

"FLORIDA THIS WEEK: YEAR IN REVIEW"

DECEMBER 2007

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

>>> COMING UP NEXT, WE'LL TAKE A LOOK AT THE BIG STATE AND LOCAL STORIES OF 2007.

THE PEOPLE, THE CONTROVERSIES, AND THE ISSUES THAT AFFECTED ALL OF US.

POLITICAL INSIGHTS NEXT ON "FLORIDA THIS WEEK."

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

AND NOW, MODERATOR ROB LOREI.

>> WELCOME TO A SPECIAL YEAR IN REVIEW EDITION OF "FLORIDA THIS WEEK."

FIRST, THANKS TO ALL OF YOU WHO DONATED TO WEDU THIS MONTH, YOUR FINANCIAL SUPPORT KEEPS WEDU'S QUALITY LOCAL PROGRAMS LIKE "FLORIDA THIS WEEK" ON THE AIR.

WELL, OUR YEAR IN REVIEW PANEL OF JOURNALISTS IS, JEREMY WALLACE IS A POLITICAL REPORTER FOR THE "SARASOTA HERALD TRIBUNE."

UNEDITED REALTIME CLOSED CAPTIONING

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

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

AND MIKE DEESON IS SENIOR REPORTER AT WTSP TELEVISION.

GOOD TO SEE EVERYBODY.

THANK YOU FOR COMING.

OUR PANEL OF JOURNALISTS HAS EACH COMPILED A LIST OF THE TOP
TEN STATE AND LOCAL STORIES OF THE YEAR.

FROM THOSE LISTS, WE COMPOSED THE OFFICIAL "FLORIDA THIS
WEEK" TOP TEN LIST.

HERE ARE NUMBERS TEN THROUGH SEVEN.

THE NUMBER TEN STORY IS A TIE.

USF'S FOOTBALL SUCCESS AND THE PINELLAS LAND DEAL SCANDAL
INVOLVING PROPERTY APPRAISER JIM SMITH.

NUMBER NINE, STEVE/SUSAN STANTON FIRED FROM HER JOB AS LARGO
CITY MANAGER.

NUMBER EIGHT, CONTINUING VOTING PROBLEMS WITH A SLOW SWITCH
TO PAPER BALLOTS IN PLACES LIKE HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY AND THE
UNRESOLVED MYSTERY OF WHAT HAPPENED TO THOSE 18,000 MISSING
VOTES IN THE 2006 SARASOTA CONGRESSIONAL RACE.

NUMBER SEVEN, THE ANTIGROWTH, ANTIDEVELOPER MOVEMENT AS
EVIDENCED BY THE FLORIDA HOMETOWN DEMOCRACY INITIATIVE,
RECENT VOTES IN ST. PETERSBURG BEACH AND SARASOTA, AND THE
CITIZENS MOVEMENT TO PRESERVE WETLANDS IN HILLSBOROUGH
COUNTY FROM DEVELOPMENT.

UNEDITED REALTIME CLOSED CAPTIONING

JEREMY, HERE IT IS, TWO YEARS AFTER THAT ELECTION, THE JENNINGS/BUCHANAN RACE, WE'RE STILL TALKING ABOUT IT, AND THE VOTING ISSUES STILL UNRESOLVED --

>> [AUDIO CUTS OUT] -- ARE STILL GOING THROUGH VOTING MACHINES IN SARASOTA TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHAT HAPPENED. IT WILL GO CLEAR ON INTO AT LEAST THE EARLY PART OF 2008. YOU CAN SEE WHY, YOU KNOW, THE CONTROVERSY JUST IGNITED A STATEWIDE CHANGE TO A DIFFERENT KIND OF VOTING SYSTEM. NATIONALLY, SARASOTA BECAME OR EVEN INTERNATIONALLY BECAME PRETTY WELL KNOWN, EVEN IN FRANCE IN THEIR ELECTIONS, THEY WERE QUESTIONING THEIR VOTING MACHINE, REFERENCING SARASOTA, HOPING THAT THE SAME THING WOULD NOT HAPPEN. CLEARLY, THE IMPACT WAS PRETTY GLOBAL BY THE TIME WE WERE DONE, AND WE STILL HAVEN'T FINISHED COUNTING.

>> MIKE, YOU COVERED THAT PINELLAS LAND DEAL SCANDAL THAT WENT ON FOR MONTHS, AND IT REALLY CAST APPALL, I THINK, OVER ALL OF PINELLAS COUNTY GOVERNMENT.

I THINK PINELLAS COUNTY GOVERNMENT BEFORE THIS WAS VIEWED -- HOW WAS IT VIEWED BEFORE THE SCANDAL?

>> CERTAINLY CLEANER THAN HILLSBOROUGH WHERE OVER THE YEARS HAS SEEN COMMISSIONERS LED OUT OF THE COURTHOUSE IN HANDCUFFS.

THIS WAS A SCANDAL THAT NOT ONLY SHOOK UP THE GOVERNMENT, BUT PROBABLY SHOULD HAVE DONE IT MORE SO. THEY LOST NOW THE ATTORNEY.

THE PROPERTY APPRAISER IS NOT GOING TO RUN.

THE COUNTY MANAGER WAS FORCED OUT.

THEN THE ELECTED OFFICIALS WHO WENT THROUGH HAND-WRINGING SAYING, GEE WHIZ, WE SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER, WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

THEY WALKED AWAY UNSCATHED.

BOB STEWART ON THE COMMISSION PROBABLY MADE THE BEST MOTION THAT DAY SAYING, YOU KNOW, WE ARE ALL TO BLAME.

WE SHOULD PROBABLY ALL RESIGN.

