

"FLORIDA THIS WEEK"

MAY 9, 2008

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

>>> COMING UP NEXT, WE'LL RATE THE BEST AND WORST DECISIONS BY THE JUST-COMPLETED SESSION OF THE FLORIDA LEGISLATURE.

ANOTHER SUPERDELEGATE FROM FLORIDA ENDORSES BARACK OBAMA.

FLORIDA HISPANIC DEMOCRATS NOW OUTNUMBER HISPANIC

REPUBLICANS, AND WHAT WILL FLORIDA'S PROPOSED GAY MARRIAGE

BAN ACTUALLY OUTLAW?

POLITICAL INSIGHTS NEXT ON "FLORIDA THIS WEEK."

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

AND NOW, MODERATOR ROB LOREI.

>> WELCOME BACK.

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

JEREMY WALLACE IS A POLITICAL REPORTER AT THE "SARASOTA HERALD TRIBUNE."

TERRY KEMPLE IS PRESIDENT OF THE COMMUNITY ISSUES COUNCIL  
AND A REPUBLICAN.

AND DR. KEITH BERRY IS A PROFESSOR AT HILLSBOROUGH COMMUNITY  
COLLEGE AND A DEMOCRAT.

THANK YOU FOR COMING.

GOOD TO SEE YOU.

WELL, THE STATE LEGISLATURE WRAPPED UP ITS REGULAR SESSION  
LAST WEEK WITH FALLING SALES TAX REVENUE.

THE HOUSE AND SENATE CUT MILLIONS FROM NEXT YEAR'S BUDGET.  
HARDEST HIT WERE EDUCATION, HEALTH CARE AND SERVICES FOR THE  
POOR.

AMONG THE WINNERS WAS PRISON CONSTRUCTION.

GOVERNOR CRIST CONGRATULATED LEGISLATORS WHEN IT WAS OVER.

WELL, JEREMY, LET'S START WITH YOU.

WHO WERE THE BIGGEST WINNERS, BIGGEST LOSERS IN YOUR MIND?

>> WELL, IT SEEMS LIKE WE HAVE TWO CATEGORIES THIS YEAR.

INSTEAD OF WINNERS, IT'S LOSERS AND NOT-SO-BAD LOSERS.

WELL, IT'S BEEN TEN YEARS SINCE THEY'VE HAD TO ACTUALLY WORK  
WITHIN A BUDGET THAT WAS GOING TO BE LESS, SO THERE CLEARLY  
WAS A LOT LESS THEY COULD DO.

BUT THEY DID GET A COUPLE OF THINGS ACCOMPLISHED THAT I  
THINK MAYBE SURPRISED SOME PEOPLE.

ONE, THEY WERE ABLE TO EXPAND THE FLORIDA FOREVER PROGRAM,  
THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAM UNTIL 2020, AND I KNOW THEY DID  
SOME WORK ON EDUCATION.

THEY WERE ABLE TO TACKLE FCAT.

THEY MADE IT LESS OF A DETERMINANT FOR SOME OF THESE SCHOOLS, AT LEAST REDUCE THE WEIGHT OF IT.

ANOTHER THING THAT WAS REALLY IMPORTANT, I THINK, FROM OUR PERSPECTIVE DOWN IN SARASOTA WAS THEY CHANGED THE RULES FOR TEACHERS TO REQUIRE MORE ETHICAL CONDUCT.

NOW NO LONGER CAN SCHOOL DISTRICTS PASS THE BUCK ON, YOU KNOW, TEACHERS WHO WERE CHARGED WITH SEXUAL HARASSMENT ISSUES OR OTHER PERSONAL ISSUES.

IT WAS AN ISSUE THAT REALLY CREATED OUT -- THAT CAME OUT OF SARASOTA.

OUR NEWSPAPER, THE HERALD TRIBUNE, WE DID A TWO-YEAR SERIES ON THIS.

JUST TO SEE THE LEGISLATURE RESPOND TO THAT, PUTTING SOME NEW RULES TO PROTECT KIDS, YOU KNOW, THAT'S ANOTHER ONE OF THE UNSUNG ISSUES.

>> BIG ISSUE HERE IN HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY, TOO.

>> YEAH, IT WAS A STATEWIDE ISSUE.

