

"FLORIDA THIS WEEK"
OCTOBER 26, 2007

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

>> COMING UP NEXT, THE STATE LEGISLATURE STILL CANNOT REACH AN AGREEMENT ON PROPERTY TAXES.

THE REPUBLICANS HOLD A LIVELY DEBATE IN ORLANDO.

MEL MARTINEZ STEPS DOWN AS CHAIR OF THE REPUBLICAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE.

AND PRESIDENT BUSH CALLS FOR CUBANS TO OVERTHROW THEIR GOVERNMENT.

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, DAN RUTH, HE'S A COLUMNIST FOR THE "THE TAMPA TRIBUNE."

ERIC DEGGANS IS THE MEDIA CRITIC AT THE "ST. PETERSBURG TIMES."

MARK PROCTOR IS A POLITICAL CONSULTANT AND A REPUBLICAN.

UNEDITED REALTIME CLOSED CAPTIONING

AND SARA ROMEO IS DIRECTOR OF TAMPA CROSSROADS AND A
DEMOCRAT.

THANK YOU FOR COMING, EVERYBODY.

GOOD TO SEE YOU.

WELL, THE STATE LEGISLATURE FAILED THIS WEEK TO REACH AN
AGREEMENT ON WHAT TO DO ABOUT PROPERTY TAXES.

THE LEGISLATIVE STANDOFF BEGAN LAST WEEK WHEN THE SENATE
PASSED A PROPOSAL THAT INCLUDES DOUBLING THE
\$25,000 HOMESTEAD EXEMPTION, MAKING SAVE OUR HOMES SAVINGS
PORTABLE AND GIVING A 25% BREAK TO NEW HOME BUYERS.

THE SENATE PLAN FULFILLS MANY OF THE PROMISES MADE BY THE
GOVERNOR DURING HIS ELECTION CAMPAIGN.

BUT THE HOUSE UPPED THE ANTE, OVERWHELMINGLY PASSING A MORE
AGGRESSIVE PLAN GIVING BIGGER TAX BREAKS TO HOMESTEADS AND A
TAX CAP ON OWNERS OF BUSINESSES AND VACATION HOMES.

THE SENATE SAYS THE HOUSE PLAN BREAKS A DEAL TO PROTECT
SCHOOL SPENDING.

TIME IS RUNNING OUT.

LEGISLATORS HAVE UNTIL TUESDAY TO REACH A COMPROMISE.

MARK, IS THERE GOING TO BE A COMPROMISE?

>> WELL, FRIDAY, TODAY, AS WE TAPE, SENATE PRESIDENT KEN
PRUITT ANNOUNCED THAT THEY WOULD GO INTO SESSION ON MONDAY,
9 A.M. MONDAY MORNING, BACK IN TALLAHASSEE.

AND THEY BELIEVE THEY WILL BE ABLE TO STRIKE A DEAL.

THERE HAVE BEEN REALLY FOUR MAJOR PROBLEMS DEALING WITH THE

HOMESTEAD EXEMPTION, FIRST-TIME HOME BUYERS, SENIORS, AND THEN THE BUSINESS EXEMPTION.

MY GUESS IS, BASED ON MY CONVERSATIONS WITH SOME OF THE PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THE PROCESS THAT THE PORTABILITY ISSUE WILL REMAIN.

THAT WILL BE CONSISTENT IN BOTH THE HOUSE AND THE SENATE, AND THAT WILL BE THAT YOU CAN MOVE, TAKE YOUR HOMESTEAD EXEMPTION AND MOVE, AND THAT THE HOMESTEAD EXEMPTION WILL INCREASE.

NOW, THE HOUSE -- OR EXCUSE ME, THE SENATE PLAN IS TO DOUBLE TO 50,000.

THE HOUSE PLAN, I THINK IS DOOMED FOR FAILURE.

AND THAT IS THE PLAN THAT WOULD BE 40% OF THE MEDIAN PRICE VALUE OF THAT HOME IN THAT COUNTY.

DADE AND BROWARD WOULD BE LIKE \$100,000 HOMESTEAD EXEMPTION. THE PROBLEM IS THE VILLAGES EFFECT.

THE VILLAGES IN THE CENTRAL PART OF THE STATE IS IN THREE OR FOUR DIFFERENT COUNTIES.

THAT MEANS THAT ONE PERSON WOULD HAVE ONE TAX EXEMPTION, SOMEBODY ELSE WOULD HAVE A DIFFERENT.

ANYWAY, I THINK WE'RE HEADED TOWARD GETTING THIS RESOLVED ON MONDAY IN TIME FOR THE DEADLINE ON TUESDAY.

>> IS IT COMING CLOSER THEN TO THE SENATE VERSION AND WHAT THE GOVERNOR'S FIRST INTENTIONS WERE?

>> YEAH.

AND I THINK THAT ONE OF THE KEY FACTORS IS THAT THIS WILL
HAVE TO NOT AFFECT EDUCATION.

THE MONEY FOR EDUCATION WOULD REMAIN.

AND I THINK THAT IT'S GOING TO IN MANY RESPECTS GO TOWARD
THE HOUSE VERSION OF SOME OF THE EXEMPTIONS, BUT THE SENATE
VERSION ON THE AMOUNT OF THE EXEMPTION.

>> ONE OTHER THING, MARK, AS LONG AS WE'VE GOT YOU ON THE
FLOOR, I THINK ONE OF THE BIG LOSERS SO FAR HAS BEEN PEOPLE
WHO BOUGHT THEIR HOMES IN THE LAST EIGHT OR TEN YEARS AND
WHO HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE SAVE OUR
HOMES TAX CAP.