THEY ALL WENT, YEAH, THAT'S A GREAT SUGGESTION, BOB, AND THEN THEY MOVED ON.

THE TRUTH IS, I THINK THERE WILL BE MORE FALLOUT ON THAT LONG TERM ELECTION-WISE.

I THINK PEOPLE IN PINELLAS COUNTY WERE UPSET AND HAD THEIR CONFIDENCE SHAKEN IN THE LEADERS WHO HAD BEEN THERE SO LONG WITHOUT TERM LIMITS, WE MIGHT ADD.

>> ERNEST, FROM THAT GROUP OF STORIES, WHAT WAS MOST SIGNIFICANT TO YOU?

>> WELL, YOU KNOW WHAT IS RELATED HERE, CONFIDENCE.

CONFIDENCE HAS BEEN SHAKEN IN GOVERNMENT AND IN OUR ELECTION SYSTEM.

AND THAT'S WHAT HAS BEEN TROUBLING TO ME NOT ONLY WITH SARASOTA, BUT WE CONTINUE TO SEE THE HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY SUPERVISOR OF ELECTIONS, BUDDY JOHNSON, MAKE WHAT APPEARED TO BE MISSTEPS IN TERMS OF HANDLING ELECTIONS.

NOW THE SECRETARY OF STATE, KURT BROWNING SAYS HE'S STAYING AWAKE AT NIGHT BECAUSE HE'S WORRIED ABOUT HILLSBOROUGH'S TRANSITION FROM THE COMPUTERS TO THE PAPER BALLOT MACHINES. I MEAN, THAT'S TROUBLING TO ME BECAUSE YOU ALREADY HAVE A SEGMENT OF PEOPLE WHO DON'T BELIEVE WE HAVE FAIR ELECTIONS. THEY ARE NOT GOING TO THE POLL BECAUSE THEY DON'T BELIEVE. YOU KNOW, IF WE'RE GOING TO BE AMERICA, WE NEED TO REGAIN THEIR CONFIDENCE SO THEY SHOW UP AND VOTE.

>> BROWNING IS SAYING THAT JOHNSON IN HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY IS TOO SLOW.

YOU KNOW, THESE ELECTIONS ARE COMING UP, AND HE SAYS YOU SHOULD BE OUT THERE GIVING OUT CONTRACTS TO BUY THESE NEW PAPER TRAIL VOTING MACHINES THIS YEAR.

AND BROWNING, THE REPUBLICAN SUPERVISOR OF ELECTION FOR THE ENTIRE STATE, IS COMPLAINING ABOUT JOHNSON, BUT I'M WONDERING, YOU KNOW, WHY -- WHY HASN'T JOHNSON DRAWN A CHALLENGER FOR HIS REELECTION?

AT LEAST WE HAVEN'T SEEN ANY MAJOR PEOPLE COME FORWARD.

>> THAT'S A REALLY INTERESTING QUESTION.

YOU WOULD THINK SOMEONE WOULD SEE IT AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO GAIN OFFICE.

I'M NOT SURE WHAT THE ANSWER IS.

>> IT'S STILL EARLY.

>> IT'S A CONSTITUTIONAL OFFICE, TOO.

THOSE IN SARASOTA, KATHY DENT, THE SUPERVISOR OF ELECTIONS,

TOOK SO MUCH HEAT, THERE'S REALLY NO BIG-TIME OPPONENT RIGHT NOW, EVEN THE DEMOCRATS STILL HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO FEEL THE CANDIDATES.

I THINK IT'S THE NATURE OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL OFFICE.

IT'S REALLY HARD TO RAISE MONEY AND RUN A CAMPAIGN TO OUST AN INCUMBENT.

>> LAURA, OUT OF THAT PACKAGE OF FOUR STORIES, WHAT DID YOU THINK WAS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT?

>> I SUPPOSE WE SHOULDN'T LET THE YEAR CLOSE WITHOUT SAYING A FEW MORE WORDS ABOUT SUSAN STANTON WHO REALLY BROUGHT KIND OF THE TYPICAL FLORIDA TABLOIDY STORY SPOTLIGHT TO US AGAIN FOR A LITTLE WHILE.

IT'S REALLY A STORY ABOUT TOLERANCE.

I THINK IN LOSING THAT JOB STEVE/SUSAN STANTON MOVED ON TO A HIGHER PLANE, KIND OF BECOMING AN ADVOCATE NATIONALLY. AND WE'LL HEAR MORE FROM HER.

>> MIKE, YOU SAW THAT UP CLOSE.

YOU TRAVELED WITH STANTON TO WASHINGTON, D.C.

>> TO WASHINGTON, D.C.

AND SOME PEOPLE -- THEY WERE TRYING TO GET TRANSGENDER RIGHTS.

SOME PEOPLE IN THE CAPITOL WERE VERY MUCH FOR IT.

SOME PEOPLE SAW THE INTOLERANCE AND THE LOOKS FROM THE PEOPLE ON CAPITOL HILL JUST AS WELL.

SOMETIMES WE'RE NOT AS TOLERANT IN AMERICA AND CERTAINLY NOT

IN LARGO, AS PEOPLE WOULD LIKE US TO BELIEVE IN THE CITY OF
PROGRESS, LARGO.

>>> WELL, THE NEXT 2007 STORIES ON OUR TOP TEN LIST, NUMBER
SIX, THE CONTINUING FALLOUT FROM THE MARTIN LEE ANDERSON
DEATH AT THE BOOT CAMP IN NORTH FLORIDA AND THE ACQUITTAL OF
THOSE GUARDS AND A NURSE WHO WERE ALLEGEDLY RESPONSIBLE.
NUMBER FIVE, SKY HIGH PROPERTY INSURANCE RATES DESPITE THE
EFFORTS OF THE GOVERNOR AND THE LEGISLATURE AND GOVERNOR
CRIST HAS BECOME MORE AGGRESSIVE TOWARD THE INSURANCE
COMPANIES.

