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**Broward Mayor Barbara Sharief delivers State of the County Address.**

**By Kimberly Maroe**

Broward Mayor Barbara Sharief says job creation is high, unemployment is stable and county property taxes are lower than the year before. She made the comments at the 9th Annual Broward Workshop "State of Our County" Address with an estimated one thousand people in attendance.

"Our \$4.5 billion balanced budget this year finances major improvements at the airport and Port Everglades and major capital projects that will provide jobs for years to come," said Mayor Sharief.

"In addition, Commissioners cut the ad valorem tax rate by 1% to give property owners with a homestead exemption a tax break and added an additional \$25,000 homestead exemption earmarked for low income senior citizens," said Sharief.

The Broward Workshop hosts "The State of Our County" forum annually to address current and future issues related to Broward County business.

Mayor Sharief noted that job creation remains strong as employers provided 20,400 jobs in February, a 4.5% increase from the same time last year. The unemployment rate of 4.5% is the same as in 2016.



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Passenger travel at Fort Lauderdale Hollywood International Airport totaled more than 2.8 million people, a sharp 9.4% increase from 2016 as total passenger traffic by the end of year is expected to exceed a record setting 32 million people. Improvements at the airport continue with Concourse A at Terminal 1 expected to open early June, adding five new gates at completion with international capability and a new U.S. Customs and Border Protection Facility and centralized TSA security check-point.

Broward County's Port Everglades had a record-setting month in cargo in December 2016, logging 104,590 TEUs (20-foot equivalent units, the industry's standard measurement for containers), moving through the Port. "This is the highest producing month in the Port's nearly 90 year history and a 15 percent increase over December 2015," noted Sharief. The number of people taking cruises from Port Everglades topped 3.8 million in 2016, as Broward welcomes the newest Celebrity Cruises' ship Celebrity Edge in 2018 and Silversea Cruises' newest cruise ship Silver Muse later this year.

Business growth in Broward County remains strong says the Mayor, who created the "Broward Means Business" initiative in 2014. "According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics there are nearly 68,000 private businesses in our County, an increase of over 2,000 from the third quarter of last year," said Sharief.

Looking ahead Broward County is moving forward with plans to expand the Broward County Convention Center and build a headquarters hotel. "Challenges in the future include funding for adequate public transportation and affordable housing to accommodate expected population growth. Keeping our port, airport and all county buildings safe and secure remains a number one priority," said Sharief.

Featured speakers this year included George L. Piro, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI Miami Division and Jerry Parrish, Ph.D., Chief Economist & Director of Research, Florida Chamber Foundation. Broward Vice Mayor Beam Furr and Commissioners Chip LaMarca, Nan Rich and Michael Udine attended the morning break-fast, which annually draws hundreds of people from all facets of business and industry.

The Broward Workshop is a private, non-profit, non-partisan business organization established in 1981, consisting of the chief decision makers representing 100 of Broward County's major businesses and professions.

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