ANYTHING IN IT FOR THEM AS FAR AS YOU KNOW?

>> YOU KNOW, AND I THINK THEY MAY BE CAUGHT IN A SQUEEZE,
YOU KNOW, THE PEOPLE PRIOR TO THAT ARE COVERED ON ONE, AND
THE NEWER ARRIVALS ARE COVERED ON THE OTHER.
THEY ARE JUST GOING TO HAVE TO PLAY IT BY EAR AND SEE WHAT
HAPPENS.

>> THEY ARE SORT OF IN THE GAP.

DAN, THIS IS -- A LOT OF PEOPLE THOUGHT THIS WOULD NEVER
HAPPEN, THAT THERE WAS NEVER GOING TO BE A COMPROMISE
REACHED.

NOW IT LOOKS LIKE THERE MIGHT BE A COMPROMISE REACHED.

>> WELL, YOU KNOW, THEY HAD AN AGREEMENT GOING IN, AN
AGREEMENT ON A FRAMEWORK GOING IN, AND THEN THE HOUSE
DECIDED TO WANDER OFF, YOU KNOW, INTO THE DESERT SOMEWHERE.

SO NOW THEY'VE KIND OF -- THEY'VE COME BACK.

I'M GOING TO LET MY CHICAGO SHOW HERE JUST A LITTLE BIT.

I KNOW THIS IS ALL A BIG KUM BA YAH MOMENT WHERE WE'RE ALL SUPPOSED TO -- THIS TO ME ALSO SPEAKS TO ONE OF CHARLIE CRIST'S WEAKNESSES AS A GOVERNOR, AND THAT HE NEEDED TO GET IN THERE AND KNOCK SOME HEADS TOGETHER.

AT SOME POINT IT'S NICE FOR EVERYBODY TO SIT AROUND AND BE NICE AND, OH, THAT'S A VERY GOOD IDEA, ROB, BUT THEN YOU NEED TO HAVE A POLITICIAN SOMETIMES WHO COMES IN AND GRABS BY THE LAPEL AND SAYS, LOOK, THIS IS THE WAY IT WILL BE AND KNOCK HEADS TOGETHER AND GET IT DONE.

COULD YOU IMAGINE DEMPSEY BARON PUTTING UP WITH THIS STUFF OR EVEN JEB BUSH FOR THAT MATTER PUTTING UP WITH IT.

CHARLIE TRYING TO BE OVERDIPLOMATIC AND OVERACCOMMODATING KIND OF ALLOWED THIS ISSUE TO SLIP AWAY FROM HIM ALMOST UNTIL THE 11th HOUR.

>> WHAT DID YOU CALL CHARLIE CRIST THIS WEEK, GOVERNOR R --

>> MR. BLUE BIRD ON MY SHOULDER.

>> SARA, YOU'VE BEEN UP THERE IN THE LEGISLATURE AS A STATE HOUSE MEMBER.

HAVE YOU EVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THIS, THIS PROCESS LIKE THIS?

>> I'VE SEEN EQUALLY FRUSTRATING PROCESSES, AND THAT'S REALLY WHAT THIS IS.

AND AT DIFFERENT POINTS IN THIS DEBATE, THERE WAS A QUESTION

IN MY MIND ABOUT MAKING CHARLIE CRIST LOOK GOOD OR ABOUT TRUE PROPERTY TAX REFORM.

AND I THINK THE LEGISLATURE HAS TAKEN ON A VERY, VERY LARGE ISSUE.

THE REPERCUSSIONS THEY HAVEN'T EVEN STARTED LOOKING AT YET. IT'S JUST WHAT THEY WANT TO DO AT THIS POINT.

BUT ANY OF THESE SAVINGS THAT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT TO TAXPAYERS IS GOING TO RIPPLE DOWN INTO THE COMMUNITY.

AND, YOU KNOW, I WAS AT A MEETING YESTERDAY JUST IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE ARENA ALONE AS A RESULT OF THIS TAX REFORM. THERE'S GOING TO BE UNFUNDED MANDATES TO THE TUNE OF MILLIONS AND MILLIONS, MAYBE AS MUCH AS \$300 MILLION IN THE COUNTIES AND COMMUNITIES JUST FOR WHAT THIS SAVINGS IS GOING TO CREATE.

SO I THINK IN MY MIND, AND THIS IS THE ISSUE WITH TALLAHASSEE ON MANY CASES, THIS IS A HUGE ISSUE IN OUR STATE.

NOT JUST ABOUT SAVING PROPERTY TAX FOR INDIVIDUALS AND BUSINESS OWNERS AND MAKING, YOU KNOW, EQUAL AMONG EVERYBODY AND WHEN YOU BOUGHT YOUR HOUSE, BUT IT'S ALSO ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE BILLS COME IN, AFTER WE PAY THOSE LOWER BILLS, THEN WHAT BILL DO WE HAVE TO PAY?

THIS IS A HUGE ISSUE.

I WOULD LIKE TO HAVE SEEN THEM BACK OFF AND HAVE ABOUT SIX MORE MONTHS OF THOUGHTFUL DEBATE ABOUT EXACTLY WHAT'S GOING

TO HAPPEN.

ONCE THIS GOES INTO EFFECT, YOU KNOW, IT'S EITHER GOING TO HAVE TO WORK VERY WELL OR WE'RE ALL DONE.

>> IF IT IS PASSED IN JANUARY, THEN DOES IT GO ON THE BOOKS JULY 1st THEN?

