

"FLORIDA THIS WEEK"

APRIL 25, 2008

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

>>> COMING UP NEXT, HILLARY CLINTON'S WIN IN PENNSYLVANIA REFOCUSSES THE SPOTLIGHT ON SEATING FLORIDA'S DEMOCRATIC DELEGATION.

THE STATE'S SENATE OPENS THE DOOR TO TEACHING CREATIONISM AND INTELLIGENT DESIGN.

A POWERFUL LAWMAKER IS PUSHING THE CSX DEAL.

AND THE LEGISLATURE IS PLANNING TO SPEND MONEY FROM A MAJOR TRUST FUND.

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

VICKIE CHACHERE IS AN EDITORIAL WRITER AT THE "THE TAMPA TRIBUNE."

SARA ROMEO IS DIRECTOR OF TAMPA CROSSROADS AND A DEMOCRAT.
AND ADAM GOODMAN IS A POLITICAL CONSULTANT AND A REPUBLICAN.
GOOD TO SEE YOU, EVERYBODY.

THANK YOU FOR COMING.

WELL, SENATOR HILLARY CLINTON'S WIN IN THE PENNSYLVANIA DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY HAS FIRED UP HER CAMPAIGN.

HER BACKERS SAY THAT IF YOU LOOK AT ACTUAL VOTES CAST NATIONWIDE, SHE'S THE LEADING CANDIDATE, THAT IS, IF YOU COUNT THE MICHIGAN ELECTION AND THE VOTES CAST IN FLORIDA'S DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY.

BUSLOADS OF CLINTON BACKERS ARE PLANNING TO TRAVEL FROM FLORIDA TO WASHINGTON, D.C. NEXT WEEK TO RALLY AT DEMOCRATIC PARTY HEADQUARTERS.

THEY ARE ASKING THAT ALL OF FLORIDA'S 211 DELEGATES BE SEATED AT THE DENVER CONVENTION.

SO, HAS THE TIDE CHANGED AND IS HILLARY NOW -- DOES SHE HAVE THE MOMENTUM, ERNEST?

>> I THINK SHE HAS THE MOMENTUM.

BUT WE HAVE SEEN THE MOMENTUM SWING BACK AND FORTH SO OFTEN IN THIS PRIMARY RACE THAT I DON'T THINK WE CAN SAY WE WON'T SEE ANOTHER SHIFT.

IF OBAMA GOES IN, DOES WELL IN NORTH CAROLINA AND PARTICULARLY INDIANA, THEN ANOTHER SHIFT WILL HAVE OCCURRED.

>> BY FOCUSING ATTENTION ON THE POPULAR VOTE, IS SHE CHANGING THE RULES?

I MEAN, IS THAT A FAIR WAY TO CALCULATE WHO IS AHEAD?

>> WELL, IT CERTAINLY SEEMS LIKE SHE'S EXTENDING, TRYING TO EXTEND THE GAIN MIDWAY THROUGH THE THIRD QUARTER WHEN SHE'S BEHIND.

BUT IT'S A PROBLEM FOR THE DNC.

AND A YEAR AGO, I THINK EVEN THE MOST STAUNCHEST GOPers WOULD CONCEDE THAT THE DEMOCRATS WERE ABOUT TO RETAKE THE WHITE HOUSE.

IT APPEARS TO ME THAT NOW THE DEMOCRATS HAVE FOUND A WAY, A MAGICAL FORMULA TO LOSE IT AGAIN, EVEN THOUGH THE INCUMBENT PRESIDENT HAS ONE OF THE LOWEST APPROVAL RATINGS EVER.

>> I HEAR ADAM CHORTLING OVER HERE.

HAVE THEY FOUND A WAY TO LOSE IT?

>> YEAH, I THINK THE DEMOCRATIC NOMINATION FIGHT HAS BECOME THE MOST POPULAR TELEVISION SHOW IN AMERICA FOR REPUBLICANS. THE RATINGS ARE WAY OFF THE CHART.

ALL THE IRONIES THAT WOULD COME OUT OF THIS.

INCLUDING THE FACT THAT IT MAY COME DOWN TO FLORIDA TO FIGURE OUT THE COUNT.

YOU KNOW, IN A PLACE WHERE COUNTING HAS HAD QUITE A HISTORY. A COUPLE OF THINGS CAME OUT THIS WEEK, THOUGH, THAT I THINK CHANGED THE DYNAMICS.

ERNEST IS RIGHT, THE MOMENTUM IS WITH HILLARY, THIS BACK AND

FORTH.

BUT SOMETHING HAPPENED IN PENNSYLVANIA.

ALMOST HALF THE PEOPLE THAT VOTED SAID THEY BELIEVE HILLARY CLINTON WILL BE THE NOMINEE, WHICH FLIES IN THE FACE OF EVERY POLITICAL PUNDIT AND EVERY TELEVISION ANCHOR PERSON IN AMERICA WHO HAS ALREADY PROCLAIMED OBAMA THE NOMINEE.

NUMBER TWO IS, LATE DECIDERS.

THE LATE DECIDERS IN THIS RACE, AS WITH MANY OTHER DEMOCRATIC PRIMARIES, ALL SEEM TO BE BREAKING PREDOMINANTLY LIKE SIX OUT OF TEN, SEVEN OUT OF TEN FOR HILLARY.

SO THIS WHOLE ARGUMENT THAT THE MORE YOU KNOW BARACK THE BETTER, WHICH WOULD BE THE ARGUMENT HE MADE IN FLORIDA FOR NOT HAVING THE FLORIDA VOTE COUNT, DOESN'T WASH.

