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“Let’s Get to Work...Together”

Governor Rick Scott
2012 State of the State Address

*Florida State Capitol Building – House Chamber
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REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

THANK YOU.

MY FELLOW FLORIDIANS, PRESIDENT HARIDOPOLOS, SPEAKER CANNON, MEMBERS OF THE FLORIDA SENATE AND FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, CHIEF JUSTICE CANADY, MEMBERS OF THE FLORIDA SUPREME COURT, MY FELLOW CABINET MEMBERS, ATTORNEY GENERAL PAM BONDI, CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER JEFF ATWATER, COMMISSIONER OF AGRICULTURE ADAM PUTNAM, AND LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR JENNIFER CARROLL, IT IS AN HONOR TO BE WITH YOU ALL HERE TODAY.

YOU KNOW, I’VE ALWAYS BEEN A BIG BELIEVER IN GETTING TO WORK EARLY, BUT THIS IS THE FIRST TIME WE’VE EVER SHOWN UP FOR WORK TWO MONTHS EARLY.

PLEASE ALLOW ME TO RECOGNIZE MY WIFE OF 39 YEARS, ANN, MY DAUGHTER ALLISON, MY SON-IN-LAW PIERRE, AND MY 8-WEEK-OLD GRANDSON AUGUSTE, WHO ARE ALL HERE WITH US TODAY.

PEOPLE ALWAYS ASK ANN AND ME WHY WE RAN FOR THIS JOB. OUR ANSWER IS GROUNDED IN THIS ONE SIMPLE TRUTH: WE CAN NEVER LOOK AT OUR CHILDREN, ALLISON AND JORDAN, AND NOW OUR GRANDCHILD, AUGUSTE, WITHOUT FEELING OUR LOVE FOR THEM. AND WE KNOW THIS TYPE OF LOVE ALSO CARRIES A DUTY. THAT DUTY IS TO LEAVE OUR CHILDREN A BETTER PLACE THAN WE INHERITED. IT’S THE SAME DUTY THAT PROBABLY BROUGHT YOU TO THIS CHAMBER TODAY, AND IT’S A DUTY THAT EXTENDS TO ALL CHILDREN OF THIS STATE.

LIKE YOU, WE’RE WILLING TO GIVE OUR ALL TO MAKE FLORIDA THE BEST PLACE TO LIVE AND RAISE A FAMILY; A STATE WHERE YOU CAN FIND A JOB, GET A QUALITY EDUCATION FOR YOUR CHILDREN; A STATE WHERE YOU CAN ENJOY A LOW COST OF LIVING FREE OF BURDENSOME TAXES AND UNNECESSARY GOVERNMENT INTERFERENCE; A STATE WHERE DREAMS BECOME REALITY EVERY DAY.

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LAST SESSION, TOGETHER WE MADE THE CHANGES NECESSARY TO IMPROVE THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE CITIZENS OF OUR STATE. EDUCATION, PENSION AND MEDICAID REFORMS COUPLED WITH GOVERNMENT REORGANIZATION AND DEREGULATION HAVE ALL HELPED TO PRODUCE JOBS, SAVE TAXPAYER MONEY, IMPROVE THE EDUCATION OF OUR CHILDREN AND BRING DOWN THE COST OF LIVING FOR ALL FLORIDIANS.

WE WORKED TOGETHER TO ACCOMPLISH ALL OF THIS, AND SO IF I HAVEN’T YET TOLD YOU FACE-TO-FACE, LET ME TELL YOU NOW...ON BEHALF OF THE CITIZENS OF FLORIDA, THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU!

LIKE ALL OF YOU, I LOVE MY WORK. I TELL PEOPLE EVERYWHERE I GO, IF YOU LIKE PEOPLE AND YOU LIKE MAKING A DIFFERENCE, THERE’S NO BETTER JOB THAN BEING THE GOVERNOR OF FLORIDA. I’VE BEEN ON THE JOB A YEAR NOW, AND I HAVE TRAVELED ALL OVER THE STATE. I’VE HAD THE HONOR OF MEETING AND LISTENING TO THOUSANDS OF FLORIDIANS, AND THEY’VE SHARED WITH ME THEIR JOYS AND CONCERNS.

