

"FLORIDA THIS WEEK"

AUGUST 3, 2007

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>> THE FOLLOWING IS A SPECIAL PRESENTATION OF WEDU, TAMPA, ST. PETERSBURG, SARASOTA.

>> COMING UP NEXT, SEPTEMBER'S SCHEDULED REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE IS IN ST. PETERSBURG MAY BE IN DOUBT. THE STATE BUDGET IS FACING A \$1.5 BILLION SHORTFALL. THE GOVERNOR WANTS TO KNOW WHY INSURANCE RATES ARE NOT GOING DOWN.

AND A GRAND JURY IS LOOKING INTO A CONTROVERSIAL PINELLAS LAND DEAL.

POLITICAL INSIGHTS NEXT ON "FLORIDA THIS WEEK."

>> FROM THE WEDU STUDIOS, THIS IS "FLORIDA THIS WEEK."
AND NOW, MODERATOR ROB LOREI.

>> WELCOME BACK.

WEDU IS FUND-RAISING THIS MONTH FOR OUR CURRENT MEMBERS,
THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT.

AND TO THOSE OF YOU WHO HAVE YET TO CONTRIBUTE, WE HOPE THAT
YOU MAKE A PHONE CALL AND A DONATION SO WE CAN KEEP PROGRAMS

UNEDITED REALTIME CLOSED CAPTIONING

SUCH AS THIS ONE ON THE AIR.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

THIS WEEK, OUR PANELISTS ARE, WILLIAM MARCH IS A POLITICAL REPORTER AT THE TAMPA TRIBUNE.

ADAM SMITH IS THE POLITICAL EDITOR AT THE "ST. PETERSBURG TIMES" AND COHOSTS POLITICAL CONNECTIONS ON BAY NEWS 9.

PHYLLIS BUSANSKY IS THE HEALTH CARE CONSULTANT AND A DEMOCRAT.

AND KEN ANTHONY IS A BUSINESS OWNER AND A REPUBLICAN.

THANKS FOR COMING, EVERYBODY.

WELL, NEXT MONTH'S CONSENT AGENDA YOUTUBE DEBATE FEATURING THE REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY CANDIDATES COULD BE DELAYED AFTER AT LEAST TWO CONTENDERS SAID THEY WON'T BE ABLE TO MAKE IT TO ST. PETERSBURG ON SEPTEMBER 17th.

THE TWO ARE FORMER NEW YORK MAYOR RUDY GIULIANI AND FORMER MASSACHUSETTS GOVERNOR MITT ROMNEY.

ONLY THREE CANDIDATES, TEXAS CONGRESSMAN RON PAUL, ARIZONA SENATOR JOHN McCAIN AND FORMER WISCONSIN GOVERNOR TOMMY THOMPSON HAVE COMMITTED TO THE EVENT.

SO WILLIAM, IS THIS GOING TO HAPPEN OR NOT?

>> WELL, IT MAY HAPPEN BUT WON'T HAPPEN ON SEPTEMBER 17th.

THIS DEBATE HAD A COUPLE OF PROBLEMS GOING IN.

ONE WAS SEPTEMBER 17th DATE IS EXACTLY ONE MONTH BEFORE THE CANDIDATES ARE ALL SUPPOSED TO BE BACK IN FLORIDA FOR ANOTHER DEBATE AT THE STATE REPUBLICAN CONVENTION IN

UNEDITED REALTIME CLOSED CAPTIONING

OCTOBER.

AND THE FORMAT WITH THE YOUTUBE QUESTIONS WHERE MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC VIDEOTAPE THEMSELVES ASKING A QUESTION ON YOUTUBE AND SUBMIT THAT, IT'S NOT ONE THAT'S REAL POPULAR WITH THE CANDIDATES.

MITT ROMNEY SAID RIGHT OUT THAT HE DIDN'T THINK IT WAS APPROPRIATE TO THE DIGNITY OF A PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE.

OTHER CANDIDATES AREN'T SAYING IT, BUT SOME OF THE OTHERS DON'T LIKE IT EITHER.

ROMNEY IS THE ONLY ONE WHO HAS LEFT IT OPEN THAT HE MIGHT NOT PARTICIPATE EVEN IF THE DATE CONFLICT IS REMOVED.

BUT, YEAH, THE DEBATE PROBABLY WILL HAPPEN BECAUSE FLORIDA IS GOING TO BE CRUCIALLY IMPORTANT.

AND MY GUESS IS, MOST OF THE CANDIDATES WILL PARTICIPATE.

IT'S LIKELY THAT ROMNEY WILL FEEL THE PRESSURE TO JOIN IN, EVEN IF HE DOESN'T LIKE THE FORMAT.

>> ADAM, WHAT ARE YOU HEARING ABOUT THE POTENTIAL FOR THE PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE?

>> I THINK IT WILL HAPPEN.

IT REALLY WAS A SCHEDULE PROBLEM, I THINK.

UNFORTUNATELY FOR JOHN McCAIN AND SOME OF THE OTHERS, THEY DON'T HAVE A LOT OF FUND-RAISERS STACKED UP CONFLICTING WITH THIS THING.

HE COULD USE MORE FUND-RAISERS.

IT'S A SYMBOLIC THING.

OBVIOUSLY, THEY DON'T LIKE THE FORMAT THAT'S A LITTLE LESS PREDICTABLE AND YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT KIND OF CRAZY QUESTION YOU'LL GET, IF IT'S A SNOWMAN OR SOMEBODY ELSE.

