

Gov. Scott: Let's Keep Working

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Today, Governor Rick Scott delivered his fourth State of the State Address at the Florida State Capitol. Below are Governor Scott's remarks as prepared for delivery. For biographies of guests featured in the Governor's address click [here](#).

STATE OF THE STATE – “DESTINATION OPPORTUNITY”

Remarks as prepared for delivery

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Good morning, Chief Justice Polston and distinguished members of the Supreme Court.

Welcome Attorney General Pam Bondi,

Chief Financial Officer Jeff Atwater,

Agriculture Commissioner Adam Putnam.

President Gaetz and Speaker Weatherford

and a special welcome to Florida's new Lieutenant Governor Carlos Lopez-Cantera.

To the members of the Florida Senate and to the Florida House, thank you for having me.

To the former Senate Presidents and House Speakers here, it is an honor to address you today.

A lot has happened since I spoke to you last year.

I could talk about how our unemployment rate is now down to 6.3 percent

How our crime rate is at a 42-year low

How we have invested record funding in protecting our environment

While our tourism industry is breaking records

Or how we have added more than 460,000 new private-sector jobs since the end of 2010

But, I want to start off with some developments a little closer to home.

I am proud to announce that Ann and I are now the proud grandparents of three grandsons.

Our daughter Allison gave us another grandson, Quinton, in July; and Jordan had her first child, Sebastian, in September.

Please help me welcome the love of my life, First Lady Ann Scott;

Our daughter, Jordan, son-in-law Jeremy;

And, our newest grandson, Sebastian.

There are only a few things more exciting than a new baby in the family. It is fun to dream about what they will become one day.

Auguste, our oldest grandson, is the only one old enough to have his own dreams right now.

He is two.

Depending on the day, he wants to be a cowboy...or a forklift operator.

My hope is that Florida will be the place where he can make his dreams come true – whatever they are.

But, that's not where our state was headed a few years ago.

Like Washington, Florida's economy was driven into the ground by spending what some embraced as "free money."

Of course, there is no such thing.

Florida's big spending racked up big debt.

Florida was in a hole.

Unemployment was above 11 percent

More than one million people were unemployed

and our debt ballooned to more than \$28 billion.

...The year was 2010.

Some say these statistics were all because of a global recession.

They say it doesn't matter who was running our state – that anyone would have been just a victim of the times.

I disagree.

As Americans, our freedom and our optimism make us anything but victims – even in the worst circumstances and the toughest times.

Our leaders especially – and every person in our state – are not simply bystanders in the arena of life where the hard battles are fought and history is made.

Our people are strong.

Our people are dreamers.

They came to Florida because they want the liberty to build a lasting legacy for generations to come.

That is worth fighting for, and we did.

We could have kept embracing spending and debt – but we didn't.

We could have kept growing government and expecting our challenges to solve themselves – but we didn't.

Together, we made government more efficient.

Together, we have cut almost 3,000 regulations on small businesses.

Together, we have now paid down \$3.6 billion in state debt

And paid back another \$3.5 billion borrowed from the federal government for unemployment assistance.

Working together, Florida rejected the tax-borrow-and-spend strategy that was hurting our future.

It wasn't easy getting Florida's fiscal house in order.

And it wasn't any fun either.

In my three years as Governor, I have yet to have anyone come into my office and lobby me to spend less taxpayer money.

The simple truth is that our state...just like our small businesses and our families....has to live within its means.

We can't spend more than we take in.

Our kids and grandkids will pay for it.

Let's be honest about it – we inherited a terrible mess.

...Growing unemployment

Dangerous levels of debt

Growing deficits

And a crippled housing market

We had two options – we could take the usual way out by raising taxes and running up more debt... or we could do the politically hard thing and trim our budget.

When the hard thing is the right thing, we need the courage to do the hard thing.

And we did.

The result is that Florida is now tied for having the largest drop in unemployment out of all 50 states, Florida is one of only a few states that has gone from above the national average in unemployment to below the national average in unemployment.

And unlike the previous Administration which lost almost 1 million jobs

We have added almost a half a million jobs.

Together, we have cut taxes 24 times already

And my hope is that we are about to cut them again... by another \$500 million this year.

As I tell the hard-working people of Florida as I travel our state: We want you to keep more of the money you earn

Because it's your money!

Working together, we have made Florida not just a destination for tourists – but a destination for opportunity.

And when I say that “we” have done it, I don't mean just those of us here in this chamber today.

No, the real credit goes to the hard working and industrious people of the great state of Florida.

I know that it has become fashionable in Washington to think that our people are victims who need handouts.

But the people of Florida are diligent and hard working people.

They aren't looking for more promises from government...or programs from government.

They want their shot at success.

They want the freedom to overcome adversity.

