

"FLORIDA THIS WEEK"

OCTOBER 5, 2007

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

>> COMING UP NEXT, THE LEGISLATURE MEETS IN A SPECIAL SESSION WHILE THE FUTURE OF TAX CUTS AND NO-FAULT IS STILL IN DOUBT.

SOME LEADING FLORIDA DEMOCRATS SUE THE NATIONAL PARTY.

THE BOOT CAMP DEATH TRIAL BEGINS IN PANAMA CITY.

AND MEL MARTINEZ STEPPING DOWN FROM HIS POSITION AS HEAD OF THE REPUBLICAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE.

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

UNEDITED REALTIME CLOSED CAPTIONING

VICKIE CHACHERE IS AN EDITORIAL WRITER AT THE TAMPA TRIBUNE.
GOW FIELDS IS A LAKE LAND CITY COMMISSIONER AND A REPUBLICAN.
AND MIKE SUAREZ IS CHAIRMAN OF THE HILLSBOROUGH DEMOCRATIC
PARTY.

THANKS FOR COMING, EVERYBODY.

GREAT TO SEE YOU.

WELL, FLORIDA LAWMAKERS THIS WEEK CONVENED IN TALLAHASSEE
FOR A SPECIAL SESSION THAT INCLUDED BUDGET CUTTING AND AUTO
INSURANCE LEGISLATION.

BILLS SLASHING ABOUT ONE BILLION DOLLARS FROM THE STATE
BUDGET CLEARED COMMITTEES ON A STRAIGHT PARTY LINE VOTE.
DEMOCRATS OBJECTED TO VARIOUS CUTS, ESPECIALLY TO HUMAN
SERVICES AND WANTED TO REPEAL SOME TAX EXEMPTIONS GIVEN
DURING THE JEB BUSH YEARS.

LAWMAKERS ARE ALSO ADDRESSING NO-FAULT AUTO INSURANCE LAW,
WHICH EXPIRED THIS WEEK.

THE NEW BILL STRICTER ON FRAUD, WOULD RENEW PERSONAL INJURY
PROTECTION OR PIP INSURANCE REQUIREMENTS BUT NOT UNTIL EARLY
NEXT YEAR.

PLANS FOR CUTTING PROPERTY TAXES REMAIN A KEY ISSUE, YET NO
CONSENSUS IS EMERGING.

A SEPARATE PROPERTY TAX SESSION IS SCHEDULED FOR LATER THIS
MONTH.

>> WHEN YOU DO, YOU KNOW, FOUR, FIVE, SIX OF THEM, THEY
DON'T BECOME SPECIAL ANYMORE.

UNEDITED REALTIME CLOSED CAPTIONING

>> WHEN WE COME BACK AND REDUCE PROPERTY TAXES, WE'LL HAVE THE ABILITY TO GIVE THE PEOPLE MORE OF THEIR HARD-EARNED MONEY.

WE'LL PUT MORE MONEY IN THEIR POCKET SO THEY CAN SPEND IT IN THE LOCAL ECONOMY.

>> GOW, IS THERE A SENSE THAT, YOU KNOW, THESE SPECIAL SESSIONS ARE WORTH IT, THAT THEY'VE GOT SOME DIRECTION, THAT THERE'S SOME LEADERSHIP THERE IN TALLAHASSEE TO MAKE SURE THAT THE TIME UP THERE IS PRODUCTIVE?

>> WELL, I'LL GIVE YOU MY TAKE ON WHAT I'VE SEEN GOING ON THAT'S DIFFERENT.

THE LEADERSHIP IN BOTH HOUSES HAVE TAKEN A MUCH MORE FORCEFUL APPROACH OF HOW THEY DEAL WITH THE RANK-AND-FILE MEMBERS.

AND THEY'VE DECIDED WHAT THE AGENDA NEEDS TO BE AND WHAT THE OUTCOME NEEDS TO BE.

AND IF THEY CAN GET CONSENSUS WITH VERY LITTLE INPUT, VERY LITTLE COMPROMISE AND NEGOTIATION, THEN YOU GET A RESULT.

AND WHEN THEY CAN -- WHEN THEY CAN'T, THEY HAVE TO DELAY IT, HAVE ANOTHER SPECIAL SESSION OR THEY JUST PUSH IT BACK ALTOGETHER AND WE'LL DEAL WITH IT SOME OTHER TIME LATER.

AND WHAT WE'RE SEEING COMING OUT OF THAT IS REALLY THE RESULT OF A DIFFERENT WAY OF PUSHING AN AGENDA AND NOT ALLOWING AS MUCH INPUT, COMPROMISE, OR NEGOTIATION.

>> BUT HAVING SO MANY SPECIAL SESSIONS, DOES THAT SHOW A

SIGN THAT THERE MIGHT BE A LACK OF LEADERSHIP IN
TALLAHASSEE?

>> WELL, TO ME, IT SHOWS THAT THIS STYLE OF LEADERSHIP IS
NOT EFFECTIVE.

THAT'S WHAT IT SHOWS.

>> TALKING ABOUT THE LEADERSHIP OF THE HOUSE OR THE SENATE?
ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT THE GOVERNOR?

>> WELL, THE GOVERNOR LAYS OUT WHAT HE WANTS TO SEE HAPPEN.
AND IF THE HOUSE AGREES WITH HIM, THEY FORCE IT DOWN
EVERYONE'S THROAT.

AND ONE OF THE REASONS PROPERTY TAX -- WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN
NEXT IS NOT RESOLVED IS BECAUSE OF THE WAY IT WAS PUSHED
DOWN A LOT OF THE MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE THROATS.

