

"FLORIDA THIS WEEK"

AUGUST 31, 2007

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

>> COMING UP NEXT, THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY VOTES TO PENALIZE FLORIDA DEMOCRATS FOR MOVING UP THEIR PRIMARY ELECTION DATE.

THE SECOND ANNIVERSARY OF KATRINA FOCUSES ATTENTION BACK ON FLORIDA'S OWN STORM RECOVERY.

A NEW CENSUS REPORT SAYS FLORIDA HAS ONE OF THE NATION'S HIGHEST RATES OF PEOPLE WITHOUT HEALTH INSURANCE.

AND PROPERTY TAXES ARE NOT DROPPING LIKE A ROCK.

POLITICAL INSIGHTS NEXT ON "FLORIDA THIS WEEK."

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>> FROM THE WEDU STUDIOS, THIS IS "FLORIDA THIS WEEK."

AND NOW, MODERATOR ROB LOREI.

>> WELCOME BACK.

THIS WEEK, OUR PANELISTS ARE: ERNEST HOOPER IS A COLUMNIST AT THE "ST. PETERSBURG TIMES."

UNEDITED REALTIME CLOSED CAPTIONING

LAURA FIORILLI-CREWS IS A NEWS AND SPECIAL PROJECTS PRODUCER
AT TBO.COM.

RON WEAVER IS AN ATTORNEY AND A DEMOCRAT, AND PAUL
BEDINGHAUS IS A REPUBLICAN STATE COMMITTEEMAN AND CPA.

GOOD TO SEE YOU, EVERYBODY.

WELL, LAST WEEK, THE DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL COMMITTEE VOTED TO
STRIP FLORIDA OF ITS 210 DELEGATES TO THE DEMOCRATIC
CONVENTION NEXT SUMMER IF THE STATE GOES AHEAD WITH THE
JANUARY 29th PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY.

THE COMMITTEE GAVE FLORIDA 30 DAYS TO CHANGE THE SELECTION
DATE.

FLORIDA'S JANUARY 29th PRIMARY HAS DRAWN FIRE FROM BOTH
MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES WHOSE LEADERS INSIST THAT IT BE HELD
NO EARLIER THAN FEBRUARY 5th.

THE DEMOCRATS ARE NOT ALONE.

THE NATIONAL REPUBLICANS ARE PLANNING TO PUNISH THE STATE AS
WELL.

LOCAL REACTION WAS SWIFT.

>> THE DEMOCRATS WILL FEEL TOTALLY DISENFRANCHISED.

WHY SHOULD WE BOTHER VOTING AND GOING OUT IF OUR VOTES DON'T
COUNT?

ALL THE MILLIONS OF DOLLARS THAT FLORIDA HAS DONATED TO THE
NATIONAL PARTY, TO THE INDIVIDUAL CANDIDATES THAT WILL ALL
BE WASHED DOWN THE DRAIN.

>> RON, THAT'S VIC DIMAIO, AS YOU KNOW, WHO IS SOMETIMES A

PANELIST ON THIS SHOW.

HE SUED THE DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL COMMITTEE THIS WEEK SAYING
YOU CAN'T DO THIS, YOU CAN'T TAKE AWAY OUR DELEGATES.

>> 25 YEARS AGO, THE U.S. SUPREME COURT SAID THAT THE
DEMOCRATS UNFORTUNATELY CAN SET THEIR RULES FOR WHO THEY
ALLOW AND UNDER WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES THEY ALLOW THEIR
DELEGATES TO BE CERTIFIED.

HOWEVER, THERE MAY BE AN EXCEPTION HERE.

IF YOU LISTEN TO THE TAPE OF THE FLORIDA LEGISLATURE, A
PROMINENT DEMOCRAT DID ASK THE REPUBLICAN LEGISLATURE NOT TO
DO SOMETHING THAT WOULD PENALIZE THE FLORIDA DEMOCRATS THE
WAY THEY ARE BEING PENALIZED, AND THERE WAS A LOUD LAUGHTER
THROUGHOUT THE CHAMBERS FROM THE REPUBLICAN LEGISLATURE.
THAT COUPLED WITH THE MORE IMPORTANT MERITS ARE THAT THIS
MAY BE A DISTINGUISHABLE CASE, THAT 25 YEARS AGO, THE U.S.
SUPREME COURT MAY HAVE TO REVISIT THIS 25-YEAR-OLD RULING
AND LET FLORIDA DEMOCRATS, FOUR MILLION OF US, BE
REENFRANCHISED HERE ON THE 42nd ANNIVERSARY OF THE VOTING
RIGHTS ACT AND FOR THREE REASONS.

NUMBER ONE, I THINK THAT FLORIDA DEMOCRATS ARE NOT REALLY AT
FAULT HERE.

NUMBER TWO, I THINK THAT FLORIDA DEMOCRATS SHARE WITH SOUTH
CAROLINA THE REPRESENTATIVENESS OF THE SOUTH.

AND THIS YEAR UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, AS LONG AS THE
DEMOCRATS PLEDGE THAT THEY HAVE TRIED TO CHANGE IT AND THEY

UNEDITED REALTIME CLOSED CAPTIONING

CAN'T BY THE NECESSARY DATE, THAT THEY BE ALLOWED THIS YEAR AND THIS YEAR ONLY TO VOTE WITH SOUTH CAROLINA, REPRESENT BEFORE FEBRUARY 5th, ON JANUARY 29th A COUNTING POLL OF WHO THEY WANT TO BE THE DEMOCRATIC NOMINEE.

