

**State of the City Address**  
**Mayor Francis X. Suarez**  
**February 26, 2018**

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Thank you all for being here. Gracias a todos por estar aquí. I am humbled as I look out into this historic chamber and see such a distinguished group of people. Today, I am joined by mayors, commissioners, city managers, school board members, state and federal officials, and even foreign dignitaries.

You are all here because at a fundamental level, you share a core belief with me: You believe that Miami - long known as a gateway city - is now a global city. And you understand that this is thanks to the wealth of our culture, the breadth of our diversity, the ingenuity and entrepreneurial spirit of our people. And you, like me, believe that it is our job as elected officials to foster and support the incredible things happening in our communities.

I am also joined today by the members of our community whose work is often overlooked. Those residents who volunteer their time for our city - the community organizers, the presidents of neighborhood associations, the members of boards and committees, the resident activists who come to City Hall and keep us, the elected officials, honest and inspired. These are the uncompensated, unsung heroes that constitute the soul of our city. We are also joined by the hard-working employees who keep our city running - the department directors, the police officers and fire fighters, the administrative assistants and park managers, the solid waste professionals, and so many others who are vital to our city's proper functioning. I've always respected our employees' selflessness, but your strength and grit in the aftermath of Hurricane Irma last September proved our city's resiliency.

In the past, some have said that Miami isn't a "civically-engaged" city. I would challenge those that make that claim to look out into these chambers today, at all of you, the hundreds of individuals who came here today because you care about the state of your city. It is all of you that give me the confidence to say, definitively and without reservation, that the state of our city is strong.

This past Friday marked the 100<sup>th</sup> day of my mayoralty. Many of you were next door with me at Dinner Key Marina on my very first day as Mayor, for my swearing-in ceremony, and if you were, you know why I chose to do this speech indoors. I have to admit, I was disappointed that day. So much hard work had led up to that speech, and everything was going so perfectly, but about halfway through, the heavens opened up and it absolutely poured on us. I remember being up on stage thinking, "boy, I sure hope this isn't a message from God warning me what it's like to be Mayor."

But soon, the skies cleared, and all of you – my colleagues and friends and family – came back out from your covered hiding places, and we continued the ceremony – and many of you actually crowded onto the stage with me, so that I was able to finish my speech surrounded by the people who helped me get there. The next day, our Vice Chairman Ken Russell sent me a photo he took on his phone after the rainstorm had ended. It was a picture of me finishing my speech, and in the background was not only a clear Miami sky, but a rainbow framing the stage.

Those of you who know me, know that I am a very spiritual person. When I saw that picture, I was reminded of the book of Genesis, where God says, “Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and a rainbow appears in those clouds, I will remember the covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind.” So if God was trying to send me a message that day, he sent it loud and clear. He promised to guide me in my service to the City, through good times and bad.

The 99 days that followed have been full of incredible progress, but have also been beset by moments of tragedy. The senseless killings in Parkland have shaken our region and our country to the core, but the resiliency of those parents, teachers, and especially students has reminded me of God’s promise to bring a rainbow after every storm.

This past week, our Commission reiterated Miami’s long-standing policy urging the federal government to ban assault weapons, and joined me in advocating for the banning of “bump stocks” as well. We also committed to putting officers in our schools and working with the School Board and the State to ensure we have the resources so that this never happens again. I am also exploring geo-fencing technology that would surround our schools and sound an alarm if a gun is brought within the perimeter. Harnessing twenty-first century technology is crucial in the fight against violent crime, both at schools and throughout our community.

That is why, the very next day after my swearing-in, the Commission unanimously approved my request for a significant expansion of our ShotSpotter program. For those of you who are not familiar with ShotSpotter, it is a high-tech gunfire detection system that geo-locates gunshots within five feet of where the gun was fired, giving our police officers a one-to-two minute lead time when responding to gunfire incidents. In the four years since we first brought ShotSpotter and other innovative strategies to Miami we have seen gunshot incidents fall by about 50 percent, and homicides fall by 35 percent. I am confident that this expansion will get us even closer to ending gun violence in Miami.

These first 100 days have seen us make other significant strides towards my vision for the City. In December, the Commission unanimously supported me in ending our red-light camera program. The red-light cameras were a source of revenue for the City, but they were also an unjust burden that disproportionately affected our low-income residents. It was imperative that

we end this program. I am happy to report that in two days – February 28th – the very last red-light camera ticket will be issued in the City of Miami.