DOES IT BECOME PART OF THE CONSTITUTION?

>> YES, IT WOULD, UM-HUM.

>> ERIC, WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE PROCESS, AND WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE OUTCOME?

OR AT LEAST WHAT WE'RE ASSUMING IS THE OUTCOME?

>> WELL, THERE'S BEEN A FEW INTERESTING THINGS.

FIRST OF ALL, IT'S BEEN INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT POLLS SHOW THAT CRIST IS NOT PAYING A POLITICAL PRICE FOR THIS, THAT HIS POPULARITY IS STILL HIGH.

EVEN AS PEOPLE FEEL THAT THE STATE IS NOT GETTING THE JOB DONE.

BUT I ALSO AGREE THAT THE OVERALL TAX STRUCTURE SITUATION IS UNREALISTIC.

AND WE NEED MORE MONEY FOR A LOT OF IMPORTANT ISSUES, EDUCATION, MENTAL HEALTH, CERTAINLY PUBLIC WORKS.

AND SO CUTTING AT THIS POINT, YOU KNOW, HOW MUCH MORE CAN THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES CUT?

AND I THINK THAT'S WHAT THE LEGISLATURE REALLY IS FACING AND PROBABLY WILL HAVE A VERY DIFFICULT -- I MEAN, IF THEY CAN'T EVEN DO THIS, IF THEY CAN'T EVEN DELIVER ON WHAT THEY'VE

BEEN PROMISING FOR MONTHS AND MONTHS, HOW ARE THEY GOING TO DEAL WITH THE REAL PROBLEM, WHICH IS THE OVERALL STRUCTURE OF OUR TAX SYSTEM?

>> THERE'S THE OLD LINE, EVERYBODY WANTS TO GO TO HEAVEN BUT NOBODY WANTS TO DO WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO TO GET THERE.

AND THAT'S WHAT YOU SEE HERE.

EVERYBODY WANTS TO CUT TAXES.

MAKES EVERYBODY FEEL REAL GOOD.

AND THEN YOU HAVE TO PAY THE PRICE.

>> MARK, YOU GET THE LAST --

>> LET ME JUST SAY, ULTIMATELY IT WILL BE UP TO THE VOTERS.

THEY'LL NEED 24 VOTES IN THE SENATE FOR THIS TO PASS OUT OF THE SENATE, BUT THEY ARE GOING TO NEED 30 VOTES TO GET THIS AS A BALLOT JANUARY 29th.

SO ULTIMATELY, THE VOTERS WILL HAVE THE FINAL WORD.

>> AND THEN THEY NEED 60% OF THE VOTERS, TOO, ON JANUARY 29th.

>> THAT'S RIGHT.

>>> WELL, THE REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES HELD A DEBATE LAST WEEK IN ORLANDO.

EACH CANDIDATE TRIED TO OUTDO THE OTHER ON THE QUESTION OF WHO IS MORE CONSERVATIVE.

THEY ALSO SPENT A LOT OF TIME CRITICIZING DEMOCRATIC FRONTRUNNER HILLARY CLINTON.

>> IF YOU THINK HEALTH CARE IS EXPENSIVE NOW, JUST WAIT TILL

IT'S FREE.

WE'RE NOT GOING HILLARY'S WAY.

>> SHE MADE A STATEMENT LAST WEEK, AND I'VE BEEN VERY CRITICAL OF HER, BUT I WANT TO TELL HER I AGREE WITH THIS ONE.

QUOTE HILLARY CLINTON.

I HAVE A MILLION IDEAS, AMERICA CANNOT AFFORD THEM ALL.

>> SARA, YOU KNOW, THE PEOPLE UP FOR GRABS ARE THE INDEPENDENTS DOWN THE ROAD.

I MEAN -- WELL, LET'S GO BACK TO THE REPUBLICAN PRIMARY FOR A MOMENT.

WHO DO YOU THINK CAME OFF THE WINNER IN THE RACE FOR THE REPUBLICAN PRIMARY?

>> IN THAT PARTICULAR DEBATE, NO QUESTION IT WAS HILLARY.

[LAUGHTER]

>> SPOKEN LIKE A TRUE DEMOCRAT.

BUT DO YOU THINK THAT ANY OF THE REPUBLICANS CAME OFF LOOKING MORE PRESIDENTIAL OR -- YOU KNOW, ONE OF THE PROBLEMS IN THE REPUBLICAN PARTY IS THAT, FOR INSTANCE, EVANGELICALS ARE LARGELY UNDECIDED IN THE REPUBLICAN RACE HERE IN FLORIDA.

>> THEY ARE.

AND I THINK IT'S GOING TO BE A REAL BASHING IN THEIR PARTY ALONE.

I REALLY COULD NOT HONESTLY SAY TO YOU THAT I THINK ANY OF

THE CANDIDATES SHINE.

AND AGAIN, YOU KNOW, WITH THE ENTIRE CADRE OF CANDIDATES BASHING HILLARY, YOU GOT TO WONDER WHY EVERYBODY IS BASHING HER.

I MEAN, FAR AND AWAY, SHE'S A FRONTRUNNER.

BUT I THINK THE BIGGER QUESTION IS THE NEGATIVITY.

DOES THE NEGATIVITY PLAY IN THESE ELECTIONS?

AND OBVIOUSLY, WE'VE HAD THAT DISCUSSION HERE ON YOUR SHOW SEVERAL TIMES.

YEAH, IT DOES.

NEGATIVITY PLAYS TO ALL PARTIES.