BUT THERE'S A SYMBOLIC ISSUE OF REPUBLICANS ARE ALREADY BEHIND THE BALL IN TERMS OF SORT OF HARNESSING THE INTERNET. SO TO SAY THIS FORMAT MAKES ME TOO UNCOMFORTABLE, I'M NOT GOING TO DO THAT, THAT CAN BE A PROBLEM.

IT WILL HAPPEN, BUT IT WILL JUST HAPPEN LATER, I THINK.

>> KEN, WHAT DID YOU THINK ABOUT THE QUESTION FROM THE SNOWMAN AND SOME OF THE OTHER QUESTIONS FROM THE LAST YOUTUBE DEBATE, THE DEMOCRATS DEBATE?

DO YOU THINK IT DIMINISHED THE INTEGRITY OR SOMEHOW DIMINISHED THE CANDIDATES BY APPEARING ON STAGE AND TAKING A QUESTION FROM, FOR INSTANCE, THE SNOWMAN?

>> I DON'T WANT TO SAY WHETHER IT DIMINISHES THE DIGNITY OF RUNNING FOR THAT OFFICE OR NOT, BUT THERE WAS A CONNECT WITH THE EVERYDAY MAN OUT THERE SAYING, HEY, I DO HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO ASK THAT QUESTION.

AND I THINK THAT'S WHAT IS GOING TO PROVIDE THE PRESSURE FOR THE CANDIDATES TO APPEAR BECAUSE THE DEMOCRATS ALL CAME.

AND THEY ANSWERED THE QUESTIONS, WHATEVER THEY MAY HAVE BEEN OR IN SOME INSTANCES THEY DIDN'T ANSWER THE QUESTION, BUT THEY WERE THERE.

THEY WERE PRESENT, AND THEY MADE THEMSELVES AVAILABLE.

SO FOR GIULIANI OR ROMNEY TO NOT COME, WHETHER IT'S ON THE

17th OR WHETHER IT'S RESCHEDULED, I THINK DURING THE GENERAL ELECTION NEXT YEAR, COULD BE A TOOL THAT COULD BE USED BY THE OTHER SIDE.

>> THAT'S WHAT THE BLOGGERS SAY.

SOME OF THE BLOGGERS ARE SAYING THAT IT SHOWS THAT THE REPUBLICANS ARE WIMPS OR THAT THEY'RE AFRAID OF QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC IF THEY DON'T SHOW UP FOR THE YOUTUBE DEBATE.

>> EXACTLY.

>> PHYLLIS, WHAT DID YOU THINK OF THE FORMAT?

>> WELL, AS AN EX-ELECTED OFFICIAL AND SOMEBODY WHO WENT TO DEBATE AFTER DEBATE, ENOUGH IS ENOUGH.

I MEAN, I JUST THINK THAT WE'RE JUST WEARING AND FRAYING, YOU KNOW, THESE CANDIDATES.

AND I THINK WE SHOULD HAVE A NATIONAL PRIMARY.

I THINK WE SHOULD START TALKING ABOUT GIVING A NATIONAL HOLIDAY TO VOTE OR CHANGE THAT TO PRESIDENT'S DAY AND HAVE VOTING.

AND I THINK WE OUGHT TO LET THE CANDIDATES KIND OF DEVELOP THEIR POSITIONS, GET SMARTER, YOU KNOW, AS THEY GO ALONG AND BRING THEM OUT MUCH LATER.

I THINK IT'S ABSURD TO ASK THESE CANDIDATES TO GO FROM PLACE TO PLACE AND ABSURD FOR FLORIDA REALLY TO INSIST ON BEING FIRST OR ONE OF THE FIRST.

ABSURD.

IT'S A CHILDISH GAME.

>> SO WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE PROSPECTS FOR FLORIDA BEING PUNISHED IF IT GOES AHEAD WITH ITS PLAN FOR ITS EARLY PRIMARY?

THERE'S SOME TALK THAT THE DEMOCRATS ARE GOING TO STICK BY THEIR RULES AND TAKE AWAY SOME DELEGATES AND PUNISH CANDIDATES WHO CAMPAIGN HERE.

>> I MEAN -- I KNOW NOTHING THAT YOU KNOW.

NO, I DON'T THINK THAT WILL HAPPEN.

IN THE END IT WON'T.

BUT I THINK IT'S UNFORTUNATE, YOU KNOW, THAT THE DEMOCRATS DIDN'T STICK TO THE REGULAR SCHEDULE AND PUSH THEMSELVES FORWARD.

OR THE LEGISLATURE PUSH --

>> WILLIAM, THE QUESTION THAT PHYLLIS BRINGS UP ABOUT DEBATE FATIGUE, I MEAN, YOU DO HEAR THAT IN SOME CIRCLES THAT, HERE WE ARE, THE FIRST OF THESE PRIMARIES OR THESE CAUCUSES ARE IN JANUARY, AND WE'RE ALREADY DEEP INTO THE DEBATE SEASON. DO YOU GET A SENSE, YOU KNOW, FROM YOUR REPORTING THAT THERE IS ANY SORT OF DEBATE FATIGUE OUT THERE ON THE PART OF THE PUBLIC?

>> ON THE PART OF THE PUBLIC, I'M NOT SURE.

ON THE PART OF THE CANDIDATES, DARN STRAIGHT THERE IS.

AND A LOT OF THE PRESSURE FOR THE DEBATES, LET'S FACE IT, COMES FROM GROUPS, ORGANIZATIONS, OR IN SOME CASES, MEDIA

ORGANIZATIONS DON'T WANT TO GET FOR THEMSELVES THE STATUS AND THE PRESTIGE OF HOLDING A PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE. CNN AND YOUTUBE BOTH PROBABLY WANT FOR THEMSELVES THE STATUS OF HOLDING THE DEBATE.

