



The Honorable Manuel A. Diaz
Investing in Our Future – 2008 State of the City Address
Freedom Tower
Miami, Florida
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My fellow residents, family and friends, Mr. Chairman, Commissioners, elected officials, distinguished guests, Welcome. Bienvenidos, Bon Jour, Bom Dia.

During the last few decades, the world has changed at a pace never before imagined, a world very different from the one our parents expected for us. And yet, this much we know.....that our children and grandchildren will live in a world of exponential change, a world few of us can conceive today, and much less understand.

For the first time in history, over half the world's population live in cities. In the US, it is 87%, in Latin America and the Caribbean, 78%. And this trend will continue. Metro areas drive the world's economies. In the US, they are responsible for over 85% of all jobs, income, the value of goods and services, and our Gross Domestic Product. And this trend will continue.

We have entered a new economic era where information flows freely across the globe. Because information flattens the world, the role of cities has become more important than ever- cities give us a sense of place. Cities are now defined by what makes them unique and are the focal point for human interaction and opportunity. Cities must function as incubators of the knowledge-based businesses driving the new economy.

Cities will have to compete to attract knowledge workers whose ideas serve to grow economies. And in order to attract the best and the brightest, cities must invest in the drivers of growth. Prosperous cities will be those that can become places for innovation and change.

While our parent's generation made employment decisions based on loyalty to a company, the single most important factor in attracting young workers is not what they will do, but where they will do it. And this trend will continue.

It is in this environment that Miami has finally emerged as a global city. We have moved way beyond being a gateway - today, we are the point of translation - where people from the North, South, East and West come together to live, work, understand one another - and prosper from this relationship. This nation's most diverse city has opened its arms to the world, and the world has come to us.

But you must know that our future is not guaranteed. Many cities can also lay claim to the same virtues that have made us strong. We will only continue to be relevant if we can continue to effectively compete. And not just with cities in the US. Monterrey, London, Madrid, New Delhi, Shanghai are all pushing the frontiers of progress. These and other cities are not looking inward, not lacking in confidence, not afraid to try something new, not afraid to invest in their futures.

We should not be afraid either. Like in business, a city must continually re-invent itself. It must plan, innovate, lead and change. It must provide for the current needs of its residents. But it must also invest in its future. For many have choices, choices of where to play, raise a family or start a business. These choices will determine the state of our city for generations to come.

If we fail to invest in our quality of life, fail to invest in hope and opportunity, if those who can choose, choose others over us, then, rest assured our city will cease to prosper. And we shall once again condemn ourselves to irrelevance.

We cannot forget that this was the Miami of just 10 years ago. Our leaders failed to invest, and we lost our way. Not a major project was being built, and we had double digit unemployment. People were moving out, and Miami was bankrupt. Economic growth was not supported, but merely an accident of geography.

Ours was a city with no choices, ours was a city relegated to mediocrity, ours was a city without hope and opportunity.

We changed that – because we knew Miami was better. We changed that by investing in our people and our neighborhoods. We changed that by investing in job creation and economic development, public safety, our streets and sidewalks, flood mitigation, parks and green spaces, education and affordable housing. And we did this while reducing our millage rate a record 25% in just 6 years, saving our taxpayers almost \$200 million dollars.

We are not the same Miami of 10 years ago, or even 5 years ago. Today, we have double digit population growth, full employment, the best bond rating ever, crime at 30 year lows - and we are the cleanest city in America. We consistently rank as the best city to conduct business in Latin America. Our metro economy is the 11th largest in the U.S., 40th largest in the world, and is larger than those of every country in this hemisphere, except Canada, Brazil and Mexico.

In the past decade, while other US cities saw young workers move out, Miami is among a handful that saw more young workers move in. If we are to build on this momentum, if we want our children and our grand-children to choose Miami, we must be able to sustain a globally competitive economy by continuing to invest in the people, places, and things - that make us who we are.

It is no coincidence that we are at the Freedom Tower - this is Miami's Ellis Island –it is where the American Dream began for so many – it began here for my mother Elisa – and it began here for me.

Much in the same way this building was a beacon of hope and a new beginning for many, today our city is a beacon of hope, a new beginning for many in this Hemisphere and the world.

Our challenge is how to stay that way--- and this is why the state of our future city will depend on the investments we make today.

Our investment starts with people. In the new economy, knowledge is more powerful and more important than ever. Quite simply, the more you learn, the more you'll earn. Are we making the investment necessary to prepare our children to be successful in the 21st Century?