>> YOU KNOW WHAT STRUCK ME ABOUT THIS IS IT SEEMS THAT THESE GUYS HAVE TO START GETTING REAL.

THEY HAVE TO STOP TALKING ABOUT THE HILLARY BOOGIE MONSTER OR THE MICHAEL MOORE BOOGIE MONSTER OR, YOU KNOW, THE TERRORISM BOOGIE MONSTER.

I THINK THE WAY THAT THEY ARE GOING TO REACH INDEPENDENTS IS BY TALKING TURKEY ABOUT THE MISTAKES THAT HAVE BEEN MADE OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS AND WHAT THEY ARE GOING TO DO TO FIX THEM.

YOU KNOW, ONE OF THE THINGS I WAS INTERESTED IN HEARING IS, WHAT ARE THESE GUYS GOING TO DO THAT'S DIFFERENT FROM WHAT WE HAVE NOW?

INSTEAD, WE GET A LOT OF AIRY TALK ABOUT, YOU KNOW, HOW GIULIANI RAN NEW YORK CITY AND WHAT HILLARY IS GOING TO DO

UNEDITED REALTIME CLOSED CAPTIONING

IF SHE BECOMES PRESIDENT.

PEOPLE DON'T REALLY WANT TO HEAR THAT.

THEY WANT TO HEAR WHAT THEY ARE GOING TO DO.

>> MARK, DID YOU SEE A WINNER COME OUT OF THIS?

>> NO.

AND UNFORTUNATELY, I REALIZE THE POINT WAS ALREADY MADE,

THAT AS A REPUBLICAN -- I'M UNDECIDED ON THIS MYSELF.

I THINK THERE ARE A NUMBER OF REPUBLICANS THAT HAVE BEEN UNDERWHELMED BY WHAT THEY'VE SEEN IN THE PERFORMANCE IN THE REPUBLICAN SIDE.

WITH REGARD TO THE HILLARY ISSUE, I THINK THAT DID ELICIT A LOT OF RESPONSE BECAUSE ON THE REPUBLICAN -- ON THE REPUBLICAN SIDE, THE ISSUE IS WHO CAN BEST BEAT HILLARY CLINTON.

I THINK THAT IS THE ISSUE.

NOW, IN THE INDEPENDENTS, I'M NOT SURE THAT WILL BE AS BIG AN ISSUE.

BUT ON THE REPUBLICAN, THAT IS GOING TO BE -- I THINK YOU'RE GOING TO HEAR MORE AND MORE, AND ON THAT ONE, PROBABLY GIULIANI, PROBABLY IS PERCEIVED TO DO BETTER THAN HILLARY.

BUT I THINK FRED THOMPSON HAS DISAPPOINTED SOME OF THE PEOPLE THAT WERE WAITING FOR HIM TO ENTER IN THE RACE.

ROMNEY SEEMED TO HAVE, YOU KNOW, KIND OF PEAKED UP AND KIND OF LEVELED OUT A LITTLE BIT.

JOHN McCAIN MAY COME BACK.

HE'S STARTING TO SHOW A LITTLE LIFE AGAIN.

[LAUGHTER]

HE GOT THE BIGGEST LAUGH, BIGGEST APPLAUSE AND THE STANDING OVATION -- BUT IT WAS A JOKE ABOUT WOODSTOCK.

>> DON'T YOU THINK THAT THAT IS THE PROBLEM, THAT FOR MONTHS NOW, EVERYONE HAS KNOWN THAT THE ANSWER TO WHO CAN BE HILLARY IS RUDY.

HE'S THE ONLY PERSON.

>> I'M MISSING SOMETHING HERE.

WHY IS EVERYBODY SO CERTAIN THAT HILLARY CLINTON IS GOING TO BE THE NOMINEE?

THERE'S NO EVIDENCE THAT I SEE THAT INDICATES THIS IS A DONE DEAL.

>> OBVIOUSLY THAN SHE HAS MORE MONEY --

[TALKING OVER ONE ANOTHER]

>> THERE HASN'T EVEN BEEN A VOTE CAST YET OR A CAUCUS HELD YET.

AND THERE'S NO INDICATION THAT I'VE SEEN THAT SHE CAN COMPETE IN THE SOUTH.

I MEAN, THERE'S A LOT OF WEAKNESSES IN HER CAMPAIGN.

YEAH, SHE DOES VERY WELL IN A LOT OF THESE NATIONAL POLLS.

YOU AND I KNOW A LOT IS DRIVEN BY NAME RECOGNITION AS WELL.

I'M NOT QUITE SO SURE SHE WILL BE THE NOMINEE YET.

SHE MIGHT WELL BE, BUT I DON'T THINK THAT'S A CERTAINTY.

THE OTHER THING IS, I'M GETTING SICK AND TIRED OF THESE

DEBATES.

[LAUGHTER]

I MEAN, WE HAVE THESE EVERY WEEK THERE'S A DEBATE.

AND WHAT DO THEY SAY?

THEY SAY THE SAME THING OVER AND OVER AND OVER AGAIN.

AND I THINK THAT'S --

>> THAT'S WHY YOU'RE SICK OF THEM.

>> YES.

AND I THINK THEY ARE TURNING PEOPLE OFF.

>> SO ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO THE YOUTUBE DEBATE IN

ST. PETERSBURG?

>> NO!

I'M NOT LOOKING FORWARD TO.

[LAUGHTER]

THESE ARE PEOPLE DRESSED UP LIKE A SNOWMAN ASKING PEOPLE WHO

WANT TO BE THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE FREE WORLD SOME

DUMB QUESTION.