NUMBER THREE IS, THE MATH DOES KEEP CHANGING BECAUSE THE RULES HAVE NOT BEEN SET.

THE LOSER THIS WEEK, ONCE AGAIN, WAS HOWARD DEAN, WHO IS GOING TO HAVE TO EXPLAIN TO AMERICA HIS LATEST CONCOCTION ABOUT HOW HE'S GOING TO DETERMINE A NOMINEE WITHOUT --

>> ADAM, I THINK UNDERLYING THAT IS AN ASSUMPTION THAT IF YOU DIDN'T VOTE FOR BARACK OBAMA IN THE PRIMARIES, THAT YOU MIGHT NOT VOTE FOR THE DEMOCRAT IN THE FALL.

OR WHAT I'M GETTING AT IS, IF YOU VOTED FOR HILLARY CLINTON THIS TIME AROUND, DOES THAT MEAN THAT IF YOU'RE A DEMOCRAT, YOU'RE GOING TO VOTE FOR MCCAIN IN THE FALL?

>> NOT NECESSARILY.

BUT THERE'S ALMOST A SCARY KIND OF CONNECTION RIGHT NOW -- I SAY SCARY, I HATE TO EVEN SAY THIS AS A REPUBLICAN -- BETWEEN HILLARY AND JOHN MCCAIN IN THAT HILLARY IS STARTING TO MAKE THE CASE THAT JOHN MCCAIN WILL BE MAKING IN THE FALL AGAINST WHAT I THINK WILL BE THE NOMINEE, WHO IS BARACK OBAMA.

AND THE CASE IS, I'M SAFE HARBOR.

BARACK OBAMA WILL HAVE ALL SORTS OF QUESTION MARKS ATTACHED TO HIM.

THE QUESTION IS, IS AMERICA READY TO TAKE A VERY RADICAL JUMP AS OPPOSED TO A JUMP OF CHANGE?

AND CERTAINLY MCCAIN IS NOT GEORGE BUSH.

HOW HARD THE DEMOCRATS WILL TRY.

YOU MIGHT SAY, THIS IS A PREVIEW OF COMING ATTRACTIONS IN THE FALL.

>> SARA, IS IT A RADICAL IDEA TO VOTE FOR BARACK OBAMA?

>> I ABSOLUTELY DON'T THINK IT'S A RADICAL IDEA TO VOTE FOR BARACK.

I THINK THAT ERNEST WAS RIGHT IN HIS FIRST STATEMENT, THE PENDULUM HAS SWUNG BACK AND FORTH SEVERAL TIMES.

ALBEIT, I THINK THE PENDULUM HAS SWUNG MORE TOWARD -- FAVORITISM TOWARD BARACK OBAMA.

AND I THINK THERE'S STILL A LOT OF CAMPAIGNING TO BE DONE.

I THINK THE NEXT TWO PRIMARIES WILL CERTAINLY NOT SOLIDIFY WHO THE NOMINEE IS.

UNFORTUNATELY, I THINK WE'LL GO ALL THE WAY TO CONVENTION TO DECIDE THAT.

BUT I DO THINK THAT BARACK STILL HAS A HUGE POTENTIAL AND A VERY STRONG CHANCE TO PULL THIS ONE OUT AS THE DEMOCRATIC NOMINEE.

>> VICKIE, YOUR PAPER HAD A STORY THIS WEEK ABOUT THE PRESSURE ON DECIDING WHAT TO DO WITH FLORIDA'S DELEGATION. IT PUTS FLORIDA RIGHT UP THERE AGAIN.

>> YEAH, IMAGINE THAT.

HERE WE ARE AGAIN.

[LAUGHTER]

IT'S ALMOST TOO ENTICING OF A STORY TO NOT WRITE, THAT FLORIDA ONCE AGAIN IS THE CENTERPIECE OF DECIDING WHO IS -- WHO IS THE PERSON SELECTED OR ELECTED.

THE NATIONAL MEDIA, OF COURSE, IS JUST GOING TO GLOM ON TO THAT LIKE NOTHING ELSE.

IT WILL BE THE GREAT DRAMA OF THE SUMMER.

>> WELL, ADAM, YOU ARE GLOATING HERE, BUT IT IS APRIL, RIGHT?

THE GENERAL ELECTION IS MONTHS AWAY.

I MEAN, CONCEIVABLY, DOES ALL THE BAD NEWS -- IF BARACK OBAMA IS THE NOMINEE, DOES ALL THE BAD NEWS KIND OF SPIN ITSELF OUT?

I MEAN, THIS WEEKEND WE'LL HEAR A LOT OF NEWS ABOUT THE REVEREND WRIGHT.

A LOT OF THOSE STORIES BY THE TIME WE GET TO NOVEMBER WILL HAVE BEEN REHASHED SO MUCH THAT WILL THE VOTERS BE TIRED OF THE STORIES?

>> I THINK THE STORY IS JUST BEGINNING TO BE UNDERSTOOD ABOUT BARACK OBAMA, WHO, FRANKLY, CAME OUT OF NOWHERE FOR THE AMERICAN PUBLIC, AT LEAST, ABOUT A YEAR-AND-A-HALF, TWO YEARS AGO.

I STILL THINK IT'S FRESH.

I'M NOT REALLY GLOATING.

I'M JUST A VERY HAPPY PERSON TODAY.

[LAUGHTER]

I THINK SO IS JOHN MCCAIN.

>> SARA, DO YOU THINK THESE REPUBLICANS ARE COUNTING THEIR CHICKENS TOO SOON?

