

Promoting Good Government

Florida's taxpayers deserve their money to be spent in the most efficient and accountable manner possible especially during lean times like these. In addition to prioritizing spending and rooting out wasteful spending, the Legislature made some important decisions to reform government by ending some practices that I believe were just plain wrong.

I supported legislation to end the process known as "double-dipping." We closed a loophole that has allowed a growing number of elected officials and state employees to officially retire and collect retirement benefits but then return to their old job and resume collecting their state salary after just a short time. In 2007, Florida paid out \$300 million in pensions for this group of "retirees" who in fact did not fully retire. It was wrong and we put an end to this practice.

I supported legislation to give Florida voters the power to end the public financing of statewide political campaigns.

Under the current system, \$11 million of taxpayer funds was doled out to candidates in 2006. Though this system first began as a noble way of trying to level the playing field and reduce the influence of special interests, I and many of my colleagues felt it was not working and that the millions provided to candidates could better be spent on other things such as education and help for those truly in need.

We also passed a law to prevent local governments from spending the public's money on advertising campaigns aimed to influence voters' decisions on state or local issue questions appearing on the ballot. I supported this bill because I fundamentally feel government should not use the public's money to try to tell voters how to vote.

I believe these actions show Floridians that their government is serious about saving money and doing what's right.



Will Weatherford

STATE REPRESENTATIVE
DISTRICT 61

CAPITOL UPDATE

WILL WEATHERFORD

STATE REPRESENTATIVE
DISTRICT 61

Dear Friends,

With the 2009 legislative session at a close, I wanted to take a moment to give you an update on what was accomplished.

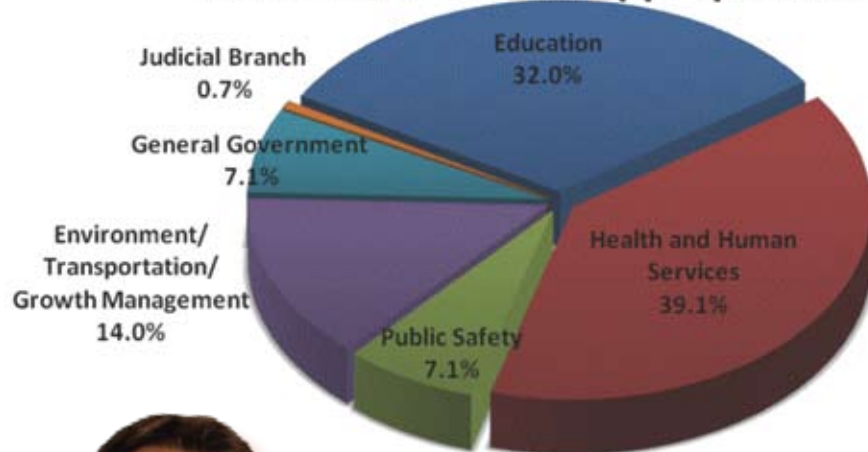
As you know, our nation and our state are facing one of the worst recessions in decades. The decline in our economy left our state facing a budget deficit of \$6 billion. Unlike the federal government, our state constitution requires us to have a balanced budget, meaning we simply cannot spend money we don't have. I and many of my colleagues felt it was important that we live within our means so we made some tough decisions to prioritize spending by focusing on our state's core missions: quality education, safe streets, and assisting children and seniors in need. Because we had to make some tough choices, we also found it important to reduce our own salaries.

Not only do I believe we were successful in passing a responsible budget but we also worked for additional property tax relief, strengthening the economy, stronger schools and some needed reforms in government. I hope you will find this legislative update to be informative. If you would like to receive electronic updates, or have any questions or concerns, please contact me at info@willweatherford.com. Your opinions and concerns are very important to me and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Will Weatherford
State Representative, District 61

Fiscal Year 2009-10 Appropriations



Policy Areas	Appropriations*
Education	\$21.273
Health and Human Services	\$26.043
Public Safety	\$4.755
Environment/Transportation/Growth Management	\$9.294
General Government	\$4.720
Judicial	\$.451
Total State	\$66.54 Billion

*In billions.

Will Weatherford

STATE REPRESENTATIVE, DISTRICT 61

COMMITTEES

- State & Community Colleges & Workforce Appropriations Committee - Chair
- Policy Council - Vice Chair
- State & Community Colleges & Workforce Policy Committee - Vice Chair
- Full Appropriations Council on Education & Economic Development
- Joint Legislative Budget Commission
- Rules & Calendar Council
- Select Committee on Seminole Indian Compact Review
- Select Policy Council on Strategic & Economic Planning

www.WILLWEATHERFORD.com

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Protecting Education

In spite of the difficult budget times facing Florida and the nation, the Florida House continued its commitment to creating an excellent educational environment. The \$66.5 billion budget we passed for the coming year actually increases per-student funding to a statewide average of \$6,873. We also provided local school boards greater flexibility in spending to help them better address their local needs.

We know it is not only how much we spend on education that matters but how it is spent matters too. By raising standards, demanding accountability and offering innovative opportunities, student achievement results are improving significantly.

The most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores, which compare reading and math test results from around the country, show that Florida made remarkable educational gains over the past two years. In fact, Florida was one of only four states with significant increases in both fourth and eighth grade reading since 2005. Florida's fourth graders improved

from 28th to 18th in reading and from 24th to 19th in math. This is real progress, but we still have much work to do.

