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## Taking care of what matters most: Hard times still good times to give

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Some eyebrows may have been raised when Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke acknowledged for the



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first time, speaking before the Joint Economic Committee of Congress, that a "recession is possible." Yet for South Floridians — who have been witness to one of the most rapidly declining housing markets and highest oil prices in the country — signs of an economic downturn have been apparent for months. In an effort to protect assets and mitigate loss, most individuals and businesses have already begun to tighten their budgets. But while many of us may need to cut back on how much we spend, it is imperative that we not cut back on how much we give.

As a young child, I was exiled from Cuba to the United States under Operation Pedro Pan, and I am a living testament to the profound impact community support can have on an individual's success. Operation Pedro Pan, coordinated by the Roman Catholic Church, the U.S. government and Cuban

patriots, brought me and more than 14,000 other unaccompanied minors to America so that we could receive an education free from communism. Without their coordinated generosity, I would not be where I am today.

For the most vulnerable in our community, social-service agencies are often a final safety net. Unfortunately, this net will likely widen, and we will likely see a higher demand for social services from people who have never sought help before. According to a report released this month by the Department of Labor, 80,000 jobs were cut in March, marking the third straight month that jobs have fallen and the longest period of decline since early 2003.

In tough economic times, charitable giving becomes all the more important. A well-funded, well-managed organization has the potential to do more than give hope. Every year United Way of Miami-Dade invests in programs and builds partnerships that equip people with the tools and resources to overcome obstacles and ultimately achieve long-term independence. It works with volunteers and social service agencies to advocate for better policies and leverage resources that strengthen our community.

While Bernanke's testi-

mony may have put some on edge, the outlook is not all grim. The year I came to the United States, our country was facing one of the toughest economic and political crises of our times. Yet the generosity of our community did not falter. Today I continue to be impressed by our city's ability and willingness to come together. History has shown that together, we can ride the tide and come out stronger.

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