>> I DEFINITELY THINK THEY ARE COUNTING THEIR CHICKENS, AND I THINK THEY ARE REALLY PLAYING INTO WHAT'S HAPPENING RIGHT NOW AND HELPING CREATE A LITTLE BIT MORE CONFUSION AT THIS TIME.

AND PERHAPS NOT ADAM, BUT I KNOW THERE'S A LOT OF GLOATING GOING ON ON THE OTHER SIDE.

IT'S EARLY THOUGH, VERY EARLY.

>> ERNEST, MY QUESTION TO YOU, AND THAT IS, YOU KNOW, ADAM SAID THAT THIS STORY IS JUST BEGINNING TO COME OUT.

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THIS CYCLE OF THE NEWS ABOUT LET'S SAY THE REVEREND WRIGHT AND SOME OF THE OTHER THINGS,

WEATHER UNDERGROUND PERSON WHO BARACK OBAMA SERVED ON THE BOARD WITH?

>> WELL, I WAS TELLING SARA BEFORE THE SHOW STARTED, I THINK A LOT OF THIS IS DRIVEN BY THE GOP BECAUSE THEY DON'T WANT TO SEE BARACK OBAMA IN THE GENERAL ELECTION.

I THINK THEY LIKE THEIR CHANCES AGAINST HILLARY CLINTON.

AND SO, YOU KNOW, RUSH LIMBAUGH JOKES ABOUT OPERATION CHAOS.

BUT I THINK THERE'S SOME REAL TRUTH TO WHAT WE'RE SEEING.

I THINK THEY WANT HILLARY TO GET THE NOMINATION.

I THINK THEY ARE WORKING DILIGENTLY TO TRY AND POKE HOLES IN OBAMA'S CAMPAIGN.

>>> OKAY.

WELL, STATE LAWMAKERS IN TALLAHASSEE AND THE HOUSE HAVE STARTED DEBATE ON LEGISLATION ALLOWING THE STATE TO BUY 61 MILES OF RAILWAY FROM A PRIVATE COMPANY TO BEGIN A COMMUTER RAIL SYSTEM IN THE ORLANDO AREA.

UNDER THE PLAN, CSX WOULD SELL RAILROAD TRACKS TO THE STATE FOR \$423 MILLION AS LONG AS THE COMPANY RECEIVES SOME PROTECTION FROM LIABILITY AND ACCIDENTS.

COMMUTER TRAINS WOULD OPERATE ON THE LINE, BUT SO WOULD FREIGHT TRAINS.

CSX HAD MADE IT CLEAR THAT IT WON'T SELL THE TRACKS WITHOUT THAT LIABILITY PROTECTION.

ORLANDO AREA LAWMAKERS SUPPORT THE PROJECT SAYING IT WILL BRING CLEANER TRANSPORTATION TO THE REGION AND EASE HIGHWAY

CONGESTION.

OPPONENTS BELIEVE IT GIVES CSX TOO MUCH PROTECTION FROM ACCIDENTS AND CREATES TOO MUCH FREIGHT TRAIN TRAFFIC IN LAKELAND.

>> THERE'S A SHROUD OF SECRECY THAT SEEMS TO HAVE FOLLOWED THIS DEAL UP UNTIL THE LAST COUPLE OF MONTHS PRIOR TO SESSION WHEN IT HAS COME FORWARD.

>> BUT THE ISSUE TODAY WAS NOT NECESSARILY WHETHER IT'S A GOOD OR BAD BUDGET DEAL BUT IT WAS THE ISSUE ON LIABILITY. I THINK THERE'S A LOT OF QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STATE ASSUMING LIABILITY FOR A PRIVATE CORPORATION.

>> THE BENEFIT IS THE QUALITY-OF-LIFE IMPROVEMENT TO THE PEOPLE THAT LIVE IN THE I-4 CORRIDOR.

THAT'S WHY WE'RE DOING THIS.

>> LET'S START WITH THAT.

IT'S A QUALITY-OF-LIFE ISSUE FOR PEOPLE ON THE I-4 CORRIDOR, AND, THEREFORE, IT'S A GOOD IDEA.

>> YEAH, THAT WAS ONE OF OUR ESTEEMED LEGISLATORS, I NOTICED.

I SUPPORT DEVELOPING ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION.

I HAVE BEEN A BIG SUPPORTER OF THAT.

VERSUS BUILDING MORE HIGHWAYS OR WIDENING THE STREETS AND MAKING BIGGER INTERSTATES, SO I WOULD SUPPORT DEVELOPING MORE RAIL TRAFFIC, PARTICULARLY IN LIGHT OF US APPROACHING, PROBABLY BEFORE THE END OF THE YEAR, \$5 A GALLON IN GASOLINE

AND SOME OTHER ISSUES.

BUT THIS DEAL SMELLS REALLY BADLY.

THERE ARE PARTICULAR PEOPLE WHO ARE SERVING IN THE STATE LEGISLATURE RIGHT NOW WHO WOULD BENEFIT AND PROFIT FROM THIS.

THAT'S ONE OF THE ISSUES I BELIEVE THAT HAS BEEN BROUGHT OUT IN A NUMBER OF PAPERS STATEWIDE.

BUT THE OTHER ISSUE IS, WHY WOULD THE STATE OF FLORIDA RELEASE ANYONE FROM LIABILITIES THAT MAY BE CREATED?

I THINK THE LEGISLATION EVEN READS REGARDLESS OF WHO CAUSED THE ACCIDENT, SO THEY COULD ACTUALLY -- CSX COULD BE AT FAULT IN A LOSS OF LIFE OR PROPERTY DAMAGE AND NOT BE HELD LIABLE FOR THAT.

