

Good evening, Miami-Dade, and welcome to beautiful Zoo Miami.

Buenas noches.

Bon-swà toot moon.

I want to thank Chairman Gilbert, leader of our Board of County Commissioners, a great partner, for his warm welcome, and Commissioner McGhee for hosting us in his home, District NINE.

Thank you to tonight's performers, faith leaders, honor guard, our poet laureate, Richard Blanco, our wonderful MC, zoo director Will Elgar, our gracious hosts at the zoo and their animal ambassadors!

Most of all, THANK YOU, our residents, for joining me here TONIGHT and virtually. Thank you for your ENGAGEMENT, your TRUST, and the HONOR to serve as your first woman mayor.

This is my 4th state of the county address. This one is extra special for me because we're in South Dade, where I got my start in elected office as Commissioner for District EIGHT.

Over the last THREE years, Miami-Dade has grown, changed, and EMERGED STRONGER despite many challenges. Now, we are THE community of the future. WE'RE the place that people want to be.

To grasp the bright future right in front of us, we must be BRAVER and BOLDER than ever.

It will REQUIRE.. COURAGE.

It will REQUIRE.. TAKING RISKS.

It WILL require INNOVATION!

I've NEVER stuck to the status quo.

And neither have YOU, the people of Miami-Dade.

To embrace the endless possibilities that tomorrow holds, we MUST keep going.

Embracing the NEW ECONOMY will propel us into the FUTURE as an opportunity-rich, technologically advanced community.

Embracing INNOVATION, to tackle our greatest challenges, will ensure a thriving tomorrow FOR ALL.

We are the most recovered local economy in the country. Last month, we boasted the low unemployment rate of 1.6%, well below the national average of 3.7.

We are one of the SAFEST metropolitan areas in the country, and business is booming.

But this prosperity WASN'T always promised.

When I took office in late 2020, in the midst of the pandemic, our community faced unprecedented difficulty and LOSS.

We had a choice. To JUST GET BY, or to courageously lay the groundwork for a BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR ALL.

WE CHOSE COURAGE.

A year later, businesses reopened, newcomers arrived, and a NEW economic landscape was unfolding. There were GAPS to fill from the pandemic – and we HAD to be even bolder.

We turned decades of DELAYED investment in county facilities and services into a once-in-a-generation opportunity to REBUILD STRONGER.

WE CHOSE OPPORTUNITY.

We laid the foundation. Now, we must CONTINUE to BUILD –

So that our kids and grandkids can rely on TRANSIT to get them where they need to go,

So they can enjoy an ENVIRONMENT just as beautiful as it is protected,

So they can grow up in SAFE COMMUNITIES, and

So they can get GOOD JOBS in the new workforce.

Now, THE FUTURE IS HERE, and it is calling UPON us to INNOVATE.

Spanish: Elegimos valentía, oportunidad e innovación. En este momento, somos la comunidad del futuro.

Creole: Noo say fee-TEE. Ko-mi-noh-TEH AH.

In my EARLY DAYS as mayor, it was hard to see this bright future.

It felt like the world had come to a STOP and our lives were upended.

I came into office in the midst of the pandemic and led us through a people focused response that saved lives, jobs, and businesses.

We ensured testing and shots were available to all. Our FREE testing sites remained open MONTHS after federal funding ended, to make sure NOBODY was left behind. Thanks to our team's heroic efforts, Miami-Dade achieved the HIGHEST vaccination rate in the entire state.

One of our most CHALLENGING moments came 7 months into my term - the tragic collapse of the Champlain Towers South in Surfside. It claimed 98 precious lives.

2 ½ years later, we're more determined than ever to ensure that this can NEVER HAPPEN AGAIN.

We accelerated building recertification,

We required associations to post their budget and safety record,

And we strengthened our building code,  
With thanks to Commissioner Garcia.

As we turned the corner, I promised I'd put YOU at the center of county government. We launched THRIVE305, the largest public engagement initiative in our HISTORY, which molded our actions from YOUR priorities.

We RECOVERED from those difficult days. But we did more than that. We chose COURAGE over FEAR and STAGNATION.

In fact, our pandemic response was SO STRONG that more people and businesses moved to Miami-Dade – generating growth that BROUGHT both challenges AND opportunities.

We laid the groundwork: to get MORE people, BETTER jobs, REVITALIZE our small businesses, and UNLEASH the power of innovation across the public and private sectors, creating greater pathways to opportunity for all.

And for two years in a row, we CUT TAX RATES to the LOWEST IN 40 YEARS.

Facing a national trend of growing gun violence, we TURNED THE TIDE and launched the groundbreaking Peace & Prosperity plan, sponsored by Commissioner Hardemon. This 20-year, \$90 million dollar investment includes a range of crime reduction programs.