AND THEN IN FOUR YEARS WE'LL SWITCH OFF WITH SOUTH CAROLINA, AND FLORIDA, IN FOUR YEARS, WE'LL BE PARENTED.

IT WILL HONOR THE RULES OF THE ROAD BY THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY BUT DON'T DISENFRANCHISE THEM UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES.

>> THAT'S PRETTY COMPLEX.

LET ME GO BACK TO YOUR FIRST POINT.

THAT IS, YOU THINK -- AS A LAWYER, SPEAKING AS A LAWYER, DO YOU THINK THIS CASE WILL EVEN MAKE IT INTO COURT, OR WILL A JUDGE LOOK AT THIS AND SAY, I CAN'T REALLY RULE IN A DISPUTE BETWEEN THESE TWO BRANCHES OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY?

>> 25 YEARS AGO, THE U.S. SUPREME COURT REFUSED TO GET INTO THIS AND SAID, LOOK, THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY AND THE REPUBLICAN PARTY CAN SET ITS RULES AND CAN SET THE DECISION ON WHO TO CERTIFY AS DELEGATES.

THAT'S THEIR PREROGATIVE.

HOWEVER, IF AN EXCEPTION COULD BE FOUND HERE IN THE COURTS -- IT'S NOT OUT OF THE QUESTION THAT UNDER THESE UNIQUE CIRCUMSTANCES, THE REPRESENTATIVENESS OF THE SUBJECT BY SOUTH CAROLINA INSTEAD OF FLORIDA, WHERE IS THE MERIT AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL BASIS FOR THAT?

WHY SOUTH CAROLINA IS GOING TO BE ALLOWED EARLY AND NOT

UNEDITED REALTIME CLOSED CAPTIONING

FLORIDA, FLORIDA WAS NOT CHOSEN BY DEMOCRATIC LEGISLATURE.

IT WAS NOT PUSHED BY THE DEMOCRATS.

IT WAS OBJECTED TO BY THE DEMOCRATS ON THE FLOOR OF THE
FLORIDA LEGISLATURE.

THEREFORE, THERE SHOULD BE SOME MERCY.

I'M A DEMOCRAT AND I'M A PARENT.

>> SO THERE'S A TRACK RECORD THERE BASED ON THE RECORD IN
THE LEGISLATURE.

PAUL, THOUGH, HAVE THE DEMOCRATS NATIONALLY SHOT THEMSELVES
IN THE FOOT BY TAKING THIS ACTION?

>> I FEEL VERY, VERY BADLY FOR THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY, ROB.
MY HEART IS HEAVY.

BECAUSE THE DEMOCRATS IN FLORIDA ARE NOT ONLY CONCERNED
ABOUT THE DELEGATES TO THE CONVENTION, THAT'S A PARTY --
IT'S A FORMAL PROCESS.

BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY TO THEM IS THAT THE DEMOCRATS IN
FLORIDA DON'T WANT TO SEE THAT TAX CUT PASSED IN JANUARY.
AND THEY NEED THEIR PEOPLE TO TURN OUT IN JANUARY.

IT'S THE SAME DAY AS THE PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY VOTE.

I'M TALKING ABOUT THE SUPER HOMESTEAD EXEMPTION AMENDMENT TO
THE FLORIDA CONSTITUTION.

IF THE VOTES AREN'T GOING TO COUNT, THEN THEY ARE CONCERNED
THAT MILLIONS OF DEMOCRATS WON'T SHOW UP AT THE POLLS IN
JANUARY.

AND THEY WON'T BE ABLE TO DEFEAT THE TAX CUT FOR FLORIDIANS.

THAT'S WHAT THEIR REAL CONCERN IS.

>> LAURA, DO YOU THINK THE DEMOCRATS HAVE HURT THEMSELVES
PRETTY BADLY BY DOING THIS?

THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATS.

>> POSSIBLY SO.

AND I DON'T THINK THAT THE DECISION CAN STAND AS IT IS.

I UNDERSTAND IT'S THEIR DECISION, HOW THEY WANT TO AWARD
THEIR DELEGATES, BUT THEY JUST CAN'T IGNORE FLORIDA.

IT'S REALLY NO WAY TO TREAT A SWING STATE.

I WOULDN'T BE SURPRISED IF OVER THE NEXT SEVERAL ELECTIONS,
THE METHOD OF CHOOSING A PARTY NOMINEE CHANGES.

THE NEW HAMPSHIRE PRIMARY HAS BEEN IMPORTANT FOR ABOUT 50
YEARS NOW, AND EVERYBODY IS TRYING TO GET EARLIER AND
EARLIER.

BUT BEFORE THAT, YOU KNOW, EARLY PRIMARIES WEREN'T A FACTOR.
IT COULD BE TIME FOR ANOTHER EVOLUTION.

>> UM-HUM.

ERNEST, WHAT DO YOU THINK THE IMPACT OF THIS DECISION BY THE
NATIONAL DEMOCRATS IS GOING TO BE?

>> THE MOST TROUBLING ASPECT TO ME IS THE FACT THAT NOT THAT
THE DELEGATES WON'T COUNT.

WE CAN GET AROUND THAT.

THE NOMINEE CAN SAY, I'M THE NOMINEE.

I'M HEAD OF THE PARTY NOW, AND I WANT FLORIDA'S DELEGATES TO
COUNT.

