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Board of County Commissioners

Ken Keechl

Commissioner - District 4

115 S. Andrews Avenue, Room 412 • Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33301 • 954-357-7004 •
FAX 954-357-7798 www.broward.org

Broward County's FY '09 Budget Process

By Broward County Commissioner Ken Keechl, District 4

As I promised each of you during my campaign to be your Broward County Commissioner, I will never vote to raise your property taxes. My philosophy is simple. I recognize that this is your money, not mine. So when faced with a proposed expenditure, I ask myself the following question: Is this item truly necessary? If not, I have voted against the expenditure and I will continue to do so.

Since taking office in November 2006, and in furtherance of my campaign promise, I have led the charge on the County Commission to lower your property taxes. Last year, we were successful in reducing the County's FY '08 budget by almost \$100,000,000.00. It wasn't easy, but we instituted a hiring freeze; agreed to eliminate unnecessary expenditures; and re-evaluated the need for each and every program offered by the County.

This year I again intend to keep my promise to each of you.

The Broward County Commission has recently begun the FY '09 budget process. The tax rolls have not yet been certified by our Property Appraiser, Lori Parrish, but based on a significant decrease in property values, and after reviewing some preliminary data; I believe that the Broward County Commission will need to eliminate at least another \$100,000,000.00 from our FY '09 budget.

Make no mistake. This year will be harder than last year. Instead of last year's hiring freeze, this year some County employees will have to be laid off; others will have to work harder and more efficiently. Already we have approved County Administration's plans to consolidate certain departments, divisions and sections within the Broward County government's vast bureaucracy. We will undoubtedly see a slight decrease in the number of hours that our parks and libraries will remain open. Unproductive bus routes will be consolidated or eliminated.

I am again asking Broward County Administration to review all previously approved capital expenditures. I am convinced that many of the projects currently within Broward's Capital budget are unnecessary and should be postponed, if not eliminated.

Lastly, in furtherance of our goal to lower property taxes in FY'09, the County Commission has also requested that BSO reduce its budget by approximately 10 percent or \$50,000,000.00. Since BSO spends approximately 50 cents of every \$1.00 that Broward County collects in property taxes, this request is proportionate and reasonable. Yet, because I am not unmindful that the economy is in a possible recession, I recognize that crime may increase in the near term. As a result, I will not advocate, nor vote for, any reduction of police officers or fire fighters from BSO's FY '09 budget.

Nevertheless, there are plenty of expenditures in BSO's FY '09 budget that should be reduced. BSO's overtime and public relations expenditures are just two simple examples of areas that I have asked BSO to review. I am confident that Sheriff Lamberti will work with the Commission over the summer to reduce his budget, while simultaneously insuring that Broward's residents continue to be safe and protected.

In closing, I would like to once again thank you for the honor of being your County Commissioner. It is a job that I do not take lightly. Together we can, and will, make Broward County a better place for our families and loved ones. As usual, if you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at kkeechl@broward.org or 954 357-7004. Remember, I work for you.