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Press Release

FLORIDA'S LABOR MOVEMENT UNVEILS TOP LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES AIMED AT PROTECTING HARD WORKING FLORIDIANS AND THEIR FAMILIES

~Strong voices in Tallahassee advancing legislative priorities of working families and shoring up political victories in recent special legislative elections~

TALLAHASSEE - The newly re-organized Florida AFL-CIO announced today its legislative priorities for the upcoming 2008 Legislative Session, promising to advance and support its working family agenda with grassroots action. Following a string of electoral victories in key special legislative elections around the state, an energized effort will put Florida's working families first.

"Momentum has been building across the State among in our Labor community as we worked together to achieve critical victories in four key special legislative elections," said Cindy Hall, Florida AFL-CIO President. "These four races make it abundantly clear that Labor has reasserted itself on the political scene in a monumental way and that we will deliver for candidates who are sympathetic to the needs of Florida's working families, regardless of party affiliation. Big business has had a choke hold on Tallahassee for too long, and our members, regardless of their party affiliation, are ready for it to end. Elected officials who stand with Florida's working families can rely on the support of thousands of reenergized union activists and their families. Those who continue to put big business special interests ahead of the needs of working families will not."

Hall credits the recent legislative victories to the Florida Labor movement's recently completed massive re-organization called the "New Alliance" that has infused Labor with new members, more resources and a coordinated electoral strategy. These new strategies led to the Labor community being widely credited as the critical factor in last week's special election victory of Tony Sasso in the House District 32 special election. Sasso beat an opponent who was much better funded and backed by some of the state's most powerful special business interests. This general election upset was, thanks in large part, to the grassroots efforts of hundreds of Democratic, Republican and Independent union members. This victory follows on the heels of three others: Darren Soto (D) in House District 49, Charles McBurney (R) in House District 16, and Oscar Braynon (D) in House District 103.

Fresh on the heels of these recent legislative victories, Florida Labor is proud to unveil its priority programs for the 2008 legislative session.

Increased Access to Health Care – Millions in Florida still do not have adequate access to health care and Florida is one of few states still losing ground in providing health care for children. The Florida Legislature needs to adopt the critical Kidcare reform legislation that failed to pass in the Senate last year, support administrative changes that will improve the program's retention and add state workers back into the ranks of eligible families. The Legislature needs to fully fund Medicaid so that Floridians will be able to benefit from the millions in federal matching funds, earned by their own already-paid taxes that are still sitting in Washington because Florida refuses to adequately fund the program or maximize the federal funding match. Finally, the dangerous continued flirtation with privatizing important programs like

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Medicaid must stop. Without a doubt, these “reforms” force Florida’s most vulnerable into the unstable and inefficient HMOs, creating major instability and insecurity among these Floridians.

Protecting Public Schools – Florida’s labor movement will be working with legislators on both sides of the aisle to ensure that public education is truly “held harmless” as both the House and Senate wrestle with the current budget crisis. In addition to stopping the bleeding from our public schools, Labor will be working to actually provide enhancements for our schools, our teachers and our students. Additionally, Labor will vigorously oppose any misguided attempts to shift precious resources away from public schools to private schools through the expansion of any of the various failed voucher and privatization schemes.

Protecting Essential Services – Florida stands at a very precarious crossroads. Depending on how the Legislature handles the current budget crisis, Florida could continue its downward spiral, shackling future generations with an incredibly unfair and inadequate tax system that decimates local governments or services or they can use this as an opportunity for real tax reform that ensures that Florida’s most powerful interests pay their fair share. Arbitrary revenue and spending caps that have failed miserably in every state they have been tried should be abandoned in favor of real tax reform that provides relief to those who really need it while beginning the process of collecting much needed revenue from those who have not been paying their fair share.

Protecting Workers’ Rights – The powerful business lobby and special interests that have long-controlled policy in Tallahassee continue waging a multi-year campaign against the most basic rights of working families. They have attempted to manipulate the voting process to make it more difficult for grassroots groups to help register and mobilize voters, have worked to restrict access to the ballot box through free and fair elections and have almost completely eliminated the right of the people to petition their government and amend their constitution. Additionally, these same powerful groups have been working to carve out islands within the state where businesses decide what basic constitutional rights will be respected and which ones will be ignored. Workers should not and cannot be forced to give up their most basic freedoms simply to have a job. The Florida AFL-CIO will work to ensure that the right of workers to secure their private, lawfully-held possessions in their cars and to defend their cars against unlawful searches by their employer will be protected.

“We have proven that Florida’s new Labor movement can have a big impact on elections and as such, we will no longer be taken for granted. Legislators from both parties who will honor our pro-working family agenda will be able to count on our support. Those who take aim at hurting our hard working middle class families will not,” added Cindy Hall

Rich Templin, the Communications Director for the organization said, “We have worked hard under the New Alliance reorganization to build one voice, one movement and one direction. With our newly enhanced communications infrastructure, our members will know what is happening in Tallahassee this session and will know how to participate in the process. Most importantly, they will be armed with the knowledge of Tallahassee happenings to hold their elected officials accountable for their actions.”

The AFL-CIO is the state-wide labor federation, comprised of over 500 local unions representing approximately 500,000 workers, retirees and their families.

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