

"FLORIDA THIS WEEK"

OCTOBER 12, 2007

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

>> COMING UP NEXT, THE BOOT CAMP KILLING CASE GOES TO THE JURY.

TALLAHASSEE MAY BE CLOSE TO A DEAL ON PROPERTY TAXES.

THE LEGISLATURE CUTS THE BUDGET BY MORE THAN A BILLION DOLLARS, AND WE'LL TAKE A LOOK AT THE LATEST PRESIDENTIAL POLL NUMBERS IN FLORIDA.

POLITICAL INSIGHTS NEXT ON "FLORIDA THIS WEEK."

¶¶

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

AND NOW, MODERATOR ROB LOREI.

>> WELCOME BACK.

THIS WEEK, OUR PANELISTS ARE JOE BROWN IS A COLUMNIST AND EDITORIAL BOARD MEMBER AT THE "THE TAMPA TRIBUNE."

ERNEST HOOPER IS A COLUMNIST AT THE "ST. PETERSBURG TIMES."

MARY FIGG IS A FORMER STATE LEGISLATOR AND A DEMOCRAT, AND

UNEDITED REALTIME CLOSED CAPTIONING

A.J. MATTHEWS IS A REPUBLICAN STATE COMMITTEEMAN.

THANK YOU FOR COMING.

GREAT TO SEE YOU.

WELL, IN PANAMA CITY, JURORS RETURNED A NOT GUILTY VERDICT FRIDAY IN THE CASE OF SEVEN JUVENILE BOOT CAMP GUARDS AND A NURSE ACCUSED OF THE MANSLAUGHTER DEATH OF A 14-YEAR-OLD BOY.

THE VIDEO SHOWED THE GUARDS REPEATEDLY HIT, KNEED AND DRAGGED MARTIN LEE ANDERSON AFTER HE COLLAPSED WHILE RUNNING LAPS AT THE CAMP.

THE NURSE STOOD BY WATCHING.

THE JURORS DECIDED THE CASE FOR THE DEFENSE IN ABOUT 90 MINUTES.

JOE, WHAT DID YOU THINK OF THE VERDICT?

>> I'M NOT REALLY SURPRISED.

I SAID BEFORE AND I WAS TELLING A COWORKER THIS WILL PROBABLY BE THE FLORIDA VERSUS THE RODNEY KING TAPE.

YOU SEE WHAT WAS HAPPENED.

IT WAS TAPED.

IT LOOKED LIKE THEY ARE BEATING THIS KID, AND THEN THE JURY FINDS THEM NOT GUILTY.

BUT NOT GUILTY OF WHAT?

JUST LIKE IN THE KING CASE, THEY JUST COULDN'T PROVE -- COULDN'T BRING THEMSELVES TO VOTE FOR WHAT THE PROSECUTION WANTED.

UNEDITED REALTIME CLOSED CAPTIONING

IN THIS CASE IT WAS MANSLAUGHTER.

MAYBE THEY SHOULD HAVE WENT FOR CRIMINAL NEGLIGENCE OR
SOMETHING.

I DON'T KNOW.

>> DO YOU THINK THE CHARGES WERE TOO HIGH?

DO YOU THINK THE MANSLAUGHTER CHARGE WAS TOO HIGH?

>> I DON'T KNOW.

I THINK THAT MARK OBER TOOK HIS TIME TO DECIDE WHAT TO
CHARGE THEM WITH.

MAYBE HE FIGURED THAT'S WHAT HE COULD GET.

I DON'T KNOW.

IT'S BAD BECAUSE THIS KID IS DEAD AND NO ONE IS PAYING FOR
IT.

AT LEAST NOT CRIMINALLY.

NOW, THEY WON IN THE CIVIC COURT.

BUT NOBODY IS PAYING FOR THIS OTHERWISE.

I WAS TALKING WITH SOMEBODY, WELL, WHO IS AT FAULT?

I CAN ONLY SAY THE SYSTEM.

AT THAT TIME THIS JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM, WHICH PRODUCED
THE BOOT CAMP WHICH IS NO LONGER IN EXISTENCE.

THAT'S ABOUT ALL YOU CAN BLAME RIGHT NOW.

>> BUT ISN'T IT INTERESTING THAT THE CIVIL SUIT WAS SETTLED
BEFORE THE ACTUAL TRIAL?

AND I HAVE TO THINK THAT WAS A FACTOR.

THE FACT THAT HIS FAMILY HAD BEEN REWARDED BY THE STATE

LEGISLATURE, I WOULD GUESS PLAYED A ROLE IN THE JURY'S
DECISION.

PERHAPS THEY FELT LIKE JUSTICE HAD ALREADY BEEN SERVED
BECAUSE THE FAMILY WAS AWARDED.

>> BUT THE FAMILY IS STILL QUITE UPSET, THOUGH.

>> WELL, SURE THEY ARE.

SURE THEY ARE.

>> I WANT TO BELIEVE THAT THE JURORS WERE A LITTLE MORE
SAVVY THAN TO BELIEVE THAT MONEY PAID CIVILLY THROUGH THE
STATE OF FLORIDA WOULD NOT BE THE OVERWHELMING FACTOR IN THE
CASE.

THERE WERE -- THERE WAS REASONABLE DOUBT, APPARENTLY.

OTHERWISE THEY WOULDN'T HAVE VOTED THAT WAY.