THEY QUIETLY SIT -- A NUMBER OF THEM QUIETLY SAID THEY
DIDN'T AGREE WITH IT, BUT THEY WENT ALONG BECAUSE THAT'S
WHAT THEY WERE SUPPOSED TO DO.

AND NOW THAT THIS BEGAN TO UNRAVEL, YOU DON'T HAVE THE SAME
NUMBERS GETTING BACK ON BOARD TO SUPPORT IT AGAIN.

THERE ARE A NUMBER OF PROPOSALS OUT THERE OF WHAT SHOULD
HAPPEN NEXT.

IF ANY OF THOSE FAIL AND DOESN'T END UP ON THE BALLOT IT
WILL BE ON THE AGENDA FOR THE REGULAR SESSION AGAIN NEXT
YEAR.

>> VICKIE, WHAT'S YOUR SENSE OF WHAT'S GOING ON IN
TALLAHASSEE IN TERMS OF WHY WE HAVE SO MANY SPECIAL

SESSIONS?

>> THERE SEEMS TO BE SOME DISARRAY IN TALLAHASSEE.

AND THE LEGISLATURE AND THE GOVERNOR HAVE SORT OF OPERATED WITH SPECIAL SESSIONS.

THEY WOULD COME IN WITH AN AGENDA, WITH SOMETHING ALREADY PRENEGOTIATED AND VOTED UP OR VOTED DOWN, WHICH WOULD MAKE FOR VERY SHORT, EFFICIENT, SPECIAL SESSIONS.

WE DON'T REALLY SEE THAT ANYMORE.

THERE IS LESS OF THAT -- THAT FORCEFULNESS FROM THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE.

THERE'S A LOT MORE ROOM FOR PEOPLE TO THROW THINGS INTO BILLS.

IT'S NOT SORT OF A CLEAN-CUT SITUATION THAT USED TO OCCUR UNDER PREVIOUS GOVERNORS.

THAT'S WHY PEOPLE REALLY DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO.

THEY HAVEN'T BEEN GIVEN THEIR MARCHING ORDERS, PER SE.

IT CREATES AN EFFICIENT PROCESS.

SOME WOULD SAY A BETTER PROCESS BECAUSE IT OPENS THE DOOR FOR MORE VOICES AND IDEAS.

>> I WANT TO GO BACK TO THIS IDEA OF A BILLION DOLLARS IN CUTS IN THE STATE BUDGET.

I MEAN, DO WE HAVE A SENSE RIGHT NOW OF WHETHER OR NOT THESE CUTS ARE GOING TO SERIOUSLY AFFECT THE SERVICES THAT THE STATE PROVIDES, OR WHETHER OR NOT THESE ARE THINGS THAT THE PUBLIC OF FLORIDA IS REALLY NOT GOING TO REALIZE IS BEING

CUT?

>> I THINK THERE ARE SOME THINGS THAT ARE GOING TO BE CUT THAT PEOPLE AREN'T GOING TO NOTICE.

THERE ARE JOBS THAT AREN'T GOING TO BE FILLED.

THERE WAS A LOT OF PADDING IN THE BUDGET WITH THINGS LIKE RENTS AND FINANCING OF PROGRAMS THAT WEREN'T REALLY BEING USED.

THEN YOU GET INTO AREAS LIKE THE MEDICAID BUDGET.

AND SURELY PEOPLE ARE GOING TO FEEL THE EFFECTS THERE.

YOU CAN'T REALLY MAKE DEEP CUTS IN A BUDGET LIKE THAT THAT REALLY IS ABOUT GETTING SERVICES TO PEOPLE OR SERVICES TO THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED.

YOU'RE GOING TO SEE THINGS.

CUTS AT THE UNIVERSITIES, THERE ARE GOING TO BE LARGER CLASSES.

PEOPLE ARE GOING TO FEEL THOSE CUTS.

>> ADAM, WHAT'S YOUR SENSE OF WHAT'S GOING ON IN TALLAHASSEE?

>> WELL, I THINK THEY ARE HEADING FOR A BIG BLACK EYE.

THE MAIN ISSUE -- TWO ISSUES IN THE STATE THAT PEOPLE ARE TALKING ABOUT AND FEELING VERY PERSONALLY ARE INSURANCE RATES, PROPERTY INSURANCE RATES AND HIGH TAX BILLS.

AND THEY HAVE BEEN PROMISED OVER AND OVER AGAIN THAT THESE THINGS ARE GOING TO DROP LIKE A ROCK.

RIGHT NOW, IT'S NOT EVEN CLEAR THERE'S GOING TO BE ANY TAX

RELIEF ON THE AGENDA FOR JANUARY 29th.

IF YOU PICK UP THE PAPER, EVERY DAY, IT'S A NEW IDEA, A NEW MOVE THAT THEN GETS -- THEY HAVE TO BACK PEDAL ON BECAUSE THAT'S FALLING APART.

JUST LIKE WE HAD A FEW MONTHS AGO, YOU HAVE A VERY AMBITIOUS HOUSE SPEAKER WHO WANTS VERY DRACONIAN TAX CUTS.

YOU HAVE A MORE CONSERVATIVE HOUSE OR SENATE THAT DOESN'T WANT TO GO SO FAR.

AND YOU HAVE A GOVERNOR WHO OFTEN SEEMS TO BE ON THE SIDELINES.

>> WELL, THE GOVERNOR ON THE SIDELINES, I MEAN, JEB BUSH WHEN HE WAS IN POWER, LIKE HIM OR NOT, HE WOULD HAVE HAD AN AGENDA AND KIND OF RAMMED IT THROUGH AND MADE SURE THAT EVERYBODY LINED UP ON HIS AGENDA BEFORE THEY HAD A SPECIAL SESSION.