INSTEAD, THE STATE TAKES IT ON, TO ME, PARTICULARLY WE'RE TALKING ABOUT CUTTING BUDGETS TO EVERY CONCEIVABLE AREA IN OUR STATE, AND WE'RE GOING TO TAKE ON A LIABILITY FOR A COMPANY, I WOULD ONLY TAKE THAT ON IF WE'RE GOING TO TAKE ON A PROPORTIONATE SHARE OF THE PROFITS.

>> VICKIE, THE TRIBUNE EDITORIAL BOARD THIS WEEK CAME OUT WITH A VERY STRONG EDITORIAL AGAINST THE DEAL.

ONE OF THE THINGS THAT YOU GUYS POINTED OUT WAS THAT THE STATE DOESN'T HAVE ANY CURRENT APPRAISALS OF THE PROPERTY THAT IT'S PROPOSING TO BUY.

>> YEAH.

THEY ARE USING VERY OLD NUMBERS.

AS WE ALL KNOW IN FLORIDA, TIMES HAVE CHANGED.

YOU'VE GOT TO KEEP THINGS CURRENT, AND YOU HAVE TO DEAL,
OBVIOUSLY, IN AN ERA WHEN WE DON'T HAVE A LOT OF MONEY, WE
CAN'T JUST THROW IT AROUND, YOU HAVE TO DEAL IN NUMBERS THAT
ARE REALISTIC.

AND THAT DIDN'T SEEM TO BE A PART OF THIS DEAL.

>> WHAT HAPPENED TO FISCAL PRUDENCE IN TALLAHASSEE?

>> I DON'T KNOW.

[LAUGHTER]

>> GONE DOWN A DIFFERENT TRACK, OBVIOUSLY.

>> ERNEST, IS THIS A GOOD DEAL FOR THE PEOPLE ON THE I-4
CORRIDOR?

>> I THINK IT'S A GOOD DEAL FOR ORLANDO.

BUT, YOU KNOW, LAKELAND IS ALSO PART OF THE I-4 CORRIDOR,
AND THIS PLAN WOULD DRIVE MORE FREIGHT TRAIN TRAFFIC INTO
LAKELAND, PARTICULARLY DOWNTOWN LAKELAND.

AND I KNOW A LOT OF THE LAKELAND RESIDENTS AREN'T HAPPY
ABOUT IT.

USING THE CSX RAILS FOR A COMMUTER TRAIN MAKES A LOT OF
SENSE, BUT IT HAS TO BE DONE THE RIGHT WAY.

AND WE NEED THE THREAT OF LIABILITY TO MAKE SURE CSX IS
GOING TO DO ALL THAT THEY CAN TO MAKE SURE THIS IS DONE THE
RIGHT WAY.

>> EXACTLY.

>> IF THEY DON'T HAVE THAT THREAT, THEY DON'T HAVE TO BE

DILIGENT ABOUT IMPLEMENTING IT.

>> CAN YOU IMAGINE THE CONSUMER CONFIDENCE ON, HEY, GET ON OUR COMMUTER TRAIN, IT'S RUNNING ALONGSIDE FREIGHT TRAINS, AND IF SOMETHING BAD HAPPENS, WE DON'T HAVE TO PAY THE BILL.

>> DON'T CALL US.

>> YEAH, I MEAN, WHO REALLY WANTS TO GET ON THAT COMMUTER TRAIN KNOWING THAT CSX ISN'T REALLY GOING TO BE HELD RESPONSIBLE IF THERE IS AN ACCIDENT?

>> ADAM, WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE DEAL?

>> FIRST, I WANT TO ADDRESS IT FROM TWO DIFFERENT ANGLES. ONE, THIS INSIDIOUS SENSE OF CONSPIRACY.

THERE HAVE BEEN DOZENS AND DOZENS OF PUBLIC MEETINGS THAT WENT INTO THIS BEFORE IT HIT THE PRESS AS A MAJOR ISSUE. IT'S NOT LIKE IT WAS SUDDENLY SPRUNG ON THE PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY THE PEOPLE AROUND POLK COUNTY AND LAKELAND WHERE THERE'S BEEN SOME FUSS RECENTLY ABOUT POTENTIAL TRAFFIC, AND THERE HAVE BEEN ACTUALLY RESOLUTIONS TO THAT AND REMEDIES PROPOSED FOR THAT.

AND NUMBER TWO IS, THIS IDEA -- ERNEST SAID IT'S ONLY ORLANDO THAT THEY WOULD LOVE IT, ABSOLUTELY, WELL, THE TAMPA BAY PARTNERSHIP ENDORSES THIS.

SO HAVE A LOT OF OTHER PEOPLE ON THIS SIDE OF THE I-4 CORRIDOR BECAUSE IT'S PART OF A COMPREHENSIVE EFFORT OF TRYING TO GET 25 TO 50 YEARS AHEAD OF THE GAME.

IF WE DON'T, WE'LL ALL BE SITTING IN CARS WITH OR WITHOUT

GAS AT \$10 A GALLON.

>> THAT'S THE QUESTION, DOES THIS DEAL MAKE A MASS TRANSIT,
RAIL TRANSIT IN THE TAMPA BAY AREA MORE LIKELY?

>> IT DOES.

IT DOES.

IT ALL CONNECTS TOGETHER.

AND, FRANKLY, ONE OF THE REASONS I THINK THERE'S SOME
CREDIBILITY THAT'S IN FAVOR OF THIS, ESPECIALLY ON THE
ORLANDO SIDE, THEY HAVE DONE A HECK OF A GOOD JOB IN RECENT
YEARS OF REALLY DOING IT RIGHT.