Commissioner Spence Jones....did you know that today the amount of technical information doubles every two years? In the next five years, it will double every 72 hours. We need to prepare your son Nathaniel, Jr. for a career that does not yet exist, a technology not yet developed, to solve problems we don't even know are problems yet. And this is why we invest in education. We owe this much to Nathaniel and to all our children.

The Education Compact is our investment in the future of our city. Our successful partnership with the school board has served as a model for school systems throughout America. We have no more F elementary schools. Out of 18,000 high schools nationally, 3 of ours are ranked in the top 100. Our school system is once again a finalist for the prestigious Broad Award and our Superintendent, Dr. Rudy Crew was named national superintendent of the year.

But in spite of our gains, critical challenges lay ahead. Our graduation rate remains dangerously low– and while they talk about a world class education system, our Legislature slashes nearly a billion dollars in funding for our children. We refuse to accept the growing technology gap between children who will compete in the global economy, and those who, not by their choosing, will watch the world pass them by.

So we invested in Elevate Miami. This nationally recognized partnership between the city, school board, the private sector and philanthropy uses technology to open up a new world of learning and opportunities for all Miamians. Elevate touches the lives of thousands of seniors and low income residents, turning libraries, parks, community and government centers into free access points to the world.

But let me focus on what it does for our children. Our school partners developed the Rites of Passage curriculum. Every 6th grader in Miami who does well in school, follows the rules, and earns the respect of their peers and adults will take home a free computer with free internet access.

Monday, I joined Superintendent Crew and the first group of students to earn the Rites of Passage. Thanks to The Knight Foundation, AT & T, Microsoft and Per Scholas, 600 6th graders took home a computer. But they took home a lot more - they and their families got connected to an unbelievable wealth of knowledge and information, bringing the world into their homes.

And in so doing, a greater number of our children from all walks of life will be able to compete, become conversant in the language of information, and be ready to assume the knowledge jobs of tomorrow. It is quite simple. Without this investment today, these jobs will go elsewhere. We will have failed our children, we will have failed our city.

Once you have a job, it is not enough that you make money, but that you know what to do with it. Funny thing about money: everybody wants it, but few understand how it works. If you discount the greed and misrepresentation, the root cause of our current sub-prime loan crisis is tied to massive levels of financial illiteracy.

To break the cycle of poverty, it is not enough for us to create economic opportunity. We must also provide a different sort of education - financial literacy - what some refer to as the most significant civil rights issue of this century.

ACCESS Miami gives a "hand up" to our residents. This nationally recognized program is one of the nation's most comprehensive efforts to combat poverty. Through a wide range of tools, including tax credits, small business support, micro-lending, job placement and training, individual development accounts, savings and IRA accounts, credit and financial education courses, we are charting a course toward self-sufficiency.

Many of our low income residents do not have a checking account. Worse yet, few understand why this puts them at a disadvantage. We are breaking through these barriers, connecting the un-banked to financial institutions. I am proud that we are one of 6 cities chosen to develop a national policy to address poverty by financially empowering Americans.

And we continue our record investment in affordable housing. Over \$800 million dollars in affordable housing has been completed or is being developed, well within striking distance of our goal to develop \$1 billion in affordable housing by the year 2010.

I am especially excited that the first two single family, affordable GREEN homes in the state were built in Liberty City, by a young developer who grew up in the neighborhood. Ario, I am proud we invested with you.

Finally, we have not forgotten the most vulnerable among us. We continue to invest in our city's homeless, and, as a result, have reduced our homeless population by 50%. The US Interagency Council for Homelessness honored us recently with the "Home for Every American" award, only the 4th city in the country to receive this honor.

Guided by the principle that a great city is a collection of great neighborhoods, our administration has made unprecedented investments in all our neighborhoods. Six years ago, we did not have a capital improvement plan. We do now.

By leveraging our investments to include federal, state and county partners, our city's neighborhoods will benefit from over \$2 billion dollars in infrastructure investments over a 10 year period.

It is a city investment of over \$300 million to rebuild our streets and sidewalks. It will be difficult to find any street in any neighborhood that will not be touched by this investment. It is over \$100 million in public safety, ensuring that our first responders continue to save lives and keep our neighborhoods safe, over \$150 million to mitigate flooding problems that have plagued many of our neighborhoods for decades, and over \$300 million in our parks.

