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# A Message From Your President

*John Rivera*

## Florida At The Crossroads

Much of this *Roll Call* deals with Florida's ongoing financial problems. True, we are caught up in the larger, national financial picture now deemed to be a recession. But Florida's history of boom and bust is repeating itself, making our problems even more aggravated. For those members who think these wild gyrations of our economy have no effect on them, just wait until the next contract is negotiated or the buzz saw of layoffs come their way. If you haven't had (or are about to have) the displeasure of such cutbacks, you are truly among the most fortunate few. In fact, the woes of state government as detailed in the *Roll Call* portend what is coming down the pike for those not yet impacted. We have seen the future and it is not pretty.

Just how did we get into this pickle? For starters, Florida's economy is primarily based on three industries: building, tourism, and agriculture. When any one of them goes into the tank, so does the overall economy and, in return, the state government budget. Adding to this difficulty are our out of sync taxation system and such natural disasters as our infamous hurricanes. It is tough for many working families to make it in Florida, given the sour job prospects in many areas, out-of-whack property taxes, and outrageous insurance rates. That's why many schools





in our state are actually losing students, as working stiffs vote with their feet and move to Georgia, North Carolina, or elsewhere. Any place where the economy is more stable and government services are more predictable. As my friend **Ernie George** (President Emeritus) has often remarked to me, Florida is in danger of being like San Francisco—where only rich people can live and play. Most of us are un-rich citizens who simply want to live in a state that is affordable, where there are ample job opportunities, and where our children will have a good chance of succeeding—like having safe communities and putting necessary resources into public schools and universities.


There ought to be a lesson somewhere in all of this. Maybe it's that we need to diversify our economy (as SB 2310 from this Session seeks to do), and we need to diversify our antiquated tax system. This is where we stand: Florida's economy and taxation system are still stuck in the last century. And until voters force politicians to address these deficiencies, Florida will continue to be mired in this rut. The great middle class will either continue fleeing or avoiding Florida, and little junior, no matter how good a student, can forget about getting into a decent state university. What we are doing now "ain't" getting it. If you feel the same way, please go out of your way to let your politicians know this—both face to face and at the ballot box! The one thing most politicians understand is a motivated, angry, fed-up voter. ●

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