AS YOU SAID, THIS GOVERNOR IS A LITTLE BIT MORE DEFERENTIAL, AND HE WANTS TO SEE WHAT THE PEOPLE IN THE HOUSE AND THE PEOPLE IN THE SENATE THINK BEFORE HE DECIDES WHICH SIDE HE'LL GO WITH, RIGHT?

>> AND IT'S NOT CLEAR HOW MUCH LONGER THAT WILL SERVE HIM WELL.

RIGHT NOW, EVEN WITHOUT GIVING A LOT OF RESULTS, HE HAS ENORMOUSLY HIGH POPULARITY RATINGS IN THE POLLS.

BUT WHEN JEB BUSH CAME IN OFFICE, EARLY ON, HE UNDERSTOOD, YOU SPEND YOUR POLITICAL CAPITAL FAST AND DO YOUR BIG,

UNEDITED REALTIME CLOSED CAPTIONING

BOLD AGENDA EARLY.

THAT'S NOT REALLY HAPPENING WITH CHARLIE CRIST RIGHT NOW.

>> MIKE, GO AHEAD.

>> I WAS JUST GOING TO SAY, YOU KNOW, IF GOVERNOR GRAHAM IN HIS FIRST YEAR IN OFFICE WAS GOVERNOR JELLO, I'M NOT REALLY SURE WHERE CHARLIE IS AT.

HE HAS TO BE SOMEWHERE MINUS THAT.

YOU CAN'T LEAD BY PLATITUDES.

HE'S PROBABLY ONE OF THE NICEST GUYS YOU EVER WANT TO MEET.

BUT THERE ARE TIMES YOU HAVE TO BUTT HEADS WITH PEOPLE AND MAKE THEM DO WHAT YOU WANT THEM TO DO.

HE HAS THE POWER TO DO IT, AND HE HASN'T SHOWN ANY LEADERSHIP WHATSOEVER.

WE HAD THE SAME PROBLEMS IN THE SAME LEGISLATURE WHEN JEB BUSH WAS THERE.

THE HOUSE AND THE SENATE WERE CONSTANTLY FIGHTING, BUT, JEB DID HAVE AN AGENDA.

LIKE YOU SAID, EITHER LIKE IT OR HATE IT, HE STILL HAD AN AGENDA.

I DON'T THINK THAT CHARLIE CRIST HAS LEARNED TO HANDLE HIS POLITICAL CAPITAL.

>> LET ME ASK ONE OTHER QUESTION, AND THAT IS, VICKIE TALKED ABOUT THE CUTS TO MEDICAID AND HUMAN SERVICES, PEOPLE WHO ARE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED.

SOME OF THE DEMOCRATS SAID THAT WHAT WE SHOULD DO IN ORDER

TO FIX THE TAX QUESTION OR RATHER THE REVENUE QUESTIONS IN TALLAHASSEE IS REPEAL SOME OF THOSE TAX BREAKS THAT JEB BUSH GAVE OUT AND CHAMPION FOR HIS EIGHT YEARS IN GOVERNOR.

ONE OF THE THINGS THAT JEB BUSH DID WAS HE REPEALED THE INTANGIBLES TAX.

I DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH MONEY YOU CAN GET AND WHETHER OR NOT THAT WOULD COVER THE MEDICAID SHORTFALL THAT WE HAVE, BUT DOES THAT IDEA HAVE ANY LEGS, EITHER NOW, EVEN THOUGH THE REPUBLICANS CONTROL IT, OR IF THE DEMOCRATS WERE TO SOMEHOW GAIN CONTROL OF THE LEGISLATURE IN FOUR YEARS OR EIGHT YEARS, DOES THAT IDEA COME BACK AT ALL?

>> NO.

YOU DON'T THINK SO.

THAT'S A DEAD ISSUE.

>> DOA.

ONE THING ALL THE REPUBLICANS AGREE ON IS THEY ARE NOT RAISING TAXES.

>> IT'S NOT ON LEADERSHIP'S AGENDA TO TAKE THAT APPROACH.

WE DON'T EVEN HEAR MUCH ABOUT WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN WITH THE TAX AND BUDGET REFORM COMMISSION, WHICH MEETS NOW, AND THE RESULTS COME OUT TO US NEXT YEAR.

AND WE'RE HEARING NEXT TO NOTHING ABOUT IT.

>> NO BIG PLANS --

>> THAT'S IN THE STATE CONSTITUTION THAT THIS BODY CONVENES, BRINGS FORWARD RECOMMENDATIONS, AND GOES TO THE BALLOT FOR

THE PEOPLE TO VOTE ON.

>> OKAY.

WELL, SENATOR BILL NELSON AND FELLOW FLORIDA DEMOCRATIC REPRESENTATIVE ALCEE HASTINGS FILED A LAWSUIT AGAINST THE DNC, THE DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL COMMITTEE THIS WEEK.

THEIR SUIT CLAIMS THAT IF THE DNC ACTS ON ITS THREAT TO BAR FLORIDA DELEGATES FROM BEING SEATED AT NEXT YEAR'S PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATING CONVENTION, THAT VIOLATES THE CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS OF FLORIDA VOTERS.

THE DNC ARGUES THAT IT HAS THE POWER TO SET THE RULES FOR CANDIDATE SELECTION.

MEANWHILE, FRONT-RUNNING DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATES, LIKE BARACK OBAMA, ARE WALKING A THIN LINE BY REFUSING TO CAMPAIGN IN FLORIDA WHILE AT THE SAME TIME ACTIVELY FUND-RAISING IN THE STATE.

WELL, ADAM, IS YOU HAVE SOME FIRSTHAND KNOWLEDGE OF BARACK OBAMA COMING TO THE STATE LAST WEEK.