GO AWAY!

[LAUGHTER]

I'M NOT INTERESTED IN LOOKING AT SOME SNOW.

CAN YOU IMAGINE DWIGHT EISENHOWER -- SOME COCKAMAMY SNOWMAN.

I DON'T THINK SO.

>> NOW THE CHICAGO IS REALLY SHOWING.

>> ALL RIGHT.

WELL, THE REPUBLICAN PARTY'S HIGHEST RANKING HISPANIC

OFFICIAL RESIGNED LAST WEEK.

FLORIDA SENATOR MEL MARTINEZ STEPPED DOWN AS CHAIR OF THE REPUBLICAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE SAYING THAT HE HAD ACCOMPLISHED HIS GOALS, BUT MANY ANALYSTS POINT TO THE BITTER BATTLE WITHIN THE PARTY OVER IMMIGRATION AS A MORE LIKELY REASON FOR THE RESIGNATION.

MARTINEZ HAD BEEN ON THE JOB FOR JUST 10 MONTHS.

WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF THE RESIGNATION OF MEL MARTINEZ FROM THE RNC?

>> AS A LIBERAL, I MIGHT SAY THIS IS JUST A REFLECTION OF WHERE THE REPUBLICAN PARTY IS AT THIS POINT, AND MAYBE HE'S DISTANCING HIMSELF FROM SOME THINGS THAT HE PROBABLY SHOULD DISTANCE HIMSELF FROM.

BUT, YOU KNOW, WE NOTED IN OUR PAPER THAT, NUMBER ONE, IT'S A BIG JOB.

IT'S A TOUGH JOB TO DO PART TIME ANYWAY.

AND HE DID TAKE A HIT BY HAVING THEM BE THE FACE OF GEORGE BUSH'S IMMIGRATION POLICY.

SO, YOU KNOW, MAYBE IT'S A BEST THING FOR BOTH SIDES.

>> WAS IT BECAUSE THE SENATOR WAS MODERATE ON THE QUESTION OF IMMIGRATION THAT HE WAS TAKING THESE HITS AND HE DECIDED TO GET OUT OF DODGE?

>> HONESTLY, I DON'T KNOW THE ANSWER, BUT I THINK THAT WAS PART OF IT.

BUT I ALSO KNOW THAT THERE ARE A LOT OF REPUBLICAN

SUPPORTERS OF HIS THAT FELT HE WAS SPENDING MORE TIME IN WASHINGTON AND THE RNC THAN HE WAS BACK IN HIS HOME STATE. GRANTED, HE'S NOT UP FOR REELECTION FOR THREE MORE YEARS. BUT I BELIEVE THERE ARE PEOPLE THAT FELT THAT HE NEEDED TO GET OUT, GET BACK, SERVE HIS CONSTITUENTS, AND BUILD HIS SENATE RELATIONSHIP BETTER.

THE OTHER -- LA GACETA POINTED OUT TODAY, IT MAY HAVE BEEN A COINCIDENCE, BUT HE RESIGNED ON FRIDAY AND MONDAY THE RNC CAME DOWN WITH THE RULING THAT THE FLORIDA REPUBLICANS WOULD ONLY GET HALF THEIR DELEGATES.

THAT MAY HAVE BEEN A COINCIDENCE, BUT YOU HAVE TO BELIEVE BY FRIDAY HE PROBABLY DID KNOW THAT RULING WAS COMING DOWN.

>> UM-HUM.

I'M WONDERING, DAN, ABOUT THIS WHOLE QUESTION OF IMMIGRATION AND HOW IT'S GOING TO PLAY OUT IN THE COMING ELECTION AND WHETHER OR NOT -- I MEAN, THE REPUBLICANS, ESPECIALLY AT THAT ORLANDO DEBATE, SEEM TO TAKE A REAL HARD LINE AGAINST ANYTHING THAT EVEN HINTED THAT THERE WAS GOING TO BE AMNESTY FOR PEOPLE WHO HAD COME HERE ILLEGALLY.

BUT IN THE LONG RUN, HOW DOES THAT SERVE THE REPUBLICAN PARTY?

IS THAT GOING TO BE SOMETHING THAT'S GOING TO BRING THEM BACK INTO A MAJORITY PARTY?

>> I THINK BASICALLY IT APPEALS TO THEIR FELLOW TRAVELERS.

I DON'T THINK IT BRINGS ANY NEW PEOPLE INTO THE TENT.

IT'S AN IMPORTANT ISSUE.

IT'S SOMETHING WE REALLY NEED TO DEAL WITH.

I'M NOT DISCOUNTING THAT, BUT IT REALLY IS A PHONY ISSUE WITH RESPECT TO THE ENORMITY THAT IT SEEMS TO CARRY IN THAT PARTY.

IMMIGRATION, ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION, BY THE WAY, IS DOWN ALONG THE BORDER SINCE THEY ADDED ALL THE EXTRA TROOPS THERE.

IT'S STARTING TO DIMINISH SOMEWHAT.

SO I THINK IT'S ONE OF THOSE PHONY ISSUES THAT POPS UP DURING CAMPAIGNS.

AND WITH RESPECT TO MEL MARTINEZ, I THINK THE BOTTOM LINE IS, HE WAS ELECTED FOR BETTER FOR WORSE, HE WAS ELECTED TO BE YOU A STATES SENATOR.

