



CHARLIE CRIST
GOVERNOR

STATE OF FLORIDA

Office of the Governor

THE CAPITOL
TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA 32399-0001

www.flgov.com
850-488-7146
850-487-0801 fax

Governor Charlie Crist's 2008 State of the State Address March 4, 2008

Remarks prepared for delivery

Good evening. Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Lt. Governor, Mr. Chief Justice and members of the court, members of the Cabinet, the Legislature, honored guests, and my fellow Floridians across our state. Good evening to you all.

I also want to recognize my family seated in the gallery, my mother, my father, my sisters and their families. Thank you for your support. I love you very much.

I want to thank Sergeant Allison Jean Justice from Jacksonville for her service to the American people. Whether serving in Iraq, Afghanistan or other places around the world, the members of the Florida National Guard and our Armed Forces are protecting our freedoms in distant places. General Burnett, good to see you. And Representative Mike Scionti, Captain Scionti – welcome home.

It is good to be here with all of you this evening.

In many ways, tonight marks a new beginning. We begin a new tradition of speaking to our fellow Floridians at a time of day when every Floridian can explore the opportunities and challenges that lie before us. So, tonight we open another window into the workings of their government. For the Floridians listening to this address for the first time – a special welcome.

Thank you, President Ken Pruitt and Speaker Marco Rubio for your great work. Because of your leadership and the tireless work of the people in this chamber, and the work I know that you will continue to do, tonight my friends I can report to you that the state of our state is indeed strong.

A year ago I stood here before you as Florida's new Governor. Together, we have faced many challenges – from spiraling property taxes and insurance rates, to devastating tornadoes that claimed 21 lives. And together we have taken on these challenges.

Florida's families and business are faced with extraordinary economic times – sky rocketing gas prices, the threat of foreclosure and a softening housing market. And, like Florida's families, these challenging times will require us to meet the demands of declining revenues.

And how will we do this?

By keeping taxes low, creating jobs, and fueling an economy that ranks ahead of most nations of the world, we set a model at which others can marvel.

– more –

Governor Crist's 2008 State of the State Address

Page 2

Pessimists see problems, while optimists see opportunities. You know I am an optimist, but no matter the perspective, we can dare to be great.

In early 2007, this Legislature passed, and I signed, a law lowering property insurance companies' costs with the condition they pass those savings on to policy holders by cutting rates.

Since then, no new rate increases have been approved. Thank you, Commissioner Kevin McCarty for your great work on behalf of the people. Rates have dropped an average of nearly 16 percent – and we will continue fighting for the people. I would urge my fellow Floridians to visit ShopAndCompareRates.com to find lower rates.

The message was clear: This Governor and this Legislature can, and will, work together to help Floridians realize – and keep alive – the dream of owning a home.

And acting as the people's trustees, you passed a \$15 billion property tax cut – the largest tax cut in our state's history. And voters made their voices heard loud and clear with the passage of Amendment 1, bringing another \$9.3 billion in property tax relief.

...A \$25 billion tax cut over the next five years, all right back into the pockets of Florida's families.

And at a time when families need it most. Families like the Randolphins...

(Video of personal story about property taxes)

These property tax cuts are just the beginning. We can and should continue to fight for property tax relief and I encourage the Taxation and Budget Reform Commission, led by our great former Speaker of the House Allan Bense, to give the people the opportunity to vote for another tax cut. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Just as Amendment 1 gave the people of Florida the opportunity to let their voices be heard, so has the significant election reform you passed last year. By moving up our state's presidential primary, Floridians turned out in record numbers to truly make an impact on who will become the next President of the United States. And when we dutifully cast our paper ballots this November, we will do so knowing that the integrity of this process, the very foundation of our democracy, has been protected by the actions of this body. Just 90 miles south of us in Cuba, there are those who dream of having this privilege and we must honor them by casting our ballots in November.

One of my top priorities is making certain that every child in Florida has the opportunity to live in a loving, safe and permanent home. Together, we are increasing the number of successful adoptions. Thanks to the hard work of the Office of Adoption and the Department of Children and Families – Secretary Butterworth, what an incredible advocate you are for the children of our state – and their many workers in the field, who are ensuring that more of Florida's children find loving homes.

Homes like Vivian Wilson's. Vivian chose to adopt three teenage sisters. She is proud of the way the girls have gained confidence socially, academically and intellectually – proud that they are accepting challenges that they used to shy away from.