They have their own dreams – and many of those dreams start with getting a great education.

That's why we are again proposing to invest record amounts in our K-12 education system.

With your support, this budget will invest a total of \$18.8 billion in education – the highest in Florida history.

This record investment builds on our previous budgets, which invested an additional \$1 billion in K-12 education for two years in a row.

Of course, ensuring students get a quality education means they must have excellent teachers.

That's why, last year, with your support, we gave every fulltime public classroom teacher the opportunity to get a pay raise.

This investment is sure to pay off:

Florida teachers are ranked among the most effective in the nation.

Because of their hard work, our fourth and eighth graders have had the largest achievement gains in the nation.

Our fourth graders are now second in the world for reading.

And, Florida high schools are 4 out of the top 10 in the country.

What motivates our teachers everyday is more than a paycheck.

I want to share with you the story of a teacher from Delray Beach

After being diagnosed with breast cancer in 2012, this Spady Elementary School teacher said her students saved her life by supporting her and making her stronger

Even when she returned to the classroom while still receiving treatments.

Her students made sure she would sit when teaching and they helped her with simple chores around the classroom.

But most of all, they made her laugh...And, they constantly showered her with love.

This is the story of teacher Ruthie Santiago – who is still teaching and just celebrated her second anniversary of being cancer free.

Please join me in welcoming Ruthie and her principal, Rona Tata as we honor Ruthie's bravery in battling cancer and her incredible service as a teacher.

It is teachers like Ruthie that make Florida schools some of the best in the country.

We commit to you that we will keep working until we have the best schools in the world.

We will keep working until all of our children have the very best opportunities.

Every parent wants their child to get a great education... and for many that doesn't end at high school.

That's why we are recommending \$80 million in our budget this year for those colleges and universities who graduate students best positioned to get a job.

We are changing how we fund higher education but if we want to make higher education more accessible to low and middle-income families.

We have to make it more affordable.

Last year, I vetoed a tuition increase that would have taken a total of more than \$42 million from Florida families.

And, this year, with your help, we want to get rid of the 15 percent annual increase and inflationary increase on tuition.

Undoing these 2007 and 2009 laws is another way we can keep higher education affordable and accessible.

My commitment to every family dreaming to send their children to college is simple:

We will hold the line on tuition.

Parents saving for their children to get a four-year degree from a public university today need to save over \$53,000.

Fifty-three-thousand-dollars.

We shouldn't celebrate how accessible higher education is until we can make it more affordable.

That's why I am proud that all of Florida's 4-year state colleges now offer bachelor's degrees for only \$10,000.

These degrees aren't just affordable – they are also geared toward high-demand job fields so students are prepared to start a great career when they graduate.

When we set out to jump start our economy four years ago, we talked about creating 700,000 jobs in seven years.

It was an ambitious goal.

Today, we are moving the bar even higher.

If we continue to pay down debt – like we do in this budget by another \$170 million

If we continue to cut taxes – by rolling back the 2009 tax hike on annual motor vehicle fees so Floridians keep more of the money they earn

And, if we continue to cut taxes on small businesses – by cutting the tax on business leases and rolling back the business tax to now exempt 4 out of 5 Florida businesses from paying it.

If we do all this, we can make Florida not just the land of 700,000 new jobs.

We will make Florida the land of opportunity.

I believe Florida will become so rich in opportunity that we will beat New York in population, and beat Texas in job creation.

Four years ago people were down on Florida.

High unemployment...

Shrinking home values...

Florida was in retreat.

For the first time in decades, more people left the state of Florida than moved in from other states.

Now, we are on the rise...

Jobs are coming back,

Career opportunities are growing,

Home values are improving,

And there is simply no reason that Florida cannot be the number one state in the country to find a good job,

Raise a family,

And achieve the American Dream.

Working together, we are making Florida number one.

I want to share with you the story of a young man living in Puerto Rico a few years ago.

The economy there was hurting, and he couldn't find a good-paying job.

He moved to Florida from Puerto Rico in 2007 with his parents and his sister, but struggled to find work.

That all changed one day when he drove by a building under construction.

That building would become O'Reilly Auto Parts...

Which just opened a distribution center in Lakeland and announced their plans to hire 400 new workers.

That young man is Jorge Martir and he has worked in quality assurance there since November.

Jorge says his new job is a dream-come-true.

But, he has other dreams.

He wants to keep working his way into higher positions at O'Reilly.

In fact, Jorge just got promoted to Supervisor In Training, and he starts that new job on March 9th.

Jorge is here today.

Jorge, please stand.

Congratulations on your job and your promotion.

We know your dream is to stay in Florida and make a great career at O'Reilly Auto Parts.

We join with you today in saying – let's keep working.

A second story I want to share is about a young woman who immigrated to Miami from Haiti when she was eight-years-old.

