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Press Release

FLORIDA AFL-CIO: FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION'S DETERMINATION TO DECIMATE UNIONS USING COMMUTER RAIL TRANSACTIONS EMERGE FURTHER

The state agency's own website exposes the real reasons why FDOT, House Leaders and the Governor refuse to negotiate with Florida's labor unions on SunRail: Getting rid of union workers at FDOT is their core mission.

Tallahassee, Fla. The Florida AFL-CIO today held a press conference to release the latest set of facts surrounding the Florida Department of Transportation's (FDOT) extremist political agenda aimed at Florida's working families. During the press conference, Mike Williams, president of the Florida AFL-CIO further exposed FDOT's comprehensive plan to target workers benefitting from healthcare and retirement plans. Their motivation: maximizing profits for Florida's most profitable and politically connected corporations. FDOT have been unwilling to meet with interested parties to achieve a compromise on the SunRail legislation if representatives of labor are present. Working closely with Senate staff and leadership, labor has proposed numerous compromises that would allow the project to move forward with full bi-partisan support. Instead, FDOT, the Governor's office and the House leadership are willing to risk Florida's commuter and high speed rail future to advance their own extremist anti-worker agendas.

Today's press conference illustrates just how far FDOT has gone to advance its agenda by hosting and promoting severe, anti-union sentiments as part of its own course offerings at its annual construction conferences and on its own state web site.

"It has become abundantly clear that FDOT, a state agency whose mission should be to work on behalf of all Floridians is engaging in an ideological campaign that takes direct aim at Florida's working class people," said Mike Williams. "FDOT's politically and ideologically driven agenda hurts working families by taking away healthcare, retirement benefits and federal protections with the end goal being to maximize the profits of an already very profitable corporation."

In his remarks, Williams referred to the February 24, 2009 FDOT continuing education course offered during the 2009 FDOT Construction Conference. During the conference, FDOT contracted Mr. Phillip Russell, a labor and employment lawyer representing employers to present ***Staying Union Free in a Pro-Union World***. The course materials provide conference attendees and the public with workshops and conference materials to assist FDOT vendors and FDOT employee engineers in preventing their workers from exercising their constitutional rights to join unions. The workshops and materials included titles such as ***Stay Union Free*** and ***Reasons You Do Not Want a Union***. Florida engineers who attended the conference, including in-house state engineers and approved-vendor engineers received eight hours of engineering professional development hours under Course No. DOT Course Code: PE-06-0001. As of November 30th, these "educational" materials were still available on the state sponsored web site.

"While the AFL-CIO strongly supports commuter rail and high speed rail, FDOT, the leadership of the House of Representatives and Governor Crist have structured and continue to pursue the SunRail commuter transaction in such a way that a key component in the deal's terms includes the discharging of all union, federally-protected railroad workers on any state-acquired commuter rail corridor now or in the future," added Williams. "The SunRail transaction documents go so far as to attempt to undo the contractually-negotiated railroad worker protections for TriRail, meaning that many TriRail railroad workers will also be discharged when the SunRail transaction is finalized unless FDOT is stopped," said Williams. "The Florida AFL-CIO's strong opposition to the CSX/SunRail transaction and its implementing legislation continues

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because this transaction remains nothing short of government-enabled union busting by the Florida Department of Transportation.”

“The riding public should also be concerned for its safety because the federal protections FDOT is seeking to exempt Florida commuter rail lines from are vital component to our national railroad safety system. Such protections allow workers to bring safety problems to the attention of the proper authorities without fear of company reprisals. FDOT wants to replace these workers so that safety work can be performed by the lowest bidder, with no protections for safety” Williams said.

Williams concluded, “The Governor and House, by not agreeing to a reasonable compromise on concerns raised by Labor have jeopardized billions of dollars in federal stimulus money, the future of TriRail and the future of SunRail. Today’s news is evidence that an ideological and extremist agenda is being advanced to destroy the lives of Florida’s railroad worker families and SunRail is the first big step in fulfilling it.”

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