THE REAL QUESTION IS, WILL PEOPLE CAMPAIGN HERE?
AND WILL WE GET A CHANCE TO TELL THEM ABOUT THE ISSUES THAT
WE REALLY CARE ABOUT?
AND WILL WE GET A CHANCE TO GET A REAL FEEL FOR THE
CANDIDATES AND WHAT THEY STAND FOR?
THEY MAY CHOOSE NOT TO CAMPAIGN HERE BECAUSE IT IS A
DISPUTE.
AND THAT'S WHAT IS MOST TROUBLING TO ME.
THE OTHER THING IS THAT IF THIS JUDGE RULES IN FAVOR OF THE
STATE OF FLORIDA, THERE WILL BE MASS CHAOS.
EVERY STATE WILL THEN SAY, OH, WELL, IF IT DOESN'T MATTER,
YOU KNOW, MICHIGAN WILL GO TO THE 15th.
AND WE'LL END UP HAVING A PRIMARY ON CHRISTMAS EVE.
>> OR HALLOWEEN.
>> YEAH.
THERE'S NO TELLING WHAT WILL HAPPEN.
>> BUT ARE THE REPUBLICANS, PAUL, HOME FREE ON THIS?
BECAUSE THE GOP ALSO HAS RULES THAT SAY THAT YOU CAN'T MOVE
UP YOUR PRIMARY EARLIER THAN FEBRUARY 5th, AND THE
REPUBLICANS HAVE ALSO DONE THAT HERE IN FLORIDA.
>> WELL, ACTUALLY, WHAT THEIR NATIONAL RULES SAY IS THAT
REPUBLICANS CANNOT SELECT THEIR DELEGATES BEFORE THAT DATE.
THE POSITION OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY OF FLORIDA IS THAT
WE'RE NOT SELECTING OUR DELEGATES ON THAT DATE.
WE'RE ACTUALLY SELECTING OUR DELEGATES AT A LATER DATE IN

UNEDITED REALTIME CLOSED CAPTIONING

FEBRUARY OR MARCH.

SO THAT'S THEIR POSITION GOING TO THE NATIONAL CONVENTION.
AND FLORIDA PLANS ON BRINGING ALL THE DELEGATES TO THE
CONVENTION NEXT YEAR.

SO UNLIKE OUR DEMOCRATIC COUNTERPARTS, REPUBLICANS LET OUR
PEOPLE VOTE AND COUNT --

[LAUGHTER]

GOOD FOR BUSINESS.

>> RON, WITH ALL THE IMPORTANCE THAT FLORIDA HAS HAD THE
LAST COUPLE OF ELECTIONS, THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATS CAN'T LET
THIS STAND, CAN THEY?

>> NO, THEY NEED TO SOLVE IT.

THEY HAVE 23 DAYS LEFT TO SOLVE IT.

I THINK THEY'LL SOLVE IT EITHER WITH SOMETHING LIKE
SWITCHING OFF WITH SOUTH CAROLINA GOING FORWARD, HAVING THE
DEMOCRATS PLEDGE THAT THEY WILL TRY TO GET A SPECIAL SESSION
OUT OF CHARLIE CRIST AND MARCO RUBIO AND TRY TO HAVE IT IN
THE SAME TIME AS THE SEPTEMBER 18th SPECIAL SESSION ON
BUDGET CUTTING.

AND IF THEY FAIL AND ONLY IF THEY FAIL TO GET THAT, THEN
THEY WOULD BE GIVEN AT LEAST SOME MERCY HERE NOT TO RULE OUT
FLORIDIANS AND FLORIDA DEMOCRATS PREFERENCES.

>> LAURA HAS THE RIGHT IDEA.

WE NEED TO REVAMP THE ENTIRE PRIMARY PROCESS.

WE NEED TO START ALL OVER.

I THINK A REGIONAL APPROACH.

DIVIDE THE STATE UP INTO FIVE DIFFERENT REGIONS.

AND EVERY FOUR YEARS, YOU LET ONE REGION GO FIRST.

>> JUST DIVIDE THE U.S. INTO FIVE DIFFERENT REGIONS.

>> EVERYBODY GETS A CHANCE OVER THE NEXT 20 YEARS TO BE REPRESENTED.

>>> THIS PAST WEEK MARKED THE SECOND ANNIVERSARY OF HURRICANE KATRINA.

NEW ORLEANS AND SURROUNDING AREAS ARE FAR FROM RECOVERED,

YET A YEAR EARLIER, FLORIDA WAS HIT BY FOUR HURRICANES.

AND ON THE RECORD RECOVERY OF THOSE 2004 STORMS IS ALSO

NOTABLE, ACCORDING TO THE FT. MYERS NEWS PRESS OF THE MORE

THAN ONE MILLION FLORIDIANS WHO CONTACTED F.E.M.A. SEEKING

ASSISTANCE FOR HOMES DAMAGED OR DESTROYED BY THE 2004

HURRICANES, FEWER THAN ONE IN TEN RECEIVED MONETARY HELP.

AND A NUMBER OF THOSE PEOPLE RECEIVED F.E.M.A. HOUSING

RELIEF OF LESS THAN \$10 EACH.

HAVE WE RECOVERED FROM OUR OWN SERIES OF HURRICANES IN 2004?

>> DEFINITELY NOT.

IF YOU LIVED THROUGH IT OR EVEN IF YOU HAVE JUST DRIVEN

THROUGH THE DESTRUCTION IN ANY OF THE AREAS THAT WERE SO

HARD HIT, I DON'T THINK WE'VE QUITE RECOVERED.

