

Florida: Governor vows to never stop fighting for Florida's families



David M. Kall | Thursday, March 16, 2017

Last week, on the first day back to work for lawmakers, Gov. Rick Scott gave his [state of the state address](#) in which he promised debates over bills and policies, and a new perspective, gained from the state's heartbreaks. Despite the tragic Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando, the governor asserted that "the future of our state is even greater than our past accomplishments..." He "resolved to build a society where any child, no matter where they are from, has the opportunity to live their dreams."

Recognizing the heroism and sacrifice that he witnessed in Orlando, the governor underscored his commitment to public safety, and spotlighted his \$6 million recommendation for counterterrorism efforts this year. Gov. Scott next highlighted the state's booming economy, touting the fact that lawmakers have cut taxes 55 times, "saving families \$6.5 billion." Pledging to do more, he will be "fighting to cut taxes by \$618 million to cut costs for small businesses, students, veterans, teachers and families."

One of the reasons for the strong economy, according to the governor, is [Enterprise Florida](#), a public-private partnership between business and government leaders, and the principal economic development organization for the state. As it happens, on Valentine's Day, lawmakers put forth [House Bill 7005](#), which calls for the elimination of numerous economic incentives and economic development programs, including Enterprise Florida. Other targets are the film and entertainment tax credit program, the Capital Investment Tax Credit Program, and the Florida Small Business Development Center Network.

HB 7005 seeks to repeal the [statute](#) that authorized the creation and funding of Enterprise Florida in the first place, and transfer all matters to the Department of Economic Opportunity. The rationale for this step comes, in part, from a report by the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability, which found that even though Enterprise Florida is expected to obtain private sector support to help pay for its operational costs, state funding has always far exceeded private sector funding.

Other top priorities the governor listed in his speech are tourism, education, environmental protection, transportation infrastructure, public health, including combating the Zika virus, natural disaster preparation, and employment for the disabled. The "great news" is that "[s]ince 2011, our state's economy has grown by 22 percent and our available revenues exceed current expenses by \$2.8 billion dollars." This, he said, plus the \$5 billion dollar reserve, ensure that the funds to fight for Florida's future are available, while also controlling spending.

Budget details

The governor's 2017-18 budget, [Fighting for Florida's Future](#), follows these priorities. An [overview](#) provided more details of his plan:

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Cutting taxes and fees by more than \$618 million. This includes:

- Decreasing the tax on business rents;
- Providing a one-year sales tax exemption on college textbooks;
- Cutting the business tax;
- Exempting school book fairs from the sales tax;
- Implementing a 10-day back-to-school sales tax holiday, nine-day disaster preparedness sales tax holiday, three-day veteran's sales tax holiday and one-day camping and fishing sales tax holiday; and
- Cutting an additional \$8.1 million in annual fees for services for seniors, teachers, veterans and businesses, while maintaining the quality of services provided.

Growing the economy by allocating \$85 million for economic incentives to bring more jobs to Florida, and to support small businesses.

Investing in education by:

- Directing \$21 billion in state and local funding through the Florida Educational Finance Program (FEFP) for K-12 public schools. This equates to \$7,421 per student. This is the highest total funding, state funding and per-student funding for K-12 in Florida's history;
- Allocating \$6.6 billion in total funding for higher education, which includes increased funding for the Bright Futures Scholarship program; and
- Maintaining tuition at current levels.

Protecting the environment by investing nearly \$4 billion in Florida's environment as follows:

- \$360 million for water quality projects, which includes record funding of \$65 million for Florida's springs, and \$60 million for the new Indian River Lagoon and Caloosahatchee Clean-Up Initiative,
- \$225 million for Everglades restoration.

Keeping families healthy by investing the following:

- \$1 billion plus in mental health and substance abuse funding, including \$18.7 million for community-based behavioral health services;
- \$632 million for core services to children who depend on Florida's child welfare system; and
- \$7.4 million plus to remove everyone off of the critical needs waiting list at the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) for the fourth consecutive year.

Building strong communities by:

- Investing more than \$5.1 billion in public safety, which includes
 - \$14.6 million for a 5 percent pay raise to award Florida's nearly 4,800 sworn state law enforcement officers;
 - \$5.8 million to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) to hire 46 new employees dedicated to counterterrorism; and
 - \$45 million plus to increase the pay of Florida's correctional and correctional probation officers.

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Investing in Florida's veterans community by allocating \$102 million in to support active military, veterans and their families.

The *Miami Herald* described the cantankerous mood in the legislature on the first day back, noting that Gov. Scott and House Speaker Richard Corcoran jabbed “at each other at close range in a preview of a combative spring at the state Capitol.” Corcoran attacked Enterprise Florida as a corporate welfare program, to which Gov. Scott argued, “It’s easy to throw out catch phrases like ‘picking winners and losers’ and ‘corporate welfare’ ... That’s not what we are doing.”

The article also acknowledged the abrupt resignation of Enterprise Florida’s President and CEO, Chris Hart, just one day prior to Gov. Scott’s state-of-the-state speech, and just three months after taking the position. In his [resignation letter](#), posted online by Florida Trend, Hart explained his position:

Between November 30 and [March 6, 2017]...I have come to realize that Governor Scott and I do not share a common vision or understanding for how Enterprise Florida, Inc. can best provide value within his administration. This difference of opinion is of such a critical nature that I no longer believe I can be effective in my position.

The legislation gutting Enterprise Florida, HB 7005, is proceeding with near unanimous support through the House. But the *Orlando Sentinel* quoted Hart condemning lawmakers’ support of the measure, promising that “[i]f you vote for this, you will fundamentally be walking away from 20 years of economic development policy and economic development strategy in the state of Florida.” Gov. Scott decried the effort as well: “Perhaps if these politicians would listen to their constituents, instead of playing politics, they would understand how hurtful this legislation will be to Florida families.”

According to a poll by the [University of North Florida Public Opinion Research Laboratory](#), 46 percent of Florida registered voters strongly or somewhat approve of how Gov. Scott is handling his job, but just 13 percent support a reduction in the tax businesses pay on corporate leases. Forty percent think the tax should not be reduced and that the money should be dedicated to public universities. Thirty-three percent also think the tax should not be reduced, but that the revenue should be dedicated to improving infrastructure.



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Team member bio