

*STATE OF THE COUNTY ADDRESS
BROWARD COUNTY MAYOR DALE V.C.
HOLNESS
NOVEMBER 17, 2020*

Today is a special day here in Broward County as we select a new Mayor and Vice Mayor and swear-in our Commissioners who have been once again elected to serve our great County. Congratulations.

It is with a lot of reflection and introspection that I deliver the State of the County for 2020.

What words would you appropriately use to describe this past year? Challenging with a lot of anxiety!

What an historic time to serve as Mayor. I certainly came in with high hopes.

In November of 2019, when I had the honor of being chosen by this Board to serve as Mayor, my goal was to lead a path to prosperity—with a plan that would guide us over the next 30 years to 2050 toward “Prosperity for All.”

This detailed 2050 Plan, if you’ll recall, would be all encompassing and included Economic opportunity, income equity, job creation, home ownership, educational

opportunities, addressing poverty, criminal justice, our healthcare system, the environment, transportation. Our cities and businesses, faith-based leaders, all of us, coming together to establish a path forward with an identifiable timeline and benchmarks to take us through the next thirty years.

I was filled with optimism. In November, things were going our way. Unemployment in Broward County was at about 2.8%. The Fort Lauderdale Hollywood International Airport was growing at a record setting pace. Port Everglades was welcoming more and more cruise ships and a large increase in cargo from all over the world. Tourism was strong. In January 2020 we celebrated the \$1 billion Convention Center expansion and Headquarters Hotel project with expansion construction well underway. Voters had approved the Transportation Surtax and our Mobility Advancement Plan was up and running. Business was booming. Job creation was at an all-time high.

Life was Good....

And then came March, and a worldwide pandemic swept across the United States and came to our County and to our homes. The Coronavirus—COVID-19-- was spreading at a rapid pace...and suddenly it was here too.

On March 2nd we began proactive precautionary measures in Broward County after two cases of the coronavirus were reported in Hillsborough and Manatee Counties.

On March 9th, a Local State of Emergency was declared in Broward County, after the Governor declared a Public Health Emergency the day before.

It was unprecedented and disturbing. We were battling an unknown enemy. One we could not see nor predict.

If ever there was a test of strength in leadership, this was it.

Life and death decisions had to be made quickly. The health and welfare of the public was our only focus. Our County emergency processes clicked into gear.

Under the guidance and outstanding leadership of the Broward County Commission, County Administrator Bertha Henry, Deputy Administrator Monica Cepero, the entire team, our County Attorney's Office, and our 31 municipal leaders, very tough choices along with strict enforcement became necessary to protect our people, while we tried to control community spread of a deadly virus, we had never seen before.

For this battle, we needed to mount an army. We have almost 2 million people to protect. These decisions are not for the faint of heart.

We knew we couldn't do it alone, so we engaged city leaders, our entire medical community, hospital districts, the Florida Health Dept, the Broward Sheriff's Office, the School Board, our business community, non-profits, our congressional delegation, our state leaders, our faith based leadership. Our County employees. And every single resident of Broward County.

Every one of us, had a role and a responsibility.

On March 13th, 11 positive COVID-19 cases were reported in Broward County by the Florida Dept of Health.

We had no choice. Broward County began the painful process of shutting down.

All public events were cancelled.

On March 22nd, perhaps, one of the hardest decisions of all, we closed all non-essential businesses. Four days later, Broward County issued an Emergency Order urging all residents to "shelter in place, under the safer at home" policy.

Life as we knew it, had changed.

...and then came April...more tough choices, more difficult decisions.

Two ships, that had been turned away from Countries around the world, were heading to Port Everglades.

Two Holland America cruise ships carrying approximately 1,250 passengers and 1,200 crew lay off the coast of South Florida, awaiting clearance to dock at our Port. Because some of the passengers had tested positive for COVID-19, and four passengers onboard had died, the ships had been denied entry at ports along their route to the U.S.

Together, under strict requirements of Broward County's Unified Command, we made the humanitarian decision to let the ships into our Port. The Zaandam and the Rotterdam were given permission to dock at Port Everglades on April 2nd, after having been at sea for nearly a month.

We did so with great planning, precision, and caution. In no way, did we endanger our community. We took measures to care for the sick, we tested and quarantined other passengers, some we transported home.