YOU KNOW WHAT? IT TURNS OUT WE SHARE THE SAME JOY AND THE SAME CONCERN.

THE JOY IS IN LIVING IN THIS MOST SPECIAL PLACE; LIVING IN FLORIDA. IT’S A PLACE OF SUNSHINE, AND BEACHES, AND CITIES THAT PULSE WITH ENERGY AND LIGHT. IT’S A PLACE WHERE CLEAR RIVERS FLOW TO BLUE OCEANS, AND A PLACE WHERE BOLD PEOPLE COME TO BUILD THEIR DREAMS. FROM OUR SHORES, WE HAVE LAUNCHED MEN TO THE MOON. AND WITH THIS SAME BRAVE SPIRIT MILLIONS HAVE COME TO PLANT THEIR FLAG IN FLORIDA SOIL TO BUILD SOMETHING NEW AND BETTER. I KNOW I DID. I KNOW MANY OF YOU HERE TODAY HAVE FELT THIS JOY, TOO.

BUT WITH THAT JOY COMES A NAGGING DOUBT. WHEN I TALK TO FLORIDIANS, THEY WORRY THAT THEIR BEST OPPORTUNITIES ARE BEHIND THEM; THAT THEIR CHILDREN MAY NEVER EXPERIENCE THE SECURITY AND PROSPERITY THEY HAVE KNOWN. THEY WONDER WHETHER THE RINGING PROCLAMATION OF PROGRESS HAS BEEN SILENCED; THAT THE BIRTHRIGHT OF EVER-GREATER PROMISE AND OPPORTUNITY THAT WE ONCE SAW AS BEING WITHIN OUR REACH MAY, INSTEAD, NOW BE UNATTAINABLE.

AND IT IS UNDERSTANDABLE THEY WOULD FEEL THIS DOUBT. FOLLOWING A SERIES OF VERY PRODUCTIVE AND PROSPEROUS YEARS, FLORIDIANS SAW THE UNEMPLOYMENT RATE BEGIN TO STEADILY CLIMB IN THE FALL OF 2006. FROM A LOW OF 3.3 PERCENT THAT YEAR IT GREW TO A HIGH OF 12 PERCENT IN DECEMBER 2010! FLORIDIANS SAW HOME VALUES DROP, WAGES DECLINE, AND JOBS AND OPPORTUNITIES FADE AWAY.

MY FELLOW FLORIDIANS, I’M HERE TODAY TO TELL YOU THAT PROMISE AND OPPORTUNITY WILL RETURN; IN FACT ARE RETURNING EVEN AS WE MEET HERE TODAY. WHILE WE HAVE MANY MILES TO GO, AND SOME OF THEM WILL BE PAINFUL, OUR HIGHER JOURNEY IS ALREADY UNDER WAY. THIS YEAR AND TODAY WE SEE THE REBIRTH OF AN EVEN GREATER FLORIDA.

DON’T JUST TAKE MY WORD FOR IT. LOOK AT THE NUMBERS.

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IN THE PAST YEAR, FLORIDIANS, NOT GOVERNMENT, CREATED ALMOST 135,000 NEW PRIVATE SECTOR JOBS. WE NETTED MORE THAN 120,000 TOTAL JOBS IN THE FIRST 11 MONTHS OF 2011; THE THIRD MOST OF ANY STATE IN THE NATION. IN FLORIDA, THOSE NEW JOBS PRODUCED THE SECOND LARGEST DROP IN UNEMPLOYMENT IN THE COUNTRY.

WHEN I SAID “LET’S GET TO WORK” IT WASN’T JUST A SLOGAN. FLORIDA GOT TO WORK, AND EACH FLORIDIAN DESERVES THE CREDIT!