I THINK IT TAKES MANY YEARS TO GO AHEAD AND DO THAT.

THIS IS A VERY INTERESTING INVESTIGATION.

AND THUMBS UP TO THE NEWS PRESS FOR SPENDING TWO OR THREE

YEARS IN THE COURTS TRYING TO PURSUE THE DOCUMENTS THAT THEY NEEDED TO DO IT.

IT WAS IMPRESSIVE AND GREAT TO READ.

BUT YOU HAVE TO WONDER WITH THOSE PAYMENTS OF LESS THAN \$10, WHY THEY EVEN BOTHERED TO PROCESS THE PAPERWORK THAT IT TAKES TO MAIL SOMEONE A CHECK.

I THINK I SAW ONE FOR 41 CENTS.

IT'S AN INSULT.

IT'S NOT GOING TO HELP ANYBODY RECOVER, AND IT REPRESENTS A LOT OF WASTED EFFORT ON THE PART OF THE PEOPLE WHO APPLIED FOR THE AID AND THE GOVERNMENT THAT SUPPOSEDLY DISHES IT OUT.

>> IS THIS A FAILURE OF F.E.M.A.?

IS THIS A FAILURE OF THE GOVERNMENT?

IS THIS A FAILURE OF THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION?

OR IS THIS SOMETHING THAT WAS SO FAR BEYOND THE SCALE OF WHAT WE'VE EXPERIENCED IN THE PAST THAT ANYBODY WOULD HAVE SCREWED IT UP?

>> I THINK IT HAS A LOT TO DO WITH THE REPETITIVE HURRICANES, THE UNUSUALLY STRONG SEASON THERE.

BUT I ALSO THINK THAT DISASTER AID IS JUST A VERY TRICKY THING TO TRY TO DISPENSE AND TO MONITOR AND TO DO WITH ANY KIND OF EFFICIENCY.

AND THIS IS JUST ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF THAT.

KATRINA, CHARLEY, PICK YOUR HURRICANE, IT NEVER QUITE WORKS

OUT RIGHT.

>> PAUL, WILL THERE BE ECHOS OF DISSATISFACTION ON THE PART OF PEOPLE FROM KATRINA OR WHAT HAPPENED HERE IN FLORIDA IN THE 2008 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION?

WILL THAT HAVE ANY IMPACT ON ANY OF THE CANDIDATES?

>> I THINK THE LARGEST IMPACT WOULD HAVE BEEN IN '06, BECAUSE IT WAS JUST SO CLOSE.

AND IT'S HARD TO LOOK BACK AND SAY, WE'RE DOING ENOUGH OR WE'RE NOT DOING ENOUGH.

THE JOB IS SO ENORMOUS.

REBUILDING NEW ORLEANS AND GETTING PEOPLE BACK IN THERE FROM ALL AROUND THE COUNTRY THAT HAVE SCATTERED, IT'S JUST A TREMENDOUS EFFORT THAT'S GOING TO BE REQUIRED.

IT'S GOING TO TAKE DECADES, I THINK.

AND SO TO SAY THAT TWO YEARS AFTER THAT WE'RE NOT BACK TO NORMAL IS JUST NOT -- IS NOT REASONABLE EXPECTATION, I DON'T THINK.

>> AND THERE WERE SOME -- I WOULDN'T CALL THEM PROTESTS, BUT I THINK THERE WAS SOME DISSATISFACTION WHEN THE PRESIDENT VISITED NEW ORLEANS AND THE MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST THIS WEEK, PEOPLE WERE SAYING, YOU KNOW, IT'S NOT HAPPENING FAST ENOUGH.

WE CAN'T GET BACK INTO OUR HOUSES.

WE'RE NOT GETTING ENOUGH MONEY TO REBUILD, BUT WE NEED TO REBUILD.

BUT YOU DON'T THINK IN THE LONG TERM THAT WILL HAVE MUCH IMPACT.

>> I THINK WHAT MAY HAPPEN IN THE REALLY LONG TERM, 10, 20 YEARS I THINK WOULD BE AN INTERESTING STUDY TO SEE HOW THESE PEOPLE, THE YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THIS, HOW THEY VIEW THEIR GOVERNMENT WHEN THEY'RE ADULTS AND OLDER ADULTS AND WHETHER OR NOT THEY THINK THEY CAN EVER RELY ON THEIR GOVERNMENT.

THAT WOULD BE AN INTERESTING STUDY, I THINK.

>> ERNEST, WHAT DO YOU THINK IS GOING TO BE THE OUTCOME OF THESE TWO HURRICANE EVENTS?

>> I THINK IT'S GOING TO HAVE A HUGE IMPACT ON THE ELECTION. IN MY OPINION, PEOPLE SHOULD BE MORE UPSET WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND HOW THEY RESPONDED TO THESE HURRICANES THAN THEY ARE ABOUT IRAQ.

IN MANY WAYS YOU CAN DEBATE THE IRAQ SITUATION.

YOU CAN TALK ABOUT THE FACT THAT DEMOCRATIC MEMBERS OF CONGRESS APPROVED AND GAVE THE PRESIDENT PERMISSION TO GO INTO IRAQ.

THIS IS JUST FAILURE ON A PRETTY HUGE SCALE.

I MEAN, THE MONEY THAT THEY DISTRIBUTED TO THESE PEOPLE IN SOUTHWEST FLORIDA THAT MONEY COULD HAVE BEEN POOLED TO CREATE SOME KIND OF RESOURCE CENTER TO HELP THESE PEOPLE.