ONE REASON IT'S GOING TO BE IN ST. PETERSBURG IS THAT CHARLIE CRIST WANTED TO DELIVER A POLITICAL PLUM TO HIS HOMETOWN.

AS TO THE PUBLIC, I DON'T THINK THAT THEY SPEND THAT MUCH TIME WATCHING THEM.

I DON'T THINK THE VIEWERSHIP IS THAT HIGH, AND I DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH THEY LEARN FROM DEBATES, REGARDLESS WHETHER YOU DRESS UP AS A SNOWMAN OR A SEA TURTLE OR, YOU KNOW, A DEAD SEAL PUP OR WHATEVER, YOU CAN ASK WHATEVER QUESTION YOU WANT, BUT YOU CAN'T STOP IT.

YOU CAN'T MAKE A CANDIDATE TO GIVE YOU A STRAIGHT, DIRECT ANSWER TO IT.

YOU'LL BRING UP A SUBJECT IN YOUR QUESTION, AND THE CANDIDATE WILL RESPOND WITH WHATEVER TESTED MESSAGE HE'S GOT ON THAT SUBJECT.

I'M NOT SURE THAT THAT DOES PEOPLE THAT MUCH MORE GOOD THAN JUST READING IN THE PAPER OR WATCHING ON THE NEWS WHAT THE CANDIDATES SAY.

>> AND ADAM, THESE CANDIDATES ARE SO GOOD, THEY ARE ON MESSAGE.

THEY DON'T GET KNOCKED OFF BY ANY OF THESE CHARACTERS THAT

ASK QUESTIONS ON YOUTUBE.

>> WHICH IS WHY I THINK SOMETHING LIKE THE YOUTUBE DEBATE, GOD FORBID I WANT TO DISS THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA THAT USUALLY RUNS THESE FAIRLY DRY, PREDICTABLE DEBATES, BUT THIS WAS SOMETHING A LITTLE DIFFERENT.

YOU ACTUALLY SAW FOR THE FIRST TIME BARACK AND HILLARY MIX IT UP, WHETHER IT WAS A LITTLE PHONY OR NOT, BUT YOU GOT SOME NEW ISSUES OUT THERE.

>> WHAT ABOUT CHARLIE CRIST?

CHARLIE CRIST REALLY I THINK WAS LOOKING FORWARD TO THE DEBATE.

HE TOUTED IT.

DOES THIS HURT HIM IF HE CAN'T -- I KNOW HE'S MAKING SOME PHONE CALLS, RIGHT, TRYING TO GET THIS THING ON TRACK IN ST. PETERSBURG.

>> YEAH, I THINK IF THIS FALLS APART, THAT WOULD BE A BIT EMBARRASSING.

HE'S ALREADY ON RECORD SAYING HE'S GOING TO PUT -- IF NEED BE, HE'LL PUT PRESSURE ON THESE GUYS TO COME.

AND WHEN YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT A KEY, THE FIRST BIG PRIMARY STATE AND A GOVERNOR WITH 70% APPROVAL RATINGS, YOU BETTER COME.

>> I WOULD LIKE TO ADDRESS THE QUESTION ON HOW PEOPLE SELECT THEIR CANDIDATES.

I THINK IT'S SNIPPETS OF A LOT OF THINGS.

YOU KNOW, THE DEBATES, WHAT THEY READ IN THE NEWSPAPER.

WHAT SOMEBODY ELSE MAY HAVE SAID.

WHAT THE PUNDITS SAY ABOUT HOW A CANDIDATE PERFORMED IN A DEBATE, THE WHOLE BIT.

AND ALSO, IT'S USED AS A WAY TO, DID GOOD SO GIVE ME SOME MONEY BECAUSE MY STOCK IS RISING OR FALLING.

AND SO I THINK IF WE LOOK AT ALL OF THOSE AREAS, I THINK DEBATES DO HAVE AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE WHOLE CAMPAIGN SEASON.

>> SO YOU LIKE A LOT OF DEBATE.

>> NO, I DON'T LIKE A LOT OF DEBATES BECAUSE I'VE HAD TO DO A LOT OF DEBATES.

SO I DON'T NECESSARILY LIKE A LOT OF DEBATES, BUT I THINK IT'S IMPORTANT, PARTICULARLY THE CANDIDATES KNOW THE EARLY PRIMARIES, I NEED TO BE THERE.

YOU KNOW, IF I DON'T GET IT, HOUR, WHATEVER, IF I DON'T GET A GOOD SHOWING, I MAY NOT MAKE IT TO FLORIDA.

AND THAT'S WHY YOU FIND ALL OF THE STATES NOW TRYING TO MOVE THEIR PRIMARIES UP EARLY BECAUSE THEY WANT TO BE ABLE TO HAVE AN IMPACT.

A NATIONAL PRIMARY, I DON'T KNOW THAT WE'LL EVER GET THERE, BECAUSE IT MAY ONLY REQUIRE ONE OR TWO DEBATES.

NO, I CAN'T RAISE ENOUGH MONEY TO RUN MY CAMPAIGN.

I THINK ALL OF THAT IS INTERRELATED.

AND IT IMPACTS THOSE CANDIDATES BASED ON THOSE APPEARANCES

IN SMALL GROUPS, LARGE GROUPS, ON TV, WHATEVER, FOR PEOPLE TO MAKE THEIR ASSESSMENT ON WHO DO I LIKE?