WE HAVE TWO OPPOSING VIEWS FROM TWO MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS
WHO CONDUCTED AUTOPSIES.

THAT IN ITSELF WOULD HAVE LED ENOUGH TO BELIEVE THAT THIS
WAS, IN FACT, REASONABLE IN THAT ISSUE.

>> MARY?

>> OR THAT ONE OF THE PEOPLE PERFORMING THE AUTOPSIES WAS
INCORRECT.

I THOUGHT THE MOST STRIKING THING ABOUT THIS TRIAL WAS THE
LACK OF DOUBT.

THE LACK OF DOUBT ON THE PART OF THE PERSONNEL AT THE BOOT
CAMP, THE LACK OF DOUBT BY THE STATE OF FLORIDA IN HAVING
BOOT CAMPS.

WHOEVER THOUGHT THAT TAKING A CHILD OR A YOUNG MAN OUT OF A VIOLENT ENVIRONMENT AND PUTTING HIM IN ANOTHER ABUSIVE ENVIRONMENT IS GOING TO, QUOTE, STRAIGHTEN HIM OUT. THERE WAS VERY LITTLE EVIDENCE THAT BOOT CAMPS WORK, AND YET THE STATE OF FLORIDA WENT FORWARD ON THAT IDEA. AND THE CASE IN THE YOUNG MAN WHO WE SAW BEATEN BY THE GUARDS, ET CETERA, THE NURSE'S TESTIMONY WAS, HE DID WHAT THEY ALWAYS DO.

"THEY ALWAYS DO."

THERE WAS APPARENTLY NO DOUBT IN HER MIND THAT THIS WAS ONE OF THOSE "THEY" PEOPLE.

>> THAT HE WAS FAKING OR SHIRKING.

>> HE WAS SHIRKING.

HE WAS MALINGERING.

"THEY" ALWAYS DO THAT.

NO ONE ON THAT TEAM OF LAW ENFORCEMENT AND THE NURSE, ET CETERA, EVER STOPPED TO THINK MAYBE HE'S NOT MALINGERING.

MAYBE THERE'S A SOMETHING PROBLEM HERE.

THERE WAS NO DOUBT THERE.

AND AS A RESULT NOW, WE HAVE DOUBT ABOUT THE OUTCOME OF THE JURY.

>> -- WORKING ON THE STREET FOR 21 YEARS AS A POLICE OFFICER, I HAD SEEN COUNTLESS TIMES WHERE MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS, PARAMEDICS, EMTs, EVEN OTHER POLICE OFFICERS PUT AN AMMONIA CAPSULE IN SOMEBODY'S NOSE TRYING TO

WAKE THEM UP, BREAK IT TO SEND THE AMMONIA FUMES INTO THE PERSON'S SYSTEM.

I'VE NEVER ONCE SEEN AN INDIVIDUAL PERISH OR DIE BECAUSE OF IT.

>> A.J., IT WASN'T JUST AMMONIA CAPSULES.

IT WAS KNEEING AND BEATING AND KICKING.

>> WHAT WAS THE STANDARD ON THE YOUNG MAN WHEN HE SAID "I CAN'T BREATHE"?

DID ANYONE CHECK HIS BREATHING?

DID ANYONE DO VITAL SIGNS?

WHAT WAS THE STANDARD OF CARE THERE?

AND I WOULD SAY -- I HATE TO SAY THE NURSE WAS AT FAULT, BUT SHE LOOKS VERY MUCH LIKE SHE WAS AT FAULT.

>> WELL, MAYBE THAT'S THE ISSUE WE NEED TO LOOK AT.

INSTEAD OF CHARGING WITH MANSLAUGHTER, MAYBE THE AMOUNT OF CARE, THE APPROPRIATENESS OF THE CARE IS TO BE QUESTIONED.

>> JOE, LET ME ASK YOU THIS.

A LOT OF THE COLUMNISTS AND NEWSPAPER STORIES ABOUT THIS TRIAL TALKED ABOUT THE CLIMATE IN PANAMA CITY SURROUNDING THIS CASE.

AND THERE WAS AN INTERESTING POINT MADE BY ONE OF THE LOCAL COLUMNISTS THIS WEEK THAT ONE OF THE PROSECUTORS FROM HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY WHO PROSECUTED THESE SEVEN GUARDS AND THE NURSE WAS ASKED DURING THE TRIAL, WHERE WERE YOU BORN, WHAT STATE ARE YOU FROM?

UNEDITED REALTIME CLOSED CAPTIONING

AND OUR PROSECUTOR FROM HILLSBOROUGH SAID, MAINE.

AND THEN THE DEFENSE ATTORNEY WHO ASKED THE QUESTION, SAID,
WELL, I WAS BORN HERE.

IT WAS AS IF OUTSIDERS WERE COMING TO PERSECUTE THESE FOLKS
IN PANAMA CITY.

>> WHICH IS WHY THE TRIAL SHOULD HAVE BEEN MOVED FROM THERE.
IF THERE EVER WAS A CASE FOR CHANGE OF VENUE, THIS WAS IT.
A LOT OF PEOPLE, OH, WHY ARE THEY SAYING THAT WHEN THEY SAID
THEY DIDN'T THINK THEY WOULD GET A FAIR TRIAL THERE BECAUSE
OF THE WAY IT WAS BEING HELD UP THERE, I THINK IT WAS BAY
COUNTY, I AGREE, IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN MOVED.