I MEAN, I'M NOT SURE WHAT THE ANSWER IS, BUT I KNOW THE ANSWER IS NOT SENDING OUT CHECKS FOR FOUR AND FIVE DOLLARS.

I MEAN, THAT'S JUST NONSENSICAL.

AND SOMEONE NEEDED TO STAND UP AND SAY THIS DOES NOT MAKE SENSE.

I'M SURPRISED IT DIDN'T HAPPEN.

THE RESPONSE HAS BEEN BAD, AND THE RESPONSE IN NEW ORLEANS HAS BEEN SO BAD THAT SOME PEOPLE THINK IT'S BY DESIGN.

SOME PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HAS NOT DONE MORE TO HELP NEW ORLEANS BECAUSE THEY DON'T WANT THE LARGE POPULATION IN THAT CITY TO COME BACK.

>> THAT WAS A DEMOCRATIC CITY, RIGHT?

VOTED PRETTY CONSISTENTLY DEMOCRATIC.

>> IT WAS A DEMOCRATIC CITY, AND NOW IT'S NOT.

AND VOTERS IN NEW ORLEANS HELPED DECIDE STATE ELECTIONS FOR GOVERNOR AND U.S. SENATE.

BOTH THOSE ELECTIONS ARE COMING UP IN '08.

AND NOW THAT THAT POPULATION HAS BEEN DISPERSED, IT'S LIKELY THAT THOSE TWO SEATS ARE GOING TO BE WON BY REPUBLICANS.

SO WHEN IT'S THAT BAD THAT IT'S LEADING TO PEOPLE THINKING THAT IT'S BY DESIGN, IT'S BAD.

>> PAUL?

>> I UNDERSTAND THAT POINT OF VIEW.

HOWEVER, IT'S ALSO -- THERE'S ALSO GREAT DEBATE ABOUT THE WISDOM OF BUILDING A CITY THAT'S SEVEN OR TEN FEET UNDER SEA LEVEL AGAIN.

AND THAT'S PART OF THE DEBATE.

WHERE SHOULD WE REBUILD?

SHOULD WE REBUILD?

HOW SHOULD WE REBUILD?

SHOULD WE JUST DO AS WE DID BEFORE AND WOULD WE BE RESPONSIBLE IN HAVING A CITY LIKE WE DID BEFORE, HAVING THESE PEOPLE BE VULNERABLE AGAIN AS THEY WERE BEFORE?

I THINK THAT GOES INTO THE MIX AS WELL.

>> DOES THE SAME GO FOR REBUILDING HERE IN FLORIDA IF YOU WERE ON A BARRIER ISLAND OR IF YOU WERE IN AN AREA THAT WAS HURT BY HURRICANE CHARLEY, SAME THINKING GO FOR THAT?

>> SURE, I THINK THAT GOES AS WELL FOR FLORIDA, BUT NOT TO THE SAME EXTENT, BECAUSE YOU'RE NOT BUILDING IN AN AREA, I DON'T KNOW, SEVEN OR TEN FEET UNDER SEA LEVEL.

I MEAN, WE TALK ABOUT SEVEN FEET ABOVE SEA LEVEL HERE.

THEY ARE TALKING ABOUT UNDER SEA LEVEL THERE.

THAT'S JUST AMAZING TO ME.

>> RON, YOU GET THE LAST WORD ON THIS ONE.

>> PAUL, DO YOU THINK -- ERNEST AND PAUL AND LAURA -- THAT MAYBE IT'S TIME FOR SOME HEALING ON THIS SUBJECT, AND WHAT WE REALLY NEED IS TO DO WHAT THREE FLORIDA CONGRESSMEN ADVOCATED THIS WEEK, KLEIN, MAHONEY, AND WEXLER, WHICH IS WE HAVE A NATIONAL CATASTROPHE FUND.

NEXT TIME -- AND IT MAY BE NEW ORLEANS AGAIN FOR REASONS YOU POINTED OUT CORRECTLY -- AND VIS-A-VIS FAIRNESS AND HEALING FOR THAT POPULOUS, THE NEXT TIME IT HAPPENS TO FLORIDA OR

LOUISIANA, WHICH GET ABOUT NINE-TENTHS OF THE HARDEST BLOWS,
THAT WE HAVE A NATIONAL CATASTROPHIC FUND AND THE FOLKS IN
IDAHO AND THE FOLKS IN WYOMING AND THE FOLKS IN NEW
HAMPSHIRE CONTRIBUTE ACCORDINGLY.

AND WHEN THERE'S A BAD NORTHEASTER, A PERFECT STORM IN
NEW YORK AND MASSACHUSETTS, WE WOULD ANTE UP AND
OTHERWISE -- THAT WAY THE NATION CAN SHOW THAT ITS
INTENTIONS WERE GOOD IN THE UNEXPLAINABLE STORIES OF FLORIDA
AND THE DISPARITIES AND IN THE TRAGEDIES OF KATRINA THAT WE
FINALLY HAVE A NATIONAL CATASTROPHE FUND AND IT DEAL WITH
THE GREATEST PROBLEM FIRST AND IT DO IT EFFICIENTLY IN WAYS
THAT GET RID OF ALL THIS UNNECESSARY QUESTION ABOUT THE
CONVICTION OF THE ADMINISTRATION TO TAKE CARE OF THOSE THAT
ARE HURTING THE MOST.

>> I'M FOR IT IF IT'S EFFICIENT.

BUT WHAT WE ARE SEEING NOW IS INEFFICIENCY.