The NAEP results are proof positive that Florida should continue on its path of accountability and increased academic expectations for students. It's an approach that's working.



Reforming Property Taxes



This session, we passed several pieces of legislation aimed at providing additional property tax relief for Floridians.

I believe we restored balance and fairness to the property appraisal process. Under the new law we passed, if you disagree

with your property appraiser's assessment, the appraiser will now have to justify the assessment. Previously, it has been up to you to prove that the appraisal was wrong. We changed the law because it was the right thing to put government on the side of the taxpayer.

We also passed a ballot measure for November 2010 that will provide the opportunity for Florida voters to cap potential property tax increases on non-homestead property to a maximum of 5% in any year. The current

cap is 10%. We also provided an additional homestead exemption to Floridians who have not owned a principal residence in Florida for the preceding 8 years. If approved, the measures will provide first-time homebuyers, business owners, part-time residents and rental property owners tax protections and savings similar to those being enjoyed by homesteaders.

We also brought relief to the over 25,000 military personnel who claim Florida as their home and are currently deployed overseas on active duty. To show our gratitude to these brave men and women serving in harm's way, Florida voters will have the opportunity to create a property tax credit for deployed members of the military or military reserves.

I believe that tax relief is not just about providing relief to families, seniors and businesses, it is about stimulating our economy. I feel strongly that we can speed up our economic recovery by keeping taxes and burdensome government regulations low, reducing state spending while maximizing the value of every tax dollar we collect and pursuing policies that encourage entrepreneurship and re-investment in our state.

Sponsored Legislation

Revitalizing Florida's Economy

Spotlight on House Bill 485 Florida New Markets Development Program



One of my biggest priorities for this session was to sponsor legislation that will create jobs in the state of Florida. Simply stated, I want to see Floridians going back to work. I was pleased that on May 21, 2009, Governor Crist signed into law, HB 485, the Florida New Markets Development Program – Fast Track Economic Stimulus for Small Businesses that I sponsored and

the Legislature approved. This legislation parallels the highly successful Federal New Markets Program, which Congress recently expanded. House Bill 485 was created to help encourage greater investment in Florida by providing a tax credit at the state-level.

The objective is simple; to leverage federal tax credits and piggyback a state incentive to attract private sector investments and thus create immediate access to capital for small businesses in Florida's low-income communities. Because this initiative models the highly successful federal program, it is familiar to investors and regulated by the U.S. Department of Treasury.

According to a recent study, this program will immediately attract \$250 million in private sector investment throughout the state. Over the life of the incentive, \$500 million will be invested in Florida's small businesses. It has the potential to create 4,200 jobs annually, increase Florida's GDP by \$633 million per year (GDP is the total market value of all final goods and services produced in Florida), create \$6.3 billion of economic output and more than \$300 million in tax revenues for our state (Source: Washington Economics Group study).

I believe this legislation will be a significant way to positively change the direction of Florida's economy. Creation of the Florida New Markets Development Program will ensure that jobs will become available and Florida's economy will get a needed boost.

Throughout this year's Legislative Session, we stayed focused on our responsibility to Florida's families and businesses. Every budget decision and every bill was viewed through the lens of getting Florida's economy back on track and helping create jobs for Floridians. We took important steps forward to incentivize new businesses, stimulate job creation and remove barriers to economic growth in Florida.

This year, we continued reforming Florida's workers' compensation system to prevent job losses and help job creation in the state. We worked to help create jobs and increase economic development by expediting permitting processes and fast tracking construction projects identified by local governments as a target industry business. We also created economic incentives to encourage business growth across the state. Our budget provided \$13.5 million in the Quick Action Closing Fund to attract new companies to Florida and increased funding for Film and Entertainment Incentives to attract more film and entertainment jobs to our state.

We know that the real estate market will provide important fuel for Florida's economic recovery. Our budget helps Florida's families directly by providing \$30 million for first-time homebuyer assistance. We also continued our commitment to lending a helping hand to those Floridians who have lost their jobs due to the economic downturn.

We took a responsible, long-term view toward restoring Florida's economy this year. We continued to work to prepare for a future that will once again place Florida among the top states in economic growth and prosperity in America.

Helpful Websites

Florida Discount Drug Card – www.floridadiscountdrugcard.com
Health Insurance for Children – www.floridakidcare.org
Affordable Health Insurance – www.coverfloridahealthcare.com
Health Care Information – www.floridahealthfinder.gov

College Scholarships – www.floridastudentfinancialaid.org
Prepaid College Tuition – www.myfloridaprepaid.com
School Grades – schoolgrades.fldoe.org
Scholarships for Students – www.scholarshipfunding.org

Information on licensed professionals – www.myfloridalicense.com
Information on Healthcare Professionals – www2.doh.state.fl.us/IRMO00profiling/searchform.ASP
Sexual Predator search (by neighborhood) – offender.fdle.state.fl.us/offender/Search.jsp
Criminal History Searches – [https://www2.fdle.state.fl.us/cchinnet](http://www2.fdle.state.fl.us/cchinnet)

Employment Information – www.employflorida.com
Public Assistance Benefits – www.myflorida.com/accessflorida
Veterans Information – www.floridavets.org
Elder Affairs – elderaffairs.state.fl.us

Hurricane Preparedness – www.floridadisaster.org/family
Volunteerism – www.volunteerflorida.org