It soon became very clear that HOUSING was the GREATEST challenge to our growth, so I declared an affordability crisis in April of 2022.

We rolled up our sleeves – and started building new units, renovating existing ones, and protecting tenants through a new Office of Housing Advocacy -- helping more than 26,000 families stay in their homes, with dignity.

We got here today because we were BRAVE in the face of adversity,  
we were BOLD in the face of uncertainty,  
and we were FEARLESS in laying the foundation for the future.  
Now, THE FUTURE IS HERE, and with it, THE NEW ECONOMY.  
The world is watching - and investing - in us. It is very clear to see why!

Miami-Dade generates an annual gross domestic product of nearly \$185 billion dollars. In the past year alone, 6,000 NEW jobs were created.

Unemployment now stands at the LOW 1.6 PERCENT, behind the state average of 3 PERCENT. That's nearly half!

We're THE business-friendly place to be.

AND we're being recognized for it. South Florida was recently named by the U.S. Department of Commerce as one of only 31 TECH HUBS in the country, and the ONLY one focused on climate.

We're working together to bring down millions of dollars for businesses and jobs.

I'm proud to have leaders from our universities who are part of the Tech Hub here tonight – UM, FIU, FMU, and MDC. And leaders from St. Thomas and Barry, we're ready to welcome you to the team! All, please stand!

In this new economy, county government will be a leader in upskilling our WORKFORCE - so growing companies can find talent right here, and NO ONE IS LEFT BEHIND.

That's WHY we're investing in our greatest asset, YOU.

The new Future Ready Scholarships at Miami Dade College make sure all county residents in need have the opportunity to complete a degree AT ZERO COST.

We also invested in CodePath, which helps students like SEBASTIAN NUNEZ, become job ready.

Since attaining his computer science degree, he's TRIPLED HIS INCOME! Incredible! Will Sebastian and the CodePath team, please stand!

Within the county's own workforce, we're not just talking the talk, we're walking the walk.

We worked with our unions to achieve historic protections and expanded paid internships and apprenticeships.

And we're helping our small businesses thrive in the new economy too. To date, more than 10,000 have joined STRIVE305 to better market, grow, and innovate.

Looking ahead, we expect to reach 75% of all small businesses in our county by 2025. Amazing!

This NEW economy demands innovation, so we're searching the globe. Last year, we launched the Miami-Dade Innovation Authority, and its first public challenge sought creative ideas for the reuse of SEAWEED.

Next up, they are seeking ways to improve the passenger experience at Miami International Airport.

Miami-Dade, we're showing the world that this growth is not a MOMENT, but a MOVEMENT.

To the business leaders listening tonight – Please hire local. Partner with our schools. Invest in us. It's an investment in OUR future.

We're in this for the long haul - together. We're building for today and investing in tomorrow – to ensure that future generations will have an even greater opportunity to thrive.

And that's why I am so excited to announce that I will be partnering with Commissioner Cohen Higgins on a forward-looking bond package to present to you, the voters, this November. It will ensure that we are TRULY FUTURE READY.

Our collective efforts, alongside local leaders and community members, will build on YOUR PUBLIC TRUST to gain support for a \$2.5 billion dollar ACCOUNTABLE and PROJECT-SPECIFIC bond initiative.

It will fund pressing challenges like HOUSING, SEPTIC TO SEWER, FLOODING, AND PARKS in every corner of our county. This historic approach will turn around the follies of the past and build for the future.

And that's why our bond initiative will be named 305 FUTURE READY!

Spanish: Este año, la comisionada Cohen Higgins y yo incluiremos en la boleta electoral del 2024 una iniciativa sobre \$2.5 mil millones de dólares en bonos para invertir en vivienda, inundaciones, parques e infraestructura.

Creole: Bil-teh voht-ah-neigh SAH, ap gen-lah-DUH. YAW de-pweh-SENK milyah DOUGH-lah, poo beh-zweh, ko-mi-noh-TEH noo-ah.

The future will be stronger, safer, and more resilient than ever before.

A driving reason that many people and companies move here is because we are SAFE.

Violent crime has gone down, while SOLVING crime has gone up.

We've introduced groundbreaking policing methods, like the Crisis Response Unit, which responds to emergencies with a licensed mental health professional alongside our police.

Out of nearly 800 calls for service in the first 6 months alone, ZERO resulted in use of force. Some CRU members are here tonight – please stand!

We also celebrated the return of the police department's mounted patrol unit, thanks to a generous donation from the Milton family foundation and the leadership of Vice Chairman Rodriguez.

Alongside the 11th Judicial Circuit of Florida and Jackson Health system, the county will open the trailblazing Miami Center for Mental Health and Recovery THIS YEAR, thanks to Judge Steve Leifman's vision.