>> STATE ECONOMISTS REPORT FLORIDA'S TAX COLLECTIONS WILL BE NEARLY 1.5 BILLION LESS THAN PREVIOUSLY ESTIMATED FOR LAST YEAR AND FOR THE CURRENT FISCAL YEAR.

THEY BLAME THE REVENUE SHORTFALL ON AN UNEXPECTEDLY LONG DECLINE IN THE HOUSING MARKET.

A SPECIAL SESSION OF THE LEGISLATURE WILL MEET AGAIN NEXT MONTH TO ADJUST THE CURRENT BUDGET DOWNWARD.

WELL, ADAM, THIS IS, I GUESS, NOT TOO SHOCKING, BUT IT'S THE SECOND TIME AND WE HEARD TALK DURING THE LEGISLATURE THAT THEY WILL HAVE TO CUT AND NOW THIS SEEMS MORE SEVERE THAN THE PREDICTIONS THAT CAME OUT EARLIER?

>> IT'S PRETTY TOUGH, ACTUALLY.

THE LAST TIME WE HAD THIS KIND OF SHORTFALL WAS AFTER 9/11. AND THEN THEY DEALT WITH IT LARGELY BY DELAYING THE CUT IN THE INTANGIBLES TAX.

THEY CAN'T DO THAT NOW.

>> BECAUSE THE -- IT HAS BEEN WIPED OUT.

>> IT'S GONE.

ESPECIALLY IN A CLIMATE OF TAXES BEING TOO HIGH, NOBODY WILL BE TALKING ABOUT PUTTING MORE REVENUE ON THE TABLE.

YOU REALLY HAVE THE PROSPECT OF JOBS BEING CUT, YOU KNOW, A LOT OF PROGRAMS ARE ALREADY LOBBYING THEIR LEGISLATORS TO SPARE THEM.

UNEDITED REALTIME CLOSED CAPTIONING

PROBABLY THE SAFEST JOB IN FLORIDA IS A BRIDGE INSPECTOR.

>> YOUR PAPER REPORTED, TOO, THAT THINGS DON'T JUST LOOK BLEAK FOR THE COMING FISCAL YEAR OR THE FISCAL YEAR THAT WE JUST STARTED JULY 1st, RATHER, BUT THEY LOOK BLEAK FOUR YEARS OUT.

>> WELL, YOU KNOW, IT ALL KIND OF TIES TOGETHER.

IT'S PRETTY GRIM OUT THERE IN FLORIDA.

IF THEY DON'T START DOING SOMETHING TO DEAL WITH THE INSURANCE CRISIS, YOU KNOW, THAT STARTS TO HAVE A LONG-TERM IMPACT.

AND RIGHT NOW, IT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE A LOT OF RELIEF ON THE HORIZON.

>> THE INSURANCE CRISIS AND THE PROPERTY TAX ISSUE.

THOSE ARE THE TWO THINGS THAT SEEM TO BE HOLDING BACK THE HOUSING MARKET IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA, AND THOSE WERE THE TWO TOP PRIORITIES OF THE GOVERNOR GOING INTO HIS FIRST TERM AND GOING INTO THAT FIRST SESSION.

WE'RE GOING TO TALK ABOUT INSURANCE IN A LITTLE BIT, BUT HOW IS HE DOING ON PROPERTY TAXES?

>> WELL, THOSE ARE ALL -- THOSE ARE BOTH AREAS WHERE

GOVERNOR CHARLIE CRIST HAS MADE AN IRONCLAD PROMISE TO THE VOTERS OF FLORIDA, PROPERTY TAXES WILL DROP LIKE A ROCK.

I WILL TAKE ON THE INSURANCE COMPANIES, AND I WILL CUT THOSE PREMIUMS.

HE MAY YET SUCCEED, BUT SO FAR, HE HASN'T REALLY -- SO FAR

HE HASN'T KEPT THAT PROMISE, AND HE'S STILL WORKING ON BOTH.

HE HASN'T KEPT EITHER ONE YET.

>> HOW INDEPENDENT IS FLORIDA FROM THE REST OF THE COUNTRY?

I MEAN, IF FLORIDA WERE TO SOLVE ITS PROBLEMS INTERNALLY,
WOULD WE STILL BE BUCKING THIS NATIONAL TREND OF THIS
DISAPPEARANCE OF THE HOUSING BUBBLE?

>> WELL, FLORIDA HAS BEEN MORE RECESSION-PROOF THAN THE REST
OF THE COUNTRY IN THE PAST.

BUT WE HAVE OUR OWN -- WE HAVE OUR OWN SPECIAL PROPS HOLDING
US UP, BUT WE ALSO HAVE OUR OWN SPECIAL VULNERABILITIES.
THE STATE IS VERY HEAVILY DEPENDENT, THE ECONOMY IS VERY
HEAVILY DEPENDENT ON HOUSING MARKET, HOUSING SALES, HOUSING
DEVELOPMENT.

AND THAT'S WHAT IS HURTING US NOW BECAUSE GENERAL ECONOMY
PROPERTY TAXES AND INSURANCE RATES ARE BADLY HURTING THE
HOUSING MARKET.

THAT'S MAKING PEOPLE FEEL POORER.

IT CUTS DOWN ON WHAT ARE CALLED THE DOC STAMP TAXES THAT YOU
GET FROM A SALE OF REAL ESTATE.

BUT ALSO WHEN PEOPLE FEEL POORER, THEY DON'T BUY AS MUCH,
THAT CUTS DOWN THE SALES TAX.