ALSO DESERVING CREDIT ARE YOU, THE LEGISLATORS IN THIS ROOM. LAST YEAR YOU PASSED AND I SIGNED A BUDGET WE BALANCED WITHOUT RAISING TAXES OR FEES DESPITE A REVENUE SHORTFALL OF NEARLY 4 BILLION DOLLARS. WE DID THIS BY MAKING GOVERNMENT LEAN AND EFFECTIVE. THANK YOU FOR DISPLAYING THIS UNPRECEDENTED COURAGE AND COMMITMENT.

THE STEPS WE HAVE TAKEN IN THE LAST YEAR HAVE MADE A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF WORKING FLORIDIANS. WE NEED TO CONTINUE TO CUT RED TAPE, LOWER TAXES, AND BRING GROWTH TO FLORIDA.

IN ADDITION TO JOBS GROWING, JUST THREE WEEKS AGO, THE U.S. CENSUS BUREAU ANNOUNCED THAT DESPITE A RECORD LOW GROWTH RATE ON THE NATIONAL LEVEL, FLORIDA GREW BY MORE THAN A QUARTER MILLION PEOPLE IN A 15-MONTH PERIOD. THAT’S AMAZING!

THIS MAKES US THE THIRD FASTEST GROWING STATE IN THE COUNTRY AND PUTS US WITHIN TWO YEARS OF PASSING THE STATE OF NEW YORK IN POPULATION. THIS IS A CLEAR SIGN THAT THE PROMISE OF FLORIDA STILL BURNS BRIGHT.

AND I SHOULD ADD, TO ALL OUR FRIENDS IN NEW YORK, COME ON DOWN! AS I STAND HERE TODAY, OUR TEMPERATURE OUTDOORS IS ABOUT TWICE AS HIGH AS YOURS, AND YOUR STATE TAX BURDEN PER CITIZEN IS ABOUT TWICE AS HIGH AS OURS.

THINK ABOUT IT. THE STATE OF NEW YORK, WHICH HAS JUST ABOUT THE SAME POPULATION AS FLORIDA, HAS A BUDGET ROUGHLY TWICE AS LARGE AS OURS.

YOU, THE LEGISLATURE, ALL NEED TO BE COMMENDED FOR YEARS OF TOUGH DECISIONS, BALANCING OUR BUDGET AND DELIVERING QUALITY SERVICES, EDUCATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE TO OUR CITIZENS AT HALF THE PRICE NEW YORKERS PAY.

AND FOR THOSE OF US ALREADY IN FLORIDA, WHAT DO THESE NUMBERS TELL US? THEY TELL US THE JOURNEY AHEAD IS LONG AND WILL CONTINUE TO TEST US AS A PEOPLE. THE DECISIONS WE MAKE IN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS WILL DETERMINE WHETHER WE CONTINUE TO CREATE A BUSINESS CLIMATE THAT WILL PROVIDE NEW JOBS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FLORIDIANS; WHETHER WE FULLY RECAPTURE THAT SPIRIT OF HUMAN POTENTIAL THAT IS AT THE CORE OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A FLORIDIAN. I’M ABSOLUTELY CONVINCED THAT WE WILL.

MY FRIENDS, THE STATE OF OUR STATE WILL CONTINUE TO IMPROVE.

AND WHAT ARE THOSE DECISIONS WE NEED TO MAKE TO ENSURE THIS HAPPENS? THERE ARE MANY, SO I’D LIKE TO FOCUS ON WHAT I BELIEVE ARE THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT JOBS I HAVE AS YOUR GOVERNOR: ONE, ENSURING THAT FLORIDIANS ARE ABLE TO GAIN EMPLOYMENT, TWO, SECURING THE RIGHT OF EVERY FLORIDIAN TO A QUALITY EDUCATION, AND THREE, KEEPING THE COST OF LIVING LOW, SO THAT THE FAMILIES AND BUSINESSES THAT ARE IN OUR STATE CAN PROSPER AND GROW, AND THE ONES THAT AREN’T HAVE EVEN MORE REASONS TO GET HERE SOON.