>> SO WHAT DO YOU THINK THE LONG-TERM IMPLICATIONS OF THIS
ARE?

DO WE SEE AL SHARPTON COMING TO THE STATE?

DO WE SEE CIVIL RIGHTS DEMONSTRATIONS?

>> I DON'T KNOW IF WE'LL SEE CIVIL RIGHTS DEMONSTRATIONS,
BUT I THINK THIS IS GOING TO REINFORCE THE LACK OF FAITH
THAT THE MANY AFRICAN-AMERICANS, NOT ALL, BUT MANY
AFRICAN-AMERICANS HAD IN OUR LEGAL SYSTEM.

WE SAW THE SAME TYPE OF SENTIMENT EXPRESSED AFTER THE
JENNIFER PORTER CASE HERE IN HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY WHEN SHE
DIDN'T RECEIVE ANY JAIL TIME FOR HER ROLE IN THE DEATH OF
THOSE KIDS IN THAT CAR ACCIDENT.

SO THIS IS GOING TO REINFORCE THE PROPOSITION THAT
AFRICAN-AMERICANS CAN'T GET A FAIR SHAKE FROM OUR LEGAL

SYSTEM.

RIGHTLY OR WRONGLY, I THINK IT'S GOING TO PROMPT SOME TO QUESTION STATE ATTORNEY MARK OBER AND HIS OFFICE BECAUSE THEY WERE INVOLVED IN BOTH THE PORTER CASE AND THIS CASE. I'M NOT SURE IF THAT CRITICISM IS GOING TO BE FAIR, BUT I THINK WE'RE GOING TO SEE THAT CRITICISM DIRECTED SPECIFICALLY AT MARK OBER.

>> MARY AND A.J., QUICKLY, WE'RE JUST ABOUT OUT OF TIME.

DO YOU AGREE WITH WHAT ERNEST SAID?

>> I THINK MARK OBER AND HIS TEAM WERE VERY EFFECTIVE IN THEIR PURSUIT OF TRUTH AND JUSTICE.

IF THERE IS A PERCEPTION, IS THERE A CRITICISM, IT IS UNFAIR AND UNWARRANTED BECAUSE THEY DID THEIR JOBS.

>> MARY?

>> I DON'T THINK THE DYNAMICS ARE IN THAT DIRECTION.

I THINK THE DYNAMICS ARE MORE TO THE DIRECTION OF NORTH FLORIDA AND THE SORT OF NORTH FLORIDA MENTALITY THAT THOSE OF US WHO HAVE LIVED IN FLORIDA FOR A LONG TIME ARE AWARE OF.

>> OKAY.

WELL, GOVERNOR CHARLIE CRIST CALLED A NEW SPECIAL SESSION TO BEGIN RIGHT AWAY.

THIS TIME TO FINALIZE A NEW BALLOT MEASURE ON PROPERTY TAXES.

THE GOVERNOR'S AGENDA INCLUDES A PORTABLE SAVE OUR HOMES CAP

ON YEARLY TAX INCREASES, DOUBLING THE CURRENT
\$25,000 HOMESTEAD EXEMPTION AND AN ADDITIONAL 25% PROPERTY
TAX CUT FOR FIRST-TIME HOME BUYERS.
PLUS, ELIMINATING PROPERTY TAXES FOR LOW-INCOME SENIORS AND
A TAX BREAK FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING.
THERE'S ALSO A GREATER EXEMPTION ON PERSONAL PROPERTY FOR
SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS, AND WORKING WATERFRONT BUSINESSES
WOULD BE TAXED AT A LOWER RATE THAN THE CURRENT AND HIGHEST
AND BEST USE, WHICH IS HOW THEY ARE TAXED NOW.
ERNEST, IS THIS GOING TO SOLVE THE PROPERTY TAX MESS?
>> WELL, WE'RE NOT SURE, ROB.
AND THAT'S THE BIGGEST PROBLEM.
THEY CAME UP WITH ONE PROPOSAL.
IT WAS THROWN OFF THE BALLOT BY THE COURT.
AND NOW THIS IS WHAT CHARLIE CRIST LIKES TO SAY IS HIS
SECOND PLAY FROM THE PLAYBOOK.
AND I WORRY, THERE'S A TONE OF ALMOST EXPERIMENTATION, WELL,
WE'RE GOING TO TRY THIS PLAY, BUT WE'RE NOT DONE YET.
WELL, GEE, CHARLIE, WHAT IF YOU GET SACKED ON THIS PLAY AND
IT'S THIRD AND 25?
YOU KNOW, YOU EXTEND THAT FOOTBALL ANALOGY, YOU KNOW, IT'S
SOMEWHAT TROUBLING THAT THEY SEEM TO BE HASTEFUL IN TRYING
TO COME UP WITH SOMETHING THAT'S GOING TO APPEASE PEOPLE
EVEN THOUGH THEY ARE NOT SURE IT'S REALLY GOING TO ADDRESS
ALL THE CONCERNS THAT EXIST REGARDING PROPERTY TAXES.

UNEDITED REALTIME CLOSED CAPTIONING

>> A.J., WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE LATEST VERSION?

>> WELL, GOING BACK TO FOOTBALL, NO, THIS IS NOT A TOUCHDOWN, BUT IT IS DEFINITELY A FIRST DOWN IN THE RED ZONE.