>> THAT WILL HAVE TO BE THE LAST WORD.

THE NEW CENSUS BUREAU REPORT SAYS MORE THAN 20% OF FLORIDA'S
POPULATION CARRIES NO HEALTH INSURANCE, MORE THAN ANY OTHER
STATE EXCEPT TEXAS AND NEW MEXICO.

TAMPA GENERAL SAYS THAT THE NUMBER OF UNINSURED PEOPLE
SEEKING TREATMENT AT THE HOSPITAL HAS CLIMBED BY ALMOST 40%
IN RECENT YEARS.

ANALYSTS SAY MOST OF THE UNINSURED ARE THE WORKING POOR.

ERNEST, WHAT DOES IT SAY TO US ABOUT FLORIDA THAT WE'RE

THIRD IN THE NATION IN TERMS OF THE PERCENT OF PEOPLE
WITHOUT HEALTH INSURANCE?

>> WELL, I THINK IT SPEAKS TO A COUPLE OF THINGS.

BUT I NEED TO FIRST POINT OUT THAT MY WIFE WORKS FOR A
HEALTH INSURANCE COMPANY, SO I HAVE TO BE VERY CAREFUL ABOUT
WHAT I SAY.

I THINK, ONE, IT SPEAKS TO THE LOW WAGES, LOW AVERAGE WAGE
THAT WE HAVE HERE IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA.

AND I THINK, TWO, IT SPEAKS TO THE FACT THAT A LOT OF
EMPLOYERS HAVE DISCONTINUED OFFERING INSURANCE TO THEIR
EMPLOYEES.

THE THIRD PROBLEM THAT NO ONE REALLY TALKS ABOUT IS THAT I
THINK SOME PEOPLE HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO GET HEALTH
INSURANCE, AND THEY ARE JUST DECLINING IT.

THEY ARE ROLLING THE DICE AND HOPING THAT THEY'LL STAY
HEALTHY AND THAT THEIR KIDS WILL STAY HEALTHY AND USING THAT
MONEY IN OTHER WAYS TO MAKE ENDS MEET.

AND I THINK WE'RE FACING A REAL CRISIS HERE.

AND THAT'S WHY WE'RE HEARING SO MUCH ABOUT PROPERTY
INSURANCE.

THAT'S WHY WE'RE HEARING SO MUCH ABOUT PROPERTY TAXES,
BECAUSE FAMILIES ARE STARTING TO STRUGGLE TO MAKE ENDS MEET.
AND THIS WAS ANOTHER SIGN.

I THINK THERE ARE PEOPLE OUT THERE WHO ARE JUST SIMPLY
CHOOSING NOT TO HAVE HEALTH INSURANCE.

>> PAUL, 47 MILLION AMERICANS WITHOUT HEALTH INSURANCE.
DO YOU THINK SOME ARE ROLLING THE DICE, AS ERNEST SAID, AND
ARE CHOOSING NOT TO EITHER PAY FOR THEIR COMPANY'S COVERAGE
OR PAY FOR THEIR OWN COVERAGE?
>> I HAVE NO DOUBTS ABOUT THAT, THAT THAT'S TRUE.
IT WOULD BE INTERESTING TO SEE THE AGE DISTRIBUTION OF THIS
STUDY, BECAUSE PROBABLY THE YOUNGER PEOPLE ARE REALLY
ROLLING THE DICE.
THEY ARE GENERALLY HEALTHIER.
THEY DON'T HAVE AS MANY CONCERNS.
THEY DON'T HAVE AS MANY DEPENDENTS.
AND THEY ARE PROBABLY GOING WITHOUT IT.
IT WOULD HAVE BEEN INTERESTING TO ASK IN THIS STUDY OF THE
PEOPLE THAT DON'T WANT HEALTH INSURANCE, HOW MANY REALLY --
THAT DON'T HAVE IT, HOW MANY REALLY WANT IT AND CAN'T AFFORD
IT.
THAT'S REALLY NOT ADDRESSED IN THE STUDY.
I THINK IT NEEDS SOME MORE DEPTH.
>> ONE OF THE MOST INTERESTING STATISTICS IN THAT STUDY WAS,
IT SAID THAT THE FASTEST GROWING -- LOOKED CLOSER, THE
FASTEST GROWING NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT INSURED ARE THE
PEOPLE THAT HAVE \$75,000 A YEAR AND OVER IN INCOME.
>> THAT'S A CHOICE.
>> AND YOU THINK THAT'S A CHOICE.
THEY COULD AFFORD TO DO THAT.

UNEDITED REALTIME CLOSED CAPTIONING

>> SURE.

>> RON, WHAT'S YOUR TAKE ON THIS?

>> I THINK IT'S GOING TO INFLUENCE THE NATIONAL ELECTION MORE EVEN THAN SOME OF THE OTHER ISSUES WE TALKED ABOUT. BECAUSE JOHN EDWARDS HAS BEEN OUT FRONT ON THIS ISSUE ADVOCATING A 90 TO 120 BILLION-DOLLAR UNIVERSAL HEALTH PLAN TO DEAL WITH THESE KINDS OF ISSUES.

I THINK THAT SCHWARZENEGGER AND OTHERS HAVE CREATED AN AMAZING BIPARTISAN COALITION IN CALIFORNIA WITH A 12 BILLION-DOLLAR UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE PROGRAM THAT MAY WORK.

MASSACHUSETTS ALREADY HAS HAD ONE FOR A YEAR.