I received thank you calls and letters from Consul Generals, ambassadors, and even people aboard those

ships. Broward's Port Everglades became known worldwide as the benevolent Port.

It's very hard to be leader, with bad news. You have to have conviction and confidence. Every choice is difficult and comes with consequences.

Nearly every week, I brought together all of Broward's city mayors to participate in a conference call to discuss our residents' individual concerns and needs.

These were unprecedented times. No government had ever told us to stay home, shut down our businesses, leave our jobs. No one had ever told us... to stay away from each other.

Let's face it.... we feared for our lives.

In three short months, our losses were big. The human toll was agonizing. Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach Counties had become the epicenter of Florida's COVID-19 crisis, with more positive cases and deaths from the coronavirus than the rest of Florida combined.

By March 25th, our airport was operating at 10-15 percent of capacity. Cruise ships shut down operations. The overall estimated economic loss to our tourism industry skyrocketed.

Working day and night, under extraordinary circumstances, Broward County took command as harm continued to come our way.

Our parks—once a place where people would exercise and recreate--became COVID-19 drive thru testing sites and food distribution locations. We were one of the first County's in the state to offer drive-thru and walk-up sites for people to be tested.

With the outstanding help from the Florida Dept of Health and Dr. Paula Thaqi, we protected our most vulnerable residents living in adult communities and Assisted Living Facilities.

We sheltered our homeless in local hotels. We also provided housing for people who needed a place to quarantine. We were among the very first County to offer mobile and in-home testing for the homebound elderly or disabled.

Our hospital districts (Broward Health, the Memorial Healthcare System, Cleveland Clinic, Baptist Health, and other hospitals) mobilized to make room for, manage and treat those with COVID-19. Our first responders and health care workers became our heroes.

The more we learned, the more we responded to address the needs of the public.

We opened and operated a COVID-19 call center and created a COVID-19 business complaint hotline for people to report violations. We hired extra code enforcement officers to inspect and address complaints of businesses who were not following the guidelines.

We learned to social distance, wash our hands, sanitize all facilities and by mid-April a new emergency order would be put in place, requiring people to wear a mask in Broward County when interacting with the public.

But that wasn't our only crisis. As we dealt with the coronavirus, an old demon would re-emerge.

Right in the middle of a Pandemic in May, George Floyd, was murdered in Minneapolis...in eight long legendary minutes-- that were witnessed around the world. It wasn't COVID that killed him, but it was just as insidious and it opened old wounds: Racism, police abuse, a flawed and biased criminal justice system. The public killing of a helpless black man.

Broward County experienced peaceful protests that included people of all ages, ethnicities, social and economic status, and some civil unrest too.

Our people took to the streets. People everywhere made their voices heard and loudly demanded change.

For years, conditions and social issues that I had been addressing in my district: Systemic racism, police abuse, a flawed criminal justice system, lack of opportunity, high unemployment and poverty would suddenly become a worldwide conversation, with one loud and repeated message: Black Lives Matter.

All of this taking place between the beginning of March to mid-May. Three short months. Roughly 90 days. In September: Unemployment in Broward County was at 15.2%.

If there was light at the end of the tunnel, it was only because we, as a community, made it so.

The relentless practice of staying at home, wearing masks, social distancing, proper hygiene, sanitizing, slowly began to change the tide. The number of COVID-19 cases began to slowly decline.

On May 13th, in conjunction with our neighboring counties, we began a modified Phase One re-opening of our economy.

We started slowly and expanded the re-opening of businesses, hotels, beaches, gyms, and park activities throughout the month.

We put necessary safety protocols in place, such as informational signage about COVID-19 and we ramped up enforcement and penalties for anyone not obeying emergency orders.

Broward County re-opened with a watchful eye and we continue that practice to this day.

When numbers spiked, we put curfews in place, kept bars closed, opened businesses with capacity limitations. We expanded the number of COVID-19 testing sites.

In September, Broward continued to move toward Phase 3 re-opening, thanks to the community's continued efforts and increased compliance with Emergency Orders.

By September 30th, after months of collaboration and compliance by our residents and businesses, Broward had successfully reduced the number of daily deaths from COVID-19, lowered the number of new cases, decreased positivity rates among most age groups and lowered hospitalizations.

Some relief came in the form of the CARES Act. Broward received \$340 million and distributed \$102 million to our cities. We also funded rental assistance programs to help people pay rent. Commissioners allocated \$25 million to help small businesses and \$10 million for non-profit organizations.