THE LEGISLATORS DID WHAT THEY HAD TO DO.

WE'RE TRYING TO GET TO A BETTER PROGRAM TO MAKE SURE THERE IS ACTUAL RECOVERY AND A LITTLE BIT OF RELIEF FROM THE PROPERTY TAX ISSUE.

I THINK ONCE WE GET THAT CAMEL'S HEAD IN THE TENT, THE REST OF THE BODY IS SURE TO FOLLOW.

AND WE'RE GOING TO GET SOME REAL RELIEF.

>> WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF MARCO RUBIO, THE HOUSE SPEAKER, SAYING -- YOU KNOW, HE'S KIND OF GIVEN LUKEWARM SUPPORT TO THIS.

HE'S NOT REAL THRILLED ABOUT THIS.

>> NO.

HE WANTED THE ORIGINAL PROPOSAL WHERE WE WENT AHEAD AND HAVE OUR SUPER HOMESTEAD EXEMPTION.

ANYTHING IS BETTER THAN WHAT WE HAVE NOW, AND I APPLAUD THE LEGISLATURE FOR MOVING FORWARD AND DOING SOMETHING AS OPPOSED TO DOING NOTHING.

>> ALL RIGHT.

WELL, MARY, WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT IT?

>> WELL, A.J. JUST SAID ANYTHING IS BETTER THAN WHAT WE HAVE NOW.

WELL, I TELL YOU WHAT'S BETTER THAN WHAT WE HAVE NOW, WHAT WE HAD BEFORE WE HAVE NOW.

IF WE ELIMINATED THE CAP, WHICH APPARENTLY IS VERY POPULAR --

>> YOU MEAN BEFORE THE SAVE OUR HOMES WAS ENACTED.

>> YES.

>> GOING BACK TO THE ORIGINAL SYSTEM.

>> WE HAD A MORE EQUITABLE, MORE FAIR TAXATION SYSTEM THEN.

NOW WE'VE CREATED THIS SAVE OUR HOMES INEQUITY.

NOW WE'RE GOING TO DO SOME MORE INEQUITIES.

WE'RE GOING TO GIVE THE POOR, LOW-INCOME SENIORS, WE'RE

GOING TO ELIMINATE PROPERTY TAX, PROBABLY LOW INCOME SENIORS

NOT PAYING A WHOLE BUNCH OF PROPERTY TAXES.

BUT LET ME SAY A WORD ABOUT THAT, BECAUSE I'M SENIOR BUT I'M

NOT ONE OF THE LOW-INCOME ONES, EVERYBODY RECEIVES SERVICES.

ALL OF US RECEIVE FIRE, POLICE, ET CETERA, SERVICES.

I THINK EVERYBODY NEEDS TO PAY.

NOT ELIMINATE THE PROPERTY TAX.

SECONDLY, THIS IS SORT OF LIKE A FRIEND OF MINE WHO USED TO

COOK SPAGHETTI AND HIS METHOD OF DETERMINING WHETHER IT WAS

DONE, HE WOULD THROW A PIECE ON THE WALL AND IF IT STUCK, IT

WAS DONE.

WELL, THIS IS LIKE THROWING SPAGHETTI ON THE WALL.

WHATEVER STICKS WILL WORK, I GUESS.

>> SOUNDS LIKE MARY IS ADVOCATING A SALES TAX.

ELIMINATING THE PROPERTY TAX AND GOING TO A SALES TAX.

>> MARY DIDN'T DO ANY SUCH THING.

MARY WOULD LIKE TO SEE AN ELIMINATION OF THE EXEMPTIONS IN
THE --

IT DOESN'T DO A DARN THING FOR SMALL BUSINESS.

AND SMALL BUSINESSES ARE A MAJOR PART OF FLORIDA'S ECONOMY.

I'M VERY SORRY ABOUT THAT PARTICULAR PART.

IT SHIFTS THE BURDEN.

ALSO, IT SHIFTS THE BURDEN TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT TO TAKE
CARE OF THINGS.

I'M GOING TO TALK ABOUT THAT WHEN WE GET AROUND TO TALKING
ABOUT THE BUDGET CUTS.

IT'S GOING TO PLACE AN EQUITABLE LOAD ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT.

>> JOE, YOUR EDITORIAL BOARD IS REALLY TOUGH ON THIS DEAL.

YOU GUYS SAID THAT THIS IS THE WRONG WAY TO SPELL TAX RELIEF
IN YOUR EDITORIAL ON FRIDAY.

YOU SAID A NEW PLAN TO CUT PROPERTY TAXES FAILS TO ADDRESS
THE INEQUITIES IN FLORIDA'S TAX STRUCTURE AND DOES NOTHING
TO HELP THOSE WHO HAVE THE MOST REASON TO COMPLAIN, THAT IS
FLORIDIANS WHO RECENTLY PURCHASED THEIR HOMES AT INFLATED
PRICES AND ARE TAXED NOW AT OR NEAR MARKET VALUE.

THAT'S A BIG GAP IN THIS PLAN.

>> YES.

AND ALL OF US ON THE BOARD HAVE STORIES.

I'LL TELL YOU MINE.

I SAID IT BEFORE ON THIS SHOW.

MY NEIGHBOR ON ONE SIDE PAYS LESS THAN HALF WHAT I PAY.