AND NUMBER FOUR, THE SEMINOLE INDIANS REACH AGREEMENT WITH
THE GOVERNOR ON THE EXPANSION OF CASINO GAMBLING.
THE STATE MIGHT GET MORE REVENUE FROM THE DEAL BUT SOME
WITHIN THE GOVERNOR'S OWN PARTY ARE CHALLENGING THE
DECISION.

LAURA, WHAT'S THE MOST SIGNIFICANT IN THAT BATCH?

>> DEFINITELY PROPERTY INSURANCE.

THAT'S STILL SORT OF THE MONSTER ISSUE.

CARRYOVER FROM LAST YEAR AND ONE THAT DOESN'T SEEM TO BE
GOING AWAY.

I THINK CRIST WILL HAVE TO GET TOUGH WITH THEM BECAUSE IT
SEEMS LIKE WE HAD KIND OF A RAFT OF NEW REGULATIONS THAT
DIDN'T SEEM TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

IT'S BEGINNING TO REMIND ME OF OIL COMPANIES REALLY.

JUST AS THE PRICE OF GAS KEEPS GOING UP AND UP AND UP AND WE

KEEP ON PAYING, THE SAME THING IS HAPPENING WITH OUR
PROPERTY INSURANCE BILLS.

>> WHEN I HEAR CHARLIE CRIST TALK ABOUT THE INSURANCE
COMPANIES THESE DAYS, HE SOUNDS ALMOST LIKE RALPH NADER.
HE'S A MAD CONSUMER ADVOCATE.

>> SIMILAR TO THAT, IT IS.

>> JEREMY, IN THAT BATCH, WHAT DO YOU THINK?

>> I HAVE TO ECHO THAT WITH THE INSURANCE.

WHEN CHARLIE CRIST WAS IN SARASOTA BACK IN NOVEMBER, HE
CALLED OUT THE INSURANCE COMPANY IN A ROOM FULL OF JUST
BUSINESS EXECUTIVES.

AND HE TOLD THEM, HEY, WE'RE GOING TO GO AFTER THESE GUYS
AND THAT WAS IT.

YOU CAN SEE, THAT IS THE ISSUE GOING IN.

I THINK IT SHOWS THE POLITICS OF HIGH EXPECTATIONS, YOU
KNOW, WHEN PEOPLE GO INTO OFFICE AND THERE'S LOTS OF TALK
ABOUT INSURANCE RATES GOING TO DROP, WE'RE GOING TO CUT
THESE INSURANCE RATES AND THEN WHEN PEOPLE ARE OPENING UP
THEIR BILL, THEY ARE SEEING THEM GO UP, IN A LOT OF CASES,
SUBSTANTIALLY.

SO YOU SEE NOW CRIST AND THE GOVERNMENT HAS TO RESPOND IN
ORDER TO REASSURE PEOPLE THAT THEY ARE WORKING ON THIS
ISSUE.

>> ERNEST, ONE OF THE STORIES THAT HAS HAUNTED US FOR THE
LAST TWO YEARS, AND THAT IS THE DEATH OF MARTIN LEE

ANDERSON.

>> YOU KNOW, I THINK IT'S A VERY SIGNIFICANT STORY, NOT ONLY FOR THE STATE, BUT FOR THE NATION.

IT'S BEING BUNDLED, IF YOU WILL, WITH SOME OTHER CASES THAT HAVE HAPPENED AROUND THE UNITED STATES, THE JENA SIX INCIDENT IN LOUISIANA, GENARLOW WILSON, THE YOUNG MAN WHO WAS JAILED IN GEORGIA.

AND IT SEEMS TO BE REFUELING THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, LIKE WE HAVEN'T SEEN SINCE THE '60s.

THE ONE THING I'M LOOKING FOR, THOUGH, IN 2008, YOU KNOW, AS THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT CONTINUES, I'M HOPING THAT BLACK LEADERS WILL ALSO TAKE A LOOK AT ISSUES IN OUR OWN COMMUNITY THAT ARE IMPACTING THE BLACK COMMUNITY IN AN ADVERSE WAY SUCH AS BLACK ON BLACK -- YES, WE HAVE TO CHALLENGE THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM WHEN WE FEEL LIKE THERE'S AN UNFAIR DECISION, BUT WE ALSO HAVE TO LOOK IN THE MIRROR AND SOLVE THOSE PROBLEMS.

>> WHAT IS ALSO INTERESTING, TOO, I THINK THE ACTIVISM IN TALLAHASSEE, ESPECIALLY AMONG FAMU STUDENTS, WHEN AN ISSUE LIKE THIS COMES UP -- DURING THE JEB BUSH ADMINISTRATION, THERE WERE SEVERAL ISSUES OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION THAT HAD COME UP THAT GALVANIZED THE STUDENTS UP THERE.

THIS CASE OF MARTIN LEE ANDERSON AND THE ACQUITTALS GALVANIZED THE STUDENTS UP THERE.

>> YES, I WOULD SAY EVEN MORE SO THAN THE PROTESTS WE SAW

WITH JEB BUSH'S ONE FLORIDA PLAN.

AGAIN, THE BIG QUESTION IN '08 IS, ARE WE GOING TO CONTINUE TO SEE THAT, OR WAS THIS JUST A MOMENT IN TIME OR THE START OF THE SECOND CIVIL RIGHTS ERA, SO TO SPEAK?

>> MIKE, ONE OF THE OTHER STORIES IN THE LIST WAS CASINO GAMBLING.