TALK ABOUT, DID HE CAMPAIGN HERE?

WAS HE FUND-RAISING?

WHAT WAS HE DOING IN.

>> THEY HAVE SIGNED THIS PLEDGE, THE LEADING DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATES WITH THE STATE SHARES IN THE ALL-IMPORTANT IOWA, NEW HAMPSHIRE, SOUTH CAROLINA, NEVADA, THE EARLY STATES, THE STATES THAT ARE ALLOWED TO BE EARLY, AND THAT PLEDGE SO THEY CAN COME TO FLORIDA AND RAISE MONEY BUT THEY CAN'T CAMPAIGN.

UNEDITED REALTIME CLOSED CAPTIONING

SO THAT MEANS HE, BARACK OBAMA, WAS IN TOWN THE OTHER DAY
RAISING MONEY.

AND PATHETIC WHAT REPORTERS LIKE ME TRIED TO ASK SOME
QUESTIONS AND WERE LEFT HAVING TO SHOUT QUESTIONS AND
GETTING NO ANSWERS.

>> YOU GOT NO ANSWERS, YET YOUR SHOUTING TO BARACK OBAMA AND
HIS, I GUESS, SHORT ANSWERS ENDED UP BEING SOMEWHAT OF A
CONTROVERSY INVOLVING NEVADA VOTERS OR AT LEAST NEWS
ARTICLES IN NEVADA AND IOWA.

>> I WAS SHOUTING QUESTIONS RIDICULOUSLY -- ABOUT THE
NATIONAL CAT FUND, WHICH SOMEBODY IN NEW HAMPSHIRE, THEY
ASKED ME IF THAT HAD TO DO WITH CATS?

[LAUGHTER]

AND HE FINALLY RESPONDED, MAYBE, UNFORTUNATELY, FOR HIM, HE
SHOUTED BACK AND SAID, I'M NOT ALLOWED TO TALK TO YOU.

>> AND THAT WAS IT.

>> ISN'T IT YOUR CALL?

AREN'T YOU RUNNING FOR PRESIDENT?

SO THERE WERE STORIES IN IOWA AND NEVADA SORT OF RAISING THE
QUESTION IF BARACK OBAMA DOES BRIEFLY TALK TO REPORTERS IN
FLORIDA, IS HE VIOLATING OUR PLEDGE?

>> BUT WHEN BARACK OBAMA GOES INSIDE THAT HOUSE WHERE THESE
BIG FUND-RAISERS ARE, I MEAN, ISN'T HE CAMPAIGNING INSIDE
THAT HOUSE.

>> HE'S FUND-RAISING.

>> HE'S FUND-RAISING, NOT CAMPAIGNING.

THAT'S OKAY.

ALL RIGHT.

MIKE, THE LAWSUIT THAT WAS ORIGINALLY FILED BY VIC DiMAIO, WHO IS A LOCAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY ACTIVIST AND ALSO PANELIST ON THIS SHOW, WAS THROWN OUT BY JUDGE LAZAR IN FEDERAL COURT.

THAT WAS THE FIRST LAWSUIT AGAINST THE DNC.

ANY CHANCE THAT VICTOR WILL TRY TO TAKE THIS HIGHER, OR IS THAT A DEAD ISSUE?

IS HIS ISSUE A DEAD ISSUE?

>> I CAN'T ANSWER THAT.

I DON'T KNOW IF HE'LL CONTINUE TO GO AFTER THAT PARTICULAR -- YOU KNOW, AFTER THAT PARTICULAR ISSUE.

I KNOW THAT WITH NELSON'S SUIT, I'M NOT SURE WHERE THEY ARE GOING WITH THIS.

I MEAN, THE RIGHT TO VOTE, DOESN'T MEAN YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO ACTUALLY GET IN THE PRIMARY.

PRIMARY VOTING IS A LITTLE DIFFERENT, IF YOU WERE BARRED BECAUSE OF YOUR AGE, RACE, WHERE YOU CAME FROM, THAT MAY BE SOMETHING DIFFERENT.

BUT THEY ARE ESSENTIALLY DOING THE ENTIRE STATE.

SO I'M NOT SURE HOW THEY ARE GOING TO WIN THAT SUIT.

YOU KNOW, THE WAY WE FEEL, WE DO HAVE A PRIMARY SET.

IT WAS SET BY THE LEGISLATURE.

WE'RE GOING TO FOLLOW BY THE RULES OF THE LEGISLATURE AND THE DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL COMMITTEE, AND WE'RE GOING TO HAVE A PRIMARY.

>> OKAY, WE'RE GOING TO HAVE A PRIMARY, AND THEN WHAT HAPPENS TO THE DELEGATES SELECTED AS A RESULT OF THE PRIMARY?

>> NO ONE KNOWS.

RIGHT NOW, DELEGATES ARE OFF THE TABLE.

WE'RE HOPING THAT WHOEVER BECOMES THE NOMINEE OF THE PARTY WILL GIVE US BACK OUR DELEGATES PRIOR TO THE EVENT IN COLORADO IN AUGUST.

NOW, WHETHER OR NOT THAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN, WE DON'T KNOW.

WE'RE IN TOTALLY UNTRIED TERRITORY RIGHT NOW.

>> MIKE WILL BE AT THE MOTEL 6, 200 MILES AWAY FROM --

[LAUGHTER]

>> WELL, LUCKILY FOR ME, I'M NOT EVEN GOING TO GO TO THE CONVENTION.

IT'S GOING TO BE EASY FOR ME AND I DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT MOTEL 6.