THESE ARE -- ONE ON THE OTHER SIDE PAYS ABOUT A THIRD MORE.

THESE HOUSES ARE ALL PRETTY CLOSE TO EQUAL IN VALUE.

I MEAN, THAT'S -- THAT'S NOT FAIR.

>> NOW, THE GOVERNOR SAID THAT WE CAN COME BACK AT THE NEXT
SESSION OF THE LEGISLATURE AND ADD MORE --

>> I'M NOT -- OKAY.

YOU KNOW, THAT WAS THE LAST TIME.

YOU KNOW, OH, TAXES GOING TO GO DOWN.

AND I GOT MY TRIM NOTICE AND MY TAXES WENT DOWN.

\$40.

[LAUGHTER]

I MEAN, IT'S BETTER THAN NOTHING, GRANTED.

BUT I'M JUST -- I JUST REMAIN UNCONVINCED.

>> IF THE VOTERS PASS THIS AND IF IT MAKES IT ON THE BALLOT
IN JANUARY, AS WE ASSUME IT'S GOING TO, AND THE VOTERS PASS
IT IN JANUARY AND THE AVERAGE TAX BREAK IS ABOUT \$200 THAT
THEY GET IN THE PROPERTY TAX, DOES THAT SOLVE WHAT WE'VE
BEEN CALLING THE PROPERTY TAX CRISIS HERE?

JANUARY VOTE SOLVE IT?

READ THE EDITORIAL, YEAH.

>> NOT AT ALL.

>> SO WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

OR WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

DOES CHARLIE CRIST GET BLAMED?

DOES THE LEGISLATURE GET BLAMED?

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

>> I DON'T THINK IT'S A MATTER OF BLAMING AS IT IS TO LOOK FORWARD, TO LOOK FOR OTHER SOLUTIONS.

LIKE MARY SAID, SHE WANTS FAIRNESS.

WELL, I'M AN ADVOCATE OF THE SALES TAX.

LET'S ELIMINATE THE PROPERTY TAX, BECAUSE EVERYBODY DOES, IN FACT, RECEIVE SERVICES.

EVERYBODY PAYS SOME SORT OF SALES TAX, REGARDING -- NO MATTER HOW MUCH YOUR INCOME IS, YOU'RE GOING TO TAKE A SMALL PORTION OF YOUR INCOME TO BUY SOMETHING THAT'S GOING TO BE TAXED.

>> AND THE TAXATION BUDGET REFORM COMMISSION, WHICH ISSUES ITS REPORT NEXT YEAR, HOW LIKELY DO YOU THINK THEY'LL CALL FOR THAT PLAN WHICH IS SPEAKER RUBIO'S PLAN, SOMETHING HE'S BEEN ADVOCATING FOR THE LAST --

>> I THINK AFTER DOING SOMETHING.

AFTER GETTING THAT HEAD OF THE CAMEL IN THE TENT, THEY ARE GOING TO PROBABLY SAY, YEAH, WE GET A LITTLE CLOSER TO DOING THAT.

>> OUR LOCAL PROPERTY APPRAISER SAYS IF THAT PLAN PASSES, THERE'S GOING TO BE A WAL-MART ON THE GEORGIA BORDER ALL ACROSS THE STATE.

[LAUGHTER]

PEOPLE ARE GOING TO BE DRIVING TO GEORGIA TO BUY THEIR GOODS AND SERVICES TO AVOID THE TAX.

>> BECAUSE OUR SALES TAX WILL BE 11, 12 PERCENT.

>> SOMEONE WHO IS MARRIED TO A SUPER SHOPPER, I CAN SEE THAT HAPPENING.

>> GASOLINE IS TAXED, THOUGH.

[LAUGHTER]

>> SEE, GASOLINE IS TAXED.

TO GET UP TO GEORGIA TO GO TO WAL-MART, YOU'LL HAVE TO BE SPENDING TAX MONEY.

>>> STATE LEGISLATORS CUT \$1.1 BILLION FROM THE CURRENT FISCAL YEAR'S BUDGET.

AMONG THE CUTS, PUBLIC SCHOOL SPENDING IS DOWN BY ABOUT \$100 PER STUDENT AND STATE UNIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS WOULD FACE A 5% TUITION HIKE THIS COMING JANUARY. NURSING HOMES AND HOSPITALS THAT CARE FOR LOW-INCOME PEOPLE, PLUS MEDICAID PROGRAMS FACE UP TO \$500 MILLION IN REDUCTIONS.

SO, MARY, WHAT DID YOU THINK ABOUT THESE BUDGET CUTS?

>> WELL, I THINK THIS IS KIND OF HOPE-AND-PRAY BUDGET.

HOPE THAT THIS WORK DOES THE TRICK TILL THE NEXT SESSION, AND HOPE AND PRAY THAT THE NEXT YEAR'S DEFICIT IS NOT GOING TO BE GREATER, WHICH WE ALL BELIEVE THAT IT WILL BE.

WHAT THE LEGISLATURE ACTUALLY DID WAS TO CUT IN THE TWO BROAD CATEGORIES OF FUNDING.

THEY CUT OUT THE RECURRING MONEY AND REPLACED IT WITH THE SO-CALLED NONRECURRING MONEY.

THAT'S ONE TIME NOT DEPENDABLE THAT IT WILL BE THERE NEXT YEAR.