WHEN IT COMES TO JOBS, IT’S IMPORTANT TO REMIND OURSELVES THAT PRIVATE BUSINESSES CREATE PRODUCTIVE AND ENDURING JOBS, NOT GOVERNMENT. WHAT GOVERNMENT GIVES TO ONE PERSON NECESSARILY HAD TO BE TAKEN FROM THE POCKET OF SOMEONE ELSE. THERE IS SOMETHING ARROGANT AND OVERREACHING IN THINKING WE HAVE THE SUPERIOR WISDOM TO MICROMANAGE THE ECONOMY.

HAVING SPENT DECADES IN BUSINESS AND NOW A YEAR IN GOVERNMENT, I’M CONVINCED MORE THAN EVER THAT WITH FEW EXCEPTIONS THE BEST THING GOVERNMENT CAN DO IS TO CREATE A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD FOR ALL COMPETITORS AND THEN GET OUT OF THE WAY SO THEY CAN COMPETE. WHAT WE CAN DO IS TO CONTINUE TO PUT FLORIDA COMPANIES IN A POSITION TO OUT-COMPETE COMPANIES IN ALL OTHER STATES AND COUNTRIES.

SMALL BUSINESSES PROVIDE MOST OF OUR NEW JOBS IN FLORIDA. I KNOW THIS FROM MY OWN EXPERIENCE. I STARTED IN BUSINESS WITH A SINGLE DOUGHNUT SHOP, AND BEFORE LONG I HAD TWO DOUGHNUT SHOPS AND MANY MORE EMPLOYEES. TWO RESOURCES WERE CRITICAL IN ALLOWING ME –OR ANY SMALL BUSINESS-- TO CREATE THESE NEW JOBS: CAPITAL AND TIME. EVERY DOUGHNUT I SOLD GAVE ME MORE CAPITAL TO HIRE MORE PEOPLE AND BUY MORE EQUIPMENT. EVERY MINUTE I SPENT FOCUSED ON THE BUSINESS RESULTED IN OUR GROWTH, AND, MORE NEW JOBS.

WE HAVE SOMEONE IN THE GALLERY TODAY WHO ALSO KNOWS SOMETHING ABOUT THE POTENTIAL OF JOB CREATION IN DOUGHNUT SHOPS.

RACHEL WAATTI CAME TO THE UNITED STATES 12 YEARS AGO, AND HAS OWNED NICOLA’S DOUGHNUTS IN TAMPA FOR THE PAST YEAR. RACHEL HOSTED ME AT MY FIRST WORKDAY, AND IT WAS VERY SUCCESSFUL – WE SOLD OUT; MORE THAN 240 DOZEN BY 8:30 AM.

NICOLA’S HAS BEEN IN BUSINESS FOR 30 YEARS, HAS TWO LOCATIONS, AND HAS BEEN VOTED “BEST DOUGHNUTS IN TOWN” BY THE TAMPA TRIBUNE AND ONE OF THE “24 BEST DOUGHNUTS IN AMERICA” BY TRAVEL AND LEISURE MAGAZINE. THEY HAVE RECENTLY ADDED CUPCAKES, AND WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MY MOM, THEY NOW SELL A GREAT APPLE FRITTER.

RACHEL AND HER HUSBAND LUTHER ARE A GREAT EXAMPLE OF THE HARD WORK IT

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TAKES TO RUN A SMALL BUSINESS AND JUST HOW OUR ECONOMY WILL GROW. THANK YOU FOR BEING HERE.

TAXES AND REGULATIONS. THEY ARE THE GREAT DESTROYERS OF CAPITAL AND TIME FOR SMALL BUSINESSES. ALMOST EVERY DOLLAR I EARNED AS A SHOP OWNER WENT TOWARD GROWING OUR LITTLE DOUGHNUT SHOPS. SO, EVERY DOLLAR TAKEN IN TAXES SLOWED THAT GROWTH. ALMOST EVERY MINUTE I HAD IN THE DAY ALSO WENT TOWARD GROWING OUR SMALL BUSINESS. SO, EVERY MINUTE SPENT ADDRESSING SOME NEW REGULATION ALSO SLOWED THAT GROWTH.