Just this year, we opened a beautiful new park at Fern Isle. Next month, we will open our signature park at Grapeland Heights, with four new baseball fields and the city's first ever water park. Both parks were contaminated by toxic waste dumped by past administrations. This is how we used to treat our green spaces. We cleaned them up and gave them a new life for our children and our families to enjoy.

Soon we will also open a brand new, state of the art gymnasium at Jose Marti Park. And, honoring the dream of so many, including the late Commissioner Art Teele, the Little Haiti Soccer Park and Cultural center, the first park in Little Haiti, will open within the next 2 weeks.

Let there be no doubt that these unprecedented investments have served to strengthen our neighborhoods, create jobs and lower our taxes. But, let there also be no doubt that we will only continue to grow if we continue investing in our future.

Recently, the City and County joined forces in a way few could ever have imagined. We recognized the need to invest in the future of our urban core. We recognized the need to invest in all of those things that people look for in a city, projects that contribute to the quality of our lives and help build a strong economy for future generations. And we recognized that our failure to invest will place us at a competitive disadvantage for decades. Because those that have choices, will simply choose not to come or not to stay.

Let me set the record straight - Funding for these projects comes from 4 sources: tourists, other levels of government, publicly approved bonds- and a redevelopment district created to promote economic growth and development.

If you live in Overtown, if you live in Flagami, Miami Lakes, Homestead, or anywhere else, these projects will not require any new taxes from you - not a single dime from your pocket - but we will all enjoy the benefits.

Let's look at the specific investments:

Why is the Port Tunnel important? 17,000 City of Miami residents, 17,000 people from Liberty City, Little Havana, Little Haiti and Allapattah put food on their table, have a roof over their heads, and send their kids to school because of the Port. And it provides an annual economic benefit to our city of more than \$2 billion.

But, this could all go away. Jacksonville, Port Everglades, Panama, and even the Port of Mariel are investing hundreds of millions in the future of their ports. These are high stakes. They want our jobs. I don't know about you, but I don't want to have to explain to any one of these 17,000 people why they lost their job to the Port of Mariel.

We owe them a duty to protect their jobs. We owe it to their families not to let our Port fall behind. We cannot fail them.

And this is why we must invest in another neighborhood. I grew up in Little Havana, as did Commissioners Sanchez and Gonzalez. I know you share my passion to bring jobs and economic prosperity to our childhood home. For the first time in a very long time, we have such an opportunity.

Forty acres that sat idle for all but 6 days a year can now be home to a baseball stadium, retail shops, restaurants and possibly even a hotel. Forty acres that sat idle for all but 6 days a year will now create jobs for thousands, inject millions of dollars into our economy, and create a sense of pride for a neighborhood that has long served as the entry point to so many in search of the American Dream. But this will be much more than an economic engine.

The Orange Bowl was home to two of the greatest sports teams ever- our Dolphins and our Hurricanes- it hosted five Super Bowls, Presidents Kennedy and Reagan - it was a center of community, a gathering place for South Florida. Today, it is our turn to make an investment so that future generations can create and enjoy new memories.

And just think, Commissioner Sanchez, 3 years from now you may be joined by your children Lucas, Elissa and Vicente as an announcer opens the 2011 World Series with these words: "Live from Little Havana, in the beautiful City of Miami..." These are great places that all great cities deserve. Joe, we owe this much to your children and to all our children.

Great cities also deserve great places of art - Museum Park and the PAC are OUR place for the arts. They generate thousands of jobs and billions of dollars - but it's about more than that.

Art is one of the few areas of civic life with low barriers to entry- it builds ties between neighbors and communities. Art is essential to the human spirit. It is our connection to one another.

A poor schoolchild in Paris can walk into the Louvre and be inspired by a Da Vinci, a poor schoolchild in New York can walk into the Museum of Natural History and see a giant dinosaur, a poor schoolchild in Sydney can go to the opera house and hear beautiful music.

These opportunities did not exist in Miami – but they will now.

Not only will our children be able enjoy great museums and great performing arts, but through Elevate Miami, a child from the West Grove will be inspired by an exhibit at our Museum of Art, a child from Wynwood will learn about the effects of climate change at our Museum of Science, and a child from Shenandoah will listen to beautiful music at the PAC, all for free.

And let me respond to those who question our investment in culture, and who give us a false choice between investing in streets or museums. We have shown that we can do both. In fact, we have to do both.