AND I THINK THAT THIS PROCESS HAS BEEN LOST IN HEADLINES OF
CONSPIRACY AND INNUENDO, AND WHAT IS GOING TO BE LOST BEYOND
ALL OF THAT IS AN ANSWER, A MASS TRANSIT ANSWER TO SOMETHING
THAT'S GOING TO BEDEVIL ALL OF US FOR A GENERATION.

>> VICKIE, IF THE STATE PAYS CSX \$420 MILLION, DOES THAT SET
A PRECEDENT FOR WHAT THE TAMPA BAY AREA WOULD HAVE TO PAY
CSX?

AND IF SO, AREN'T WE TALKING ABOUT AN ENORMOUS AMOUNT OF
MONEY BECAUSE THE TRACK LINES ARE LONGER OVER HERE?

>> OH, YEAH, AND THAT REMAINS THE UNANSWERED QUESTION IS
REALLY HOW DO WE PAY FOR IT.

CLEARLY, IF CSX GETS THIS DEAL, THE NEXT COMPANY OR THE NEXT
DEAL THAT COMES ALONG WILL WANT AN EVEN BETTER ONE.

I MEAN, THAT'S THE WAY THOSE THINGS WORK.

SO, UNLESS WE'VE GOT A LONG-RANGE PLAN ON HOW TO PAY FOR IT,

YOU KNOW, IT'S GOING TO BE THE BIG UNANSWERED QUESTION.

>> WE SHOULD ALSO REMOVE SOME OF THE CONSPIRATORIAL THOUGHTS BEHIND THIS IF SOME OF THE PLAYERS, LIKE SENATOR ALEXANDER, WERE TO REMOVE THEMSELVES FROM THE VOTE.

YOU KNOW, IT'S COMMON IN GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS AT ALL LEVELS TO REMOVE YOURSELF WHERE THERE'S A POSSIBLE CONFLICT OF INTEREST.

I HAVEN'T HEARD ANYTHING ABOUT ANYBODY WHO HAS BEEN ACCUSED OF BEING A BENEFICIARY OF ANY OF THIS VOLUNTEERING TO REMOVE THEMSELVES FROM THE DEBATE AND THE VOTE.

>> ACTUALLY, HE HAS VOLUNTEERED TO RECUSE HIMSELF FROM ANY VOTES IF IT WOULD HELP FURTHER THE PROGRESS HERE.

AND THAT'S WHERE WE GET ALL STUCK.

IF WE DO NOTHING RIGHT NOW, WE'RE GOING TO HAVE A DEFICIT IN INFRASTRUCTURE THAT'S SO STAGGERING, ALL OF US WILL BE WALKING AROUND AS OPPOSED TO DRIVING AROUND.

>> I DON'T THINK WE'RE SUGGESTING DO NOTHING.

I THINK THE CSX RAILS ARE THE WAY TO GO.

WE'RE JUST SAYING DO IT THE RIGHT WAY.

AND DO IT SO THE STATE IS AS BIG A WINNER AS CSX.

>> I AGREE.

BUT STILL THERE WILL BE THE NEED FOR A PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP.

ACTUALLY, GOING OUT TO WHAT YOU SAID INITIALLY, SARA, THERE HAS TO BE A PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP.

WE CANNOT AFFORD AS THE PUBLIC WHAT HAS TO BE DONE OUT THERE.

SO THERE WILL BE PRIVATE INTEREST INVOLVED, WE JUST HAVE TO MAKE SURE THAT THEY ARE ALL ABOVEBOARD AND DISCLOSED.

>> THAT WILL HAVE TO BE THE LAST WORD.

>>> A PROPOSED LAW ALLOWING TEACHERS AND STUDENTS TO QUESTION THE SCIENTIFIC THEORY OF EVOLUTION PASSED THE STATE SENATE THIS WEEK.

CRITICS SAY THE SO-CALLED ACADEMIC FREEDOM BILL OPENS THE DOOR TO TEACHING CREATIONISM AND INTELLIGENT DESIGN IN THE CLASSROOM.

MEANWHILE, THE HOUSE AND SENATE VERSIONS OF THE BILL DIFFER AND ONLY A FEW DAYS REMAIN TO REACH A COMPROMISE.

THE SENATE BILL NARROWLY PASSED AFTER HEATED DEBATE.

>> AND WE COULDN'T GET AN ANSWER, A YES OR NO ANSWER.

WE KEPT BEING REFERRED BACK TO THE LANGUAGE OF THE BILL BECAUSE CASE LAW CLEARLY SAYS THAT INTELLIGENT DESIGN WOULD NOT BE CONSTITUTIONAL.

SO INSTEAD OF DESCRIBING -- INSTEAD OF USING THE WORDS "INTELLIGENT DESIGN," WE MERELY DESCRIBE INTELLIGENT DESIGN.

>> THIS IS A FREEDOM OF SPEECH ISSUE.

THIS IS HIGHER ORDER CRITICAL THINKING, AND I DARESAY A LEGITIMATE GOOD SCIENTIST WOULDN'T BE AFRAID OF LEGITIMATE CRITICISM.

>> SO, VICKIE IS THERE ENOUGH TIME TO HAVE THE HOUSE AND

SENATE VERSIONS BE RECONCILED?

>> OH, YEAH, THERE'S ALWAYS TIME.

I DON'T KNOW IF THERE IS -- IF IT'S REALLY A REALITY THAT COULD HAPPEN.

I MEAN, THESE ARE THE PERFECT EXAMPLES OF WHY YOU DON'T WANT THE LEGISLATURE SETTING YOUR EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS BECAUSE IT COMES DOWN TO LAST-MINUTE DEALS AND BARGAINING THIS FOR THAT AND, YOU KNOW, THEY ALWAYS HAVE TIME.

