



**Florida Department of Transportation-D-6  
Port of Miami Tunnel Study**

**News Clip**

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From: *Miami Herald*, Wednesday, February 21, 2007  
Subject: **Miami-Dade County Mayor Carlos Alvarez' State of the County speech**

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Sounding like a boom-time leader, Miami-Dade Mayor Carlos Alvarez endorsed massive new construction plans in his state of the county speech today, making no acknowledgement of fears that a stumbling real estate market and proposed tax cuts could strain the budget.

In his first major speech since winning broad new powers, Alvarez called for construction of a downtown stadium for the Florida Marlins, a tunnel for the Port of Miami, elevated pay-to-use lanes on Interstate 95 for commuters willing to pay extra and wireless Internet service for everyone.

"It's morning again in Miami-Dade County," said Alvarez, borrowing a famous line from Ronald Reagan's 1984 presidential campaign.

The only hint he gave for financing the projects was repeated references to sharing the burden with state and municipal agencies.

"To say it is expensive would be an understatement," Alvarez said of the port tunnel, which planners have estimated at \$1.2 billion, with half coming from the state. "But I ask you to resist the immediate urge to say no."

He compared the project to the Panama Canal, Golden Gate Bridge and Miami Beach's Government Cut: "American ingenuity and publicly financed projects [that] changed our community, nation and world."

The speech was delivered at the Carnival Center for the Performing Arts -- itself a massive and massively over-budget, delay-plagued county project.

But along with a new baseball stadium, the American Airlines Arena and a forthcoming Museum Park on Biscayne Bay, Alvarez said the arts center makes "an entertainment hub in the making that will rival even the most cosmopolitan city."

In a news conference after the speech, Alvarez acknowledged that property tax-cut plans in the state Legislature "will have an effect on our delivery of services," but said he nonetheless supports relief.

"If it means working more efficiently or tightening our belts, so be it," he said.

On the Marlins stadium -- a perpetually controversial issue, whose latest version would use funds designated to eliminate slum and blight -- Alvarez said he does not "intend to sell the farm to keep the Marlins here."

"It is not my goal to enrich the wealthy at the expense of our taxpayers," he said, drawing one of the speech's 23 applause breaks. "But I do believe there is justifiable cause for a government partnership in the management and construction of a baseball facility in our community."

The mayor also called for two new programs tied to his law-enforcement background: a blue-ribbon panel to study ex-convicts' return to society and a "gun bounty" that would provide cash rewards for tipping police to illegal firearms.

"We need to make sure our residents not only feel safe, but are safe," Alvarez said. He cited falling crime statistics, but acknowledged the plague of homicides, which he blamed on "gangs, drugs and guns."

Reaction from county commissioners, who uniformly opposed Alvarez's successful campaign to win strong-mayor powers, was cautiously warm.

"I'm glad to know the mayor's on board," said commission Vice Chairwoman Barbara Jordan, who was particularly pleased with Alvarez's plan for addressing ex-convicts. She was disappointed, she said, that Alvarez did not explicitly highlight her resolution asking Congress to reinstate a federal ban on assault weapons.

Commissioner Audrey Edmonson said two parts of the speech -- the focus on crime fighting and Alvarez's reaffirmation of his promise to clean up the county's housing agency -- signaled that Alvarez would not hold a grudge for the black community's especially strong opposition to last month's referendum.

"We all campaigned against the strong-mayor position," she said. "But our community, which felt it might lose out, just might turn out OK."

Indeed, Alvarez offered numerous rhetorical peace signs to the commission in general and Chairman Bruno Barreiro specifically.

"We opened a healthy and long overdue dialogue between the mayor and the chairman," he said of Barreiro. "Our respect for one another will serve this community well as we tackle tough issues."

Among those tough issues: lobbying and ethics reform, topics that could quickly derail the fragile peace between the county's executive and legislative branches. Though he did not elaborate in today's speech, Alvarez has previously floated strict new policies that would cap gifts to elected officials and bar lobbyists from making political contributions.

In one of County Hall's most carefully watched relationships, Alvarez also praised County Manager George Burgess. The mayor has publicly insisted he wants Burgess to stay, but political insiders have speculated about whether the manager would keep his job after the strong-mayor vote transferred much of his power to Alvarez.

"His knowledge and talents are invaluable," Alvarez said. "No one can help convey my goals and vision better."