IN DOING SO, WHAT THEY'VE DONE IS TO CREATE A HOLE FOR THEMSELVES FOR NEXT YEAR.

THE OTHER AND MOST IMPORTANT THING THAT THEY DID IS, YES, THEY HELD THE SCHOOLS HARMLESS, BUT THEY DIDN'T CUT AND REBALANCE THE FEFP, THE FUNDING FORMULA FOR THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS, SO THE SAME BURDEN IS ON THE LOCAL SCHOOLS.

OUR PROPERTY TAX FOR THAT HAS ALREADY BEEN DECIDED ON FOR THIS YEAR.

NEXT YEAR, THEY ARE PROBABLY GOING TO HAVE TO PICK UP, AND "THEY" IS US, YOU KNOW, "THEY" IS US.

THEY'LL HAVE TO PICK UP A GREATER SHARE OF THE FUNDING FOR SCHOOLS.

WE HAVE A STATEWIDE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM FUNDED STATEWIDE WITH MATCHING MONIES FROM THE LOCALITIES.

SO ONCE AGAIN, THE LEGISLATURE HAS DONE THE OLD SHIFT AND SHAFT.

SHIFT IT DOWN TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT.

LET THEM PICK IT UP.

AT THE SAME TIME, PICKING UP THE HAMMER AND BEATING LOCAL GOVERNMENT OVER THE HEAD, WHETHER IT'S CITIES OR COUNTIES OR WHATEVER, SCHOOL BOARDS, THAT THEY ARE SPENDING TOO MUCH

MONEY.

THEY ARE GIVING THEM MORE TO TAKE CARE OF AND TAKING AWAY
THE RESOURCES TO DO IT WITH.

>> YOU CALL THAT THE SHIFT AND SHAFT?

>> THE SHIFT AND SHAFT.

>> OH, I LIKE THAT.

I LIKE THAT A LOT.

>> THIS YEAR, BECAUSE OF THE MANDATE FROM THE LEGISLATURE,
WE TOOK 56 MILLION OUT OF THE COUNTY BUDGET.

NEXT YEAR, AND WE FIRED, WHAT, 200 AND SOMETHING PEOPLE.

NEXT YEAR, IT WILL BE 100 MILLION IF THIS TAX PROPOSAL GOES
THROUGH.

>> BUT IF THE STATE IS MANDATING THAT LOCAL GOVERNMENT
SPENDS MORE MONEY, IF THAT'S THE UPSHOT OF WHAT YOU'RE
SAYING --

>> BY THE WAY, THEY HAD A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT THAT
PROHIBITED THAT.

BUT, YOU KNOW, IT HAPPENS.

>> BUT SCHOOLS -- I MEAN, SCHOOLS ARE UNTOUCHED BY THAT
ROLLBACK THAT WAS ORDERED OF LOCAL TAXES.

SO SCHOOL BOARDS CAN CONTINUE TO RAISE LOCAL TAXES.

SO WHILE OUR GENERAL REVENUE --

>> IS THAT A GOOD THING?

[LAUGHTER]

>> WELL, I'M JUST TRYING TO GET A CLEAR PICTURE.

SO IF GENERAL REVENUE FOR COUNTY GOVERNMENT MAY BE GOING DOWN A BIT OR THAT PART OF TAXES MAY BE GOING DOWN, SCHOOL ASSESSMENTS GOING UP.

>> IT'S GOING TO HAVE TO GO UP TO TAKE UP THE SLACK THAT THE STATE FAILS TO MATCH.

>> JOE, WHAT DID YOU THINK --

>> SO IT'S NOT A TAX CUT.

>> -- OF THE STATE BUDGET THAT WAS PASSED?

>> THERE WAS ANOTHER CASE OF JOHNNIE BYRD ALZHEIMER'S CENTER.

THEY LOST SOME MONEY.

SO IT APPEARS PRETTY SPREAD OUT FROM WHAT I CAN GATHER.

>> SO YOU THINK THESE ARE PRETTY FAIR?

>> OKAY, FAIR.

FAIR IS ALL IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER.

YOU KNOW, IT ALL DEPENDS ON, YOU KNOW, WHAT YOU THINK SHOULD BE CUT.

BUT THIS IS WHAT REPUBLICANS SUPPOSED TO DO, RIGHT?

>> ABSOLUTELY.

>> THEY ARE SUPPOSED TO SHOW THAT WE CAN LIVE ON LESS GOVERNMENT AND SO FORTH AND SO ON.

>> THE REAL CONCERN IS NEXT YEAR, WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN NEXT YEAR.

THERE WAS A REPORT OUT THIS WEEK THAT WE'RE EXPECTING MORE CANADIAN TOURISTS THIS WINTER.

SO ON BEHALF OF VISIT FLORIDA, I WOULD JUST LIKE TO SAY TO ALL OUR FRIENDS IN CANADA, PLEASE, COME, AND SPEND AS MUCH MONEY AS HUMANLY POSSIBLE.

BECAUSE WE'RE GOING TO NEED IT.

WE'RE GOING TO NEED EVERY PENNY THAT THEY SPEND ON TAXES HERE IN THE HOPES OF SOMEHOW HAVING ENOUGH MONEY TO MAKE THE BUDGET WORK NEXT YEAR.

>> AND FOR THE FIRST TIME THE CANADIAN DOLLAR IS LESS THAN THE U.S. DOLLAR.