WHEN GROWTH SLOWS IN SMALL BUSINESSES, WHAT HAPPENS? NEW JOBS ARE THE FIRST CASUALTIES.

THIS SESSION, WE NEED TO LOWER BURDENSOME TAXES ON SMALL BUSINESSES AND CONTINUE OUR MISSION OF SLASHING RED TAPE IN FLORIDA.

WE MUST ALSO IMPROVE THE MACHINERY BY WHICH GOVERNMENT SEEKS TO AID JOB CREATION. I’VE PROPOSED GREATER ACCOUNTABILITY FOR OUR WORKFORCE BOARDS SO THAT TAX MONEY IS NOT WASTED AND THE PURPOSE OF THOSE BOARDS IS FULFILLED: TO GET PEOPLE JOBS.

I’M ALSO ASKING YOU TO REQUIRE JOB TRAINING FOR THOSE WHO ARE RECEIVING UNEMPLOYMENT CHECKS. EVERY CHALLENGE CREATES OPPORTUNITY. AND TIME IN-BETWEEN JOBS GIVES UNEMPLOYED FLORIDIANS THE OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN NEW SKILLS.

WHILE LOWERING TAXES AND ELIMINATING UNNECESSARY REGULATIONS ARE CRITICAL, THE BEDROCK OF ANY SOUND, SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY IS AN EDUCATED WORKFORCE WELL EQUIPPED TO MEET THE CHALLENGES OF AN ADVANCED GLOBAL MARKETPLACE.

IN MY OWN LIFE I’VE SEEN FIRSHTHAND HOW EDUCATION PUTS THE AMERICAN DREAM WITHIN REACH. I GREW UP POOR. AS A KID I DELIVERED NEWSPAPERS FOR \$5 A WEEK. WHEN I WASN’T DELIVERING PAPERS, I WAS SELLING TV GUIDES FOR 4 CENTS PROFIT A COPY AND FLIPPING HAMBURGERS FOR 85 CENTS AN HOUR.

TODAY I STAND BEFORE YOU PRIVILEGED TO BE THE GOVERNOR OF THE GREATEST STATE IN THE GREATEST NATION. THIS IS THE AMERICAN DREAM; IT’S A STORY RE-TOLD A THOUSAND TIMES WITH EACH SUCCESSIVE GENERATION; AND THE MEANS BY WHICH IT IS ACCOMPLISHED IS AN EFFECTIVE AND ACCOUNTABLE SYSTEM OF EDUCATION.

WE CAN HAVE GREAT WEATHER, BEAUTIFUL BEACHES, AND A WONDERFULLY STRATEGIC LOCATION, BUT IF FLORIDA DOESN’T PROVIDE THE INTELLECTUAL TALENT TO MAKE OUR BUSINESSES COMPETITIVE, WE WILL BECOME A FOOTNOTE WHEN THIS CENTURY’S HISTORY IS WRITTEN. BUT, IF WE CAN CONTINUE TO CREATE A CULTURE OF EXCELLENCE IN OUR SCHOOLS, FLORIDA WILL MERIT A FULL CHAPTER IN THAT HISTORY THAT DESCRIBES THE REAWAKENING OF A MIGHTY, PROSPEROUS NATION. WE CAN DO THIS.

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AND WE BEGIN TO DO THIS BY BUILDING ON THE SUCCESSES OF LAST SESSION WHEN WE INCREASED SCHOOL CHOICES FOR FLORIDA’S PARENTS. WE ALSO REFOCUSED AN OUTDATED TENURE SYSTEM INTO A SYSTEM THAT CAN REWARD ITS BEST PERFORMERS FOR EXCELLING IN EDUCATING OUR STUDENTS.

AS YOU KNOW, NONE OF THIS WAS PARTICULARLY EASY, BUT ALL OF IT WAS OBVIOUSLY NECESSARY IF WE’RE TO GIVE OUR CHILDREN THEIR CHANCE TO GRASP THE FUTURE. THANK YOU FOR YOUR WILLINGNESS TO CONFRONT THESE ISSUES.