YOU HAD SCHOOL DISTRICTS THAT HAVE PROBLEMS WITH A TEACHER. THEY REACH A CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT AND PASS THEM ON TO ANOTHER SCHOOL DISTRICT UNBEKNOWNST TO THE NEXT GROUP OF KIDS.

NOW WE HAVE A SITUATION WHERE THEY DID AT LEAST ADDRESS ISSUES EVEN WITH THE FINANCIAL --

>> JEREMY, AS YOU'RE TALKING, THOSE ALL SOUND POSITIVE.

>> YEAH.

>> THEY SOUND LIKE DESPITE THE LEAN BUDGET YEAR, POSITIVE THINGS CAME OUT.

>> YEAH, AND CERTAINLY FOR A COUPLE OF SPECIFIC BILLS, CERTAINLY.

THE OVERALL CUT IN SERVICES THAT PEOPLE ARE GOING TO EXPERIENCE.

YOU JUST LOOK AT THE IMPACT ON EDUCATION FUNDING.

THAT'S CLEARLY A BIG NEGATIVE RIGHT NOW.

WE DON'T REALLY QUITE KNOW HOW SCHOOLS WILL GET FUNDED AT THE LEVEL THAT THEY ARE NOW.

EVERY SCHOOL DISTRICT PERSONNEL PERSON I'VE SPOKEN TO SAID IT'S ALL COMING BACK ON THEM SOMEHOW.

AND HOW WE'LL MANAGE TO HAVE THE SAME -- OR PER PUPIL SPENDING WILL BE DOWN.

IT WILL BE REALLY DIFFICULT FOR TEACHERS TO NAVIGATE IN THAT SYSTEM.

>> MANATEE COUNTY HAS TO CUT \$21 MILLION OUT OF ITS BUDGET. THERE WILL BE PROTEST BY TEACHERS IN THE COMING WEEK.

>> ABSOLUTELY.

AND I THINK THERE WAS SOME CONCERN, YOU KNOW -- I KNOW ONE OF THE THINGS THAT DIDN'T PASS, THEY WERE GOING TO DO SOME LIGHTENING UP OF THE CLASSROOM SIZE INITIATIVE THERE TO SEE IF THEY COULD SAVE MONEY THAT WAY.

THAT NEVER MADE IT THROUGH.

THOSE TYPES OF INITIATIVES ARE GOING TO BECOME MORE AND MORE APPEALING TO THE STATE LEGISLATORS AS THEY LOOK FOR AREAS TO CUT.

AND I THINK IN THIS CASE, YOU KNOW, EDUCATION FUNDING IS CERTAINLY ONE OF THE BIGGEST LOSERS.

>> KEITH, YOUR BIGGEST WINNERS AND LOSERS AS A RESULT OF THE SESSION?

>> WELL, THE LOSERS, OBVIOUSLY, THE ELDERLY, THE POOR. WINNERS, AGAIN, LIKE YOU SAY, WINNERS AND LOSERS, WITH REGARD TO FCAT, I THINK THAT'S A GREAT BOON TO REDUCE THE EMPHASIS ON THE FCAT.

I THINK THE FCAT WAS A COLOSSAL WASTE OF MONEY.

IT SHOULD BE ABOLISHED REALLY.

THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH TESTING.

BUT WE HAVE PROFESSIONALS IN THE CLASSROOM WHO CAN TEST.

WE CAN DO THAT.

SOME PEOPLE MADE A LOT OF MONEY OFF OF THE FCAT CREATING THAT AND DOING THAT.

ALL THE MONEY THAT WE SPEND ON THAT CAN BE USED FOR TEACHER SALARIES, FOR ENHANCING, INSTRUCTION, MAKING SURE THAT TEACHERS ARE IN THE PROPER FIELD THAT -- PARDON ME, THAT THEY ARE TEACHING, ET CETERA.

BUT ONE OF THE THINGS I FIND IS THAT THIS IS ALL COMING BACK TO PASS FROM THE PAST LEGISLATURES, SQUANDERING MONEY AND OPPORTUNITY.

FOR EXAMPLE, THE GIMMICKS, LIKE A TAX-FREE WEEK ON BACK-TO-SCHOOL SUPPLIES, INCREMENTALLY, INDIVIDUALLY, THAT DIDN'T REALLY SAVE YOU A WHOLE LOT OF MONEY.