98 CENTS.

>> WELL, IT'S EQUAL NOW TO THE U.S. DOLLAR.

>> NO, IT'S LESS.

>> LESS, OKAY.

>> U.S. DOLLAR IS LESS.

>> U.S. DOLLAR IS LESS.

THAT'S RIGHT.

IN THE RACE FOR THE WHITE HOUSE, THE NEW QUINNIPIAC UNIVERSITY POLL SHOWS DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL CONTENDER HILLARY CLINTON HOLDS A LARGE LEAD OVER BARACK OBAMA IN FLORIDA WHILE REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE RUDY GIULIANI LEADS OVER GOP HOPEFULS IN THE STATE BUT BY A SMALLER MARGIN.

THE POLL WAS CONDUCTED DURING THE FIRST WEEK OF THIS MONTH, AND 44% OF FLORIDA DEMOCRATS THINK CLINTON HAS CLINCHED THE PARTY'S NOMINATION, YET ALMOST THE SAME NUMBER, 41%, SAID

UNEDITED REALTIME CLOSED CAPTIONING

THEY HAVE AN UNFAVORABLE VIEW OF CLINTON.

GIULIANI'S EDGE OVER PRESIDENTIAL HOPEFUL FRED THOMPSON REMAINS SLIM, AND MITT ROMNEY HAS GAINED SLIGHTLY SINCE SEPTEMBER.

A.J., IS THIS DOWN?

I MEAN, IS THIS DOWN ON THE REPUBLICAN SIDE TO JUST A THREE-PERSON RACE?

>> I THINK FOR THE MOST PART WE'RE LOOKING AT A THREE-PERSON RACE.

OF COURSE, WE STILL HAVE A TWO-PERSON RACE ON THE DEMOCRAT SIDE.

WE HAVE BARACK OBAMA -- EXCUSE ME, BARACK HUSSEIN OBAMA AND HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON.

THAT'S HIS MIDDLE NAME.

BUT THE REALITY THERE IS, IN ORDER TO HOPEFULLY HELP OUR BUDGET WOES, PERHAPS MAYBE THE DEMOCRATS CAN START SPENDING MONEY ON THE CAMPAIGNS HERE IN FLORIDA.

AND THAT WOULD ALLEVIATE SOME OF THE TAX PROBLEMS.

OF COURSE, THEY LIKE -- HILLARY CLINTON LIKES TO USE FLORIDA AS AN ATM AS OPPOSED TO ANYTHING ELSE.

>> WE DON'T HAVE ADVERTISING TAX HERE IN FLORIDA.

YOU KNOW, THAT'S ONE OF THOSE TAX EXEMPTIONS.

>> RIGHT.

BUT REMEMBER, THE PEOPLE THAT DO PRODUCE THE SHOWS AND DO PRODUCE THE SPOTS DO SPEND MONEY.

AND THAT'S WHERE THE TAX DOLLARS COME FROM.

YEAH, 44% THINK SHE'S GOT IT LOCKED UP.

41% OF THE DEMOCRATS SIMPLY DON'T LIKE HER.

THAT'S SIGNIFICANT.

>> WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF REPUBLICAN CHAIRMAN JIM GREER THIS WEEK WARNING EVANGELICALS IN FLORIDA NOT TO GO WITH THAT IDEA THAT WAS FLOATED TWO WEEKS AGO, STARTING A THIRD-PARTY CANDIDACY?

BECAUSE A LOT OF EVANGELICALS ARE NOT HAPPY WITH THEIR REPUBLICAN CHOICES.

>> RIGHT.

WELL, ONCE AGAIN, WE HAVE TO LOOK BACK TO A NUMBER OF YEARS AGO WHEN AN INDIVIDUAL CAME OUT OF NOWHERE TO SEIZE A DEMOCRAT NOMINATION AND EVENTUALLY MADE HIMSELF PRESIDENT. WILLIAM JEFFERSON CLINTON.

IF WE DO HAVE A THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATE LIKE THAT, MUCH IN THE SAME WAY THAT WE HAD BACK WHEN ROSS PEROT RAN, WE'RE GOING TO GET HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON IN THE WHITE HOUSE.

AND WE WANT TO AVOID THAT AT ALL COSTS, BECAUSE LET'S FACE IT, FLORIDA IS A RED STATE.

WE GO RED.

AND THERE'S ONLY BEEN TWO OTHER CANDIDATES THAT HAVE WON STATEWIDE ELECTION SINCE CLINTON WAS PRESIDENT.

AND I REALLY BELIEVE THE STATE OF FLORIDA CAN DO BETTER THAN HAVING HILLARY CLINTON --

>> WHAT I FIND FASCINATING ABOUT ALL OF THIS IS THAT A.J. IS STRUGGLING TO CONTROL HIS ENTHUSIASM ABOUT HILLARY CLINTON.

[LAUGHTER]

BEING ATOP THE POLLS.

THAT IS WHO THEY WANT AS THE DEMOCRATIC NOMINEE.

THEY FEEL THAT SHE IS THEIR BEST CHANCE TO KEEP THE WHITE HOUSE.

AND I'M NOT SURE THAT THEY ARE WRONG.

I WORRY ABOUT SOME OF THE POLLING, THOUGH, YOU KNOW.

>> EXPLAINS WHY THAT 46% DEMOCRATS DON'T LIKE HER.