She went to public school in Miami and went on to get a bachelor's degree in international business from FSU... a little school down the road that just won the national football championship

Thanks, Coach Jimbo Fisher!

This young lady worked a few jobs after she graduated, but in 2012, both she and her husband were out of work.

She finally found a job in the bilingual sales department at AT&T which recently announced their expansion and plans to hire 350 new workers.

That woman is Freda Voltaire.

She is more than an employee at AT&T.

She is also the mother of two young boys – two and four years old.

She said she wants her children to understand what it means to work hard... and that in America, if you work hard, you can live your dreams.

Freda, we agree.

Freda, please stand as we join with you in saying to your children and all future generations in Florida: let's keep working.

The stories of opportunity in Florida stretch from east to west – from Key West to Panama City.

In fact, a man in Panama City was struggling to find work when he was finishing his service in the U.S. Air Force.

He told his wife and son that they should prepare to move wherever he could find work.

He couldn't find good job options in Panama City...until he heard about a growing company called iSirona, a NantHealth Company.

He walked into the company and got to meet with their CEO that very same day.

iSirona, a NantHealth Company, has now announced they will add another 300 jobs in the area.

That man is U.S. Air Force veteran Sean Gilder.

Sean and his wife, Mindi, are with us today.

Sean and Mindi – please stand.

Like you, we believe Florida is the best place to raise a family, and we want our children to chase their dreams right here at home.

That's why we join with you in saying: let's keep working.

Will you please all stand with me to thank Sean for his service to our country and all of our military men and women who have served – or are currently serving – all across the world today.

We can never say thank you enough to those who have served our country.

I am so proud of all of our men and women who wear the uniform – like my dad did.

I am also proud to say that Florida has one of the largest veteran populations in the country.

In closing, I want to share with you one last story.

It is the story of a young man who lived in public housing as a kid

Who never knew his natural father

Who saw his adopted dad struggle to keep a job

And who remembers the heartbreak on his parents' faces when the family car was repossessed.

This young man joined the U.S. Navy after high school.

Newly married, he left his young bride in their tiny apartment almost 2,000 miles from their home while he went off to sea.

They didn't have much money, so they used the camping equipment they got for wedding gifts as furniture.

They used a cooler as a coffee table, and they slept in sleeping bags on the floor.

This young couple was thrifty. They saved every penny they could.

They didn't have much money, but they were determined to make it.

While working their way through college, they eventually saved enough money to open a small business.

They worked at this business themselves, along with both of their moms.

After a while, the business started making money and they added another location.

That young couple is still young at heart, even though they have now been married over 40 years.

That small business was a donut shop – and that is the story of how Ann and I opened our first business.

I share that story with you today for two reasons:

First, because I lost my mom over a year ago, and I wanted another chance to talk about her and how I wish she was here today.

We all need help in life, and my mom was my help.

She taught me the value of hard work, and she did what she had to do to put food on the table for us five kids.

She was not afraid to work 2 or 3 jobs, she refused to fail.

She taught us the value of work, and the dignity of work.

She was happy that as a grade-schooler I was selling TV Guides door to door for just a few cents a copy.

The second reason for talking about my story is that I hope it explains just a little about my passion for creating jobs and opportunities for all Florida citizens.

I know that reporters get tired of me constantly talking about creating jobs when they are asking other questions.

I know that some people think I'm too singularly focused on growing Florida's economy.

Well...all I can tell you is that we are all products of our own experiences in life.

I've seen what happens to families who are struggling to find work.

I've had Christmas without any presents.

And, I don't want any of our people to ever feel stuck in those situations.

I didn't start caring about jobs when I ran a company.

I started caring about jobs when I saw my father lose his.

That's why I want Florida to be the land of opportunity.

I want every entrepreneur to move here.

I want every business that is already here to expand.

And, I want every Floridian who has an idea to open a small business to be able to do it.

Every time a new job is created, some family, like mine growing up, is better off.

Government cannot create jobs. Washington has proven that.

But, government can create an environment where Floridians can create jobs.

We have proven that

With your help, I want us to keep cutting taxes and keep cutting regulations
so every small business can succeed.

Let's keep working.

To reject the tax-borrow-and-spend approach of D.C.

Let's keep working

Until everyone in our state,

Regardless of what country,

Family...or zip code they were born into – has their shot at the American Dream.

Let's keep working.

Until we are not only the destination for the world's tourists, but for the world's businesses.

Let's keep working.

Until all of our children and grandchildren can have any career they want right here in Florida.

The challenges facing our state are real.

Our housing market is still recovering.

Some are still looking for a job.

Members of the Senate

Members of the House

I am asking you to join with me this session to say to all the people of Florida.

We have more work left to do; so let's keep working.

Thank you.