AND EVEN IF YOU SOLVE THE PROBLEMS OVERNIGHT, IT TAKES A
WHILE FOR THE EFFECT OF THAT TO RIPPLE BACK THROUGH THE
ECONOMY TO MAKE PEOPLE STOP FEELING POORER, START FEELING A
LITTLE WEALTHIER AGAIN, WHICH IS WHY THIS WILL STRETCH OUT

FOR A FEW YEARS.

MEANWHILE, GOVERNOR CRIST HAS GOT A PROBLEM BECAUSE IF WE HAVE A FEW YEARS OF BAD REVENUES DURING HIS TERM, HE JUST GOT ELECTED, THAT WILL MAKE HIS FIRST TERM LOOK A LITTLE BLEAK.

THAT'S NOT GOING TO HELP HIS POLITICAL PROSPECTS ANY.

AND HE'S ALSO, LIKE I SAID, STRONGLY COMMITTED TO DROPPING INSURANCE PREMIUMS AND PROPERTY TAXES.

AND IF HE CAN'T COME THROUGH ON THAT, THEN HIS POLITICAL POPULARITY WILL DECLINE SEVERELY.

AND HE INSISTS HE'S GOING TO COME THROUGH ON BOTH OF THOSE.

>> KEN AND PHYLLIS, ONE OF THE ISSUES HERE, TOO, IS THAT THE STATE RELIES SO MUCH ON SALES TAX FOR ITS REVENUE.

ABOUT HALF OF ITS MONEY COMES FROM THE STATE SALES TAX.

WITH THE DECLINE IN HOUSING SALES AND PURCHASES AT HARDWARE STORES AND ALL THAT THAT WE'RE SEEING A DECLINE IN STATE REVENUE, ADAM SAID A MOMENT AGO THAT IT'S NOT LIKELY THAT THERE'S GOING TO BE A TAX INCREASE.

WOULD YOU AGREE WITH THAT?

AND IF THERE'S NOT GOING TO BE A TAX INCREASE, IS THERE -- THIS YEAR I THINK IT'S \$1.1 BILLION IN CUTS THAT HAVE TO BE MADE IN THE STATE BUDGET.

IS THERE \$1.1 BILLION OF FAT OR UNNECESSARY SPENDING IN THAT 70-SOME-BILLION-DOLLAR BUDGET IN.

>> WELL, I THINK WE HAVE TO START LOOKING AT HOW DO WE

CHANGE OUR PRIORITIES?

I MEAN, WE'VE ALWAYS BEEN PUSHING FOR GROWTH.

AND NOW IT MIGHT BE TIME TO STOP PUSHING FOR GROWTH, BECAUSE WE CAN'T AFFORD TO TAKE CARE OF THE PEOPLE WHO COME HERE AND THAT WHOLE GROWTH POSITION.

>> SO THE INVESTMENT IN CAPITAL FOR GROWTH IS A DRAG ON THE STATE BUDGET.

>> I BELIEVE WE NEED TO INVEST IN EDUCATION.

WE NEED TO INVEST IN OUR SOCIAL SERVICES.

BUT I JUST KEEP BELIEVING THAT THE MORE AND MORE PEOPLE WHO POUR IN HERE AND THEY ARE POURING INTO THE STATE OF FLORIDA, THAT WE CAN'T ACCOMMODATE OUR BUDGET.

>> IS THAT ONE WAY TO SOLVE THE STATE'S BUDGET CRISIS, AND THAT IS DISCOURAGE PEOPLE FROM MOVING HERE?

>> I THINK THAT WOULD PROBABLY WORK TO OUR DISADVANTAGE.

RECENT STUDIES HAVE SAID THAT THE PERCENTAGE OF GROWTH THAT WE'VE BEEN GETTING EACH YEAR HAS BEEN DECREASING PRIMARILY BECAUSE OF INSURANCE COSTS AND PROPERTY TAXES.

SO THE FLOW COMING INTO THE STATE HAS SLOWED SOMEWHAT.

THE SECOND THING THEY NEED TO CONSIDER IS PART OF WHAT IS GOING ON WITH THE REAL ESTATE MARKET IS A MARKET CORRECTION, WHICH WAS LONG OVERDUE.

THAT ALSO COMPOUNDED WITH THE PROPERTY TAX AND THE INSURANCE TAX.

ONE THING THAT THE LEGISLATORS, IN MY OPINION, HAVE NOT

LOOKED AT IS GOING BACK AND LOOKING AT OUR SALES TAX SYSTEM.
SOME OF THOSE THINGS THAT ARE EXEMPT FROM SALES TAX PROBABLY
SHOULD NOT.

THEY HAVEN'T REASSESSED THAT IN A NUMBER OF YEARS.

AND SOME OF THOSE THINGS THAT ARE SUBJECT TO TAXATION, MAYBE
SHOULD NOT BE.

>> AND THEN THERE'S THE STATE COMMISSION THAT'S LOOKING AT
THAT VERY QUESTION.

WE HAVE TO MOVE ON.

WE'VE DISCUSSED STATE AND LOCAL BUDGET ISSUES IN THE PAST
COUPLE OF SHOWS.

HERE IS WHAT SOME OF THE VIEWERS HAVE BEEN TELLING US ALONG
WITH OTHER COMMENTS.