IF IT'S IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO SOMEONE IN LEADERSHIP THAT THIS HAPPEN, THERE WILL BE TIME TO GET THESE BILLS RECONCILED.

>> ADAM, TO WHAT DEGREE IS POLITICS INVOLVED HERE, AND TO WHAT DEGREE IS ACADEMIC FREEDOM INVOLVED HERE?

>> I'M NOT SURE.

SAY BOTH, OBVIOUSLY.

IT'S A SHAME THAT WE'RE HAVING THIS DEBATE AT A TIME WHEN SO MANY OTHER THINGS -- WE ALL TALKED ABOUT THIS BEFORE THE SHOW, BUT SOME OF THE OTHER THINGS THAT HAVE TAKEN CENTER STAGE, AND WE'RE TRYING TO ARGUE THROUGH THE SUBJECTS OF CREATIONISM AND EVOLUTION AT THE TIME WHEN WE HAVE PEOPLE THAT ARE LITERALLY FACING VERY, VERY TOUGH TIMES.

I THINK IT'S THE WRONG SIGNAL, THE WRONG TIME AND THE WRONG DEBATE.

>>> SARA, POLITICS OR ACTUAL ACADEMIC FREEDOM?

>> I LOOK AT IT MORE AS POLITICS.

THE WHOLE TERM "ACADEMIC FREEDOM," I MEAN, WHAT IS NOT FREE

ABOUT OUR ACADEMICS?

BUT I HAVE TO GO BACK TO WHAT VICKIE SAID.

THE STATE LEGISLATURE SHOULD NOT BE SETTING OUR EDUCATIONAL POLICIES.

THIS IS AN ISSUE THAT IS, IN MY OPINION, AT THIS POINT IN TIME, FRIVOLOUS TO EVEN WASTE OUR TIME WITH.

IT'S FRIVOLOUS TO WASTE THE INK THAT THE NEWSPAPERS ARE USING TO PRINT THESE STORIES.

AND WE REALLY NEED TO MOVE ON AND DO -- TAKE CARE OF THE BUSINESS OF THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF FLORIDA THAT'S IMPORTANT AND MEANS SOMETHING TO OUR EVERYDAY LIVES.

I THINK THIS IS RIDICULOUS.

>> ERNEST, HAS SENATOR STORMS CONVINCINGLY PROVED THAT THERE IS A PROBLEM WITH TEACHERS NOT HAVING ACADEMIC FREEDOM OVER THIS ISSUE?

>> YOU KNOW, I DON'T THINK SHE HAS.

BUT I THINK THIS ISSUE KEEPS COMING UP BECAUSE THERE IS AT LEAST A VERY PASSIONATE SEGMENT.

I DON'T KNOW IF IT'S THE MAJORITY, BUT THERE CERTAINLY IS A PASSIONATE PART OF OUR STATE THAT CARES ABOUT THIS ISSUE, AND THAT'S WHY IT KEEPS COMING UP.

I KEEP HEARING THEM TALK ABOUT WHAT'S GOING TO BE TAUGHT IN THE CLASSROOM.

AND WHAT THEY NEED TO BE TALKING ABOUT IS WHAT'S GOING TO BE TAUGHT IN THE CLASSROOMS.

PLURAL .

WHAT IS BEING TAUGHT IN SCIENCE AND WHAT IS BEING TAUGHT IN SOCIAL STUDIES.

CREATIONISM, INTELLIGENT DESIGN, THOSE ARE THINGS THAT CAN BE DISCUSSED IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES' CLASSROOM.

IT'S NOT SCIENCE.

IN THE SCIENCE CLASSROOM, THE SCIENCE TEACHERS NEED TO TALK ABOUT SCIENCE.

AND I AM NOT SURE HOW MUCH FREEDOM THEY SHOULD HAVE.

THEY SHOULD BE HELD TO A STANDARD OF TALKING AND TEACHING SCIENCE IN THE SCIENCE CLASSROOM.

>> WHAT THEY SHOULD BE TALKING ABOUT IS WE DON'T EVEN HAVE ENOUGH TEACHERS QUALIFIED TO TEACH SCIENCE AT ALL IN OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

>> EXACTLY.

>> IF THE LEGISLATURE REALLY CARES ABOUT THE SCIENCE THAT OUR KIDS ARE LEARNING, WHAT THEY WILL BE DOING IS PUTTING MONEY INTO PROGRAMS THAT PREPARE PEOPLE TO GO ON TO BE SCIENCE TEACHERS AND TO BE VERY HIGHLY QUALIFIED WORLD-CLASS SCIENCE TEACHERS, NOT QUIBBLING OVER ONE PART OF ONE LESSON THAT MIGHT APPEAR IN A SCIENCE CLASS SOME DAY.

>> YOU KNOW, AND SARA, ONE OTHER THING THAT CAME UP THIS WEEK, SOME LEGISLATORS PROPOSED OR HAD BEEN PROPOSING A RELIGIOUS LICENSE PLATE THAT IS PRETTY EXPLICITLY CHRISTIAN. I MEAN, ONE DENOMINATION.

WHAT'S GOING ON IN TALLAHASSEE?

>> AGAIN, I THINK THESE ARE SMALL GROUPS OF INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE PUSHING THEIR PERSONAL AGENDAS AND TAKING UP THE TIME AND EFFORTS OF LAWMAKERS.