WE HAVE A LARGE SEMINOLE CASINO GAMBLING ESTABLISHMENT HERE IN THE TAMPA BAY AREA THAT COULD GET MUCH BIGGER IF IT CLEARS ALL THESE HURDLES.

>> WELL, IT'S GOING TO GET MUCH BIGGER.

IT DEPENDS ON HOW MUCH BIGGER IT WILL GET.

I DID A NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS WITH THE GOVERNOR WHERE HE SAID THE ONLY THING I HATE MORE THAN GAMBLING IS HIGH TAXES.

HE SEES THIS AS A REVENUE STREAM.

THE DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR WAS GOING TO ALLOW EXPANDED GAMBLING OF SOME SORT.

IT'S SOMEWHAT DISINGENUOUS TO SAY WE DON'T HAVE GAMBLING IN FLORIDA, OH, EXCEPT FOR THE LOTTERY, OOPS, EXCEPT FOR HORSE RACING, EXCEPT FOR DOG RACING, EXCEPT FOR THE SHIPS THAT GO OFFSHORE.

THEN MARCO RUBIO, THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE, SAYS I'M OPPOSED TO GAMBLING BECAUSE IT'S MORALLY WRONG.

IT DIDN'T SEEM MORALLY WRONG WHEN HE TOOK CONTRIBUTIONS FROM GAMBLING INTERESTS IN SOUTH FLORIDA.

THE TRUTH IS, IT IS MORALLY WRONG TO HIS CONSTITUENTS WHO

WILL LOSE MONEY AT THEIR TRACKS IF THE SEMINOLES EXPAND, BUT THEY ARE GOING TO EXPAND.

AND I THINK THAT THE GOVERNOR REALIZED THAT IT WAS BETTER TO GET SOME MONEY FROM THIS EXPANSION THAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN BECAUSE THE VOTERS ALLOWED TO EXPAND GAMBLING IN SOUTH FLORIDA.

SO HE HAD TO GIVE A LITTLE BIT TO THE SEMINOLES IN ORDER -- BECAUSE THEY COULD HAVE TURNED THEIR BACK AND SAY, NO, WE'LL WAIT FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR, AND THE STATE WOULD GET NOTHING ON THAT.

IT GOING TO EXPAND.

IT'S A QUESTION OF HOW MUCH.

>> AND THE LEGISLATURE KEEPS SAYING THAT THEY WANT TO HAVE A VOICE IN THIS.

HEY, I'M SORRY.

GIVEN THE LEGISLATURE'S TRACK RECORD RECENTLY, I'M NOT WILLING TO TURN ANYTHING OVER TO THEM.

>> ERNEST AND MIKE, WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF THIS TENSION, THOUGH, BETWEEN BILL McCOLLUM, THE ATTORNEY GENERAL, WHO IS CHALLENGING THIS DECISION IN COURT, OTHER MEMBERS, AS YOU SAID, ERNEST, MEMBERS OF THE STATE LEGISLATURE WANT TO TAKE THIS INTO COURT, WANT TO CHALLENGE IT, THEY WANT TO STOP IT, THEY WANT TO HAVE THEIR FINGERS IN THIS DEAL?

>> WELL, I THINK -- NOT TO QUESTION BILL McCOLLUM'S INTEGRITY, BUT I THINK A PART OF THIS IS THE GROWING

DISENCHANTMENT THAT THE RIGHT WING OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY HAS WITH CHARLIE CRIST.

>> OKAY.

WE'LL TALK ABOUT THAT IN JUST A SECOND.

MOVING UP IN THE 2007 TOP STORIES.

NUMBER THREE, CHARLIE CRIST TAKES OVER IN TALLAHASSEE MOVING THE STATE IN A SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT DIRECTION FROM THAT OF JEB BUSH AND A RIVALRY DEVELOPS BETWEEN THE GOVERNOR AND HOUSE SPEAKER MARCO RUBIO.

NUMBER TWO, FLORIDA MOVES UP ITS PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY DATE NEXT YEAR TO JANUARY 29th.

THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY CALLS FOR THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES NOT TO CAMPAIGN HERE, AND THAT UPSETS STATE PARTY OFFICIALS AND ACTIVISTS.

AS IT STANDS, THE FLORIDA DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY IS NONBINDING BECAUSE THE NATIONAL PARTY SAYS IT WILL NOT RECOGNIZE THE STATE PARTY DELEGATION AT THE CONVENTION.

LET'S START, MIKE, WITH THAT RIVALRY BETWEEN THE HOUSE SPEAKER MARCO RUBIO AND CHARLIE CRIST.

I SAID THAT CHARLIE CRIST IS SETTING A SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT DIRECTION, WAS THAT AN UNDERSTATEMENT?

>> THAT IS AN UNDERSTATEMENT.

WHEN CHARLIE CRIST WAS ELECTED GOVERNOR, THE WHOLE STATE TURNED.

BECAUSE UNDER JEB, IT WAS MY WAY OR THE HIGHWAY.

AND THAT INCLUDED REPUBLICANS.

IF THEY DIDN'T LIKE IT, IT WAS TOO BAD.

CRIST REACHES OUT ACROSS PARTY LINES, AND AS ERNEST SAID, THE CONSERVATIVE PART OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY FEELS LIKE IT HAS TO FLEX ITS MUSCLE BECAUSE THEY DON'T LIKE SOME OF THE STANCES HE'S TAKEN, SUCH AS HIS RECENT ALIGNMENT WITH ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER ABOUT THE EPA AND THE WAY THAT THE STATE SHOULD BE MOVING TOWARD MORE OF A GREEN STATE, AND HE HAS SOME IDEAS THAT ARE MUCH MORE TO THE LEFT OF THE FAR RIGHT WING OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY.

