

## Economic Recovery & Florida's Future

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JULY 2009

**O**n Friday (July 17), Florida received more staggering news that our unemployment rate reached 10.6 percent in June—the fifth highest in the nation. Florida has lost 392,800 non-agricultural jobs over the year, and some economists predict even higher unemployment in the next few months.

During these challenging times, Florida House Democrats recognize that citizens want solutions and not political posturing. Florida's challenges need more than one-party solutions.

Thousands of people have lost their places of residence due to home foreclosures. Nearly every property owner has seen deep dips in home values. Uncertainties abound about families' ability to finance their children's college education. Many are frightened by having seen their retirement accounts wither. And, shamefully, millions of Floridians — perhaps a fifth of those who live here -- are without health coverage.

Despite these woes, this is not a time for fear. Florida House Democrats believe this is a time for courage and hope. Difficult times like these require historic levels of cooperation

— bipartisan cooperation.

Unfortunately, the recently ended 2009 legislative session was one of the toughest on record—and Republican leaders could have reached out more often to work cooperatively, not competitively, on Florida's challenges.

In writing a new state budget, the Legislature faced a \$6 billion revenue shortfall. The Legislature responded by reducing programs and services, draining trust funds and increasing

fees, many of which will impact working-class families. For these and other reasons, all 44 members of the Florida House Democratic Caucus voted against the budget because it fails to adequately meet our state's needs.

In recent days, a major Wall Street ratings house, Moody's Investors Service, gave Florida's state-backed debt a continued high rating but a "negative outlook." The ratings agency warned that the Legislature's decision to significantly drain trust funds — a concern previously raised by many Florida House Democrats during budget talks -- poses serious concerns for our state to affordably borrow money and finance projects.

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Florida House Democrats are pleased, though, to have been among the first lawmakers to endorse the use of new federal economic recovery dollars approved by President Barack Obama and Congress that were used to help balance the state budget.

This Caucus seeks to redeem hope. There is confidence that there will be a healthier, better prepared and more resilient Florida ahead. Florida House Democrats are heartened by the promise of change and opportunity that our new president brings to the nation.

Of course, many challenges await us.

- Florida's education system is strong but needs improvement. There should be better accountability and higher academic standards. There should be more parental and student choices and increased competition within public schools. More emphasis can be placed on student's progress—and less on their FCAT scores.
- We need a fairer tax structure, health care reforms, and solutions to high home-ownership and property insurance costs.

➤ We need to modernize energy policies to increase the state's capacity for using renewable energy and reducing reliance on fossil fuels. The typical American power plant is outdated and inefficient. Power generation and transmission account for 40 percent of the nation's planet-warming pollution. The U.S. Energy Department estimates a five percent jump in grid efficiency would have the same benefit as taking 53 million cars off the road. The energy grid needs modernized—and Florida can play a role in developing this new technology.

➤ And the Legislature can do more to achieve greater public participation in state government, and do more to give the people confidence in the ethics of their elected officials.

In the remainder of 2009 and next year, Florida House Democrats will urge all Floridians to use our resources and the power and grace of our state to endure and to thrive.

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This is the time to improve our schools, grow jobs and provide for the health needs of our children and families. This is not a time for challenges to defeat us. There is hope for a bright future.

On behalf of the Florida House Democrat Caucus, thank you for visiting [www.flhousedems.com](http://www.flhousedems.com). I encourage you to return to this site regularly for more information about happenings in the Florida Legislature.

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