Broward County's unemployment has dropped to 8.2%.
(Sept 2020)

We were gaining some ground, as we learned to live and manage this novel virus. Carefully balancing public health, as we reopened our economy.

As we cautiously managed COVID-19, we remained vigilant in confronting the racial inequities that exist in our own community.

In October, with unanimous approval and cooperation of this Commission, we approved the creation of the 24-member Police and Criminal Justice Review Board. This Review Panel will gather data on police use of force and unfair treatment in the criminal justice system, publish data and reports, identify issues that can be addressed through policy changes, and make recommendations accordingly.

We know it's necessary. We've looked at the numbers:

- ▶ In Broward County, in 2019, 55% of convictions in our courts were Black people. Yet, Blacks make up only 30% of the population. (FDLE Criminal Justice Data Transparency Dashboard)
- ▶ Florida Dept. of Juvenile Justice shows that in 2019, 65% of youth arrested were Black.

- ▶ 2017: 86% of inmates were pretrial detainees, often too poor to post bond. (Broward Public Defender)
- ▶ Black people are 1.9 times more likely to be stopped for not wearing a seatbelt than if you are White. (ACLU 2016)
- ▶ Blacks make up 16.9% of Florida's population, yet they account for 49% of the people in prison. (Florida Dept. of Corrections)
- ▶ Tampa Bay Tribune: Study showed that Blacks receive, on average, 20% longer sentences for the same crime as compared to White people.

Earlier this month, we took another precedent setting step and voted to set a public hearing to create a Racial Equity Task Force. This Task Force will make recommendations to assist in identifying structural, systemic, and institutional racial inequities in Broward County and develop new policies aimed at eliminating racism.

The work of these two entities is the first step in creating real change.

And we know we must: The disparities are vast. Economic statistics tell the story:

- ▶ Blacks unemployment rate is 2X higher than Whites. (Economic Policy Institute, 2019)
- ▶ Black household income is 61% less than Whites (State of Working America, 2011)

- ▶ Black families have only one-tenth of the net worth of White families, the gap continues to grow. (Washington Post 2017)
- ▶ 38% of Black children in Broward County are living below the poverty line.
- ▶ Racial inequality is bad for our County and our Country--\$16 trillion has been erased from the U.S. GDP over the last two decades due to racial inequalities. If racial inequality gaps were addressed today--\$5 trillion could be added to the economy in next five years. (Citi 2020)

We often paint a rosy picture of life here in Broward County, but for many resident's life is not that way. The Police and Criminal Justice Review Board and the Racial Equity Task Force will give us broad, vivid insight into where we are in our diverse County...and forge a path forward to identify where we are going and how we are going to get there.

Prosperity for All is my life's mission.

So, what is the State of the County today? I would say it is on the road to recovery...a road that will be sometimes straight forward and smooth and at other times a bit bumpy.

With all that said, some really good things were accomplished in Broward County over the past year,

though our progress was overshadowed and slowed by the pandemic.

Let's not forget, that through it all, Broward County and all of our employees kept hard at work. Our bus drivers, emergency operations workers, public communications staff, call takers, diligently came to work every day. We improved our technology so thousands of employees could continue to provide county services from home.

We also continued to make great strides in projects that will create jobs, lower unemployment, and strengthen our economy that was destroyed as a result of COVID-19.

The transportation surtax, approved by voters, funded our Mobility Advancement Program, and during this year \$14-million dollars funded roadway, resiliency, fiber optics and school zone public works projects.

A total of \$122 million was approved to fund city planned transportation improvement projects. The surtax also provides full funding for the Municipal Community Shuttle Program in 18 municipalities, improved paratransit, and the Rider's Choice program.

This money also allows us to leverage more than \$17 million in federal grant funds, the largest award in the nation. The nearly \$150 million reinvestment in our

community is projected to create 1,488 direct jobs and have a direct economic impact of \$174.5 million.

This may also generate a ripple effect of economic activity from businesses that indirectly support these transportation-related projects which is estimated to produce 395 indirect jobs and an indirect economic impact of more than \$61 million. *

Most importantly, the “30 for 30” campaign, which places a 30% small business goal on eligible projects is bringing economic development opportunities to our locally owned small, minority and women owned businesses creating as much as \$53 million in contracting opportunities. *

Construction to expand the existing Convention Center continues and remains on schedule to open in 2021. That project kept hundreds of people employed...and Broward County’s new apprenticeship program provided workers for one project sub-contractor.