YOU KNOW, IT'S FAIRLY EASY FOR ANY GROUP IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA REGARDLESS OF WHAT YOU REPRESENT TO GO TO TALLAHASSEE AND FIND SOMEBODY OUT OF THE 160 REPRESENTATIVES THAT WILL HELP YOU FLOAT YOUR IDEA.

AGAIN, WE'VE GOT SERIOUS ISSUES.

WE'VE GOT A LOT OF PROBLEMS IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA, NONE OF WHICH REVOLVES AROUND ANYTHING ON A LICENSE PLATE.

SO, UM, I THINK, AGAIN, IT'S POLITICS.

>>> OKAY.

WELL, FLORIDA LAWMAKERS AGREED THIS WEEK TO ADD \$300 MILLION FROM THE TRUST FUND DOLLARS INTO NEXT YEAR'S BUDGET TO MAINTAIN HEALTH CARE PROGRAMS FOR THOUSANDS OF LOW-INCOME SENIORS AND SERIOUSLY ILL PEOPLE.

LEGISLATIVE LEADERS AGREED TO WITHDRAW \$300 MILLION OUT OF THE LAWTON CHILES ENDOWMENT FUND, AN ACCOUNT CREATED IN THE 1990s USING TOBACCO INDUSTRY SETTLEMENT MONEY.

ORDINARILY, LAWMAKERS FINANCE HEALTH PROGRAMS USING ONLY THE INTEREST EARNED ON THE ROUGHLY 2 BILLION-DOLLAR FUND, BUT NOW THEY WILL TAP INTO THE FUND'S PRINCIPAL.

GOOD USE OF THE TRUST FUND MONEY, TAP INTO THAT PRINCIPAL?

>> I'M ABOUT TO SOUND LIKE A DEMOCRAT, WHICH I HATE TO SAY

THIS, ABSOLUTELY.

I MEAN, WHAT MORE EVIDENCE DO WE NEED?

ALL THE DRASTIC CUTS THAT HAVE BEEN PROPOSED ACROSS THE BOARD IN HOSPITAL CARE, NURSING HOME CARE, CARE FOR THE MEDICALLY NEEDY THAN THIS.

THANK GOD THEY DECIDED TO RELEASE THE 300 MILLION.

AND I HOPE THEY EVEN GO FURTHER, IF NECESSARY, IN TERMS OF OTHER RAINY DAY FUNDS.

BECAUSE IF THIS ISN'T A RAINY DAY, I DON'T KNOW WHAT IS.

THE NURSING HOME INDUSTRY, FOR INSTANCE, WAS FACING AT ONE POINT NEARLY 300 MILLION IN CUTS.

NOW I THINK THEY ARE DOWN TO 160-SOME MILLION AND THEY ARE TRYING TO GET LOWER THAN THAT.

SEVEN YEARS AGO, THEY PASSED NEW LEGISLATION THAT INCREASED NURSING STANDARDS, AND NOW WE'RE AMONG THE BEST -- NURSING HOMES IN FLORIDA, BELIEVE IT OR NOT, ARE AMONG THE BEST IN THE NATION.

WHAT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT IS ROLLING BACK THE CLOCK, KEEPING THE STANDARDS, BUT SAYING, OH, BY THE WAY, WE PROMISED YOU ALL THE MONEY, TOO, IT ISN'T HAPPENING, SO FIGURE IT OUT.

>> AND ADAM, WOULD YOU ENVISION, THOUGH, GIVEN THE PROBLEMS THAT ARE FORECAST NEXT YEAR THAT THEY MIGHT ALSO HAVE TO GO UNDER THE TRUST FUND PRINCIPAL AGAIN NEXT YEAR IN ORDER TO PAY FOR SOME OF THESE PROGRAMS?

>> THEY MAY.

CLEARLY THEY MAY HAVE TO DO THAT.

AND I ADVOCATE THEY SHOULD, IF NECESSARY, BECAUSE, AGAIN, I THINK THAT'S WHAT THESE RAINY DAY FUNDS ARE ABOUT.

WE DID POLLING, ACTUALLY, AND SAW IN POLLING THAT PEOPLE BY PRETTY CLEAR MAJORITIES WERE IN FAVOR IN TERMS OF VITAL SERVICES, AND THIS IS A VITAL SERVICE, HEALTH, OF RAIDING RAINY DAY FUNDS.

AND I THINK IN GOOD TIMES, THOSE OUGHT TO BE THE TIMES WHEN WE SHOULD INCREASE THE RESERVOIRS FOR THESE KINDS OF MOMENTS.

>> SARA, IS THIS THE RIGHT TIME TO GO INTO THE PRINCIPAL?

>> I ABSOLUTELY THINK IT IS.

WE ARE, AGAIN, FACING BRUTAL CUTS TO THE NEEDIEST IN OUR STATE.

AND I THINK A BIGGER PICTURE WOULD BE TO, YOU KNOW, WE'RE ALWAYS REACTING.

I THINK TO BE PROACTIVE, WHEN THEY ARE ESTABLISHING THESE FUNDS AND THESE ENDOWMENTS, THIS IS NOT THE ONLY FUND IN TALLAHASSEE WHERE THERE'S A BUNCH OF MONEY SITTING THERE. A LOT OF THEM ARE KEPT VERY QUIET.

BUT WE NEED TO LOOK AT ALL OF THESE TYPES OF RAINY DAY FUNDS.

IT'S RAINING, GUYS.

IT'S RAINING CATS AND DOGS OUT THERE.

>>> WELL, FINALLY EACH WEEK, WE ASK OUR PANEL ABOUT ANOTHER

STORY FROM THE WEEK OR ON THE HORIZON WHICH AFFECTS PEOPLE
HERE IN WEST CENTRAL FLORIDA.