>> IF THE EVENTUAL NOMINEE CAN WAVE THEIR HAND, FORGET ABOUT IT, WE'RE GOING TO SEAT THE FLORIDA DELEGATES WHEN HE OR SHE IS DECIDED SOMETIME PRESUMABLY EARLY NEXT SUMMER WITH THE VOTE COUNTS, DO YOU THINK THIS IS A MOOT POINT OR DO YOU THINK THIS IS MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING?

>> WELL, I THINK IN SOME WAYS IT IS MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

BECAUSE IF I'M A PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE, REGARDLESS OF WHETHER OR NOT I GET DELEGATES FOR THE CONVENTION, TO WIN A LARGE, DIVERSE STATE LIKE FLORIDA, YOU CAN GO INTO OTHER STATES AND BE ABLE TO FUND RAISE AND CAMPAIGN SAYING I HAVE THE STRENGTH TO WIN NATIONALLY BASED ON MY PERFORMANCE IN THIS PARTICULAR STATE.

YOU KNOW, IF YOU WIN NEW YORK, CALIFORNIA, TEXAS, PENNSYLVANIA, CALIFORNIA, YOU'RE GOING TO BE.

PERCEIVED AS STRONGER THAN IF YOU ONLY WIN IOWA.

SO WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE MAP ON PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES STARTS IN IOWA EVERY CYCLE.

BUT, IT DOESN'T MEAN THAT IT ENDS THERE.

AND I BELIEVE THAT THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES, ALTHOUGH THEY ARE NOT CAMPAIGNING HERE, STILL ARE GOING TO WANT TO WIN FLORIDA.

>> GOW, ALL THE NEWS MEDIA HAS FOCUSED ON THE FACT THAT FLORIDA'S DEMOCRATIC PARTY WILL GET THE SLAP ON THE WRIST FOR HOLDING THE EARLY PRIMARY.

WHAT ABOUT THE REPUBLICANS?

ARE YOU FEARFUL THAT THE REPUBLICAN PARTY WILL FOLLOW THROUGH WITH ITS PLEDGE?

AND THAT IS, CUT OUT HALF YOUR DELEGATION TO YOUR NOMINATING CONVENTION BECAUSE OF OUR EARLY PRIMARY DATE?

>> I'M FEARFUL THAT CAN HAPPEN.

BUT MY PRIMARY REASON FOR BEING FEARFUL OF IT IS, WHAT CAN

HAPPEN LEGALLY ON THIS LAWSUIT OR WHAT MAY EVENTUALLY HAPPEN, REPUBLICAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE, THEY MAY PREVAIL IN THAT REGARD.

BUT WHERE THEY WILL LOSE AT IS WITH THE PEOPLE TRYING TO GET TO THE POLLS TO GO VOTE.

I MEAN, NO MATTER WHAT THE LEGAL ISSUES ARE, THE PEOPLE SEE THIS AS THEY ARE BEING DISRESPECTED AND THEIR VOTE DOESN'T MATTER.

AND YOU HAVE THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES PLAYING THE SAME GAME, BUT WHEN IT COMES DOWN TO IT, THEY ARE GOING TO WANT THE SAME PEOPLE TO GO VOTE.

THEY REALLY SHOULD RELOOK AT HOW THEY ARE APPROACHING THIS AND HOW IT'S COMING ACROSS TO THE AVERAGE JOHN AND JANE DOE CITIZEN OUT THERE.

>> VICKIE, WE HEARD SO MUCH TALK ABOUT THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY. NOT MUCH TALK THAT THE REPUBLICANS HAVE SIMILAR, ALTHOUGH NOT QUITE AS REPRESSIVE RULES -- THAT'S NOT THE RIGHT WORD FOR IT -- BUT WHAT ARE YOU HEARING ABOUT WHAT THE REPUBLICANS MIGHT DO BECAUSE WE'VE ALSO MOVED UP OUR PRIMARY DATE?

>> CLEARLY, SOME OF THE REPUBLICAN CANDIDATES ARE CAMPAIGNING IN FLORIDA.

WE'VE SEEN MITT ROMNEY ADS ON TV.

I THINK WITH THE REPUBLICANS, BECAUSE THEIR CANDIDATES STILL HAVE MUCH MORE OF THAT PRESENCE THAT LOOKS LIKE THEY ARE

ACTUALLY ASKING FLORIDA VOTERS TO SUPPORT THEM AND SAYING THIS IS WHAT I WILL DO FOR YOU, IT'S NOT AS BIG A DEAL WITH THE DEMOCRATS.

THE REPUBLICANS HAVE GOT TO BE LOVING THE SCENARIO, BECAUSE THEY'VE KIND OF GOT THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS.

THEY HAVE THE DEMOCRATS LOOKING LIKE THEY ARE USING FLORIDA AS AN ATM MACHINE AND NOT REALLY INTERESTED IN ANSWERING THE CONCERNS OF FLORIDA VOTERS, YET THEY ARE STILL ALLOWED TO CAMPAIGN A LITTLE BIT, COME DOWN HERE, RAISE MONEY, AND REALLY NOT TALK ABOUT THE RAMIFICATIONS OF THEIR ROLE.

SO IT'S WORKING TO THE REPUBLICAN'S ADVANTAGE.

>> OKAY.

WELL IN THE PANHANDLE, THE TRIAL OPENED THIS WEEK FOR SEVEN FORMER GUARDS AND A NURSE, ALL CHARGED IN LAST YEAR'S DEATH OF 14-YEAR-OLD MARTIN LEE ANDERSON AT A BAY COUNTY JUVENILE BOOT RAMP.

MANY WORRY ABOUT JUDICIAL FAIRNESS AS NO AFRICAN-AMERICANS ARE SEATED ON THE PANAMA CITY JURY.

