

ANOTHER VIEWPOINT

Economy boosted when businesses work together



BY CHRISTINE BARNEY AND JACK SEILER

Although we are divided by county lines, colorful cultural differences, and diverse and distinct personalities, Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties must be aligned when it comes to confronting challenges that impact the South Florida region.

The rationale is clear:

■ The three counties share a workforce, many of whom live in one county and work in another and everyone demands better and more cost-efficient mobility, transportation and housing options.

■ Man-made borders are irrelevant on issues like sea-level rise.

■ We are fighting an uphill battle for dollars. Our three counties are ranked by the Bureau of Economic Analysis as #1, #2 and #5 in terms of GDP in the state equaling \$315.2 billion, yet we send more dollars to Tallahassee than we get back.

■ We are not keeping up with the Joneses. The success of regional partnerships elsewhere in Florida and across the nation serve as a model and a warning.

The model is clear – counties acting as a region are stronger together. The warning is just as clear. Our history of competitiveness for dollars, businesses and residents fuels inefficiencies reduces impact and allows other regions to beat us in the halls of government. Collaborating as a region improves our chances for success. We saw the proof in the recent Amazon HQ bid as the South Florida regional entry made it to the finals.

So how do we learn to play well in the sandbox? First, there must be a convener offering a neutral, safe space. The South Florida Business Council (SFBC) was created to be that convener.

The SFBC is a strategic partnership among the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce, Greater Fort Lauderdale

Chamber of Commerce, and Chamber of Commerce of the Palm Beaches. These three groups, whose members represent almost 1 million employees, are the voice of business in South Florida. They set aside any competitive obstacles and agreed to use their collective resources to address South Florida's critical regional issues. The SFBC will develop solutions and use its political clout to help ensure the region gets its fair share of dollars at both the state and federal levels.

Second, parameters must be set to keep regional efforts focused. In the first quarter of its operation, the SFBC created a "Top Five Watch List," which prioritized issues based on contributed thoughts and input from the individual chambers and civic leaders. You can find the list at www.SoFloBusinesscouncil.com. These include:

1. Mobility/transportation: Increasing commute times have a direct effect on the economy through decreased worker productivity, delays in shipping and dissuading outside companies from relocating

2. Education quality: Education is the building block of economic development

3. Water management: Sea level rise, flooding, water management, beach health – the list of issues around this critical resource is long and complex

4. Affordable housing: South Florida is the nation's 12th most expensive metro area. Affordable housing offers a value-added impact in that it often reduces stress on transportation systems by eliminating commutes.

5. Tourism growth: While we have many industries in South Florida, tourism is a historic mainstay in adding direct and indirect economic impact

The SFBC has already inspired an increased political will to come together on regional solutions. We must keep a spotlight on these issues and speak with one voice as we generate solutions and fight for the state and federal legislative support we deserve. The SFBC lets us carry a bigger stick and we shouldn't be afraid to use it.

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