BUT WHEN YOU LOOK AT THE TOTALITY OF THE POT OF MONEY, THAT MONEY COULD BE USED FOR SOMETHING TO REALLY ENHANCE EDUCATION FOR EVERYBODY IN THE STATE.

ALL THESE KINDS OF GIMMICKS LIKE THAT, VERY MUCH LIKE THE GAS TAX HOLIDAY THING, ALL THOSE KINDS OF GIMMICKS COME BACK TO HAUNT US.

AGAIN, THE REDUCTION OF THE EMPHASIS ON THE FCAT WAS A POSITIVE MOVE.

ANOTHER LOSER, THOUGH, AGAIN, THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF FLORIDA, WE DID NOT CLOSE THE LOOPHOLE ON BUSINESSES THAT CAN BASICALLY TAKE THEIR TAX -- NOT PAY TAXES IN THE STATE AND PUT IT OFF IN ANOTHER STATE AND GET AWAY AND HAVE A LOOPHOLE WHERE THEY DON'T HAVE TO PAY TAXES IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA.

THAT I THINK SHOULD HAVE BEEN CLOSED.

>> TERRY, YOUR BIGGEST WINNERS AND LOSERS?

>> ACTUALLY, THE ONE THAT I WOULD LIKE TO MENTION IS BOTH A WINNER AND A LOSER.

THAT'S THE ACADEMIC FREEDOM ACT WHICH WOULD REALLY GIVE BOTH TEACHERS AND STUDENTS THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPLORE ALL OF THE SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE BOTH FOR AND AGAINST EVOLUTIONARY THEORY.

I SAY IT'S A WINNER BECAUSE IT DID PASS BOTH CHAMBERS.

THE HOUSE VOTED ONE VERSION, THE SENATE VOTED ANOTHER  
VERSION.

UNFORTUNATELY IT WAS A LOSER BECAUSE THEY COULDN'T RECONCILE  
THE VERSIONS.

SO THERE IS SOME -- AND I'VE HAD TEACHERS CONTACT ME OR  
ACTUALLY CONTACT THE COALITION OF PEOPLE WHO WERE WORKING ON  
THAT WHO HAVE SOME CONCERN ABOUT THEIR ABILITY TO REALLY  
EXPLORE THE FULL RANGE OF THOUGHT ON EVOLUTIONARY THEORY.

>> THAT WAS A BIG QUESTION THAT CAME UP WHEN SENATOR RONDA  
STORMS INTRODUCED THE MEASURE AND SHE SAID THERE ARE SOME  
TEACHERS THAT ARE NOT WILLING TO COME FORWARD TO SAY THAT  
THEIR ACADEMIC FREEDOM IS CHALLENGED BY THE STANDARD THAT WE  
TEACH EVOLUTION IN FLORIDA'S CLASSROOMS.

AND SOME PEOPLE ARE WONDERING WHETHER OR NOT YOU CAN  
ACTUALLY PROVE THAT THERE WAS SOME GREAT HARM BEING DONE TO  
FLORIDA'S SCIENCE TEACHERS.

>> WELL, THAT'S KIND OF A TWO-PART THING, ROB.

FIRST OF ALL, UP UNTIL THE NEW STANDARDS WERE ENACTED IN  
FEBRUARY, THERE WASN'T ANYTHING THAT SPECIFICALLY SAID  
EVOLUTION IN THE CURRICULUM GUIDELINES.

BUT EVEN WITH THAT BEING THE CASE, CHRISTIAN LAW  
ASSOCIATION, WHICH IS A LOCAL FIRST AMENDMENT LAW FIRM HAS  
HAD CALLS FROM TEACHERS, AND I GOT THE INFORMATION FROM  
THEM, BUT THEY'VE HAD CALLS FROM TEACHERS WHO HAVE BEEN

ASKING BEFORE THE NEW STANDARD PASSED ABOUT WHAT KIND OF PENALTIES THEY MIGHT SUFFER IF THEY TALKED ABOUT DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF EVOLUTIONARY THEORY.

NOW THAT THE STANDARD IS IN PLACE, THE STANDARD DOESN'T DEFINE WHAT EVOLUTION MEANS.

YOU KNOW, THERE IS NO DEFINITION.

SO IT'S REALLY -- THAT WAS REALLY ONE OF THE KEY THINGS THAT WAS A PROBLEM.

THE SECOND IS THAT IT DOGMATICALLY PRESENTS EVOLUTION AS IF IT'S A FULLY PROVEN FACT FOR THE FULL SWEEP OF EVOLUTIONARY THEORY.