AND SO IT HAS CHANGED THE DIRECTION OF THE STATE.

AND HE'S MORE OF A CHEERLEADER.

JEB WAS A -- JEB HAD AN IDEA.

AND JEB SAID THIS IS THE WAY WE'RE GOING TO SOLVE IT.

GET BEHIND ME AND WE'RE GOING TO GO.

WHERE CHARLIE TRIES TO BUILD A CONSENSUS AND GET EVERYBODY TO HOLD HANDS AND SING KUM BA YAH AT THE END OF THE DAY AND COME UP WITH A PLAN THAT MAKES EVERYBODY HAPPY.

BUT WHEN YOU TRY THAT, OFTENTIMES, PEOPLE ARE UNHAPPY.

>> THAT'S WHERE -- WHERE RUBIO COMES IN AND MORE SOCIAL CONSERVATIVE WING OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY SAYING, WAIT A MINUTE, WE'RE STILL REPUBLICANS.

YOU CAN TALK ABOUT GLOBAL WARMING, YOU CAN TRY TO RESTORE FELON RIGHTS FOR VOTING, YOU CAN DO THESE PAPER BALLOT INITIATIVES, BUT WE'RE STILL REPUBLICANS.

UNEDITED REALTIME CLOSED CAPTIONING

I THINK SIMILAR TO WHAT WE'RE SEEING WITH THE CASINO ISSUE.
YOU KNOW, I DON'T THINK IT'S AS -- THEM JUST WANTING TO PICK
A FIGHT WITH THEM AND NOT BELIEVING THERE'S A PROBLEM.
I THINK THEY HONESTLY BELIEVE THIS IS WRONG.
AND I THINK THEY ARE EXERCISING THEIR POWER SAYING, LOOK,
WE'RE STILL A SOCIALLY CONSERVATIVE PLACE AND WE'RE GOING TO
FIGHT.
>> JEREMY, IS THAT BECAUSE THESE CONSERVATIVE REPUBLICANS
VIEW CHARLIE CRIST AS A LIBERAL?
IS THAT HOW THEY VIEW HIM?
>> I WOULDN'T SAY LIBERAL, BUT CERTAINLY THEY ARE SEEING HIM
AS MORE MODERATE.
I HEARD PEOPLE AT THE REPUBLICAN PARTY EVENT BACK IN OCTOBER
COMPLAINING ABOUT IT.
AND HE WAS SPEAKING ABOUT GLOBAL WARMING FOR ABOUT FIVE TO
TEN MINUTES OF HIS SPEECH.
YOU COULD TELL HE WAS EXACERBATING THE PROBLEM.
>> YEAH, BUT YOU KNOW, THE OTHER FACTOR IS THAT MARCO
RUBIO'S TERM IN THE HOUSE IS COMING TO AN END.
AND HE'S SEARCHING FOR HIS NEXT STEP IN TERMS OF HIS
POLITICAL FUTURE.
AND AT LEAST -- IF WE'RE GOING TO BE HONEST ABOUT THIS,
THAT'S AT LEAST A FACTOR IN HIM TRYING TO RAISE HIS PROFILE
IN THE STATE BY CHALLENGING THE GOVERNOR.
>> HE'S DOING IT RIGHT NOW.

UNEDITED REALTIME CLOSED CAPTIONING

YOU LOOK AT THESE TAX PLANS TO CUT TAXES, YOU HAVE CRIST
PUSHING THIS PLAN, GETTING BEHIND IT, AND ALL OF A SUDDEN,
HERE RUBIO IS.

RUBIO WAS JUST IN SARASOTA WHISTLE-STOPPING FOR A TAX CUT
PLAN BUT NOT THE GOVERNOR'S.

HE WAS PITCHING AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT PLAN.

>> WE'LL TALK ABOUT THAT IN A SECOND, BUT, LAURA, I WANT TO
GET YOU IN BEFORE WE END THE CONVERSATION.

THE DEMOCRATS, THEIR NATIONAL PARTY SAYS THEIR VOTE
JANUARY 29th IS NOT GOING TO COUNT HERE.

WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF THAT?

>> IT'S SAD.

I THINK IT STILL COUNTS IN A WAY, ANY CANDIDATE COULD WIN A
GREAT SYMBOLIC VICTORY BY WINNING THE FLORIDA PRIMARY.

BUT IT'S A SHAME -- IF YOU'RE ONE OF THE PEOPLE PONDERING
WHETHER TO VOTE, WHETHER TO MAKE THE EFFORT AND GO TO THE
BALLOT AND YOU HEAR YOUR VOTE IS NOT GOING TO COUNT, PEOPLE
ALREADY FEEL THAT THEIR VOTES DON'T COUNT AND SO WHY BOTHER?

>> BUT, LAURA, BY THE TIME THEY GET TO THE NATIONAL
CONVENTION, THE PARTY LEADER, WHOEVER THE CANDIDATE IS, IS
GOING TO HAVE THE RIGHT TO SAY THESE BALLOTS WILL COUNT.

>> ONLY AFTER THEY ARE ALREADY THE LEADER.

>> BUT THE BALLOTS ARE GOING TO COUNT AND WILL HAVE AN
INFLUENCE BECAUSE THEY HAVE TO TRY TO CARRY FLORIDA IN THE
GENERAL ELECTION.

THE PRIMARY IS JUST THE FIRST PRIZE IN THE RING.

>> THEY DO.

>> IT BECOMES MORE OF A PROBLEM -- I INITIALLY DIDN'T KNOW IF IT WOULD BE AS BIG A PROBLEM.