>> OUR LEGISLATURE HAS LET US DOWN OVER THE INSURANCE AND IT
LOOKS LIKE THEY'RE HEADING RIGHT IN THE DIRECTION FOR THIS.
AND I THINK THE ONLY OUTCOME OF THIS IS GOING TO BE, I THINK
WE'RE GOING TO SEE A LOT OF TURNOVER IN TALLAHASSEE THIS
YEAR AND NEXT YEAR.

>> WHY DON'T THEY GO BACK AND LOOK AT ALL OF THE TAX-EXEMPT
ITEMS AND SEE WHAT THEY COULD ELIMINATE AND WHERE WE COULD
COLLECT MORE 7% TAXES ON PAGES AND PAGES OF RIDICULOUS
SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS' TAX ITEMS.

>> WE JUST RAISED SO MUCH MONEY IN THE PRIOR TAX YEARS, MY
GOODNESS GRACIOUS, WHAT'S HAPPENED TO ALL THAT MONEY?
WHAT IS THAT GOING TO BE USED FOR?

UNEDITED REALTIME CLOSED CAPTIONING

WE'RE IN SURPLUS IN MANY AREAS.

>> THE 10% YOU MIGHT GIVE ME ON PROPERTY TAXES HAVE NOW
INCREASED 10% ON THE SPECIAL TAXING DISTRICTS.

YOU'RE TAKING FROM ONE HAND AND GIVING TO THE OTHER.

IT'S A WASH.

>> WHY CAN'T WE HAVE A BUILDING MORATORIUM?

THESE CONTRACTORS DON'T CARE ABOUT OUR WETLANDS.

THEY JUST CARE ABOUT MONEY.

I'M JUST SO SICK OF EVERYBODY, THE GOVERNMENT LETTING THEM
DO THAT.

WE'RE NOT GOING TO HAVE ANYTHING LEFT OF FLORIDA IN ANOTHER
20 YEARS.

>> WELL, WE ALWAYS WELCOME YOUR COMMENTS ABOUT THE TOPICS WE
DISCUSS.

YOU CAN SEND AN E-MAIL TO FTW@WEDU.ORG OR CALL OUR TOLL FREE
LINE AT 800-335-9338.

WELL, AT THE FLORIDA CABINET MEETING THIS WEEK, GOVERNOR
CHARLIE CRIST ACCUSED INSURANCE COMPANIES OF CONSPIRING TO
KEEP HOMEOWNERS INSURANCE RATES HIGH.

LAST JANUARY'S SPECIAL SESSION OF THE LEGISLATURE TRIED TO
HOLD DOWN PREMIUMS, BUT SOME COMPANIES ARE ASKING THE STATE
FOR RATE INCREASES OF AS MUCH AS 95%.

CRIST IS ASKING GOVERNMENT ATTORNEYS TO FIND WAYS TO FORCE
INSURERS TO LOWER RATES.

KEN, DOES THIS SAY THAT THE SPECIAL LEGISLATIVE SESSION IN

WHICH THEY HAD THIS FIX, THEY WANTED TO EXPAND REINSURANCE OR HELP INSURANCE COMPANIES BUY REINSURANCE, WAS IT A FAILURE?

>> I DON'T THINK THAT THE RESULTS THAT THEY WERE LOOKING -- THAT THE STATE WAS LOOKING FOR MATERIALIZED.

I THINK THE INSURANCE COMPANIES GOT SOME OF THE THINGS THAT THEY NEEDED IN TERMS OF RELIEF FROM EXPOSURE BY THE STATE OFFERING LOW-COST SURPLUS LINES, EXCESS INSURANCE, THAT TYPE STUFF, BUT IT DOESN'T RESOLVE THE REAL ISSUE.

ANOTHER THING IS THAT I THINK HAPPENED IS BY THE STATE TAKING ON MORE OF THE RISK, BENEFITING THE INSURANCE COMPANIES, THE INSURANCE COMPANIES MIGHT HAVE BEEN THINKING, WELL, THEY ARE TAKING ON MORE OF THE RISK, WHAT'S GOING TO BE THE STATE'S ABILITY TO PAY IN THE EVENT THAT WE DID HAVE A LARGE CATASTROPHE?

SO THEY WENT OUT AND SPENT SOME OF THAT SAVINGS, PERHAPS, TO GET BACKUP INSURANCE.

BUT I THINK WHAT'S HAPPENED NOW IS WE'RE NOT SEEING REDUCTIONS IN THEIR PROPERTY INSURANCE RATES, BUT EVERY CITIZEN IN FLORIDA HAS NOW TAKEN ON MORE RISK AS A RESULT OF SOME OF THE ACTIONS TAKEN IN JANUARY.

>> THE EXPANSION OF CITIZENS.

>> EXACTLY.

REMAINS TO BE SEEN IF WE'RE GOING TO HAVE THOSE RATE SAVINGS.

>> I BELIEVE THAT THE INSURANCE COMPANIES ARE EXEMPT FROM
MANY THINGS THAT OTHER COMPANIES AND OTHER GROUPS ARE EXEMPT
FROM.

AND THEY ARE ALLOWED TO TALK TO EACH OTHER.

THEY ARE ALLOWED TO DISCUSS THEIR RATES WITH EACH OTHER.

THEY ARE ALLOWED TO DO PRICE GOUGING.

AND I BELIEVE -- BECAUSE THEY ARE.

I BELIEVE ON THE FEDERAL LEVEL, THAT WE --

>> NOT ALLOWED TO.

>> WELL, THEY HAPPEN TO BE DOING IT.

THEY ARE NOT GIVEN PERMISSION TO DO IT.

THEY ARE DOING IT.

>> THEY ARE NOT ALLOWED TO.