The center will serve people from our jails, hospitals, and streets, in a state-of-the-art facility with compassionate and comprehensive care.

And thanks to the hard work of our corrections team, we've turned that department around to achieve full compliance with the US Dept of Justice for the first time in 10 YEARS.

How a community treats its most VULNERABLE is a true measure of its compassion. So, for example, we're taking care of our older adults through the Save Our Seniors Program. This holiday season, we sent low-income homeowners extra funds to help with increased expenses.

I was touched to receive so many heartfelt thank you notes.

One senior wrote about how the check helped her meet essential needs like buying groceries. Another shared that it allowed him to make needed home repairs. THAT is why we do what we do.



It's also up to us to ensure that all pets in our shelter are safe and loved. I allocated an additional \$2 million dollars in the latest county budget to get more furry friends adopted, spayed, and neutered. Thank you, Commissioner McGhee, who has been such a strong advocate.

The future will be even SAFER – and offer more opportunity too. Such as opportunities to be safely housed.

The HOUSING crisis still reaches too many, which is why we're strengthening homes against severe weather, offering mortgage, utility, and condo special assessment relief, and preventing evictions wherever possible.

Thank you, Commissioner Bastien, chair of our housing committee, for your passionate leadership, and Commissioner Cabrera, for sponsoring the first-time homebuyer program which provides below-market rates.

We are also building more housing that people can afford, increasing the much-needed supply.

For example, we renovated three public housing developments in Little Havana and TRIPLED the supply of affordable and workforce units onsite.

With \$40 million dollars from HUD, we will revitalize low-income housing in Goulds.

We're supporting nonprofits like Casa Familia to build housing for adults with disabilities.

And The Homeless Trust opened Mia Casa, a community for older adults in need of stable housing.

We're on our way, but we're not done. We won't stop until everyone is safely housed – BECAUSE HOUSING IS A HUMAN RIGHT.

The future will have smarter mobility too.

We're taking bold steps on long-awaited promises in transit. Just 2 months ago, we launched the Better Bus Network!

Thank you, Commissioner Higgins, a true transit champion. The plan delivers more routes, more frequently, to more people. This community-led redesign after ALMOST 40 YEARS OF STATUS QUO better connects you from point A to point B – AND to opportunity.

And none of it would have been possible without the steadfast commitment - AND LITERAL DRIVE - of our bus operators!

Like Lidia Reyes, a mother of three who overcame years of struggle. Through our training, and the support of a local nonprofit, Lotus House, Lidia became a bus operator this summer. Congratulations Lidia!! Please stand!

Now, we're exceeding pre-pandemic transit ridership levels, and funding the county's share of ALL 5 PRIORITY CORRIDORS of the SMART program.

The South Dade Transit Way, connecting Homestead to Dadeland, will be complete THIS YEAR, and will boast the ONLY FULLY ELECTRIC bus rapid transit fleet in the WORLD!

We're working to bring the northeast corridor to life, linking downtown Miami and Aventura with neighborhood stops in between. We just received federal environmental approval!

Thanks to the leadership of Chairman Gilbert – we're on track to fulfill the long-promised North Corridor too.

And HAVE YOU HEARD? Tri-Rail is now in downtown, and Brightline goes to Orlando!

Through relentless advocacy, my administration has pulled down more than 1 BILLION DOLLARS for federal and state infrastructure.

We're making once-in-a-generation investments in tomorrow, like enhancing bicycle and pedestrian safety, restoring the Everglades, and strengthening our world class ports.

MIA is one of the fastest growing airports in the country – expected to reach 77 million passengers by 2040, up from a record breaking 52 million today.

This powerful economic engine has had its challenges, but I am TURNING THAT AROUND. It's been an unprecedented year for PASSENGER NUMBERS AND CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS, from elevators and escalators to walkways and roofs.

This record-breaking \$7 BILLION DOLLAR investment AND \$1.7 BILLION DOLLARS in maintenance is transforming MIA into a Future-Ready destination - modernizing our airport from the cabin to the curb and building a new parking garage and hotel.

Port Miami is also celebrating its busiest cruise year EVER!

With federal investment thanks to Secretary Pete, who visited us in October, we are cutting emissions, better managing stormwater, and creating the good-paying jobs of the future.

By the middle of this year, 5 OUT OF 10 TERMINALS will be plugged in to quieter and cleaner shore power.

None of this would be possible without strong financial health.

The county always achieves award winning bond ratings, which allows us to continue to build better, today and tomorrow.

Kudos to our incredible finance, budget, and audit teams for being great stewards of taxpayer dollars – and always finding ways to create efficiencies and cost savings.

And finally, the future will be more RESILIENT.

Here in paradise, nestled between the blue waters of Biscayne Bay and the Everglades' River of grass, we know that building a resilient future in the face of climate change will take the boldest of actions.

