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# A Message from the Governor of Florida

## Big Plays During Legislative Session Benefit Floridians

It has been an honor and a privilege to serve the people of Florida as Governor during these past few months. As we reflect on the work accomplished during the 2007 Legislative Session, I want to take the opportunity to thank the members of the Florida House and Senate for their hard work and dedication. Under the leadership of **Senate President Ken Pruitt** and **House Speaker Marco Rubio**, this group of men and women has served as the People's Legislature – listening to, and responding to, the needs of Floridians.

This 2007 Legislature has proven itself to be very effective. They are good people, and I respect them for what we have been able to accomplish together. We have tackled many important issues—strengthening our criminal justice system and our schools, making Florida's economy more vibrant, and improving the health of both Floridians and Florida's natural environment and much more.

Our criminal justice system will be stronger because of the Anti-Murder Act. I am grateful to the Legislature for making this new legislation a priority and the first law of the session. The Anti-Murder Act will make our communities safer by giving judges the authority to impose the maximum prison sentences for probation violators considered dangerous. It will also require brutal felony offenders who violate probation to return to jail until the court determines whether the individual poses a danger to the community.

We will also be able to strengthen Florida's efforts to prevent Internet crimes against children. A stronger CyberCrime unit will add 50 law enforcement officers to help stop predators and sex offenders before they prey on our children.

I am especially proud of the opportunity I had to stand for justice—by restoring the civil rights for certain ex-offenders who have paid their debt to society. Those who do not abide by the laws of our land pay a tough penalty for doing so, and they should. But once they have paid their debt, society should honor its part of the bargain and allow citizens to re-enter society and enjoy the rights granted by our Creator. To not do so is unjust.

In the same way, I am confident that the two consumer advocates—former **Senator Nancy Argenziano** and **Nathan Skop**—appointed to the Public Service Commission will also stand for what is right for the people of Florida.

Thanks to the Legislature, our teachers and schools will be

better equipped to foster academic success and lifelong learning by having 80 more reading coaches. These coaches will guide more teachers in how to help students develop strong reading skills. Virtual tutors will give parents the tools they need to help their own children do better in school. Top teachers and other educators will be rewarded for improving student learning. Students will be better equipped for success in school, in our economy and in life.

We made further progress in making property insurance more affordable. Citizens Property Insurance Corporation rates are now frozen until 2009, and consumers will now be able to buy less-expensive insurance from Citizens. No new “pup” companies will be allowed in Florida, and existing “pup” companies will have to report their national profits when filing for rate increases. We will remain vigilant and hold the industry's feet to the fire and make sure that companies pass relief on to Florida homeowners when the new rates come out this summer.

Florida's economy will be stronger because we have enhanced Florida's business friendly environment. We will be able to attract more high-wage businesses to Florida and strengthen Florida's film and entertainment industry, as well as significantly strengthened our ability to provide incentives to high-impact, innovative businesses through \$320 million in incentives.

Children and adults of all ages will learn how to gain the advantages of a more healthy life. The Florida Department of Health will now be headed by the State Surgeon General—Secretary of Health **Dr. Ana Viamonte Ros**, who will serve as the leading advocate for wellness and disease prevention. Regular physical education for elementary school students will help children understand at an early age that health, fitness and active living are fun and have a positive influence on learning. I have also appointed a Council on Physical Fitness to develop a state plan of action to promote physical fitness and nutrition for all Floridians. Children will also benefit by having the opportunity to live in a loving, safe and permanent home as we encourage adoption through the Office of Adoption and Child Protection.

The health of Florida's natural environment will also be strengthened. I applaud the Legislature for appropriating \$100 million for our restoration efforts of the Florida Everglades, \$54 million for Lake Okeechobee, \$40 million for the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries and \$16.5 million for the St. Johns River. Investments in the health of our natural environment protect Florida's economy and quality of life and safeguard our natural beauty for future generations.

Florida voters will have an election system we can believe in. Florida will continue to lead the way in election reform by having a paper trail for votes cast in Florida elections. An earlier presidential primary will put Florida in its rightful place—near the front of the line in determining the next leader of the free world.

We have accomplished many great things for the people of Florida—our bosses—but we still have much work to do. The Legislature will return to Tallahassee in a few weeks to finish the business of lowering property taxes. I remain optimistic that this tax reduction will happen this year—and that Floridians will get relief. While I understand the need to bring relief to the people sooner than later, I would rather we take the time to get it right in June—instead of rushing the process and not getting it right.

I am committed to listening to your needs as we prepare for the special session on property taxes. Your letters, e-mails and stories remind us that we must be vigilant to lower property taxes—and lower them significantly.

We will keep our eyes on the ball to make another big play for the people of Florida. ■



*“I am committed to listening to your needs...”*



Governor Charlie Crist surrounded by Legislators and Florida PBA Officers and members at the Anti-Murder Act signing in Tallahassee.