>> TERRY, WOULD YOU EXPECT THIS ISSUE TO BE RAISED IN THE NEXT SESSION?

DO YOU THINK SENATOR STORMS WILL COME BACK WITH THE SAME MEASURE, SAME STORM?

>> I DON'T KNOW IF SENATOR STORMS WOULD DO IT.

I CERTAINLY HOPE SHE WOULD.

I DO SUSPECT IT WILL COME BACK IN THE NEXT SESSION OF THE LEGISLATURE.

>> JOE, YOUR OTHER BIG WINNERS AND LOSERS?

WE'LL MIGHT GO BACK, BUT LET'S GET JOE HERE.

>> LOSERS I THINK WERE SOME HEALTH CARE RELATED PROGRAMS AND EDUCATION.

I DON'T THINK IT WILL AFFECT TEACHERS.

WHAT I'M HEARING, SUPPORT STAFF.

THEY ARE GOING TO LOSE SOME OF THAT AT A LOT OF SCHOOLS.

WINNERS ARE PRISONS OR AS A LOT OF PEOPLE CALL THEM THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX.

THEY ARE PROJECTING THE PRISON POPULATION TO GROW BY ABOUT A THIRD IN THE NEXT TEN YEARS.

HOW THEY FIGURE THAT OUT, I DON'T KNOW.

BUT I THINK THAT'S THE BIG WINNER.

I THINK THE TAXPAYERS ARE LOSERS WITH THIS.

WE HAVE TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THIS.

IT'S NOT JUST IN FLORIDA, BUT A LOT OF STATES ARE SUFFERING.

THEY ARE BUILDING ALL THESE PRISONS WHICH NOT ONLY COST A LOT TO BUILD, YOU ALSO HAVE DEMAND, I MEAN, STAFF-WISE, NOT JUST INMATES, THEY ARE COSTLY, AND WE HAVE TO LOOK AT MAYBE CHANGING SOME LAWS, PARTICULARLY DRUG LAWS WHERE YOU STUFF THE PRISONS WITH THESE NONVIOLENT OFFENDERS AND, YOU KNOW, WE JUST CAN'T KEEP BUILDING THEM.

GRANTED, THE VIOLENT GUYS, SEND THEM UP THERE AND KEEP THEM THERE.

BUT WE HAVE TO LOOK AT THE LAWS, MAYBE REFORMING SOME OF THE LAWS.

>> THE GOVERNOR WAS IN FAVOR THIS YEAR OF A SUGGESTION FROM ONE OF OUR PANELISTS, HER NAME ESCAPES ME, BUT THE IDEA WAS TO PROVIDE DRUG REHABILITATION IN PRISON TO TRY TO GET THESE PEOPLE TO QUIT USING DRUGS.

SARA ROMEO, FORMER STATE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE DEMOCRATS.

THE GOVERNOR WAS IN FAVOR OF EXPANDING THAT PROGRAM.

>> YES, PROGRAMS LIKE THAT OR JUST, YOU KNOW -- I TALK TO A LOT OF POLICEMEN WHO ARE TIED UP WITH MARIJUANA POSSESSION. WE HAVE TO LOOK AT REFORMING THE LAWS.

NOT JUST BECAUSE WE WANT TO BE MORE LIBERAL ABOUT IT.

BECAUSE IT'S COSTLY.

THAT'S ALL.

>>> WELL, IN THE RACE TO THE WHITE HOUSE, ANOTHER FLORIDA SUPERDELEGATE HOUSE DEMOCRATIC LEADER DAN GELBER FROM MIAMI ENDORSED SENATOR BARACK OBAMA THIS WEEK.

SO TECHNICALLY, GELBER CANNOT VOTE AT THE CONVENTION BECAUSE OF THE SANCTIONS AGAINST FLORIDA.

OBAMA ALSO ANNOUNCED THREE MORE SUPERDELEGATE CONVERTS WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON, TWO FROM NORTH CAROLINA AND ONE FROM CALIFORNIA.

MEANTIME, SENATOR HILLARY CLINTON SENT OBAMA A LETTER THIS WEEK CALLING ON HIM TO WORK WITH HER ON ASSURING THAT THE FLORIDA AND MICHIGAN DELEGATIONS WILL VOTE IN SELECTING THE NOMINEE AT THIS SUMMER'S CONVENTION.