>> WHAT I'M SAYING --

>> KEN WORKS IN THE INSURANCE INDUSTRY.

>> I KNOW THAT.

AND I RAN ON THE FACT THAT YOU HAVE TO ON THE FEDERAL LEVEL
MAKE THEM TAKE AWAY THEIR EXEMPTION AND PUT THEM UNDER SOME
KIND OF OVERSIGHT SO THAT THERE CAN BE SOME SUBSTANTIVE
CHANGE.

BECAUSE THIS IS ABSURD WHAT'S GOING ON.

AND THEY ARE JUST OUT THERE DOING AND SAYING WHAT THEY
REALLY ARE.

>> ADAM, THERE'S BEEN SOME SUGGESTION THAT THE INSURANCE
ISSUE BE READDRESSSED AT THE UPCOMING SPECIAL SESSION IN

SEPTEMBER.

>> WELL, THAT'S MOSTLY RELATING TO THE NO FAULT AUTO INSURANCE, AND THAT MAY WELL HAPPEN.

BUT I'M HEARING MORE AND MORE PEOPLE -- BOTH PARTIES IN TALLAHASSEE SAY THAT THE SPECIAL SESSION WAS A FAILURE. AND NOT ONLY ARE PEOPLE NOT GETTING RELIEF, BUT FLORIDA IS ON THE HOOK FOR A WHOLE LOT MORE RISK IF GOD FORBID A STORM COMES.

EARLIER THIS WEEK, ALEX SINK WAS AMONG THOSE SUGGESTING THAT PERHAPS WE OUGHT TO RESCIND WHAT WAS DONE IN THE SPECIAL SESSION TO GET US OFF OF THAT RISK.

CHARLIE CRIST IS TALKING ABOUT HAULING INSURANCE CEOs UP AND DOING, DO YOU SWEAR TO TELL THE TRUTH, NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH KIND OF THING.

HE'S HAD A VERY CHARMED EXISTENCE IN POLITICS.

AND HIS APPROVAL RATINGS ARE IN THE STRATOSPHERE, BUT PEOPLE ARE EXPECTING RESULTS.

AND PEOPLE ARE FIRING A LOT OF CRITICISM AT HIM SAYING, YOU PROMISED SOME RELIEF, WHERE IS IT?

>> WELL, WHAT ADAM SAID, WILLIAM, IS TRUE, THAT IF WE DON'T HAVE A HURRICANE, AND CITIZENS, WHICH IS TAKING ON MORE AND MORE OF THE RESPONSIBILITY OF COVERING HOMES, ITS STATE PROGRAM, THE GOVERNOR IS GOING TO LOOK PRETTY GOOD IF WE DON'T HAVE A HURRICANE.

IF WE HAVE A HURRICANE THAT TAXES THE ABILITY FOR CITIZENS

TO PAY OUT CLAIMS, THE GOVERNOR IS GOING TO LOOK REALLY BAD.

>> WELL, LIKE ADAM SAID, GOVERNOR CRIST HAS LED A CHARMED POLITICAL LIFE.

IF THERE'S ANYTHING THAT WOULD PREVENT US FROM HAVING A HURRICANE, IT'S HIS BETTING AGAINST IT.

BUT THERE ARE SOME -- THIS IS A TYPICAL TRADEMARK CHARLIE CRIST POPULOUS STANCE AGAINST A CORPORATE ENTITY, THE INSURANCE COMPANIES THAT HE BELIEVES IS RIPPING OFF THE CONSUMERS.

HE'S REAL SINCERE ABOUT IT.

BUT YESTERDAY IN AN INTERVIEW WITH A "THE TAMPA TRIBUNE" EDITORIAL BOARD, WHILE HE WAS BASHING THEM AND ACCUSING THEM OF BASICALLY VIOLATING THE LAW AND THREATENING TO GO AFTER THEM LEGALLY, TAKE THEM TO COURT, PUT THEM UNDER OATH, PUT THEM IN JAIL, WHATEVER, HE ALSO SORT OF SNUCK OUT WITH THE OTHER HAND A LITTLE BIT OF A POSSIBLE PEACE OFFERING AND SAID HE'S HAD CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GETTING TOGETHER, A COME TO JESUS MEETING WITH INSURANCE COMPANY EXECUTIVES TO SEE IF WE COULD TALK OUR WAY OUT OF THIS.

FIND SOME COMMON GROUND.

JUST LIKE ADAM SAID, HE HAS STAKED HIMSELF OUT, PROMISING TO CUT THESE RATES.

AS LONG AS THAT'S POSSIBLE, AS LONG AS HE CAN CONTEND THAT MAY HAVE HAPPENED, HE'S OKAY.

BUT IF HE CAN'T DELIVER, HE WILL BE IN BIG POLITICAL

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TROUBLE.

HE KNOWS THAT.

HE'S STAKED HIMSELF OUT ON IT.

HE WON'T DENY IT.

BUT THERE ARE SOME DEMOCRATS WHO DO WANT TO GET INTO THE LEGISLATION DURING THE SPECIAL SESSION, CLOSE A FEW OF THE LOOPHOLES, SOME OF WHICH -- AND THEY AGREE WITH CRIST ON THIS, TO SOME EXTENT MORE THAN THE REPUBLICANS DO.

>> OKAY.

WELL, IN PINELLAS COUNTY, A GRAND JURY HAS BEGUN INVESTIGATING A LAND DEAL INVOLVING THE COUNTY'S TAX APPRAISER.

THE COUNTY PAID FOUR TIMES THE APPRAISED VALUE FOR LAND OWNED BY JIM SMITH.