ERNEST, YOUR OTHER BIG STORY OF THE WEEK?

>> ROB, I GOT A CHANCE TO SEE THE RAYS PLAY AT THE WIDE
WORLD OF DISNEY.

IT WAS A GORGEOUS NIGHT.

I ABSOLUTELY LOVED IT.

AND DESPITE ALL OF THE PROBLEMS PEOPLE CAN CITE WITH THE
RAYS' PROPOSAL FOR A NEW STADIUM IN DOWNTOWN ST. PETE, I
THOUGHT IT WAS A GREAT NIGHT FOR THEM TO SELL FOLKS ON THE
IDEA OF HAVING BASEBALL OUTDOORS.

>> SO YOU LOVE BASEBALL OUTDOORS.

>> IN APRIL, I DEFINITELY LOVE IT.

CHECK BACK WITH ME IN AUGUST.

>> OKAY.

VICKIE, YOUR OTHER BIG STORY?

>> WELL, THE ONE THAT I THINK HAS CAUGHT A LOT OF PEOPLE'S
ATTENTION IS THE WORLDWIDE RICE SHORTAGE AND THE HOARDING OF
RICE.

OF COURSE, HERE IN TAMPA, OUR GREAT TRADITION IS THE HUGE
PLATE OF CHICKEN AND YELLOW RICE.

I JUST HOPE PEOPLE OUT THERE BE AWARE OF THE STORY, AND WHEN
THEY GO TO THEIR FAVORITE CUBAN RESTAURANT, IF THEY GET A
SMALLER PORTION, IT'S OKAY.

NOBODY NEEDS TO EAT THAT MUCH RICE.

TAKE IT EASY ON YOUR LOCAL RESTAURANTEUR.

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

>> I CHANGED MY MIND.

I HAVE TO HUG THE TAMPA RAYS.

WITH A PITCHING STAFF ERA OF RELIEF PITCHERS UNDER THREE,
ALMOST ALL OF THEM, WHICH IS PROBABLY THE FIRST TIME IN
HISTORY, IF THE MANAGEMENT OF THE TAMPA RAYS CAN MEASURE UP
AND PITCH JUST AS WELL AS RELIEVERS ARE RIGHT NOW TO GET
THIS NEW STADIUM, THEY MAY HAVE A SHOT.

I'M TELLING YOU, IT'S A VERY DIFFICULT PITCH WITH A LOT OF
THINGS AHEAD OF THEM.

A LOT OF BATTERS AHEAD OF THEM.

>> SARA, YOU'RE OTHER BIG STORY OF THE WEEK?

>> WELL, MY BIG STORY OF THE WEEK HAS TO DO WITH STATE PIE,
BULL TESTICLES AND THE STATE SONG.

AND, QUITE HONESTLY, WE HAVE WASTED A TREMENDOUS AMOUNT OF
VERY VALUABLE TIME IN TALLAHASSEE.

IT SEEMS KIND OF FUNNY, AND I GUESS IT WOULD BE A LITTLE BIT
MORE HUMOROUS, EXCEPT IT'S NOT A JOKE.

THE LEGISLATURE IS TAXED WITH ONE JOB A YEAR, AND THAT'S TO
BALANCE THE STATE BUDGET.

USING TIME AND TAXPAYERS' DOLLARS WHEN WE HAVE IMPORTANT
ISSUES, PEOPLE ARE LOSING THEIR HOMES, LOSING JOBS,
GASOLINE, AGAIN, AT \$4 A GALLON, WE SHOULDN'T BE EVEN
DISCUSSING THINGS LIKE A COWBOY IN OCALA WHO FINDS SOME

HUMOR IN HAVING COW GLANDS ON THE BUMPER OF HIS CAR.

I MEAN, IT'S MORE OF A WASTE OF TIME THAN IT IS HELPFUL AT ANY POINT.

SO I WOULD JUST LIKE TO SEND A MESSAGE TO THE LEGISLATORS FOR THEM TO DO THEIR JOB AND LEAVE THE REST OF THIS ALONE.

>> DO THE BUDGET.

WHAT DID OUR STATE PIE END UP BEING?

>> I'M NOT EVEN SURE.

I MEAN, I KNOW THEY PROBABLY ATE A LOT OF PIE, BUT, AGAIN, CHANGING THE STATE SONG, CHANGING THE STATE PIE, TELLING PEOPLE WHAT THEY CAN HANG FROM THE BUMPER OF THEIR TRUCK, THIS IS NOT WHAT THE STATE LEGISLATURE IS ABOUT, AND IT'S DISINGENUOUS FOR US TO BE --

>> I WOULD GUESS RHUBARB.

>> RHUBARB WOULD BE APPROPRIATE.

>> THANKS, PANELISTS.

THANK YOU, SARA ROMEO, ADAM GOODMAN, VICKIE CHACHERE, AND ERNEST HOOPER.

AND THANK YOU FOR WATCHING "FLORIDA THIS WEEK."

WE WANT TO HEAR YOUR COMMENTS ABOUT THE PROGRAM.

SEND AN E-MAIL TO FTW@WEDU.ORG.

OR CALL OUR TOLL-FREE LINE AT 800-335-9338.

YOU CAN WATCH THIS PROGRAM ONLINE AT THE WEDU WEB SITE BEGINNING EARLY NEXT WEEK.

PLEASE SHARE THAT ADDRESS WITH YOUR FRIENDS AROUND THE STATE

WHO FOLLOW FLORIDA POLITICS.

THAT'S WEDU.ORG.

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

FROM ALL OF US AT WEDU HAVE A GREAT WEEKEND!

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