IF YOU DON'T WANT TO BE YOU A STATES SENATOR, THAT'S FINE, GO BE THE HEAD OF THE RNC IF THAT'S WHAT YOU WANT TO DO. FIND OUT WHAT YOU WANT TO BE WHEN YOU GROW UP AND GO DO IT. I THINK PEOPLE WERE UPSET THAT HE WAS DOUBLE DIPPING.

>> SARA, DOES THAT OPEN UP MARTINEZ IN ANY WAY TO A STRONG CHALLENGE EITHER FROM WITHIN HIS PARTY OR FROM A NEW DEMOCRAT RUNNING FOR THAT SENATE SEAT?

>> I THINK HE CAN CERTAINLY EXPECT A STRONG CHALLENGE.

AND I THINK THAT WAS -- AND POSSIBLY FROM REPUBLICANS AND DEMOCRATS SIDE.

>> DO I HEAR JIM DAVIS?

>> I LOOK AT HIM AS HAVING PROBABLY MORE THAN ONE STRONG

CHALLENGE, ACTUALLY, IN THE NEXT ELECTION.

BUT I ALSO THINK THE ISSUE OF THE LATINO VOTE IS SOMETHING THAT'S VERY IMPORTANT TO BOTH PARTIES, OBVIOUSLY.

IT'S NOT JUST A REPUBLICAN ISSUE OR AGENDA.

AND I THINK IT'S EQUALLY IMPORTANT --

>> IT WAS INTERESTING THIS WEEK THAT THE REPUBLICANS ANNOUNCED NEW INITIATIVES TO REACH OUT TO LATINO VOTERS, TO AFRICAN-AMERICAN VOTERS, AND ALSO TO JEWISH VOTERS, YOU KNOW, SAYING THAT WE WANT TO REACH OUT AND DO BETTER, GET OUR NUMBERS UP IN THESE COMMUNITIES.

>> DID THEY JUST FIGURE OUT THEY WERE THERE?

I'M NOT SURE.

[LAUGHTER]

>> I THINK IT'S TOUGH WHEN YOU HAD WON SO MANY ELECTIONS BY DEMONIZING THESE GROUPS TO THEN TURN AROUND AND TRY TO REACH BACK TO THEM.

>> AND ASK FOR THEIR SUPPORT.

>> AND WHAT THEY ARE FINDING WHERE THE RUBBER MEETS THE ROAD IS WHAT THOSE NEW HISPANIC VOTERS WANT IS EXACTLY WHAT THEIR CORE CONSTITUENCY DOESN'T WANT.

GOOD LUCK MAKING THAT WORK.

>> WELL, AT LEAST IN TERMS -- AND I KNOW WE'LL PROBABLY BE DISCUSSING THIS IN A MINUTE ON THE CUBA POLICY, BUT I DON'T THINK THERE'S A MONOLITHIC LATINO VOTE.

I DON'T BELIEVE THAT IT USED TO BE THE REPUBLICANS VIEWED

THAT, YOU KNOW, ALL CUBAN-AMERICANS VOTED THE SAME WAY.

I DON'T THINK THAT IS THE CASE ANYMORE.

IT PROBABLY NEVER WAS THE CASE, BUT I THINK THAT REALIZATION IS COMING TRUE, TOO, THAT YOU JUST CAN'T -- IT'S NOT ONE SIZE FITS ALL FOR ANY SEGMENT OF THE POPULATION.

>>> OKAY.

WELL, PRESIDENT BUSH THIS WEEK SUGGESTED THE CUBAN PEOPLE PEACEFULLY OVERTHROW THE GOVERNMENT OF FIDEL CASTRO.

AND IF THEY DO, HE WARNED THE CUBAN POLICE AND ARMY TO LET PROTESTERS MARCH.

THE PRESIDENT CALLED THE CASTRO GOVERNMENT A CRIMINAL REGIME WHICH VICTIMIZES ITS OWN PEOPLE.

CASTRO HAS BEEN SICK AND OUT OF THE PUBLIC EYE FOR MORE THAN A YEAR.

BECAUSE OF THAT, SOME U.S. OFFICIALS HAD PREDICTED CUBA'S GOVERNMENT WOULD SOON COLLAPSE.

BUT SO FAR, THAT HASN'T HAPPENED.

>> NOW IS THE TIME TO SUPPORT THE DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENTS GROWING ON THE ISLAND.

NOW IS THE TIME TO STAND WITH THE CUBAN PEOPLE AS THEY STAND UP FOR THEIR LIBERTY.

AND NOW IS THE TIME FOR THE WORLD TO PUT ASIDE ITS DIFFERENCES AND PREPARE FOR CUBANS' TRANSITION TO A FUTURE OF FREEDOM AND PROGRESS AND PROMISE.

>> DAN, WHO WAS THE AUDIENCE FOR THAT SPEECH?

UNEDITED REALTIME CLOSED CAPTIONING

>> I HAVE NO IDEA.

HERE'S A GUY WITH ABOUT A 25% APPROVAL RATING IN THIS COUNTRY TRYING TO RUN CUBA NOW ON TOP OF IT.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND THAT.

YOU KNOW, THE ONGOING EMBARGO OF CUBA ASIDE FROM THE IRAQ DEBACLE IS THE WORST FOREIGN POLICY DECISION THAT THIS COUNTRY HAS MADE OVER THE PAST 50 YEARS.