Although passenger traffic year-to-date through September dropped roughly 56% from the year before, the Fort Lauderdale Hollywood International Airport still made notable progress. The award-winning \$95-million reconstruction of the North Runway was completed in May. Payments to small businesses working on ongoing aviation contracts totaled more than \$90 million in FY2020.

At Port Everglades, the long-awaited project to deepen and widen the Port's navigational channels can now begin with \$29.1 million in funding under the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the fiscal year 2020 work plan. This will allow us to build a new facility for the U.S. Coast Guard Station in Fort Lauderdale, so the Intracoastal Waterway can be widened by 250 feet to better accommodate the largest cargo ships. This improvement project will create 2,200 construction jobs and nearly 1,500 additional permanent jobs locally.

Progress continues on the proposed Joint Government Center Campus project that will one day bring Fort Lauderdale City Hall and the Broward Government Center under one roof. This took a big leap forward, as plans were approved for the creation of a Design Criteria Package for the new facility.

This past week, building on the five year success of the Florida International Trade and Cultural Expo, known as FITCE, we held a "Doing Business with the World" virtual business meeting that brought together former Heads of State, Consul Generals, Trade Commissioners and Bi-National Chambers to educate local businesses about the best export, business and investment opportunities in over fifteen countries from five continents. And unveiled plans for the proposed World Trade Center Fort Lauderdale.

Broward County also successfully passed a **\$5.3 Billion** budget for Fiscal Year 2021 that kept the property (millage) tax rate the same as last year, as we continue to fund much needed public services.

In closing, we know that 2020 will definitely go down in history....and it is my hope that 2020 will change history as we strive to build a better, fairer, more equitable future for everyone.

COVID-19 taught us a lot. Most notably, that we are all connected, and we are all in this together. No matter what your race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, educational background, or geographical location.... the coronavirus does not discriminate. It knows no boundaries and unfortunately, it's not over yet.

Life has turned to what we refer to as the “new” normal. The economy is improving, businesses have re-opened, school is back in session.

In the future, we know that full recovery is going to take a long time. Some businesses have closed forever. Thousands of people across the county are still without jobs.

And of course, for those who have lost loved ones, family and friends, there is nothing that can be done to relieve

that pain and suffering; except to show empathy and compassion.

Hopefully, the year ahead will bring a vaccine that will control this virus and life will return to normal.

Unfortunately, there is no vaccine to cure racism or the biased, unfair treatment that over centuries has been ingrained into our culture and institutions. That is something, that only we, as one human race can accomplish together...and I do believe there is more commitment today to do that among people of all races, worldwide, than ever before.

That's why my 2050 Plan that focuses on Prosperity for All will continue to be my mission, even as my one-year service as Mayor comes to an end.

I can't stress enough the hard work and dedication that our County Administrator Bertha Henry, Deputy Administrator Monica Cepero, the entire leadership team, and all of our county employees, put in this past year. Our County Attorney, Drew Meyers and his team worked tirelessly to keep our county on track with the creation of enforceable emergency orders that protected the health and welfare of our residents.

Thank you to our city mayors, who came together to act as one community with a focused goal that could only be accomplished if we worked as one unified team.

Thank you to our federal and state leaders for your help and funding.

Thank you too, to those in our business community who stood strong, as our economy came to a near standstill.

And to our nonprofit organizations, who fed the hungry, found homes for the homeless, protected our children and the elderly and were always there for those who needed a hand.

I also want to thank my staff, Dr. Heidi Richards, Yashoda Lochan, Lorraine Giannetta, Lahoma Scarlette and Kimberly Maroe for the endless hours they spent working every day...and many weekends.

Thank you to my wife, my family and friends who supported me this entire year. I appreciate your love, support, and patience.

And to my colleagues, I thank you, for your service to Broward County and for allowing me to serve as Mayor this year.

In closing, I want to acknowledge and thank Broward County's nearly 2 million residents. You didn't always agree with our decisions. But you were our only priority when we made tough decisions and choices to save lives...

I promise you, that, together, we will be successful in building a better, more prosperous Broward County.

Thank you!