*En solo dos días se apagará la última camarita de luz roja en nuestra ciudad.*

I would like to commend the Commissioners who co-sponsored this legislation with me, and Commissioner Joe Carollo for sponsoring parallel legislation on this issue and agreeing to combine it with mine. This was an issue that we were all passionate about, and I am extremely grateful that we were able to work together to carry out the will of our residents.

*Gracias a todos los comisionados que apoyaron, unánimemente, eliminar las camaritas de luz roja de Miami.*

In these first 100 days, I was also blessed to assemble a leadership team of incredible talent and integrity. This began with re-nominating Commissioner Keon Hardemon as our Chairman, and Commissioner Ken Russell as Vice-Chairman. They are both energetic, smart, and capable.

The next important step was the ratification of our new City Manager, Dr. Emilio Gonzalez. Emilio is a public servant of the very highest caliber. He is an army veteran, former Undersecretary of Homeland Security, and a highly-qualified administrator. Finally, and in my mind, most importantly, Emilio has been a proud resident of the City of Miami for almost 25 years. This is a man who is uncommonly qualified to be our City Manager. His intelligence, integrity, and experience are second-to-none. Further, he shares my vision for our City. Neither he nor I, came here to perpetuate mediocrity or the status quo. Thank you, Mr. Manager, for agreeing to lead our team.

Almost immediately after his ratification, our Manager had an extremely important choice to make. He had to replace retiring Police Chief Rudy Llanes. And before I continue, I want to take a moment to thank Chief Llanes for his years of exceptional service. We wish you all the best in your retirement.

We are living in an era of extreme public divisiveness when it comes to law enforcement, and the Police Department serves as the face of our government. They are the ones patrolling our streets, routinely interacting with residents. Our officers are being asked to do more every single day, under a lot more scrutiny. Consequently, the leader of our Police Department must possess not just intelligence and skill, but integrity, tact, and compassion.

Jorge Colina is that leader. He is a 27-year sworn officer with impressive credentials. He is fair, honest and apolitical, and he is truly committed to protecting our residents' quality of life. When he was sworn in, I issued a series of challenges to the Chief. First, I challenged him to reduce our

homicide rate by at least five percent, which would constitute a fifth consecutive year of improvement. Second, I challenged him to increase the rate at which we solve our homicides to 75 percent, which would far exceed the national average. And third, I asked our homicide detectives what the longest streak without a murder in the City of Miami has been, and the longest anyone could remember was eight weeks. So my third challenge to the Chief was the “eight week challenge.” Let’s see if we can go at least eight weeks without a homicide in the City of Miami this year. Thank you, Chief, for taking on these challenges, and for your commitment to make Miami the safest city in America.

In these 100 days, we held our first Neighborhood Town Halls, starting with Allapattah in December, moving to Coconut Grove in January, and most recently Model City just this past Saturday. Resident feedback is extremely important for me, and I am committed to continue holding these town halls in a different neighborhood each month, so that I can stay connected to our residents.

*Saber lo que está pasando en la comunidad es sumamente importante para garantizar que tengamos las soluciones correctas para los problemas de nuestra ciudad.*

I also held my first “Office Hours,” where I met one-one-one with City of Miami employees from across various departments. These sessions are crucial to understanding what is happening on the ground in our government, and I intend to hold them regularly.

Without a doubt, there has been a lot to be excited about in these first 100 days. Out of over 200 proposals, Amazon named us one of 20 finalists for the location of its second headquarters. Major League Soccer officially granted Miami an expansion franchise, headed up by global brands like David Beckham, Simon Fuller, Marcelo Claure of Sprint, Masa Son of SoftBank, and the Mas brothers. These are global brands converging in a global city. But being a global city is not just about being a destination – it is about civic engagement, charity, and compassion.

That is the kind of brand we are building when somebody like Drake chooses to come here not just to film his music video, but to donate close to a million dollars to our community. And even more impressively, the day after my swearing-in was the Miami Foundation’s annual “Give Miami Day,” so in my speech I called on our residents to participate. You all responded to the tune of ten million dollars. That is 10 million dollars our residents donated in a single day. That, to me, is the sign of a global city.

Our residents continue to heed the call. Alain Perez, the founder of EventStar, recently donated \$100,000 for a gun buy-back program. And Raoul Thomas, a prominent African-American businessman, recently invited hundreds of our kids from Overtown to watch *Black Panther* in theaters. I am confident that our residents will continue to make a difference. Send me your ideas on Twitter – @FrancisSuarez – for a new challenge we can create together.