ANDERSON WAS BLACK WHILE THE NURSE AND SEVEN OF THE EIGHT GUARDS ON TRIAL ARE WHITE.

>> IF YOU FIND MARTIN LEE ANDERSON WAS KILLED BY ONE OR MORE OF THE DEFENDANTS, YOU WILL THEN CONSIDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING THE KILLING IN DECIDING IF THE KILLING WAS AGGRAVATED MANSLAUGHTER OF A PERSON UNDER 18, OR WAS MANSLAUGHTER, OR WHETHER THE KILLING WAS EXCUSABLE OR

RESULTED FROM JUSTIFIABLE USE OF DEADLY FORCE.

>> VICKIE, THE HILLSBOROUGH STATE ATTORNEY'S OFFICE HAVE SENT UP A PROSECUTOR TO PROSECUTE THIS CASE.

THEY ARE THE LEAD PROSECUTION IN THIS CASE.

THEY SENT UP PAM BONDI, A REAL WELL-KNOWN LOCAL PROSECUTOR.

WHAT IS HER REPUTATION AS A PROSECUTOR?

>> SHE'S A VERY SKILLED PROSECUTOR.

SHE IS AN EXPERIENCED PROSECUTOR IN BRINGING MURDER CASES.

IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE A BETTER PROSECUTOR WORKING ON THIS CASE.

THIS IS A VERY, VERY TOUGH CASE, THOUGH.

IT'S GOING TO BE A BATTLE OF MEDICAL EXAMINERS AND MEDICAL EXPERTS.

IT'S GOING TO BE AN EXAMINATION OF THAT FRAME BY FRAME OF THAT VIDEOTAPE TO REALLY LOOK AND SEE WHAT HAPPENED AND THEN COMPARE THAT TO THE MEDICAL EVIDENCE.

IT'S AN EXTREMELY TOUGH CASE, AND IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE A MORE EMOTIONAL CASE.

>> ADAM, I READ IN YOUR PAPER AND OTHER PAPERS THIS WEEK, A SUGGESTION THAT THE MOOD IN THE COUNTY IS THAT THESE GUARDS MIGHT GET OFF.

I MEAN, THAT THERE'S SOME SENSE UP THERE THAT THE TRIAL MAY NOT GO IN THE PROSECUTION'S DIRECTION.

SOME PEOPLE ARE MAKING THAT PREDICTION.

>> I THINK IT'S ONE OF THESE STARK CASES WHERE YOU SEE IN

SOME WAYS THERE'S TWO AMERICAS.

MAYBE RACIAL POLITICS.

WHEN YOU HAVE AN ALL-WHITE JURY, WE CAN ALL HOPE THEY GET A FAIR TRIAL AND WE CAN ALL HOPE JUSTICE IS DONE.

NO MATTER HOW IT COMES OUT, THERE'S A GOOD CHUNK OF THAT COMMUNITY THAT'S GOING TO FEEL LIKE JUSTICE WAS NOT DONE.

>> GOW, WHAT'S YOUR SENSE ABOUT HOW PEOPLE FEEL OUTSIDE BAY COUNTY?

I KNOW A LOT OF PEOPLE IN FLORIDA ARE WATCHING THIS CASE, PAYING ATTENTION TO THE OUTCOME.

WHAT'S YOUR SENSE ABOUT HOW CLOSELY THEY ARE WATCHING?

>> THEY ARE WATCHING VERY CLOSELY.

WHEN YOU LOOK AT THE EMOTIONS JUST COMING OUT OF THE DEMONSTRATIONS AND THE MARCH IN THE JENA CASE THAT'S GOING ON, THIS ONE IS COMING RIGHT BEHIND IT.

AND YOU HAVE THE BENEFIT OF VIDEOTAPE SHOWING YOU WHAT HAPPENED.

PEOPLE ARE WATCHING VERY CLOSELY.

AND RIGHT NOW EARLY ON, IT DOESN'T LOOK VERY GOOD.

>> IT DOESN'T LOOK GOOD BECAUSE OF THE ALL-WHITE JURY.

>> RIGHT.

BECAUSE OF THE ALL-WHITE JURY, AND EVEN BECAUSE OF SOME OF THE EARLIER THINGS PEOPLE HEARD ABOUT WHAT IS BEING SAID FOR THE DEFENSE.

IF PEOPLE -- YEAH, PEOPLE ARE WATCHING VERY CLOSELY.

UNEDITED REALTIME CLOSED CAPTIONING

>> MIKE, WHAT IS YOUR SENSE OF THIS TRIAL?

>> I TELL YOU, AFTER WATCHING THAT VIDEO, IF AN ALL-WHITE JURY CANNOT FIND THOSE FOLKS GUILTY, I DON'T KNOW WHAT OTHER EVIDENCE THEY ARE GOING TO NEED.

OBVIOUSLY, I'M NOT A LAWYER AND I'M NOT INVOLVED IN THE CASE THAT INTIMATELY.

BUT JUST FIVE MINUTES OF THAT TAPE WOULD CONVINCEN ANYONE THAT THEY WERE MISTREATING THIS YOUNG MAN.

SECONDLY, I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE STATE COULD HAVE DONE TO MOVE THE VENUE FROM BAY COUNTY DOWN TO ANOTHER COUNTY.

OBVIOUSLY, THEY WERE ABLE TO APPOINT A PROSECUTOR FROM HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY, BUT WHY NOT MOVE THE VENUE?

I'M NOT SURE THAT THEY HAD THE LEGAL RIGHT TO DO THAT, BUT THAT'S SOMETHING THAT I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW IS WHY IS IT STILL IN BAY COUNTY?

>> ALL RIGHT.

