



# SOLIDARITY

## In The Sunshine

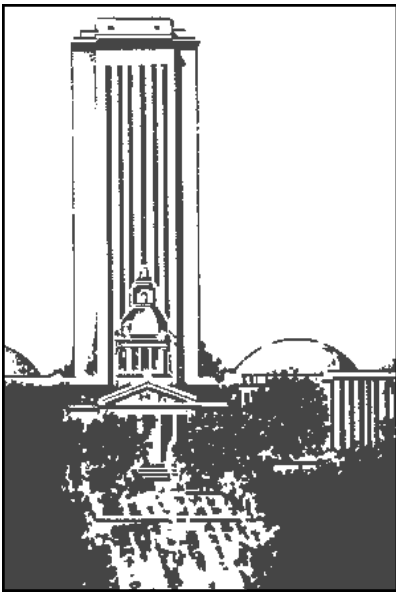
NEWSLETTER OF THE FLORIDA AFL-CIO



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## No Holiday Cheer from the Florida Legislature



**The Florida Legislature is taking the preliminary steps to address what is proving to be Florida's biggest budget crises in history.** The actions they take over the next several weeks could either see our state through this crisis or, as many of us fear, make the situation far worse for Florida's working families. First, consider these sobering facts;

- Florida's current fiscal year budget is estimated to be running a deficit of \$2.3 to \$2.8 billion.
- The 2009-2010 budget is projected to be short a whopping \$3.5 to over \$5 billion in revenue.
- Over the past 3 years, Florida has experienced a dramatic 17.1% decline in recurring general revenue, leading to more than \$6 billion in cuts over the past 3 years including huge cuts to essential services like education, health care, social service programs and the judiciary.

Most independent economists and budget analysts agree that Florida has reached a tipping point. The over \$6 billion in cuts that have already been made coupled with another \$7 to \$8 billion on the horizon threaten the vital services the people of this state depend on. Consider these equally disturbing figures;

- The budget for K-12 schools, community colleges and universities was cut \$992.5 million last year. The education budget as a whole, including voluntary pre-K programs, declined by \$2.1 billion. Florida is currently ranked 49<sup>th</sup> out of the 50 states for education funding and *Education Week* magazine gave Florida an "F" for 2008 education spending.
- Over 797,000 children in Florida still have no health insurance coverage, making Florida the 3<sup>rd</sup> worst state in the nation for providing health care for children.
- Over 4,000 people with disabilities have lost services that were considered medically necessary. They are now in the administrative system fighting for those services to be restored.
- Over 5,000 seniors are on the waitlist for the nursing home diversion program, another 1,493 are waiting for services from Home Care for the Elderly, and 17,254 are waiting for services from the Community Care program. There are two waitlists for services that people with developmental disabilities must deal with – one with more than 17,000 people and another with about 6,000 people.
- Approximately 190,000 people do not receive the critical mental health services they need. In addition, officials estimate there are about 309,000 children with emotional disturbances in need of mental health services, but limited funding only allows less than a quarter of them to get the services they need.
- Our judicial system is falling apart as well. Trial court workload comparisons nationally show that compared to other states, the workload of the judiciary in Florida's court system is very high. Considering the ten most populous states, Florida ranks as the 2nd highest in filings per judge. As of 2002, our general jurisdiction judges, circuit court, handle 46.5% more filings than the national average. The problem is chronic underfunding.

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This is just a partial picture of the critical situation facing Florida. The bottom line is that the vital programs our families need and deserve have already been slashed to unconscionable levels. As the economy get worse and more working families are thrown into poverty and the ranks of the working poor swell, these already crippled programs will be in greater need than ever before – but with the budget crisis, the funding won't be there to pay for them.