And as much as we focus on finding adoptive families for foster children, we are also focused on protecting those who remain in the state's care. That's why I've recommended \$9.8 million to purchase "all-in-one" case management devices. Developed with our friends in the private sector at UPS, we can revolutionize how we protect Florida's foster children. Up until now, we have done a better job in this country tracking packages than we have tracking the children placed in our care. This tool will help our caseworkers focus on doing casework instead of paperwork in living rooms instead of behind a desk. Our children deserve no less and I urge you to support this funding.

I believe in second chances. Every child of God is entitled to a second chance. Not only must we compensate those like Alan Crotzer who have been wrongfully accused, we must also forgive those who broke the law and paid their debt to society and provide them the opportunity to restore their dignity and their self worth. Thanks to the good work of my fellow Cabinet members, the civil rights of thousands of Floridians have been restored – Floridians like Lisa Burford. Here's Lisa's story:

(Video of personal story about restoration of civil rights)

I am proud to say Lisa was able to cast her vote on January 29th.

I am also especially proud of initiatives we have launched in the past year at little or no cost to taxpayers. Proof that government can serve the people without spending their money.

Since December, we have helped over 28,000 Floridians receive discounted prescription drugs through the Florida Discount Drug Card. People like 20 year old Jackie who sent me this e-mail:

"Dear Mr. Crist, I'm a full-time college student and lost both of my parents by the age of 19. I have not been able to go to the doctor due to prescription drugs costing more than my doctors visit. I have applied for the card and I know this will help young adults just like me."

The success of the program lies in the state's ability to negotiate on behalf of millions of Floridians to lower drug prices. Eligible Floridians can go to FloridaDiscountDrugCard.com to sign up.

And what will we do in the coming year to continue moving Florida forward?

We will plan for the future while still protecting and caring for our most vulnerable – our children, our elderly and our disabled.

Fiscal discipline has afforded us financial reserves to invest in our future while balancing our budget during difficult economic times.

We have reserves for times when we need them.

For times when we need to sustain our commitment to those who rely upon us most,

For times when we need to invest in ourselves and our future,

For times when waiting can be too costly.

Governor Crist's 2008 State of the State Address

Page 4

My legislative package sets clear priorities and outlines a comprehensive plan for moving Florida forward.

It strengthens the pillars that make our state great, the pillars that must be in place for us to be strong:

Healthy Families

World Class Schools

Safe Neighborhoods

A Vibrant Economy

Sustainable Natural Resources

These pillars must be our priorities.

The lack of health insurance is the primary barrier to accessing health care. In Florida, 3.8 million people have no health insurance – including 650,000 children. And this barrier exists not just for the poor and disadvantaged. Florida's hardworking families and small business owners are facing the same barrier every day – business owners like the Silvermintz family. Here's their story:

(Video of personal story about accessible health care)

This lack of access to health care is unacceptable. Together we can seek a comprehensive, market-based strategy that can provide uninsured Floridians with affordable health and dental care.

I am proposing \$63.9 million for the Florida Health Access System. This three-year pilot joins the State, local hospitals and county health departments in partnerships to provide preventive and primary health care services to the uninsured.

Communities across our state have found it difficult to provide access to health care for their people. This is not of their doing, but that of government.

Anti-competitive, bureaucratic barriers to affordable health care must be eliminated.

I propose \$60.6 million to be targeted toward enrolling more than 46,000 additional children in the KidCare program.

Child obesity is another threat to Florida's children.

The Governor's Council on Physical Fitness is charged with developing a state plan to promote physical fitness and sound nutrition. Last week, we challenged our elementary students and schools to do even more by participating in the Governor's Fitness Challenge. With us today is one of our state's outstanding PE teachers – Suzy Corace, Lee County's Teacher of the Year.

– more –

We must maintain our commitment to protect Florida's natural beauty and resources. We must establish a successor to Florida Forever. To strive for natural water flow, I also propose that we fully-fund Florida's share of Everglades restoration and continue restoring Lake Okeechobee and downstream coastal estuaries.

Serve to Preserve is this Administration's commitment to lead – and we are leading by example. We will work to conserve energy within State government and, together with the private sector, reduce our carbon emissions.