WHAT WE MAY SEE IN THIS ELECTION IS WHO IS REALLY SMART ABOUT THE ISSUE.

ROMNEY SEEMS TO BE A LITTLE AHEAD OF THE REPUBLICANS ON THIS ISSUE, ALTHOUGH ADMITTEDLY ONLY BY SAYING HE WANTS FEDERAL DOLLARS TO SUBSIDIZE STATE PROGRAMS TO REFORM THIS ISSUE.

I THINK ON A MORE HUMAN AND PERSONAL LEVEL, THOUGH, THAT IT IS TRUE THAT WE HAVE SEEN PEOPLE THAT HAVE ACTUALLY HAD TO SELL THEIR HOUSE AND USE HALF THE PROCEEDS TO PAY FOR SOME CATASTROPHIC PROBLEM BECAUSE THEY DIDN'T HAVE INSURANCE BECAUSE THEY DID ROLL THE DICE.

AND SECONDLY, ON A HUMAN LEVEL, THE COMMUNICABLE DISEASES, THE DANGERS OF CHILDREN BEING THE VICTIMS OF THIS KIND OF ROLLING OF THE DICE I DON'T THINK IS CONSCIONABLE.

I THINK, THEREFORE, WE NEED TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THIS PROBLEM BECAUSE IT AFFECTS ALL OUR HEALTHS AS FAR AS COMMUNICABLE DISEASES UNATTENDED TO EARLY ENOUGH TO STOP THEM INSTEAD OF CREATING ADDITIONAL PANDEMICS AND WHATEVER. I THINK WE NEED TO ADDRESS IT ON THE HUMAN LEVEL.

>> LAURA, AS SOMEBODY THAT PAYS CLOSE ATTENTION TO POLITICS, WHAT ROLE DO YOU THINK LACK OF HEALTH INSURANCE WILL PLAY IN THE 2008 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION?

>> OH, THAT'S AN ENORMOUS ISSUE COMING UP.

THE TWO SIDES THAT ARE DEVELOPING ARE THE MEDICARE FOR ALL TYPE OF PLANS AND THE ONES THAT SUGGEST THAT THE MARKETPLACE NEEDS TO DO SOMETHING TO MAKE INDIVIDUAL HEALTH INSURANCE, PRIVATE HEALTH INSURANCE BY YOURSELF MORE AFFORDABLE AS THEY DID IN MASSACHUSETTS, REQUIRING EVERYONE TO GO OUT AND BUY THEIR OWN.

IT IS GETTING MUCH MORE EXPENSIVE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF YOUR EMPLOYER'S PLAN.

I'M SURE EVERYONE KNOWS THAT ALL TOO WELL.

AND SO I THINK, AS WE SAID BEFORE, THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO OPT OUT OF THAT.

AND SOME OF THEM, LIKE YOU SAID, ARE SHOWING UP AT THE HIGHER INCOME LEVELS AND JUST KIND OF TRYING TO STEP BACK AND MAKE DO FOR A LITTLE WHILE WITHOUT IT, BUT IT CAN COME BACK TO BITE YOU.

>> ALL RIGHT.

WELL, GOVERNOR CHARLIE CRIST CONCEDED THIS WEEK THAT HE MAY HAVE RAISED EXPECTATIONS TOO HIGH ON THE PROSPECTS OF PROPERTY TAX RELIEF.

AS HOMEOWNERS ACROSS FLORIDA GET THEIR PRELIMINARY TAX BILLS, MANY ARE DISAPPOINTED WITH THE BOTTOM LINE AND FRUSTRATED THAT LEGISLATIVE REFORMS ENACTED IN JUNE HAVE NOT SHOWN A BIGGER IMPACT.

LIKewise, GOVERNOR CRIST IS HEARING GROWING DISCONTENT OVER THE LEGISLATURE'S INSURANCE REFORM PACKAGE, WHICH HAS FAILED TO DELIVER THE PROMISED REDUCTIONS IN PREMIUMS.

PAUL, IS THE GOVERNOR IN TROUBLE OVER -- WHEN PEOPLE GET THEIR TRIM NOTICES ABOUT PROPERTY TAXES AND SEE THEIR PROPERTY TAXES AREN'T REALLY GOING DOWN AS MUCH AS THEY MIGHT HAVE EXPECTED WITH ALL THE HYPE IN TALLAHASSEE?

>> I DON'T BELIEVE CHARLIE CRIST IS IN TROUBLE POLITICALLY.

I THINK PEOPLE HAVE TO REMEMBER THAT THE LEGISLATURE TOOK ACTION THAT THEY COULD TAKE THAT THEY COULD GET DONE.

CHARLIE CRIST IS ONE PART OF THE GOVERNMENT.

THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH IS ONE COEQUAL BRANCH OF THE GOVERNMENT.

THERE'S THE LEGISLATURE THAT IS HIS PARTNER IN THIS.

THE SECOND PART OF THE TAX CUT COMES IN JANUARY, AND THE PEOPLE GET TO DECIDE THAT.

SO WE'LL SEE HOW THAT GOES.

THAT'S THE \$195,000 EXEMPTION, AND WE'LL SEE IF THE PEOPLE

VOTE THEMSELVES A TAX CUT.

>> OKAY.

AND THAT'S GOING TO HAVE TO BE THE LAST WORD FOR THIS PART OF THE PROGRAM.

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.

ERNEST, YOUR OTHER BIG STORY OF THE WEEK?