WE'RE GOING TO FOLLOW THIS CASE IN THE WEEKS TO COME.

SEVERAL PUBLICATIONS REPORTED THIS WEEK THAT FLORIDA'S JUNIOR SENATOR, MEL MARTINEZ, IS STEPPING DOWN AS CHAIR OF THE REPUBLICAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE AS SOON AS A GOP PRESIDENTIAL NOMINEE IS SELECTED NEXT YEAR.

MARTINEZ'S TERM DOESN'T OFFICIALLY EXPIRE UNTIL AFTER THE 2008 ELECTIONS.

THE FIRST HISPANIC GOP CHAIRMAN'S DECISION TO EXIT EARLY COMES AS HIS PARTY FACES GROWING CRITICISM FOR IGNORING

MINORITY GROUPS.

MIKE, DO YOU THINK THAT SENATOR MARTINEZ IS A VICTIM OR BEING FORCED OUT BECAUSE THERE'S THIS FEELING AMONG SOME REPUBLICANS, NOT ALL, BUT THAT THEY'VE KIND OF GONE AWAY FROM TRYING TO ATTRACT THE HISPANIC VOTE.

>> I THINK THAT PART OF IT IS, NOT ONLY THAT PART, THEY ARE PROBABLY NOT DOING WHAT HE'S ASKED HIM TO DO, WHICH IS TO GO OUT AND GET THE HISPANIC VOTE AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE.

BUT I THINK THAT BEING A SENATOR, HE WAS DOING A DISSERVICE BOTH TO THE STATE OF FLORIDA AS A U.S. SENATOR AND TO HIS OWN PARTY BY BEING THE HEAD OF THE PARTY.

>> CAN'T DO TWO JOBS ADEQUATELY?

>> ABSOLUTELY.

I THINK THAT WAS A MISTAKE ON HIS PART.

I'M GLAD THAT HE'S STEPPING DOWN.

I HOPE THAT HE CONCENTRATES MORE ON FLORIDA ISSUES AND HIS ROLE IN THE U.S. SENATE AS OPPOSED TO BEING THE HEAD OF THE RNC.

I DO THINK THAT IT PROBABLY WOUNDED HIM PERSONALLY, BOTH THE IMMIGRATION ISSUE AND WHAT HAPPENED WITH THE DEBATES DOWN IN SOUTH FLORIDA.

>> SOME OF THE CANDIDATES DIDN'T SHOW UP FOR THE UNIVISION DEBATE.

>> CORRECT.

AND I THINK THAT REALLY HURT HIM PERSONALLY AND PROBABLY

SHOT HIS CREDIBILITY A LITTLE BIT.

>> ADAM, WHAT ARE YOU HEARING ABOUT THE REASONS HE'S STEPPING DOWN?

>> I THINK HE PROBABLY FEELS LIKE HE WISHED HE COULD STEP DOWN YESTERDAY.

HE DIDN'T WANT THE JOB IN THE FIRST PLACE.

I THINK KARL ROVE AND COMPANY WENT TO HIM AND SAID, PLEASE, PLEASE DO THIS.

>> IS THAT BECAUSE ROVE REALIZED THE VALUE OF HISPANIC VOTERS?

>> ROVE REALIZED IF YOU WANT TO MAINTAIN A LONG-TERM MAJORITY, YOU BETTER START COURTING THE FASTEST GROWING DEMOGRAPHIC IN THE COUNTRY.

MARTINEZ FELT PERSONALLY AND PASSIONATELY ABOUT HOW THE IMMIGRATION DEBATE SHOULD BE FRAMED AND HOW THE RHETORIC SHOULD BE USED.

AND HE SUPPORTED THE WHITE HOUSE POSITION ON IMMIGRATION. AND EVEN IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA, A DIVERSE STATE LIKE FLORIDA, IT HURT HIM.

HE IS RIGHT NOW THE MOST UNPOPULAR STATEWIDE OFFICIAL IN THE STATE.

AND HE'S VERY LUCKY THERE'S NOT AN ELECTION COMING UP UNTIL 2010.

>> WELL, THAT'S AN INTERESTING QUESTION.

VICKIE, HIS APPROVAL RATINGS ARE LOW.

DOES THAT OPEN HIM UP FOR A CHALLENGE IN THE NEXT SENATE RACE?

>> OH, YEAH, I THINK IT DOES.

HE'S A ONE-TERM SENATOR, HE'S GOING TO BE CHALLENGED.

HE WAS INVOLVED IN LEADING THE IMMIGRATION DEBATE.

THAT'S GOING TO LEAVE HIM CERTAINLY A TARGET.

THERE WILL BE OTHER PEOPLE WHO TRY TO CHALLENGE HIM.

MAYBE PEOPLE WITHIN HIS OWN PARTY.

THAT I THINK WILL BE THE BIG QUESTION.

ACTUALLY, A COUPLE OF WEEKS AGO, I HAD A CONVERSATION WITH HIM ABOUT THE VERY ISSUE OF WHAT THE REPUBLICAN CANDIDATES WERE DOING IN FIRMS OF -- IN TERMS OF HISPANIC VOTERS.

THE ONE THING THAT REALLY STRUCK ME AFTER TALKING WITH HIM ABOUT IT IS HOW PERSONAL THIS HAS BECOME TO HIM.

HE CANNOT UNDERSTAND HOW THE MEMBERS OF HIS OWN PARTY, THIS SORT OF VANGUARD, THE CANDIDATES OUT THERE, ARE NOT SPEAKING TO HISPANIC VOTERS.