I HAVE SPENT THE PAST TWO YEARS TRAVELING THE STATE AND LISTENING TO FLORIDIANS ABOUT THEIR VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE. I WOULD LIKE TO TAKE A MOMENT TO RECOGNIZE ONE OF FLORIDA’S TALENTED, HARDWORKING EDUCATORS WHO HAS TAUGHT ME A GREAT DEAL ABOUT THE BRIGHT FUTURES OF OUR STUDENTS AND OUR STATE.

HEATHER VINIAR IS HERE WITH US TODAY IN THE GALLERY. HEATHER IS A FIRST YEAR TEACHER IN THE RURAL FARMING COMMUNITY OF IMMOKALEE. I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO MEET HER WHEN I TAUGHT SCHOOL FOR A DAY THIS FALL. HEATHER IS VERY COMMITTED TO HER STUDENTS. SHE TEACHES AMERICAN GOVERNMENT AT IMMOKALEE HIGH SCHOOL. HER CLASSES REACH ALL KINDS OF OUR STUDENTS INCLUDING HONORS, ADVANCED PLACEMENT AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS EVERY DAY.

AND, JUST AS ALL OF US HAVE HOPES AND DREAMS FOR THE FUTURE, SO DO HER STUDENTS. THE STUDENTS I SPOKE TO WANTED TO DO EVERYTHING FROM BEING A CHEF, TO A TEACHER, TO A VET, A HAIR DRESSER, A DOCTOR, A LAWYER, OR TO OWN A SMALL SHOP OR STORE. EDUCATORS LIKE HEATHER, THESE STUDENTS AND THEIR DREAMS ARE WHAT WILL DRIVE THE FUTURE PROSPERITY OF OUR STATE.

THANK YOU, HEATHER. OUR FUTURE CERTAINLY IS BRIGHT.

AFTER TRAVELING THE STATE AND LISTENING TO PARENTS, TEACHERS LIKE HEATHER, AND OUR STUDENTS, I HEARD ONE THING VERY CLEARLY, OVER AND OVER. FLORIDIANS TRULY BELIEVE THAT SUPPORT FOR EDUCATION IS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT THING WE CAN DO TO ENSURE BOTH SHORT-TERM JOB GROWTH AND LONG-TERM ECONOMIC PROSPERITY FOR OUR STATE. AND YOU KNOW WHAT? THEY ARE RIGHT!

THAT’S WHY THIS SESSION I ASK YOU TO CONTINUE YOUR COMMITMENT TO EDUCATION—TO ENSURE THAT THE DIFFICULT DECISIONS WE MUST MAKE ON THE BUDGET ARE FOCUSED ON PRIORITIZING THE THINGS WE ALL KNOW ARE ESSENTIAL TO THE FUTURE OF OUR GREAT STATE.

MY RECOMMENDED BUDGET INCLUDES \$1 BILLION IN NEW STATE FUNDING FOR EDUCATION.

AND I ASK YOU TO PLEASE CONSIDER THAT RECOMMENDATION VERY CAREFULLY. ON THIS POINT, I JUST CANNOT BUDGE. I ASK YOU AGAIN TODAY TO SEND ME A BUDGET

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THAT SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASES STATE FUNDING FOR EDUCATION. THIS IS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT DECISION WE CAN MAKE TODAY FOR FLORIDA’S FUTURE.

BUT, OUR EFFORTS ON EDUCATION CANNOT END HERE. FLORIDA HAS A RICH CULTURAL HISTORY SURROUNDING ITS COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES. DON’T TAKE MY WORD FOR IT. ASK ANY ANTHROPOLOGIST.