I THINK IT MIGHT BE FOR THAT REASON, DON'T YOU THINK?

>> BECAUSE THEY ARE NOT SURE SHE CAN WIN IN NOVEMBER.

>> A.J. SAID THAT FLORIDA IS A RED STATE, THAT IT'S A REPUBLICAN STATE.

>> WELL, YOU KNOW, I DIDN'T NOTICE THAT.

NATIONALLY, I THINK EVERYONE CONSIDERS FLORIDA A SWITCH STATE IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION.

AND AS FAR AS ROSS PEROT, IT SEEMED TO ME THAT ROSS PEROT HURT THE DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATES, THE LAST TIME AROUND.

IT HURTS THE DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATES SOMETIMES, TOO, HAVING A THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATE.

I WOULD LOVE TO HAVE AN EVANGELICAL CANDIDATE IN THE REPUBLICAN PARTY.

>> WOULD YOU VOTE FOR HIM?

>> NO.

[LAUGHTER]

I WOULD LOVE TO HAVE ONE, THOUGH.

>> WE'RE OUT OF TIME.

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.

MARY, YOUR OTHER BIG STORY OF THE WEEK?

>> OH.

[LAUGHTER]

AS WE WERE TALKING ABOUT BUDGET AND BUDGET CUTTING AND FINANCE AND HOW DO WE FINANCE LOCAL GOVERNMENT, THIS STORY IS SO FAR AWAY FROM BEING OVER, WE'RE GOING TO BE HEARING THAT -- THIS FOR THE NEXT SEVERAL YEARS, NOT THE NEXT SEVERAL WEEKS.

>> NOT JUST A ONE-WEEK STORY.

ERNEST, YOUR OTHER BIG STORY OF THE WEEK.

>> HEY, ROB, NEXT WEEK, THE SPRING OF TAMPA BAY, FLORIDA'S LARGEST DOMESTIC ABUSE SHELTER, CELEBRATES ITS 30th ANNIVERSARY WITH THEIR ANNUAL BREAKFAST ON WEDNESDAY.

AND I JUST WANT TO SALUTE ALL THOSE FOLKS OVER THERE WHO ARE DOING A GOOD JOB OF HELPING DOMESTIC ABUSE VICTIMS AND GIVING THEM A PLACE WHERE THEY CAN RETREAT TO WHEN LIFE AT HOME GETS TOO TOUGH.

>> REALLY IMPORTANT CAUSE.

A.J., YOUR OTHER BIG STORY?

>> WELL, MY BIG STORY DEALS WITH THE CONGRESS ORDERING MEMBERS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY TO TAKE INOCULATIONS TO GO TO LARGE SPORTING EVENTS LIKE NASCAR GAMES.

OF COURSE, WE'VE GOT A FOOTBALL GAME AT THE STADIUM THIS WEEKEND, SO WAIT A SECOND, WHY DOES CONGRESS DEAL WITH THINGS LIKE ORDERING PEOPLE TO GET INOCULATIONS TO GO TO SPORTING EVENTS?

>> BECAUSE THEY DON'T WANT AN EPIDEMIC.

>> WE'RE NOT GOING OVERSEAS HERE.

THESE ARE OUR OWN PEOPLE.

MAYBE WE NEED TO LOOK AT THE HEALTH OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC AS OPPOSED TO JUST PROTECTING --

>> ARE THESE INOCULATIONS SAFE?

>> OH, ABSOLUTELY.

BUT THEY ARE ORDERING PEOPLE FROM HOMELAND SECURITY TO GET DIPHTHERIA VACCINATIONS AND THINGS LIKE THAT.

THESE ARE OUR OWN PEOPLE.

>> WHAT IS WRONG WITH THAT?

>> WELL, LET'S TAKE CARE OF EVERYBODY, WHY NOT?

>> NOT JUST THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY.

JOE, YOUR OTHER BIG STORY?

>> TWO BIG FOOTBALL GAMES THIS WEEKEND.

>> USF.

>> YES.

>> ABSOLUTELY!

>> MY STORY IS THE FRONT-PAGE STORY IN THE NEW YORK TIMES
LAST SUNDAY ABOUT STATE LOTTERIES, HOW THEY ARE NOT THE
PANACEA FOR EDUCATION EVERYBODY THOUGHT THEY WOULD.
EVERYBODY STILL CLAIMS THEY ARE.

THE REASON I BRING THAT UP IS THAT FLORIDA IS STILL FLOATING
THE IDEA OF SELLING THE LOTTERY TO A PRIVATE ENTITY.

>> DO YOU THINK THAT'S A GOOD IDEA?

>> NO.

IT'S NOT A GOOD IDEA STATE, AND IT WILL BE WORSE IN PRIVATE.

>> THANK YOU, ERNEST HOOPER.

THANK YOU, A.J. MATTHEWS.

THANK YOU, MARY FIGG.

AND THANK YOU, JOE BROWN.

AND THANK YOU FOR WATCHING "FLORIDA THIS WEEK."

WE ALWAYS WELCOME YOUR COMMENTS ABOUT THIS PROGRAM.

YOU CAN CALL OUR TOLL FREE LINE AT 800-335-9338.

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"FLORIDA THIS WEEK" RETURNS NEXT FRIDAY NIGHT AT 8:30,

SUNDAY AFTERNOON AT 12:30.

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