NOW THAT YOU SEE HILLARY CLINTON STRUGGLING IN IOWA AND NEW HAMPSHIRE TO HOLD ON TO HER LEAD, YOU'LL GET A SITUATION WHERE IT'S A REALLY COMPETITIVE RACE, AND THEY'LL COME TO FLORIDA AND OUR VOTES AREN'T GOING TO COUNT.

>> FLORIDA, FLORIDA, FLORIDA IS ALWAYS GOING TO MATTER WHETHER THEY SAY THAT OR NOT.

I THINK THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY PLAYS A DANGEROUS GAME WITH THIS MOVE, BECAUSE COME NOVEMBER, IF THE STATE OF FLORIDA FEELS ALIENATED, IT'S GOING TO HURT THAT DEMOCRATIC NOMINEE.

>>> OKAY.

WELL, AND THE NUMBER ONE "FLORIDA THIS WEEK" STORY FOR THE YEAR FOR 2007, BOB, CAN WE HAVE A DRUM ROLL?

[DRUM ROLL]

NICE.

WELL, THE PROPERTY TAX ISSUE REMAINS UNRESOLVED.

SEVERAL TAX CUT PLANS ARE PUT FORWARD, BUT NONE LOOK LIKE THEY WILL PROVIDE RELIEF ANYTIME SOON.

HOUSING PRICES COLLAPSED, MANY FLORIDIANS WOULD LIKE TO SELL THEIR HOUSES BUT THEY CAN'T.

AND THE STATE RESPONDS BY ORDERING LOCAL GOVERNMENTS TO SLASH SPENDING.

ERNEST, WE WERE TALKING ABOUT THIS A BIT LAST YEAR.

WE'RE STILL TALKING ABOUT IT.

WHY HASN'T THE PROPERTY TAX QUESTION BEEN RESOLVED?

>> YOU KNOW, THERE'S A NUMBER OF REASONS.

SOME, JUST LIKE THE PROPERTY INSURANCE SITUATION, THERE ARE SOME FACTORS THAT GOVERNMENT CAN'T CONTROL.

CERTAINLY, THE HOUSING SLUMP OR THE HOUSING TSUNAMI, AS SOME REAL ESTATE FRIENDS LIKE TO CALL IT, HAS BEEN A HUGE FACTOR.

AND I'M CONCERNED ABOUT WHERE WE'RE HEADED AS A STATE,

BECAUSE MANY OF THESE SUBDIVISIONS, MANY OF THESE CONDO

PROJECTS WERE BASED ON THE NOTION THAT WE WERE GOING TO

CONTINUE TO HAVE TENS OF THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE MOVING INTO THE STATE EVERY YEAR.

AND WITH HIGHER PROPERTY TAXES, HIGHER INSURANCE RATES,

THAT'S SLOWING DOWN.

WE'RE SEEING A DECREASE IN SCHOOL ENROLLMENT, WHICH IS A KEY

INDICATOR THAT THAT GROWTH IS NO LONGER THERE.

YOU KNOW, WE'RE NOT -- WE'RE GOING TO END UP WITH A SURPLUS

OF EMPTY CONDOS AND EMPTY HOMES.

>> JEREMY, YOU MENTIONED A MOMENT AGO THESE COMPETING TAX

CUT PLANS.

THERE'S ONE ON THE BALLOT JANUARY 29th.

NOW MARCO RUBIO IS CAMPAIGNING AROUND THE STATE FOR THIS

1.35% PROPERTY TAX CAP THAT MIGHT GET ON THE BALLOT IN 2010.

>> YES.

>> CAN PEOPLE WAIT THAT LONG?

>> WELL, SOME OF THE PEOPLE -- YOU KNOW, I WAS TALKING TO AT THE RUBIO EVENT THE OTHER DAY, THEY WERE SAYING THEY ARE NOT BACKING THE JANUARY 29th PLAN BECAUSE THEY ARE HOLDING OUT HOPE THAT THE RUBIO PLAN WILL BE BETTER FOR THEM.

THESE ARE A LOT OF PEOPLE IN BUSINESS, OWN MULTIPLE PROPERTIES, SECOND HOMEOWNERS, THOSE TYPES OF PEOPLE.

YOU CAN SEE THAT THERE'S -- THE BIGGEST COMPLAINT FROM THE VERY START HAS BEEN THE PLAN ON JANUARY 29th DOESN'T GO FAR ENOUGH.

AS RUBIO PUSHES THIS OTHER PLAN, HE JUST SEEMS TO EXACERBATE THAT PROBLEM SAYING, LOOK, IT'S NOT GOOD ENOUGH.

WE'RE GOING TO DO A BETTER PLAN LATER.

DON'T WORRY ABOUT THE 29th.

THE REAL HOPE IS IN THIS.

>> BUT THEN THERE'S THE FLORIDA COMMISSION ON TAXATION THAT MEETS EVERY 20 YEARS, AND THEY DON'T NEED THE LEGISLATURE'S APPROVAL TO PUT SOMETHING ON THE NOVEMBER BALLOT.

I THINK THAT'S WHAT THE PLAN WILL COME OUT OF.

I THINK GETTING 60% ON JANUARY 29th, WHICH THEY NOW HAVE TO DO AS THE LEGISLATURE HAD MANDATED, IS GOING TO BE A TOUGH ROAD.

BUT WHATEVER THEY COME OUT WITH THE COMMISSION ON TAXATION, THEY CAN PUT DIRECTLY ON THE BALLOT WITHOUT THE LEGISLATURE -- THANK YOU VERY MUCH -- AND I THINK THEY ARE

GOING TO COME UP WITH A PLAN THAT MAYBE WILL GO A LITTLE FURTHER.