THAT OLD LINE ABOUT, YOU KNOW, THE DEFINITION OF INSANITY IS WHEN YOU KEEP REPEATING THE SAME BEHAVIOR OVER AND OVER AGAIN, EVEN THOUGH YOU'RE GOING TO FAIL, THAT'S THIS POLICY. WE WOULD DO A LOT BETTER IN TERMS OF DIMINISHING THE INFLUENCE OF CASTRO, IF WE LIFTED THE EMBARGO AND ENGAGED THAT COUNTRY.

I GUESS WHAT HE'S SAYING, THESE PEOPLE DON'T INVADE OR OVERTHROW THEIR OWN GOVERNMENT, JUST TO TEACH THEM A LESSON, THE UNITED STATES WILL INVADE THE ISLAND OF -- TO SHOW THEM WHO IS BOSSIER.

IT WAS AN INSANE SPEECH.

IT CARRIES NO WEIGHT, I THINK, WITH THE CUBAN PEOPLE.

>> MARK, WHAT DID YOU THINK OF THE SPEECH?

>> WELL, UNFORTUNATELY, I AGREE WITH DAN, PROBABLY NOT GOING TO BE MUCH DISAGREEMENT HERE.

AND I DISAGREE WITH A POLICY THAT WE'VE HAD IN EFFECT FOR OVER 40 YEARS.

WE'VE HAD 12 U.S. PRESIDENTS SINCE THEN.

CASTRO AND HIS BROTHER ARE STILL THERE, AND I DON'T THINK THAT POLICY HAS WORKED.

AND I THINK MAYBE WE NEED TO LOOK AT SHOWING THEM DEMOCRACY RATHER THAN PREVENTING THEM FROM SEEING HOW IT ACTUALLY WORKS.

BECAUSE RIGHT NOW, THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT IS GOING IN THERE AND BUYING THE MINERAL SUPPLIES.

THEY'VE ALREADY BOUGHT THE NICKEL PRODUCTION.

OTHER GOVERNMENTS ARE GOING IN TO CUBA, AND WE'RE SITTING BACK GOING, OKAY, WE'RE GOING TO TEACH THEM A LESSON FROM 1960, AND IT JUST HASN'T HAPPENED.

I REALLY THINK WE NEED TO REEVALUATE OUR POSITION.

AND WHY HE CAME OUT WITH THIS THIS WEEK, I HAVE NO IDEA, OTHER THAN IT DID APPEASE SOME OF THE CONGRESSMAN IN SOUTH FLORIDA --

>> IT APPEASES A MINORITY WITHIN A MINORITY WITHIN A MINORITY.

>> RIGHT, RIGHT.

>> SARA, WHAT DID YOU THINK OF THE SPEECH?

>> I THINK IT WAS ONE OF THE MOST ARROGANT STATEMENTS I'VE HEARD A U.S. PRESIDENT MAKE.

IN MANY, MANY YEARS.

I AGREE WITH WHAT MARK AND DAN BOTH SAID.

IT'S A 47, ALMOST 50-YEAR-OLD POLICY THAT WE NEED TO REEVALUATE.

THE WORLD HAS CHANGED IN 47 YEARS.

EVERYTHING HAS CHANGED.

WE NEED TO LOOK AT REALLY WHAT WE'RE DOING.

AND WE NEED TO LEAD BY EXAMPLE.

JUST LIKE WE TELL OUR CHILDREN, JUST LIKE WE TELL PEOPLE IN OUR OWN COMMUNITY, WE'RE NOT HELPING THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT OR THE CUBAN PEOPLE BY CALLING ON THEM TO RISE UP AND OVERTHROW.

I MEAN, I CAN'T EVEN BELIEVE THE ARROGANCE OF THE STATEMENT.

>> ERIC, THAT'S ALL THIS TALK ABOUT THE U.S. MILITARY NOT BEING AT PEAK READINESS BECAUSE OF OUR INVOLVEMENT, ESPECIALLY IN IRAQ, THAT THIS WAR IS COSTING US \$2.4 TRILLION IF YOU GO TEN YEARS OUT INTO THE FUTURE, THE IRAQ WAR IS, I'M WONDERING WHAT THE PRESIDENT IS BACKING UP HIS WORDS WITH.

I MEAN, IF HE'S TALKING TOUGH AGAINST CUBA, WHAT DOES HE HAVE TO PRESENT TO CUBA IF HE REALLY WANTS TO PROTECT PEOPLE WHO RISE UP AND OVERTHROW FIDEL CASTRO?

>> I JUST HOPE PEOPLE REMEMBER THE LAST TIME A PRESIDENT BUSH ENCOURAGED PEOPLE WHO WERE UNDER A DESPOTIC REGIME TO REVOLT.

THAT HAPPENED IN IRAQ.

WHEN THEY DID TRY TO REVOLT, WE SAT ON THE SIDELINES AND WATCHED THEM GET SLAUGHTERED.

AGAIN, I DON'T UNDERSTAND THIS.

IF THEY DID REVOLT, WOULD WE GO INTO CUBA AND HELP THEM WITH CHINA, STANDING ON THE SIDELINES, ACTING AS A REFEREE AND THE SOVIET UNION?

OF COURSE, NOT.

I MEAN, ANYBODY WITH ANY SENSE IN THAT COUNTRY KNOWS THAT IT'S EMPTY WORDS.

I AGREE WITH DAN, HOW -- I'M NOT QUITE SURE WHO HE'S TRYING TO ADDRESS WITH THIS.

THERE MUST BE SOME AGENDA THAT MAYBE WE'RE NOT AS AWARE OF AS WE SHOULD BE, BUT ON IT'S FACE IT JUST DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE.