And beyond that, to say that those who are poor do not care about art and culture simply because of their economic condition, is more than empty rhetoric, it is dehumanizing, it is plain bigotry, and it is just plain wrong.

All our children, especially our poorer children, deserve the best we can give them - and that includes access to the arts.

Lastly, and most dear to me, let us talk about Overtown. Let me make this perfectly clear - not a single dime of Overtown money will go to fund any of these projects- Overtown money stays in Overtown. At a minimum, an additional \$650 million will be made available for Overtown - and not just for a small section of this neighborhood, but for the entire neighborhood. It's \$217 million in infrastructure improvements, \$87 million for job creation and retention, \$73 million for parks. And we have the potential to leverage over \$2 billion toward affordable and workforce housing. This is how we fight slum and blight.

With this investment, Overtown will finally join the family of Miami neighborhoods benefiting from our economic growth and prosperity.

Finally, greatness is not a distinction that can be achieved without proper planning. If you fail to plan, plan to fail. This is why we invest in planning. Commissioner Gonzalez, I want your daughter Elizabeth to live in a City with a park within a half mile from her home, where we preserve our historic buildings so she can appreciate her past, where we ensure access to the waterfront so she can enjoy the beauty of nature, and where she does not need a car, where she can walk, use a bike safely, or ride a streetcar.

This is why we need Miami 21.

I want your daughter and your grandchildren to live in a City that plans and protects its neighborhoods, making them safe, livable spaces for human interaction - where we plan for smart growth -so that she and her children can reap the benefits of living in well balanced neighborhoods.

And, we must plan because Miami is on the front line of global climate change - Commissioner Sarnoff, Theresa, our failure to act means the neighborhood we share could one day be under water. This is why we need to invest in innovation and sustainability - like our Green Lab, a first of its kind clearinghouse for ideas and solutions on climate change - on alternative sources of energy like the solar panels at City Hall, and on MiPlan, the city's comprehensive global climate change action plan.

The investments we have made would not have been possible 10 years ago. And this bears repeating, we must remember what Miami was like.

At a time when other American cities were prospering, prosperity passed us by. Our parks were neglected, our streets untouched and unsafe, our neighborhoods in decay. Miami was bankrupt, devoid of hope and opportunity.

Today - drive down Biscayne Boulevard, not only south, but north to the MiMo district and Buena Vista – visit a gallery in Wynwood, sit at a café in Mary Brickell Village, eat dinner in the Design District, stroll through Midtown, shop in Allapattah, play soccer in Little Haiti, walk your child down Cuban Memorial Boulevard, catch a play at the Lyric Theater, watch an opera Downtown. Ten years ago, would any of you have believed this possible?

I did, and you believed in me. I need you to believe in me again.

The state of our city is not a coincidence – it happened because we chose to invest strategically – it happened because your government took its obligation seriously – it happened because government began to invest in the things that make a city worth living in.

We made a choice for change...and we changed Miami for the better.

Once again, we face a moment of choice.

Some would argue that times are tough, the economy is slow – that we should not invest to create jobs and prosperity- that we should not grow. Do we heed the words of fear – of doubt – of those who do not believe in the promise of our city because they do not believe in its people, do not believe in themselves?

This is a defining moment – Should we retreat? Should I have to tell my children we settled for good enough? Or do we challenge ourselves and continue to move forward? To me the choice is clear.

While there is no doubt that these are difficult economic times - we cannot lose faith in our city - we cannot fail to invest in the promise it has always offered. We cannot sit idly, and again let the world pass us by. When the voices of doubt say we should not or cannot – we must answer, why not?

Why should we not ensure that our children and their children enjoy all the advantages of a global city? Why shouldn't Miami be greater than it is today? Beyond these walls, our extended family of 400,000 demand and deserve greatness.

Government investment is not about vision - it is a mandate- it is why we exist - it is our most solemn duty - to leave a city where poverty is not a lifelong sentence, but a temporary condition to be overcome - to leave a city that combines economic prosperity with environmental sustainability - to leave a city where our children can receive the best education, afford a home, hold a good paying job, have access to the arts and live in well planned communities - to leave a city much greater than the one left to us.

I ask you, I need you to join me in this challenge – to fulfill this duty.

To echo the words uttered by a US President not so long ago: in the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this city together – we all breathe the same air – we all cherish our children's future – and we are all mortal. Thank you, and God bless.

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