>> WELL, THIS WEEK, THE TAMPA CITY COUNCIL VOTED NOT TO ALLOW THE SALE OF ALCOHOL TO THE FANS WHO DON'T SIT IN THE CLUB SUITES AREA.

I THINK IT WAS A GOOD VOTE.

I THINK IT WAS A GOOD IDEA TO LIMIT IT.

I KNOW WE HAVE THE SALE OF ALCOHOL AT OTHER SPORTING EVENTS, BUT FOOTBALL TENDS TO BE A LITTLE DIFFERENT, A LITTLE ROWDIER.

WE'VE ALREADY SEEN SOME CROWD-CONTROL PROBLEMS OVER THE YEARS.

AND EVEN THOUGH IT SEEMS SOMEWHAT ELITIST, I DON'T THINK IT'S A GOOD IDEA TO PUT MORE ALCOHOL INTO THE HANDS OF BUCS FANS, ESPECIALLY WHEN THE BUCS AREN'T GOING TO PLAY THAT WELL THIS YEAR.

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

>> I DON'T THINK WE SHOULD -- I DON'T THINK PINELLAS COUNTY SHOULD FIRE EITHER STEVE SPRATT OR SUSAN CHURUTI.

AND HERE IS WHY.

I THINK THAT STEVE SPRATT SENT A VERY CONTRITE LETTER THAT THIS SORT OF THING WOULD NOT HAPPEN AGAIN.

HE WOULD WATCH THESE KIND OF INNER DEALINGS AMONG DIFFERENT PARTS OF PINELLAS COUNTY GOVERNMENT MUCH MORE CAREFULLY. THEY WOULDN'T RACE IT THROUGH, AND THEY WOULD MAKE FULLER DISCLOSURE TO EVERYBODY EARLIER ON WHAT THESE SORTS OF THINGS MEAN.

SECONDLY, I THINK AS FAR AS PERCEPTION OF THE PUBLIC, THE PUBLIC IS RIGHT TO DEMAND ACCOUNTABILITY ON THE PART OF ALL THESE PUBLIC OFFICIALS, BUT I THINK THAT EVEN THOUGH SUSAN CHURUTI'S LETTER MAY NOT HAVE BEEN AS CONTRITE AS STEVE SPRATT'S, I STILL THINK AFTER 26 YEARS OF SERVICE, THERE WAS A COMBINATION OF MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND NONCOMMUNICATIONS, AND NOW THAT THEY HAVE BEEN SENSITIZED TO THE ENORMOUS BURDEN OF MAINTAINING THE INTEGRITY OF PINELLAS COUNTY AND COMMUNICATING WHAT IS GOING ON WHEN THEY HAVE DEALINGS THAT LOOK LIKE THEY MIGHT IN SOME WAY HELP SOMEONE ELSE IN PINELLAS COUNTY GOVERNMENT, THEN I THINK THE SENSITIZATION HAS AWAKENED THE FACT THAT WHILE THESE ARE QUALITY PEOPLE, THEY MADE SOME MISTAKES.

I THINK THEY ARE FESSING UP TO THEIR MISTAKES, AND WE SHOULD KEEP THEM WITH THIS SENSITIZATION TO HOW THE PUBLIC REACTS TO THIS SORT OF THING.

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

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>> IN A CONTINUATION OF THE ATTENTION THAT THE TAMPA BAY AREA WILL GET, RUDY GIULIANI IS COMING TO PINELLAS COUNTY FOR A FUND-RAISER FOR THE PINELLAS COUNTY REPUBLICAN PARTY SEPTEMBER 7th AT THE VINOY IN ST. PETERSBURG.

HE IS THE LATEST OF A STRING FOLLOWING ROMNEY, OBAMA AND HILLARY.

FOR THE NEXT SEVERAL MONTHS, WE'LL SEE A LOT OF NATIONAL CANDIDATES COMING HERE.

>> I HEAR OBAMA IS COMING BACK ON THE 30th OF SEPTEMBER, TOO.

LAURA, YOUR OTHER BIG STORY OF THE WEEK.

>> WHAT A WEEK!

AUGUST IS SUPPOSED TO BE SLOW.

AND IT WAS NOT, AT LEAST THIS PAST WEEK.

-- COME BACK OVER TO HILLSBOROUGH AND PICK ON THE SCHOOL BOARD A LITTLE BIT FOR SOME BAD BEHAVIOR DURING A TEAM BUILDING EXERCISE.

THESE TEAM BUILDING EXERCISES -- AND I'VE SAT THROUGH A FEW OF THEM -- ALWAYS SEEM TO BRING OUT THE WORST IN GROUPS LIKE THIS, WHICH ARE SUPPOSED TO BE VERY PROFESSIONAL, BUT NOT NECESSARILY A TEAM.

STILL, NONETHELESS, IF YOU DISAGREE WITH YOUR COLLEAGUES, IT'S NO REASON TO POUT OR WALK OUT OF A MEETING.

>> DO YOU THINK THAT RIFT WILL BE HEALED BETWEEN FALIERO AND GRIFFIN?

>> I DON'T KNOW ABOUT THAT.

>> WELL, THANKS TO LAURA FIORILLI-CREWS, PAUL BEDINGHAUS,
RON WEAVER, AND ERNEST HOOPER.

THANK YOU FOR WATCHING "FLORIDA THIS WEEK."

WE WELCOME YOUR COMMENTS ABOUT THIS PROGRAM.

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"FLORIDA THIS WEEK" RETURNS NEXT FRIDAY NIGHT AT 8:30 AND
SUNDAY AFTERNOON AT 12:30.

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DAY!

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