MANY QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN RAISED ABOUT THE DEAL INCLUDING WHY DID THE COUNTY ATTORNEY REPRESENT BOTH THE BUYER AND SELLER IN THE TRANSACTION?

PHYLLIS, YOU WORKED -- YOU WERE ON THE HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY COMMISSION.

YOU EVER RUN INTO ANYTHING LIKE THIS?

>> WELL, I WORKED FOR HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY COMMISSION THAT WAS TAKEN TO COURT, TAKEN TO JAIL.

I WAS HEAD OF AGING SERVICES.

SO I WAS NOT A COMMISSIONER THEN.

WHEN I WAS A COMMISSIONER.

BUT WHAT THIS MADE ME THINK OF, IT'S AN INCREDIBLE ETHICAL LAPSE, IS THAT THE COMMISSION IN PINELLAS WAS NOT PAYING ATTENTION.

IT'S AS SIMPLE AS THAT.

THESE DEALS ARE GOING ON ALL THE TIME.

YOU'VE GOT TO REALLY PAY ATTENTION.

THAT'S A JOB WHERE YOU READ WHAT IS GIVEN TO YOU AND YOU ASK QUESTIONS.

AND THEY JUST LET IT GO.

AND THIS IS AN EGREGIOUS ACT, BUT THERE MUST BE A HUNDRED MORE.

IF THEY ARE LETTING THIS GO, THERE ARE OTHER THINGS SO YOU WORRY.

>> FINALLY, EACH WEEK, WE ASK OUR PANEL ABOUT ANOTHER STORY FROM THE WEEK OR ON THE HORIZON WHICH AFFECTS PEOPLE HERE IN WEST CENTRAL FLORIDA.

WILLIAM, YOUR OTHER BIG STORY OF THE WEEK?

>> WELL, THE GOVERNOR THINKS WE NEED ANOTHER BRIDGE ACROSS TAMPA BAY.

HE HASN'T PUT OUT ANY SPECIFICS OR ANY DETAILS ON THIS, BUT HE SAYS WE NEED ONE.

JIM SEBESTA, FORMER STATE SENATOR HEAVILY INVOLVED IN TRANSPORTATION, SAYS IF WE BUILD ANOTHER BRIDGE, PROBABLY WOULD GO FROM SOUTHERN ST. PETE TO THE SOUTHERN TIP OF THE INTERBAY PENINSULA DOWN NEAR BALLAST POINT.

UNEDITED REALTIME CLOSED CAPTIONING

>> VERY INTERESTING.

KEN, YOUR OTHER STORY OF THE WEEK?

>> A CLIENT TOLD ME THIS WEEK ABOUT A GRANT THAT'S BEING FUNDED IN HILLSBOROUGH, PINELLAS COUNTY BY THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND AGING SERVICES OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT, WHERE THERE ARE A COUPLE OF OUTLETS OFFERING FREE HEALTH -- PAP SMEARS AND MAMMOGRAMS.

CONDITION BEING WOMEN AGES 50 TO 64 AND MEET THE LOW-INCOME SPECIFICATIONS, AND I THOUGHT THAT WAS INTERESTING BECAUSE I HADN'T READ ABOUT IT ANYWHERE.

THEY SAID OUTREACH HAS BEEN THEIR PROBLEM.

>> PHYLLIS, YOUR OTHER BIG STORY OF THE WEEK?

>> I WAS JUST KIND OF STUNNED WHEN I SAW BRIAN BLAIR CHANGE THE LIMIT FOR CITIZENS SPEAKING UP FROM THREE MINUTES TO ONE MINUTE AND THEN TURNING TO ROGER STEWART AND GIVING ROGER STEWART, FORMER HEAD OF THE EPC FOR OVER 20 YEARS WHO KNOWS MORE ABOUT WHAT HE'S TALKING ABOUT THAN I BELIEVE BRIAN BLAIR DOES, CERTAINLY, SAYING ONE MINUTE.

THAT'S UNBELIEVABLE.

THE WETLANDS HEARING.

THE ARROGANCE TO ME WAS STUNNING.

>> ADAM, YOUR OTHER BIG STORY OF THE WEEK?

>> BARACK OBAMA IS THE FIRST DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE TO HIRE A FLORIDA OPERATIVE, A POLITICAL DIRECTOR. A LOT OF PEOPLE WERE THINKING HE MIGHT CEDE THE STATE TO

HILLARY CLINTON AND NOT PLAY IN THE PRIMARY.

HERE'S A SIGN THAT HE'S PERHAPS GETTING READY TO PLAY HARD.

>> EXPANSION MODE POTENTIALLY.

MAYBE.

ALL RIGHT.

WELL, THANKS TO ADAM SMITH, KEN ANTHONY.

THANK YOU, PHYLLIS BUSANSKY.

AND THANK YOU, WILLIAM MARCH.

AND THANK YOU FOR WATCHING "FLORIDA THIS WEEK."

THIS SHOW WILL BE AVAILABLE ONLINE FOR PLAYBACK EARLY NEXT
WEEK AT WEDU.ORG WHERE YOU CAN ALSO MAKE AN ONLINE DONATION.

THANKS FOR YOUR GENEROUS SUPPORT.

"FLORIDA THIS WEEK" RETURNS PLEDGE-FREE NEXT FRIDAY NIGHT AT
8:30 AND SUNDAY AFTERNOON NEXT WEEK AT NOON.

FROM ALL OF US AT WEDU, HAVE A GREAT WEEKEND!

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