We've become a LEADER for the entire Caribbean and the world.

Our Chief Heat Officer, the first in the world, was hard at work during the hottest summer on record. We installed AC in public housing, activated cooling sites, and delivered heat health trainings.

And it's essential that we protect beautiful Biscayne Bay, a natural treasure that generates \$64 BILLION DOLLARS of economic impact.

Investing in resilience saves us money too. FEMA recently upgraded Miami-Dade County to a Class 3 rating in the National Flood Insurance Program!

This comes with a BIG reward.

Homeowners and businesses in unincorporated Miami-Dade will receive a 35% DISCOUNT ON FLOOD INSURANCE!

This means more money back in people's pockets, and reduced flood risks, thanks to our county experts.

Thank you, Commissioner Steinberg, for being so proactive in addressing flooding in your district.

Among our zero waste efforts, we are planning for a waste sustainability campus and exploring waste reduction and

improved recycling. Thank you, Commissioner Bermudez, for your strong partnership.

And through Connect2Protect, we're converting septic to sewer across the county. Thank you, Commissioner Regalado, a huge proponent.

Our Water and Sewer Department is overseeing the connection of 11,000 properties and the largest infrastructure project in Florida's history.

We just launched a third major solar installation on a county building, saving MONEY as well as energy.

And you can maximize your building's energy efficiency too, through our Building Efficiency 305 Challenge. Join us!

We're getting closer every day to that goal of 30 percent tree canopy. 26,000 trees have been planted since I came into office - and you can help us plant thousands more through our Adopt a Tree Program!

The climate crisis is GLOBAL, but the solutions must be LOCAL. We're delivering on many right here, while we are also searching the rest of the world for further innovation to bring home.

We modeled our own Innovation Authority off of Israel's, after my first trade mission there.

And I recently went to Japan, where we promoted local business and saw cutting-edge innovation in transportation, waste, and emergency management. Now we're continuing the conversation, laying the groundwork for a direct flight to Tokyo and renewing ties with the port of Yokohama.

Across Miami-Dade, from the mangroves of the Oleta River to the farms of Redland, from new developments in Doral to the art deco district in Miami Beach...

We are building a BRAVE and BOLD NEW FUTURE.  
TOGETHER. TODAY.

And your input always matters. We heard your calls for greater access to county services.

And that's why I launched my 'NO WRONG DOOR' reforms, increasing your trust. No Wrong Door means that no matter who you call in County government, WE will help you get what you need.

And it's powered by our new engagement and resident services teams, who have become the hands and heart of county government. Thank you, Commissioner Gonzalez, for partnering to open a No Wrong Door center in your district.

Together we're building the CULTURE OF COURAGE NEEDED to TRAVEL THE ROAD AHEAD.

We are marching forward into a promising new chapter, tackling our challenges head on – so that our children and grandchildren, like my new grandbaby Leila, can enjoy even greater opportunity.

As we look ahead, Miami-Dade, we MUST continue to be COURAGEOUS. WE have always shown up for each other and we must do so now.

Through a PANDEMIC and through the HARD times that came with it,

through TRAGEDY and through TRIUMPH,

YOU were brave. YOU showed up.

That's why I'm so PROUD OF YOU, and so IN LOVE with this community!

People always tell me, 'You're everywhere!' AND IT'S TRUE.

It's because of the joy, energy, and ideas it brings me when I show up for YOU.

It DEEPENS the motivation I've always had - to MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN PEOPLE'S LIVES and OUR COMMUNITY'S FUTURE.

That is what I've worked to do my whole life. And as YOUR mayor, I will continue working day in and day out to show up FOR YOU.

WE ARE THE PLACE OF THE FUTURE.

We have the COURAGE to see it.

And we have done the work to BE IT.

Miami-Dade is booming – SO LET'S KEEP GOING!

Spanish: Miami-Dade está floreciendo – ¡sigamos adelante!

Creole: Miami-Dade ap gran-dee, DONK ah-noo kon-ti-NYAY!

To the nonprofits, businesses, and partners who are in it with us, thank you.

To our 13 county commissioners, who join me in service of their communities every day, thank you.

To our 34 wonderful cities, many represented here tonight, thank you.

To our county workforce of nearly 30,000 strong, who deliver excellent public service EVERY DAY, thank you.

And to YOU, our residents, THANK YOU FOR TRUSTING ME with the honor of a lifetime.

It is because of this TRUST, because of this TEAMWORK, and because of your unmistakable COURAGE, that I can declare with CONFIDENCE – THE STATE OF OUR COUNTY IS STRONG!

Spanish: ¡El estado de nuestro condado es fuerte!

Creole: Eh-ta kon-tay noo-ahh so-lead.

May God bless you all, and may God continue to bless Miami-Dade County.