

- To that end, one of the very first acts as Commissioner was to move our district office to the Village of Palmetto Bay – the very heart of District 8.
- Here, my staff and I are able to meet with individual constituents, as well as with large constituency groups, without sacrificing office space. Previously working out of a one room office with an adjacent conference room made it difficult to effectively serve my residents.
- Since making the move to our present location, and having only been open for 8 months, our office has hosted over 1,200 District 8 residents. We also instituted “Constituent Nights” on the 3rd Monday of every month to provide a platform for residents in my district who work during the day and need to meet with me during the evening.
- To bring government closer to the people, I brought together the Mayor, Tax Collector, Property Appraiser, and the Clerk of Courts, to create a convenient one-stop center near you where you can access a wide range of government resources, from paying your taxes to purchasing a Transit pass. Through this collaboration, the “3-1-1 Service Center” was born at the South Dade Justice Center. Because the Mayor liked the idea, he decided to open two other centers within the county, all at zero cost to the tax payer.
- For far too long, the residents of Miami-Dade had to travel to downtown Miami, at great inconvenience and expense, to access their government services when there are appropriate County facilities available for this use in or near their neighborhoods.

- In three short months, the “3-1-1 Service Center” in the South Dade area has been wildly successful, already serving a total of 4,431 residents. This is a great example of government working within its means - that must always be the first and not the last option.
- In the end, Miami-Dade should be about delivering effective customer service to its residents and this new service is a tremendous leap in that direction.
- One of the greatest joys of serving as your commissioner is being able to help the residents of my district. To date, my staff has solved issues for over 400 residents.
- In my view, there is no higher calling and no nobler cause than taking care of your fellow man. I am reminded of several families in which my office has made a difference.
- Like **Ms. Norina Kanton**. Ms. Kanton regrettably suffers from an aggressive form of cancer which requires constant medical treatment to maintain her health.
- Unbeknownst to her, the main water line in her home had sprung a leak while she was obtaining regular, life-saving chemotherapy, and radiation treatments in the hospital. Once she arrived home, she discovered a huge water bill that was impossible for her to pay.
- As a result, she went without water for an extended period of time – until she visited our office. Immediately, our staff contacted the good folks at the Community Action Agency, who in turn, contacted plumbers who volunteered their valuable time, labor and equipment to fix Ms. Kanton’s water emergency.
- These wonderful people at CAA and the volunteer plumbers who undertook this job managed to make Ms. Kanton’s situation a little less difficult to bear.

- **Mrs. Mendoza** resides in a dead end street in the Redlands. She noticed a continuous stream of unfamiliar cars parking in the unattended areas at all times of the day and night.
- Criminal activity, such as drug dealing and prostitution, started taking place. Mrs. Mendoza requested our help in working to restrict access to these areas and prevent the growing crime.
- With our help, Public Works placed guard rails along the dead end to restrict access, and since then, there have been no more repeated incidents.
- Finally, after I learned that residents in the Continental Park area were being exposed to contaminated drinking water wells found to have the toxic chemical agent **Dieldrin**, my office had to act quickly, especially after we learned that many of the residents had developed cancer.
- With the help of the County budget office we have been able to identify funding to get those residents connected to the County water supply.
- Since day one, our office has worked to liaise with District 8 not-for-profits, business organizations, crime watches, and neighborhood organizations.
- We have worked to serve as a County link, problem solver, and information network for our district municipalities and its elected leaders.

- It is because of the willingness to work together that we have been able to collaborate on all types of projects, from parks, to road improvements, to bike paths, to community engagement.
- Our office has been consistent in securing funding for numerous District 8 road improvements, beautification and capital projects within the district's municipalities and unincorporated areas - all totaling \$111,066,228 since November of 2010.
- This is in addition to the \$1.3 million for the development and improvements of our local parks. I have visited every park in my district and have seen first-hand the role they play in the community. Parks play a vital role in promoting the quality of life and livability of communities where residents enjoy and improve their mental and physical health; conserve and protect natural and cultural resources; responsibly use energy resources; and enjoy a clean, healthy environment.
- We have cooperated in recognizing distinguished and outstanding residents who are no longer with us, but made a lasting impression in their home communities of Pinecrest, Palmetto Bay, Cutler Bay, and Homestead.
- Names like **Paul S. Barrow** – who lost his life while giving a second chance to a troubled individual.
- **Samantha “Jade” Trebbi** who dedicated every waking moment of her very young life to the care and wellbeing of the poor and underprivileged, but who left us suddenly and unexpectedly on October of 2010.

