

Dear Friends,

This week marks the beginning of the 2009 spring training baseball season. I am grateful for the 14 Major League clubs who train in Florida, and the 29 Minor League clubs who play throughout the spring and summer, plus our own Rays and Marlins. These teams are bringing fans to the Sunshine State, providing family-friendly entertainment for Floridians and visitors. Minor League attendance in 2008 reached a record, including almost 1.4 million in Florida.

All of these Florida teams are a major part of Florida's economy, and the support of fans and visitors is important to their success. The sports industry in Florida is now a \$36-billion-a-year industry, employing over 400,000 Floridians. From the people who sell those great hot dogs – to the ticket vendors, these jobs are important to our economy. Spring training alone means over \$450 million for Florida each year.



Now more than ever, as Florida and the nation face historic economic challenges – we must build on these successes. Here in Florida I remain committed to nurturing and expanding baseball and other sports industries.

As Floridians, you have access to the great family entertainment that Minor and Major League clubs provide throughout the summer. I hope you take advantage of the excitement right here in our own back yard.

May God bless you and the state of Florida.

Charlie Crist



Photo Caption:

Governor Crist throws out the ceremonial first pitch in the 2009 Spring Training opener between the Houston Astros and the Washington Nationals to first base coach Jose Cruz, at Osceola County Stadium in Kissimmee.