BUT WE NEED TO BE REALISTS ABOUT THIS. SOMEWHERE OUT THERE TODAY, THERE ARE GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS MEETING IN BRAZIL, OR INDIA, OR CHINA, AND THEY’RE NOT DEBATING ABOUT WHETHER THEY SHOULD PROVIDE STUDENTS WITH THE PRAGMATIC KNOWLEDGE TO SEIZE A LARGER PIECE OF THE GLOBAL ECONOMY. NO, THE ONLY DEBATE THEY ARE HAVING IS ABOUT HOW QUICKLY THEY CAN BECOME THE DOMINANT GLOBAL PLAYERS.

I LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH YOU TO CLOSELY LOOK AT OUR HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM; TO UNDERSTAND HOW WE CAN ENSURE THAT IN THE FUTURE, JOB CREATORS FROM AROUND THE WORLD WILL HAVE TO LOOK TO FLORIDA TO FIND THE TALENTED AND EDUCATED WORKFORCE THEY WILL NEED TO COMPETE IN THE 21ST CENTURY.

IT IS ALSO OUR DUTY TO HELP ENSURE THAT IN A TIME WHEN OUR STATE IS BEGINNING TO GROW AGAIN, THAT WE DO NOT SLOW THAT GROWTH BY INCREASING THE COST TO LIVE HERE. WE CAN DO THIS BY BUILDING A LEANER, MORE EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT: CONTINUING TO RESPONSIBLY MANAGE AND REFORM OUR PENSION SYSTEM; AND CRACKING DOWN ON THE FRAUD AND ABUSE THAT SOME PEOPLE HAVE BROUGHT TO OUR AUTO INSURANCE SYSTEM.

LAST YEAR WITH YOUR HELP WE RE-ENGINEERED THE PENSION PLAN FOR FLORIDA STATE WORKERS SO THAT THE INDIVIDUALS WHO WILL SHARE IN ITS REWARDS ALSO SHARE IN ITS FUNDING. THIS WILL SAVE TAXPAYERS MONEY AND ALIGN GOVERNMENT’S PRACTICES WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR. BUT, DESPITE A YEAR OF GREAT RETURNS, OUR PENSION PLAN REMAINS BILLIONS OF DOLLARS UNDERFUNDED. WE NEED TO CONTINUE TO CLOSELY MONITOR OUR PENSION PLAN AND ENSURE THAT IT WILL NOT BECOME A LIABILITY FOR FLORIDA’S TAXPAYERS OR THOSE WORKERS WHO RELY ON IT.

THIS YEAR WE MUST ALSO REFORM AUTO INSURANCE TO CRACK DOWN ON THE FRAUD AND ABUSE THAT HAS RUN RAMPANT AND IS ESTIMATED TO COST FLORIDIANS 900 MILLION DOLLARS. IF WE DO NOT ACT, THE OFFICE OF INSURANCE REGULATION PREDICTS THAT COSTS FOR CONSUMERS WILL CONTINUE TO SPIRAL OUT OF CONTROL. OUR BEST ESTIMATES SHOW A 30 PERCENT INCREASE IN PURE PREMIUM COSTS, YEAR AFTER YEAR.

THESE COSTS ARE BEING DRIVEN UP EVERY DAY ALL AROUND OUR STATE BY SCAMS THAT ARE ULTIMATELY PAID FOR BY FLORIDA’S WORKING FAMILIES. IF WE ARE GOING TO BE SERIOUS ABOUT KEEPING THE COST OF LIVING LOW FOR FLORIDIANS, WE MUST GET TOUGH ON THE FRAUD AND ABUSE IN THE AUTO INSURANCE SYSTEM. IT IS THE CONSUMERS IN OUR STATE THAT WE MUST PROTECT, NOT TRIAL LAWYERS OR THOSE INVOLVED IN THESE SCHEMES. FLORIDIANS CANNOT AFFORD ANOTHER YEAR OF THIS

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FRAUD AND ABUSE OR THE COST THAT WILL COME WITH IT.

LET ME PAUSE TO SAY THAT AFTER A YEAR IN OFFICE I MORE THAN EVER APPRECIATE THE SACRIFICE AND DEDICATION OF ALL OUR LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS IN FLORIDA. SOMETIMES THAT SACRIFICE IS ULTIMATE. THIS YEAR I HAD THE SAD AND HUMBLING EXPERIENCE OF ATTENDING ALL TEN FUNERALS FOR OUR BRAVE LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS WHO WERE KILLED IN THE LINE OF DUTY.