>> AND I THINK THAT'S WHERE THE REAL SOLUTION LIES IS GETTING RID OF SOME OF THE TAX EXEMPTIONS THAT HAVE BEEN ON THE BOOKS FOR SO LONG.

>> SO THIS WILL BE SUNSETTING SOME OF THE SALES TAX EXEMPTIONS THAT EXISTED ON SKYBOXES, OSTRICH FEED, ALL THE KIND OF FAMOUS --

>> BOB MARTINEZ TRIED TO DO IT BACK IN THE '80s WHEN HE PUT THE SERVICES TAX IN.

AND LAWYERS WENT CRAZY.

CPAs WENT CRAZY, TV STATIONS, NEWSPAPERS -- ABSOLUTELY, WENT CRAZY AND MARTINEZ BACKED DOWN, WHICH ULTIMATELY MADE HIM A LAME DUCK FROM THE BEGINNING OF HIS ADMINISTRATION. HAD HE STAYED WITH IT, FLORIDA WOULD HAVE BEEN IN BETTER SHAPE.

HE MIGHT HAVE WON AGAIN.

BUT HE CAVED TO THE PRESSURE, WHICH WAS INTENSE.

>> LIKELY TO SEE THAT KIND OF PRESSURE AGAIN IF THAT'S PUT ON THE BALLOT A YEAR FROM NOW?

>> OH, YEAH, ABSOLUTELY.

I THINK ALL OF THIS KIND OF FITS INTO IT.

YOU SEE WHAT IS HAPPENING AS THE REAL ESTATE MARKET HAS COLLAPSED AND HOW IMPORTANT THAT WAS TO THE ENTIRE ECONOMY. PEOPLE WERE UPSET ABOUT THEIR TAX BILLS BEFORE, BUT NOW

YOU'RE IN A SITUATION WHERE YOUR TAXES ARE GOING UP EVEN AS YOUR HOME VALUES ARE GOING DOWN.

YOU CAN SEE THE TENSION OVER THE TAXES BECOMES EVEN GREATER. I THINK WHAT YOU'LL SEE IS, AS WE GET INTO THE NEW YEAR, AND WE HAVE A FULL-BORE DECLINE WHERE ALL THE PROPERTY APPRAISERS ARE ON THE SAME PAGE AND ALL STARTING TO MOVE DOWN THESE PROPERTY VALUES BUT NOT ENOUGH WHERE PEOPLE CAN'T SELL THEIR HOMES FOR WHAT THEIR PROPERTY APPRAISER'S WORTH, AND THEN THEY ARE GETTING THAT TAX BILL ON THAT, THAT WILL PUSH THESE GUYS EVEN MORE.

IF THEY THINK JANUARY 29th IS GOING TO BE ENOUGH, AND IT'S, LIKE, WOW, I'M AFRAID TO SAY THAT WHEN PEOPLE GET THE TAX BILL NEXT YEAR, IT WILL BE A LOT MORE BECAUSE THEY'LL BE DEMANDING BIGGER CHANGES.

MAYBE THE RUBIO PLAN THAT WAS SO OUTRAGEOUS AT FIRST MIGHT GET MORE ACCEPTANCE AS VOTERS SAY, NO, GET RID OF MY PROPERTY TAXES.

>> THE DIFFERENCE FROM THE '80s WHEN MARTINEZ WAS GOVERNOR IS THERE WASN'T THE BOOM AND THE HOUSING MARKET INCREASE AND THERE WASN'T THIS DRIVE TO LOWER TAXES.

I MEAN, IT WAS SOMETHING PEOPLE WERE LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE SAYING WE OUGHT TO DO THIS BECAUSE OF THE REVENUE STREAM WE'RE GOING TO NEED.

NOW YOU HAVE THE PUBLIC SAYING -- THAT IT WILL SAY TO THE TV STATIONS AND SAY TO THE NEWSPAPERS AND ATTORNEYS, WE DON'T

CARE IF YOU DON'T LIKE THIS --

>> BECAUSE IT'S A CRISIS.

>> -- IT'S A CRISIS.

>> LAURA, LET ME BRING YOU IN.

THIS WEEK, WE SAW THE PEOPLE AT THE BOTTOM END OF THE CHAIN,
SO TO SPEAK, AND THAT IS CITY EMPLOYEES IN THE CITY OF TAMPA
DEMONSTRATED OUTSIDE THE TAMPA CITY HALL THIS WEEK BECAUSE
THEY ARE FEELING THE BRUNT OF THIS EDICT FROM TALLAHASSEE TO
CUT LOCAL PROPERTY TAXES.

AND CITY EMPLOYEES ARE BEING LAID OFF.

THE MAYOR WANTS TO PRIVATIZE SOME SERVICES.

THAT'S A TREND STATEWIDE.

>> YES, AND I THINK THAT IF PEOPLE ARE ALREADY UPSET ABOUT
THE INCREASING PROPERTY TAXES THAT THEY ARE PAYING, IT COULD
TURN OUT IF THE CUTS CONTINUE, THAT THEY ARE ALSO FACING IT
ON THE OTHER END AND SEEING THEIR CITY AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT
SERVICES BEING CUT AS WELL.

>> DOUBLE WHAMMY.

>> WHICH CAN ALSO UPSET PEOPLE A LOT, ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU
START TALKING ABOUT THINGS LIKE POLICE AND FIRE PROTECTION.

>>> OKAY.

WELL, FINALLY, WE ASK OUR PANELISTS TO TRY THEIR HAND AT
FORECASTING AND TELL US WHAT IS LIKELY TO BE MAKING NEWS IN
WEST CENTRAL FLORIDA AS THE STORY TO WATCH FOR 2008.