These first 100 days have been long, hard days, but they have been fruitful days, as we have laid the groundwork for more great things to come for the City of Miami. Now, it is time to make our government a well-oiled machine, operating at maximum efficiency to serve our residents.

You have heard me say many times that we must ditch the antiquated systems that still exist in many of our departments, and use technology that is available to us in 2018. This starts with the development of a new City of Miami website that is user-friendly and focuses on accessibility, for which we will solicit resident feedback to create interactivity and efficiency. We also recently launched an Open Data site, which creates transparency and opportunities to collaborate with our tech community. And just last week, Miami was named one of the Champion Cities of the 2018 Bloomberg Mayors Challenge.

By the end of this year, we will also be modernizing our building review process. In 2018, there is absolutely no reason we should still be using a paper-based plan-review system. I envision a Miami where you can pull a permit from your smart phone, and we are going to make that vision a reality. Miami must be a tech-savvy city to prepare our residents for the jobs of tomorrow. This starts with education, continues with job training, and culminates with attracting top-tier brands to Miami. This includes tech companies like Tesla, WeWork, and Spotify, who can help redefine what Miami will look like in the future. If we want to remain competitive in the global marketplace, technology must be the economic driver of this city.

Throughout this year, I will be making announcements on partnerships with different companies that can establish us as a forward-thinking city, committed to elevating our residents' quality of life. These initiatives are meant to reinforce the narrative that Miami can nurture an inclusive tech ecosystem that benefits all members of our community, regardless of socio-economic status.

Becoming part of the knowledge-based economy and attracting tech innovators to our community is all part of Miami's transition from gateway to global city. It is also about maintaining Miami's strong connections with the international community, starting with the local consular corps – many of whom are represented here today. I just visited Israel a couple weeks ago, and I am going to continue to market Miami to parts of the world where we can further build our brand and strengthen economic connections.

I would like to recognize Commissioner Willy Gort for his efforts on the Mayor's International Council. Thank you, Commissioner Gort, for all you have done in building Miami's stature on the world stage.

Another big part of my mission to build and maintain Miami's brand is fighting the counter-branding efforts we have seen others employ against us. The reality is that we are in a global competition, and when you have a sunny, cosmopolitan city with a favorable tax environment, other cities are going to find some reason to attack you. In Miami's case, the counter-branding

we get is all about resiliency: Don't go to Miami, they say, or you'll be underwater in five, ten, or fifteen years. How do we fight that counter-branding? We do it by making Miami the most resilient city in the world.

We are on the front lines when it comes to climate change, and we received a wake-up call after Hurricane Irma last year. We were blessed to avoid a direct hit, but we still learned a lot from it. After Hurricane Andrew, we gave the world the gift of wind resiliency; now our job is to give the world the gift of water resiliency. We often look at water as an enemy, but we need to harness it and start seeing it as an asset. That begins with the completion of our updated Stormwater Master Plan, which will take into account sea level rise. We must also work together with the County and our neighboring municipalities, including Miami Beach, to take ownership of this issue and find solutions to improve our regional resiliency. As my good friend Mayor Dan Gelber says, "You can't say Miami Beach without Miami."

This past November, our residents put their faith in us to be good stewards of their taxes and we must make sure the Miami Forever bond is spent correctly and transparently. I am happy to report that last week the Commission approved, on first reading, the creation of a Citizen Oversight Board to ensure just that.

Resiliency is not only about climate change and sea level rise, it is about being prepared for anything that could negatively impact our city. I am mindful of threats looming on the horizon, including several lawsuits that expose our city to financial peril, and even threaten the viability of our City. I am committed to resolving these lawsuits in a way that benefits all parties, including our residents.

The cost of housing in Miami is one of the most pressing issues we have. During my first 100 days as Mayor, I have spoken to countless residents and held dozens of meetings looking for solutions to tackle this problem. Miami is a "Tale of Two Cities." On one hand, we have residents who can barely make ends meet – they are paying 70, 80, 90, even 100 percent of their incomes in rent. On the other hand, we have investors who are willing to spend millions of dollars in our city. As mayor, I am committed to bridge this divide. We must make sure that opportunities and prosperity filter down and benefit every single resident in the City of Miami.