A recent Orlando Sentinel editorial recognizes that our choice is not whether we can afford to go green... but that – even in this tight budget year – we can't afford not to.

Our economy is inextricably linked to our environment.

Many businesses are recognizing that there is gold in green. Publix is one such business. Allow me to introduce Mr. Dave Duncan, Vice President of facilities for Publix Super Markets.

(Video of personal story about energy and economic development)

Thank you, Dave and Publix, for your leadership.

We must continue to fuel Florida's Innovation Incentive Program to bring cutting-edge, world-class research centers to the state. These centers are economic catalysts that drive discovery and collaboration, diversify our economy and bring high-wage, high-skill, secure jobs to Florida.

And this strategy is already working.

What Florida has done for biotech, it can also do for clean tech.

That's why I'm recommending a \$200 million economic development package for solar, wind and other renewable energy, and to promote biofuels in Florida and encourage alternative fuels such as ethanol. We have the opportunity to enhance the use of this cleaner fuel, while also providing a broader market for sugar cane and citrus waste. Thank you Commissioner Bronson for your work to explore non-food sources of ethanol production in your Farm to Fuel efforts.

Our current path in education has reaped significant gains in student achievement in reading and math over the past five years. Florida's school performance has now risen from 31st to 14th among all states and risen to 7th in achievement.

While the vast majority of teachers are committed, some demonstrate exceptional creativity in bringing out the best in their students – our children.

In the same way, the Merit Award Program you created last year rewards our best and brightest public school teachers. I recommend we fully fund these teacher bonuses for those who improve student achievement and who work diligently to improve their teaching skills through national peer

review.

It is important we continue to tell our best teachers – Teachers like Michelle Lingo, Escambia County's Teacher of the Year: Thank You for a Job Well Done.

Florida's universities and community colleges provide the next critical step in the education of our people. These institutions are producing the future leaders of our state, our nation and the world. We must continue to invest in higher education.

My budget provides for more than \$5 billion for higher education and that is an increase over last year.

Not only is it essential that we stand by our schools, we must also stand by our neighborhoods.

In the Preamble to the Constitution, one of the primary roles of government is defined as ensuring domestic tranquility, which means keeping our people safe.

We are fulfilling this responsibility with tougher laws and increased enforcement along with crime prevention strategies within the criminal justice system. Effective legislation such as Stop Turning Out Prisoners and 10-20-Life is making an impact on the crime rate, while the Anti-Murder Act will prevent future tragedies. Thank you for passing this important legislation. And we must also work together to address crime in our state, including gang activity.

I was proud to launch the Attorney General's Cyber Crime Unit in 2005 to thwart the actions of those who target our children. Attorney General Bill McCollum has made fighting this crime a top priority. Thank you, General.

For families to feel safe, for them to be truly safe, they cannot be worried about losing their home to foreclosure. That's why I recently announced the Florida HOPE taskforce charged with making recommendations to help families who have found themselves victims of the housing crisis. Chief Financial Officer Sink, the Lt. Governor and I look forward to working with you on this very important issue.

All of us in this chamber are guided by our instincts, but we must also continue to be responsive to the people who sent us here. Their wisdom and their experience in the real world makes up a significant portion of the knowledge base from which we must lead.

Even in this election year, we must remember our first duty is to the people, not to our parties. Our first duty is to work together, and our first duty as, Abraham Lincoln declared, is to be a government of the people, by the people and for the people.

Abraham Lincoln declared to the nation this is a government of the people, by the people and for the people.

I admit to not having all of the answers and believe all of you in this chamber will admit to the same.

Governor Crist's 2008 State of the State Address

Page 7

But we know where to find them.

We can find answers in the hearts of the people of Florida. They are our most important resources. The people of Florida offer us our daily education and inspiration. They look to us to be their voice.

We too must inspire. Yes, we face some challenges – or opportunities – but all of us would do well to remember Ronald Reagan's words. He said we must:

"...keep our rendezvous with destiny ... uphold the principles of self-reliance, self-discipline, morality, and, above all, responsible liberty for every individual that we will become that shining city on a hill."

Fellow Floridians, President Reagan inspired us to see what is possible and dared us to be great. He was daring us to be leaders.

I love Florida, I love her with all of my heart. Her possibilities are endless, and our optimism should be boundless.

Together we are moving Florida forward.

Thank you and God Bless the Great State of Florida.

###