Many in the legislative leadership claim that the current budget crisis is the direct result of the crumbling economy which has hit Florida harder than almost every other state. While the current economic downturn plays a role in this crisis, the major reason for our problems is Florida's insufficient tax base and antiquated tax structure. Florida's labor movement and our allies have been warning our elected leaders for years that this crisis was coming, but our careful analyses and advocacy on behalf of our schools and social service programs have fallen on deaf ears as the rush to cut taxes for the wealthy and corporations have robbed our state of the much needed revenue our state needs and our residents deserve. The problem is not the economy, it is obviously not out of control spending. The problem is a lack of revenue. Consider these figures;

- Our elected leaders have given away \$14.5 billion dollars in the past nine years in high-end tax cuts. Investors that earn over a million dollars per year in *income* from stocks and bonds pay no taxes, corporate tax loopholes allow companies to escape their fair tax burden and well-connected special interests like professional sports franchises earn millions each year in taxpayer handouts.
- Florida generates close to 70% of its revenue from sales taxes, which has made our tax system one of the most regressive in the nation. It has also made us incredibly vulnerable to the current economic downturn. Even though the sales tax is the bulk of our revenue, special interests don't pay it. There are currently 323 separate sales tax exemptions in Florida, totaling over \$22.9 billion. That means that Florida exempts more from sales taxes than it collects. Some of these exemptions and their estimated costs include; yachts temporarily docked in Florida (\$3.9 million), alcoholic beverages used by businesses for tasting (\$1.3 million), feed for ostriches and racehorses (\$19.5 million), charter fishing boats (\$34.1 million) and a \$2 million annual subsidy for the Professional Golf Hall of Fame. The Legislature continues to refuse any meaningful sales tax reform.
- Florida ranks 34<sup>th</sup> in the nation for the amount of total tax revenue (state and local taxes combined) per capita, with approximately 56% of that coming from state taxes. Only 8 states in the nation have a lower state share of total taxes, meaning that while state taxes are continuing to shrink in Florida, the burden is being shifted to local governments.

These are just a few examples of the thousands inherent in Florida's tax structure, which has become a hodge-podge of exemptions and loopholes rather than a well thought out method of paying for the needs of our state. Unfortunately, well funded special interests in Tallahassee are still in control. The Florida Legislature is still talking about "tightening our belts" and slashing funding for programs, rather than showing leadership and addressing the problems that got us in this mess. The Taxation and Budget Reform Commission had a chance to carefully examine our revenue collection system and make the necessary changes, but they were hijacked by ideologues connected to former Governor Jeb Bush and refused to do anything meaningful other than an attempt to destroy our public schools through vouchers.

The current budget crisis is a disaster of apocalyptic proportions but times of crisis also represent times of opportunity. It took Florida many years of bad public policy decisions to reach this point, but now we have clear evidence that our concerns over "tax cut fever" were correct. Now is the time for the Legislature and the Governor to take a long hard look at our entire tax policy and enact the comprehensive reforms necessary to save us from this disaster. So far, the word is that they will continue to cut budgets rather than raise revenue and working families will continue to suffer. However, the Florida AFL-CIO is committed to working through the process with our allies to enact the solutions our state desperately needs for the future. A recent report from the Florida Center for Fiscal and Economic Policy stated that, "The state has reached its "tipping point." Serious additional damage is certain to happen if more budget cuts are adopted." It will take all of us working together, but we are hopeful that our movement, working with our many allies, will be able to mobilize the people of Florida to compel our leaders to finally do the right thing, reform our tax structure and ensure brighter futures for Florida's working families.

## Confused about the Budget Crisis?

FLORIDA CENTER  
FOR FISCAL &  
ECONOMIC  
POLICY



[www.fcfep.org](http://www.fcfep.org)

In 2007, the Florida AFL-CIO partnered with many of our allies to help create **The Florida Center for Fiscal and Economic Policy**. This group, a state partner with the national **Center on Budget and Policy Priorities** has proven to be an invaluable resource which was organized to perform research and review research done by others on state-level fiscal and economic matters. The Center is recognized by IRS as a §501(c)(3) charitable organization. The Florida Center is both reactive and proactive. It reviews executive and legislative fiscal proposals for their effect on low and moderate income families and individuals and indigenous

small businesses. The information and analysis produced are available to policymakers, the media, advocacy groups and individuals in time to inform them about policy debates as they occur. In addition, research and analyses are developed that can be used in proactive strategies developed with, and by, community-based organizations and advocates so that we can begin to shape the debate that takes place around issues of concern to vulnerable populations and small businesses in Florida. They are on top of the current budget crisis and are producing incredibly informative reports on both the nature of the problem and solutions that make sense. To access these reports and keep up with all the action, check them out online at [www.FCFEP.org](http://www.FCFEP.org). Download their report, *Florida's Fiscal Crisis: The Problem* to find out more about how we got in to this mess. The next report on how to fix the problem is due within days.