- And finally, **Roger Barretto**, a legendary man of vision and enterprise who helped make South Florida the worldwide gem that it is today.
- Yes, we have made much progress this year in improving our district and our overall community and it has been because of your cooperation, your invaluable counsel and your confidence in me that has allowed us to progress.
- But there is much, much more to be done. Our residents continue to hurt because of double digit unemployment and the unrelenting economic conditions that persist not only in South Florida but throughout the nation.
- We can do better. No, we must do better. How do we go forward from here? We do so by renewing our focus on what's important – the residents.
- We must work to help create jobs, reinvigorate the economic climate by spurring the local tourism industry, and by continuing to make government work more with less.
- As we gather here tonight, there are families in the South Dade area that will go without a meal because of a lack of employment opportunities.

- Small businesses are the backbone of our local and national economies and they provide the necessary jobs that our residents desperately need to support their families, but instead of local government making it easier for businesses to be established in Miami-Dade, it stifles and exhausts the business owner into submission, many having no other alternative but to abandon the entire enterprise. This is simply unacceptable!
- In a climate where a \$5,000 permit can prevent a business from opening, we must do everything possible to create an environment with sound policy to serve as a catalyst for job growth and business development.
- Through my “Work Days” program, a program I created to immerse myself in the local businesses of my district. I become an employee for the day, I spend time with businesses leaders and have learned that we must cut the red tape and make it easier to liaise with County departments. We also must decentralize the permitting process and bring it closer to the residents by creating “one-stop permitting centers.” We can do it, and it can be done within the confines of our current budget.
- As a result, I directed the Mayor’s office to prepare a report outlining the best methods and implementation schedule to create a virtual or physical one-stop information center for opening new businesses and major industries within Miami-Dade County, while eliminating unnecessary red tape and reducing the time it takes for a small business to open and provide real paying jobs for all our residents.

- I will continue to advocate for and shed light on the tourism industry in the South Dade area, working to promote and make accessible the wonders of our local and state parks, agro-tourism, cultural adventures, and local restaurants.
- To that end, we have begun taking steps through my resolution designating a “Historical Redland Tropical Trail,” a signage program which links all the tourist locations in the south and allows tourists to find those locations off the highway system. In the coming months you will see these signs begin to come up along these main road-ways.
- It is my hope that visitors feel inclined to spend their morning at the Pincrest Gardens Farmers Market, then take a walk at the Thalata Estate, enjoy a show at the South Dade Cultural Arts Center, and end the night enjoying a glass of wine at the renowned Schnebly Winery in the Redlands.
- I plan to continue to work closely with the municipalities in my area and continue to engage organizations like Chamber South, the Economic Development Council of South Dade, and the Homestead/Florida City Chamber to create a seamless economic development plan for our region - a plan that will link us in success.
- Finally, I pledge to my colleagues and to all the residents of Miami-Dade County that I will work day in and day out to continue bringing about accountability, transparency and above all else, efficiency to our County government.

- The successes we achieve are not mine - they are ours. We must commit to investing in the very fabric of what makes our community great - our people. We must preserve the very ideals for which people choose to live in South Florida, it's a great place to raise a family, make a living, lead an active life, and relish in our lush environment. I pledge to continue on that path.
- It is not lost on me that serving as your Commissioner comes with great responsibility one that is unmatched and built on a public trust. By working together, we will continue to make strides towards a better community, one that represents all of its people.
- God bless you and goodnight.