>> BUT THE FACT REMAINS THAT CUBAN PEOPLE DON'T HAVE THE SAME KIND OF FREEDOM THAT WE DO HERE IN THE U.S.

>> NO, OF COURSE, THEY DON'T.

BUT THIS IS HARDLY AN ORIGINAL THOUGHT, BUT WE HAVE DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH ALL MANNER OF DESPOTS AND HORRIBLE PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD.

VIETNAM, CHINA, AND THE LIST GOES ON AND ON AND ON.

WHY ARE WE GETTING HUFFY ABOUT CASTRO.

>> LET'S GO TO THE SUDAN.

>>> FINALLY EACH WEEK, WE ASK OUR PANEL ABOUT ANOTHER STORY FROM THE WEEK WHICH HAS IMPACTED OR WILL AFFECT PEOPLE HERE IN WEST CENTRAL FLORIDA.

DAN, YOUR OTHER BIG STORY OF THE WEEK?

>> ANY DEMOCRAT WHO IS DUMB ENOUGH TO GO TO ORLANDO THIS

WEEKEND AND PAY MONEY TO HEAR STENY HOYER DESERVES EXACTLY
WHAT HAPPENS TO HIM.

I CAN'T IMAGINE THE DEMOCRATS ARE EITHER BOTHERING TO HAVE A
CONVENTION WHEN ALL THEIR CANDIDATES ARE SO GUTLESS AND
SPINELESS THAT THEY ARE AFRAID TO CAMPAIGN IN FLORIDA.

IF I WAS AN ACTIVE DEMOCRAT, I WOULDN'T GIVE THAT PARTY A
BUS TOKEN AS A POLITICAL CONTRIBUTION.

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

>> NANCY BOSTOCK, PINELLAS SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER, REVEALED
PUBLICLY THAT SHE HAS -- IS CONSIDERING GIVING UP CUSTODY OF
AN ADOPTED SON BECAUSE SHE CAN'T GET THE KIND OF SUPPORT
FROM THE STATE, FROM THE COUNTY IN ORDER TO DEAL WITH SOME
SERIOUS MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES THAT HE HAS.

AND THIS IS A HUGE DEAL FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE MIDDLE CLASS WHO
HAVE CHILDREN, PARTICULARLY MALE, PARTICULARLY MIGHT BE
VIOLENT.

UNLESS YOU HAVE 60 OR 70 THOUSAND DOLLARS A YEAR TO PLACE
THEM IN A TREATMENT PROGRAM YOURSELF OR UNLESS YOU ARE
DESTITUTE ON MEDICAID, YOU CAN'T GET THESE KIDS THE KIND OF
SUPPORT AND HELP IN A FACILITY THAT THEY NEED.

YOU KNOW, IN THIS TIME OF COST CUTTING, I CAN'T IMAGINE WE
CAN DEAL WITH IT.

BUT THIS IS A MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS THAT WE REALLY NEED TO
PAY ATTENTION TO.

>> SARA, YOUR OTHER BIG STORY OF THE WEEK.

>> MY BIG STORY OF THE WEEK, I WANT TO CONGRATULATE THE STUDENTS AT USF WHO STAGED A SIT-IN LAST WEEK AND ASKED PRESIDENT GENSHAFT TO STEP UP AND MAKE CHANGES IN THE SECURITY ON THE CAMPUS AND INCREASE THEIR SAFETY. THERE ARE SO MANY THINGS IN THE COUNTRY THAT HAVE HAPPENED OVER THE LAST COUPLE OF YEARS, THAT I THINK WE REALLY NEED TO ENSURE THE SAFETY OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE AND OUR STUDENTS ON THE USF CAMPUS.

TO PRESIDENT GENSHAFT'S CREDIT, SHE HAS TAKEN -- THIS AFTERNOON HAD A PRESS CONFERENCE AND HAS TAKEN ACTION TO IMPROVE THE SAFETY AND SECURITY ON CAMPUS.

>> OKAY.

MARK, YOUR OTHER BIG STORY?

>> WELL, MY OTHER BIG STORY IS REALLY AN ONGOING STORY AND SAGA IN THIS AREA, AND THAT'S TRANSPORTATION. MICHAEL WARD, WHO IS THE CEO OF CSX RAILROAD WROTE AN OP-ED PIECE IN THE "THE TAMPA TRIBUNE." TRIBUNE HAS BEEN INVESTIGATING CSX.

"ST. PETERSBURG TIMES" THIS MORNING HAD AN EDITORIAL, WE HAVE TO LOOK AT INTERMODAL, INTERREGIONAL WAY TO SOLVE OUR TRANSPORTATION NEEDS AND IT HAS TO INVOLVE RAIL AND ROADS AND BUNCH OF THINGS.

I THINK THIS IS AN ONGOING PROBLEM, AND WE NEED TO GET ALL OF THE FORCES TOGETHER AND SOLVE THIS, OR WE'RE GOING TO BE IN THIS CONTINUED, YOU KNOW, ROAD GRIDLOCK FOREVER.

>> OKAY.

WELL, THANK YOU ERIC DEGGANS, SARA ROMEO, MARK PROCTOR AND
THANK YOU, DAN RUTH.

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.

YOU CAN SEND AN E-MAIL TO FTW@WEDU.ORG OR ADD A COMMENT TO
OUR "FLORIDA THIS WEEK" WEB PAGE ONLINE, THAT'S WEDU.ORG.

WHERE YOU CAN READ ABOUT OUR PANELISTS, LINK TO TOPICAL WEB
SITES AND VIEW THIS PROGRAM LATER IN THE WEEK.

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

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

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