I MEAN, THIS IS A NATURALLY CONSERVATIVE POPULATION ON THE RELIGIOUS ISSUES, ON ECONOMIC ISSUES, AND TO HIM, IT'S A MATTER OF THIS IS HIS PARTY NEEDING TO SPEAK TO A POPULATION THAT AGREES WITH IT IN ITS PHILOSOPHY, AND THEY ARE KIND OF IGNORING IT, AND HE DOESN'T REALLY UNDERSTAND THAT.

>> ALL RIGHT.

WELL, FINALLY, EACH WEEK WE ASK OUR PANEL ABOUT ANOTHER STORY FROM THE WEEK OR ON THE HORIZON WHICH WILL AFFECT

PEOPLE HERE IN WEST CENTRAL FLORIDA.

ADAM, YOUR OTHER BIG STORY OF THE WEEK?

>> BIT OF AN OFFSHOOT OF WHAT WE TALKED ABOUT EARLIER.

SOUTH CAROLINA DEMOCRATS AFTER CONTINUALLY BELITTILING THE IMPORTANCE OF FLORIDA'S PRIMARY AS A BEAUTY CONTEST ARE NOW ABOUT TO MOVE THEIRS TO JANUARY 19th BECAUSE THEY DON'T WANT TO COMPETE WITH OUR ATTENTION ON THE 29th.

[LAUGHTER]

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

>> WE HEARD THE RECENT ANNOUNCEMENT THIS WEEK THAT TECO IS NOT GOING TO PURSUE THEIR COAL GASIFICATION PLANT IN POLK COUNTY.

SAD TO HEAR IT, BUT IT'S A REALITY OF WHERE WE ARE.

PEOPLE WOULD RATHER PAY THE PRICES ASSOCIATED WITH COAL-GENERATING ELECTRICITY USED.

THE ENVIRONMENTALISTS WANT NATURAL GAS, BUT THEY DON'T -- THE PEOPLE DON'T WANT TO PAY FOR THAT IN GENERAL, AND WE'RE STILL AFRAID OF NUCLEAR.

NOT JUST AN ISSUE FOR LAKELAND AND POLK COUNTY.

IT'S REALLY A STATEWIDE ISSUE OF WHERE WE'RE GOING NEXT IN THAT REGARD.

>> IS IT LIKELY, THOUGH, THE PLANT WILL BE BUILT USING PROBABLY NATURAL GAS?

>> BECAUSE -- IT TAKES RIGHT NOW ABOUT 11 YEARS TO GET A NUCLEAR PLANT SITED AND ACTUALLY PRODUCING ELECTRICITY.

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THE STATE IS GOING TO NEED MORE ELECTRICITY BEFORE 11 YEARS CAN GO BY.

SO YOU'LL SEE MORE NATURAL GAS -- GENERATION IN THIS STATE.

>> MIKE, YOUR OTHER BIG STORY?

>> I STILL THINK THE BIG STORY WILL BE GOVERNOR CRIST AND THE LEGISLATURE.

WHATEVER IS COMING UP IN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS BOTH WITH THE SPECIAL SESSIONS AND HIS LEADERSHIP.

I THINK HIS LEADERSHIP STYLE IS GOING TO COME INTO QUESTION EVERY WEEK FOR THE NEXT FEW WEEKS BECAUSE OF WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN IN THE SPECIAL SESSION.

AND WE'VE SAID HERE THAT NO ONE KNOWS WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN.

AND THAT REALLY GOES STRAIGHT TO HIS PERSONAL LEADERSHIP STYLE.

>> OKAY, VICKIE, YOUR OTHER BIG STORY.

>> MY STORY IS SORT OF A SUBSET OF MIKE'S STORY, AND THAT'S THE GOVERNOR'S POSITION ON UNIVERSITY TUITION INCREASES, WHICH HE WAS ADAMANTLY AGAINST, SORT OF TOOK A STAND ON THAT IN THE SPRING, AND THE LATEST WE'RE HEARING NOW IS THAT THERE'S LANGUAGE THAT WOULD INCREASE COMMUNITY COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY TUITION BY 5% DEDICATING SOME OF THAT TO UNDERGRADUATE IMPROVEMENTS.

A PORTION WILL GO TO FINANCIAL AID.

AND IT LOOKS LIKE THE GOVERNOR IS NOW AGREEING.

THAT'S A PRETTY ABRUPT CHANGE FROM SOMETHING HE FELT SO STRONGLY ABOUT IN THE SPRING.

>> DOES THAT SHOW THAT IF YOU PUSH BACK A LITTLE BIT AGAINST THE GOVERNOR YOU CAN WIN?

IS THAT WHAT IT SHOWS?

>> YEAH.

I THINK IT DOES.

THE FACT IS THAT A LOT OF PEOPLE COULDN'T UNDERSTAND WHY HE WASN'T GETTING THE MESSAGE IN THE SPRING ABOUT WHAT BAD SHAPE THE UNIVERSITIES WERE AND THAT HE REALLY NEEDED TO TRY AND SHORE THEM UP AND MOVE THEM FORWARD.

AND HE WAS BEING VERY STUBBORN ABOUT IT.

AND I THINK HE'S COME OFF THAT.

SO ON ONE HAND, IT'S LIKE HE'S NOT AS STUBBORN AS HE USED TO BE, BECAUSE HE WAFFLED, WE DON'T KNOW.

>> THANK YOU, ADAM SMITH, GOW FIELDS, MIKE SUAREZ AND VICKIE CHACHERE.

AND THANK YOU FOR WATCHING "FLORIDA THIS WEEK."

WE WELCOME YOUR COMMENTS ABOUT THIS PROGRAM.

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YOU CAN ALSO SEND AN E-MAIL TO US, OUR ADDRESS IS

FTW@WEDU.ORG OR ADD A COMMENT TO OUR "FLORIDA THIS WEEK" WEB

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