## Protect Union Jobs and Mail Service!

The American Postal Workers Union is looking for our support to keep the U.S. Postal Service from further downsizing Florida's postal service by eliminating two major mail processing and distribution centers. The USPS is currently conducting a "study" to investigate the possibility of closing both the Lakeland and Manasota centers and consolidating that work into other centers in Tampa and other locations. The postal service has consolidated these services in other areas and usually these efforts have led to widespread layoffs, decreased efficiency and increased mail times. In Tallahassee for example, all mail within the city limits must first travel to Jacksonville where it is sorted and then sent back to Tallahassee for distribution. The system would work much better if the mail stayed here and was sorted by people who live and work here contributing to the health of our community. That is what this is about; keeping the postal service a part of the communities it purports to serve. The APWU is asking for our help to keep these closures from happening. After the report is completed the USPS must schedule public meetings on the issue within 45 days. In order to put public pressure on the USPS in advance of those meetings, contact the USPS and tell them to keep mail service local and keep these centers open. **Consumer Affairs Manager, 6013 Benjamin Road #201, Tampa, FL 33634**

**Informational pickets are being planned. In order to find out how you can help, please contact:**

Manasota APWU

[Local7136@aol.com](mailto:Local7136@aol.com)

President Jim DeMauro (941) 518-3544

Vice-President Glen Hayes (941) 245-1969

Citrus Area APWU

[gottabjoe@tampabayrr.com](mailto:gottabjoe@tampabayrr.com)

President Joe Paul (863) 640-2865



## Let us See You Shine!

During the elections we recruited people all over Florida to take pictures of all the action. Now we are hooked! We would love to get photos of your activities in the labor movement for use on our website and for displays during conventions and conferences. Please snap some pics of your next union picnic, party, rally or any event where union members are out and about and send them and a brief description to us at [rtemplin@flaflcio.org](mailto:rtemplin@flaflcio.org).

## Are we Communicating?!

The Labor 2008 political program was a great success on many levels. In addition to winning Florida's 27 electoral votes for Labor's endorsed Presidential candidate, picking up two congressional seats for labor's candidates and protecting many pro-worker legislators, we also gained invaluable information about our movement's organizational capacities under the New Alliance restructuring program. One aspect of our internal organizational structure that we realize needs work is our internal communications program, especially in the area of getting feedback and information from our affiliates about the work they are doing, the struggles they are facing and the successes they are having. We are working to improve our ability to keep up with events on the ground involving our affiliates so that we may respond more effectively and provide them with the support they need. We are launching a multi-stage effort to improve our ability to stay in touch with all of our affiliates. In stage one we are working to establish an up-to-date database of contact information for our affiliates, including an email address for each local union. Also, we understand that many of our locals have active newsletters where they communicate important information about their union's news and events so a portion of this database will include information about those newsletters so that we may subscribe thus allowing us to keep abreast of events around the state. We also may be able to assist these newsletters with content about happenings at both the state capitol and in Washington D.C. In the days ahead, all of our affiliates should be contacted by a member of our staff to collect the desired information so that we can complete this vital first stage. **If you don't here from someone by mid-January, please contact Rich Templin at (850) 224-6926 or by email at [rtemplin@flaflcio.org](mailto:rtemplin@flaflcio.org).** Thanks in advance for helping us complete this important work as we continue to build a stronger, more unified movement for the future!

### Save the Dates!

#### March 15-19 - 2009 Legislative Conference and Lobby Days – Tallahassee

With huge cuts to our schools and social services on the horizon, this could be the most important Legislative Session in a generation! We need to make sure that working families are well represented now more than ever. The first notice for this important event has been sent. If you have not received your notice please contact Hazel Ziegler at (850)224-6926 or by email at [hziegler@flaflcio.org](mailto:hziegler@flaflcio.org).

#### October 4<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> – 2009 Biennial Convention and Officer Elections – Daytona Beach



### Happy Holidays

The officers and staff of the Florida AFL-CIO wish each of you and your families a joyous and peaceful holiday season. Whether you celebrate Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanza or any other tradition, our hopes and prayers are with you. Times are tough and this is a time where we can reflect on our friends and families and all the things that really matter. The Florida AFL-CIO offices will be closed from December 20<sup>th</sup> through January 4th 2009. We look forward to serving you in the new year!



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*Solidarity  
in the Sunshine*

**SOLIDARITY**



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