*Necesitamos más viviendas asequibles en nuestra ciudad. Vamos a continuar trabajando para garantizar que todos los residentes de Miami, desde las personas de la tercera edad a los jóvenes recién graduados de la Universidad, puedan vivir dignamente.*

Fortunately, this city is blessed to have a Commission that has placed such a priority on affordable housing. Chairman Hardemon made sure that we dedicated an extra \$100 million from the Miami Forever Bond to create affordable housing, while Vice Chairman Russell allocated the next \$100 million from the Omni CRA. Right after being elected, Commissioners Reyes and Carollo made sure housing was a top priority. They have asked us to revisit ideas such as a Housing Authority and promoting homeownership.

We have held housing meetings to create a dialogue between the Commissioners, City employees, and residents, and this Thursday, March 1st, we will host an affordable housing workshop for our elected officials to receive public input. From there, our administration will generate a report laying out a comprehensive affordable housing strategy. With the team we have on the dais working together in service of our residents, I am confident that we will continue to find solutions to our housing crisis.

We cannot stop at housing our workforce. We must also strive to shelter the most vulnerable among us, our homeless population. Last year, I worked closely with the Miami-Dade Homeless Trust to fund a piece of their new Rapid Re-Housing Program. This funding empowers the Trust to place more and more of our homeless residents in permanent housing, where they can live in dignity. Going forward, I call on our regional partners to continue to support the Homeless Trust in its efforts. In particular, I ask that our friends in Miami Beach consider adopting the one percent Food and Beverage tax, which helps fund the Homeless Trust. It will make a world of difference for the neediest residents of our region.

Part of what makes us a global city is having world-class cultural and recreational facilities that our residents can be proud of. We do have some great facilities now, but many of them are over capacity. Look no further than Bayfront Park as a prime example. We want big events in our city, but we need to have a multitude of venues that can host them. For that reason, we need to make progress on sites like the Miami Marine Stadium, which can once again be an iconic event venue for our city.

The same goes for the Coconut Grove Playhouse. I have spoken with Mayor Gimenez and reiterated the City's \$10 million commitment towards the Playhouse's restoration. I look forward to working with him, the Lieutenant Governor, and our residents to restore the crown jewel of the Grove, Miami's oldest neighborhood which itself is undergoing a renaissance. In the same spirit, we need to continue to make progress on the Underline, the Ludlam Trail, and the renovations at Virginia Key Beach. These are complex projects involving coordination between many stakeholders, but they are worth the hard work. Our residents want and absolutely deserve world-class recreational and park facilities.

*Estamos trabajando junto al Condado y otras entidades para enriquecer la vida de nuestros residentes con más centros culturales y recreacionales.*

A great city is defined by its public spaces, and we can't claim to be a global city without them.

When I was elected, one of my priorities was expanding our trolley system to the northern and western parts of the city. Just recently, we cut the ribbon on a new route in Little Haiti, and we are working hard to introduce a new route in Flagami this year.

*Además de expandir nuestro sistema de trolleys en áreas como Flagami, continuaremos trabajando para solucionar los problemas más grandes relacionados con el tránsito y la congestión del tráfico en Miami.*

As for our regional transportation challenges, I continue to advocate strongly for the SMART Plan. I would like to commend Chairman Bovo of the County Commission for his leadership in creating TIF districts to help fund the SMART Plan. And Commissioner Xavier Suarez for presenting an innovative modality for Baylink at a Sunshine meeting last week. I would like to also urge the State Legislature to adopt the bill they are considering to restore the original intent of the half-cent sales tax. That money should be allocated to new construction, as was originally promised to the public. With the rate of disruption we are seeing in our world, if we take too long to expand our mass transit system, the private sector will simply innovate around us.

Finally, we have begun the process of reforming the way our government functions. Our City Manager has been instrumental in making common sense administrative changes that will allow us to strive for a standard of excellence. This transformation won't be complete until we reform the actual system of government itself to create more stability and accountability. We must adopt the "Strong Mayor" system employed by most big cities in the U.S. I believe that you, the voters, should be able to elect and potentially recall the City's top decision-maker. As I did in my mayoral campaign, I look forward to the process of collecting resident signatures to get these reforms on the ballot, and carrying out the will of the people.

I would like to close with a quote from Muhammad Ali. "Don't count the days, make the days count." Now that we've got 100 under our belt, I think we have settled in enough to stop counting, and start focusing on the future. Working every day to make Miami resilient, compassionate, smart, mobile, and safe. Together, we are solidifying Miami's status as a global city, and while there may be rainstorms, I know that after each one, together we will find the rainbow. Gracias y que Dios los bendiga.