FIRST, JEREMY, HERE IS WHAT YOU HAD TO SAY LAST YEAR.

>> JEREMY, YOUR OTHER BIG STORY TO WATCH?

>> I'M LOOKING FOR MEL MARTINEZ, THE SENIOR SENATOR -- OR THE JUNIOR SENATOR OF THE STATE OF FLORIDA NOW.

HE'S ON A PLATFORM NOW HEADING UP THE REPUBLICAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE WHERE HE WILL BE A NEW FACE, YOU KNOW, FOR THE PARTY, AND POTENTIALLY GIVE FLORIDA A LOT OF CLOUT IN NATIONAL POLITICS.

AND YOU WONDER IF THAT WILL TRANSLATE INTO THINGS THAT HE'S ABLE TO DO MORE SO ON INSURANCE ISSUES AND SUCH AND CONGRESS EVEN AND WHETHER HE'LL BE MORE EFFECTIVE IN THAT WAY.

>> JEREMY, HE WAS A RISING STAR.

I DON'T THINK ANYBODY SAW THAT COMING.

WE CAN'T HOLD YOU RESPONSIBLE.

HE GOT WHACKED.

>> WELL, HE WAS THERE.

HE WAS THERE UNTIL IMMIGRATION TURNED INTO JUST THE KILLER ISSUE FOR HIM.

IT JUST GOT TANGLED AROUND HIM.

AT THE DEBATE IN ST. PETERSBURG, SOME REPORTERS HAD CAUGHT UP WITH HIM AND ASKED HIM ABOUT IMMIGRATION, AND HE SAID I'M DONE WITH THAT.

I'M OVER THAT.

>> JEREMY, WE HAVE ABOUT TWO MINUTES LEFT IN THE SHOW.

WHAT'S YOUR PREDICTION FOR THE COMING YEAR?

>> WELL, I THINK GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT WILL BE AN OUTGROWTH

OF ALL THE ISSUES WE JUST TALKED ABOUT THAT HAPPENED THIS YEAR.

I THINK WE'RE GOING TO SEE SO MANY MORE COMMUNITIES WONDERING, OUR QUALITY OF LIFE HERE, WHERE ARE WE?

I KNOW ALL THE ELECTIONS IN SARASOTA AND MANATEE AND CHARLOTTE COUNTY SEEM TO BE THROUGH THE PRISM OF HOW MUCH ARE YOU GOING TO ALLOW US TO GROW?

ARE WE GROWING IN THE RIGHT WAY?

DO WE LIKE OUR COMMUNITIES OR DO WE NEED CHANGES?

I THINK LOCAL OFFICIALS ARE ALL -- ALL INCUMBENTS SHOULD BE LEERY IF YOU'RE IN LOCAL OFFICE THESE DAYS.

>> ERNEST, WHAT'S YOUR PREDICTION?

>> MARCO RUBIO LOSES THE SHOWDOWN AGAINST CHARLIE CRIST.

>> CHALLENGING CHARLIE FOR THE GUBERNATORIAL NOMINATION?

>> JUST CHALLENGE HIM TO BE -- TO BE THE UNOFFICIAL LEADER OF THE PARTY.

I THINK RUBIO WILL LOSE THAT MATCH BECAUSE HE IS STYLE OVER SUBSTANCE, IN MY OPINION.

HE'S GREAT AT THE PODIUM, BUT THERE'S NO REAL SUBSTANCE TO SOME OF HIS PLANS LIKE THE TAX CUT.

>> LAURA, YOUR PREDICTION?

>> SOMEWHAT SIMILAR TO JEREMY'S OR BUILDING ON THE ISSUE OF GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT.

I THINK WE SHOULD BE PAYING ATTENTION TO THE CENTRAL TAMPA REDEVELOPMENT PLANS AS A BELLWETHER FOR WHETHER MORE DENSE

URBAN DEVELOPMENT IS GOING TO TAKE OFF IN FLORIDA.

THAT'S WHAT I'LL BE WATCHING.

>> MIKE, YOUR PREDICTION?

>> LESS GOVERNMENT.

GOVERNMENT WILL BE FACED WITH THE CHALLENGE OF EXAMINING EVERY TIME IT SPENDS MONEY WHETHER IT'S A WORTHWHILE PROJECT OR NOT.

AND THE NICETIES AND THINGS YOU CAN DO WHEN YOU'RE FLUSH WITH MONEY WILL HAVE A ROUGHER TIME PASSING.

GOVERNMENT WILL HAVE TO DO LESS.

IT WILL HAVE TO PROTECT THE PEOPLE.

IT WILL HAVE TO PROVIDE THE ESSENTIAL SERVICES, BUT ANYTHING EXTRA BECAUSE OF THE PROPERTY TAX CRISIS THAT I'M SURE WE'LL BE TALKING ABOUT NEXT YEAR, AT THIS TIME, WE'LL BE FACED WITH THAT.

>> THANK YOU, JEREMY WALLACE.

THANK YOU, LAURA FIORILLI-CREWS.

THANK YOU, MIKE DEESON, AND THANK YOU, ERNEST HOOPER.

AND THANK YOU FOR WATCHING "FLORIDA THIS WEEK."

WE ALWAYS WELCOME YOUR COMMENTS.

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 SITE ONLINE AT WEDU.ORG WHERE YOU CAN VIEW PAST EPISODES OF THIS AND OTHER FINE LOCALLY PRODUCED WEDU PROGRAMS.

UNEDITED REALTIME CLOSED CAPTIONING

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

FROM ALL OF US HERE AT WEDU, WE WISH YOU A SAFE AND HAPPY
NEW YEAR.

REALTIME CAPTIONING BY AMERICAPTION, INC.

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