AT THIS TIME, I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO RECOGNIZE PENNY MECKLENBURG. PENNY IS A 10TH GRADE BIOLOGY TEACHER, AND AN INCREDIBLY STRONG WOMAN, WHOSE HUSBAND WAS ONE OF THESE BRAVE OFFICERS. DEPUTY JOHN MECKLENBURG OF THE HERNANDO COUNTY SHERIFF’S OFFICE TRAGICALLY DIED IN A HIGH SPEED CHASE IN JULY. PENNY, HIS LOVING WIFE, AND THE MOTHER OF THEIR CHILDREN, ANDY WHO IS 5 AND JESSICA WHO IS 2, JOINS US TODAY. PENNY, WE ARE ALL INCREDIBLY GRATEFUL TO YOU AND JOHN FOR HIS SERVICE AND SACRIFICE TO KEEP OUR STATE SAFE.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR BEING HERE. GOD BLESS YOU, AND GOD BLESS YOUR CHILDREN.

PLEASE ALLOW ME TO EXPRESS OUR GRATITUDE TO THOSE THAT SERVE EVERY DAY TO PROTECT OUR GREAT STATE.

IN CLOSING, I WANT TO THANK YOU AGAIN FOR THE CONSIDERATION YOU HAVE GIVEN ME TODAY AND THE COURTESY YOU EXTENDED TO A NEW GOVERNOR LAST YEAR. SINCE REDISTRICTING HAS BEEN ADDED TO AN ALREADY-PACKED AGENDA IN 2012, CONSIDERATION AND COURTESY WILL COMMAND A SPECIAL PREMIUM OVER THE NEXT SEVERAL WEEKS.

KNOW THAT I’M OPEN TO ANY IDEA FROM WHATEVER SOURCE THAT IS LIKELY TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF FLORIDIANS. OVER THE PAST YEAR I’VE EXPERIENCED THE BENEFIT OF LISTENING TO FLORIDIANS, LISTENING TO YOU, AND YES, EVEN LISTENING TO MY CLOSE FRIENDS IN THE MEDIA.

NO PERSON, PROFESSION OR PARTY HAS A MONOPOLY ON ALL THE GOOD IDEAS. THE COMMITMENT I MAKE TO THOSE HERE TODAY IS TO KEEP OPEN, CLEAR LINES OF COMMUNICATION SO THAT TOGETHER OUR TIME IN THE CAPITOL CAN BEST BE SPENT IN THE SERVICE OF THOSE WHO SENT US HERE. THAT IS MY PLEDGE TO YOU.

MY PLEDGE TO THE PEOPLE OF FLORIDA IS TO CONTINUE TO GIVE THIS JOB MY ALL; TO HELP BUILD THE FRAMEWORK FOR AN ENDURING PROSPERITY THAT IS GROUNDED IN THE INTELLECT AND AMBITION OF OUR CITIZENS.

WHILE THE GREAT RECESSION HAS TAKEN MUCH, IT’S ALSO REVEALED THE STRENGTH AND RESILIENCE THAT’S DEEPLY INGRAINED IN THE DNA OF THE INDUSTRIOUS PEOPLE WHO CALL FLORIDA HOME. OTHER STATES HAVE HAD THEIR CHANCE TO SHOW THEIR METTLE.

THIS IS OUR TIME.

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IT’S OUR TIME TO SHOW THE NATION AND THE WORLD THAT IN THIS CENTURY FLORIDA WILL BE THE SAFE HAVEN FOR INDIVIDUALS TO LIVE THEIR VERSION OF THE AMERICAN DREAM.

NONE OF US CAN DO THIS ALONE. SO, LET’S GET TO WORK...TOGETHER!

GOD BLESS YOU, AND GOD BLESS THE GREAT STATE OF FLORIDA.

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