KEITH, AT THE END OF THIS WEEK, SEVERAL MORE SUPERDELEGATES CAME FORWARD AND SAID THEY WOULD SUPPORT SENATOR BARACK OBAMA.

DO YOU THINK THAT IT'S ALL OVER FOR HILLARY CLINTON?

>> YEAH.

IT WAS OVER WHEN SHE DIDN'T WIN INDIANA BY A LARGE -- A

LARGER MARGIN THAN SHE WANTED AND WHEN SHE LOST SO BADLY IN NORTH CAROLINA.

HER ARGUMENT IS REALLY A SPECIOUS ARGUMENT.

SHE'S SUGGESTING THAT SHE REALLY WANTS TO GET THE VOTES FROM FLORIDA AND MICHIGAN COUNTED YET, I, HILLARY CLINTON, DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT, PLEDGE I SHALL NOT CAMPAIGN OR PARTICIPATE IN ANY STATE WHICH SCHEDULES A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OR PRIMARY OR CAUCUS BEFORE FEBRUARY 5, 2008, EXCEPT FOR THE STATES OF IOWA, NEVADA, NEW HAMPSHIRE AND SOUTH CAROLINA AS CAMPAIGNING IS DEFINED BY RULES AND REGULATIONS OF THE DNC.

>> THAT WAS THE PLEDGE SHE SIGNED AT THE DNC.

>> SHE SIGNED THAT IN SEPTEMBER OF 2007.

NOW WHEN SHE LOSES SOUTH CAROLINA BADLY, ALL OF A SUDDEN, FLORIDA, SHE WANTS THOSE FOLKS COUNTED AND IT MATTERS.

>> WHAT ABOUT HER POINT THAT OF THE STATES THAT SHE'S WON, THEY TEND TO BE THE BIGGER STATES, TEND TO BE STATES LIKE OHIO, PENNSYLVANIA, TEXAS, AND --

>> MAKES NO DIFFERENCE.

>> THOSE ARE THE STATES THAT REALLY COUNT IN THE GENERAL ELECTION.

>> WHAT REALLY COUNTS RIGHT NOW IS THAT YOU GET THE MOST NUMBER OF PLEDGE DELEGATES, THE MOST NUMBER -- THE LARGEST NUMBER OF POPULAR VOTE IN THE PLEDGE DELEGATES.

SHE'S NOT GOING TO GET THAT.

YOU CAN'T KEEP CHANGING THE RULES WHEN IT FITS YOUR NEEDS.

THAT'S WHAT SHE'S DOING.

>> WELL, AND CERTAINLY, YOU KNOW, AND I HEAR WHAT YOU'RE SAYING ON THAT.

CLEARLY, HER ARGUMENT HAS WORKED A LITTLE BIT BECAUSE THERE ARE SO MANY FLORIDA DELEGATES WHO ARE STILL UNCOMMITTED.

THIS WEEK I SPOKE TO REPRESENTATIVE TIM MAHONEY, REPRESENTS PART OF CHARLOTTE COUNTY.

HE'S ONE OF THE UNCOMMITTED PEOPLE THAT'S OUT THERE.

HILLARY CLINTON WENT TO THE HOUSE, SPOKE TO HIM INDIVIDUALLY ONE ON ONE, GAVE HIM A REALLY GOOD PITCH IT, SOUNDS LIKE.

HE'S STILL UNCOMMITTED.

SO HE'S NOT GOING TO OBAMA AT THIS POINT.

SO, CLEARLY --

>> HE COULD WIN OUT, AND SHE STILL WILL NOT SURPASS OBAMA.

>> WELL, IT'S THAT BIG --

>> THE MATH IS A TRICKY THING.

>> YEAH, BUT I THINK YOU HAVE A LOT OF UNCOMMITTED PEOPLE IN FLORIDA HERE THAT ARE STILL WILLING TO LISTEN TO THE THING OR CERTAINLY THEY HAVE BEEN STOPPED FROM GOING FULLY OVER TO OBAMA.

IF IT WAS THAT CLEAR, THEY WOULD ALL BE MAKING THAT PATH ALREADY.

>> ALL OBAMA DID WAS FOLLOW THE RULES THAT THE DEMOCRATS -- WHO WERE RUN BY THE CLINTONS, RIGHT? -- ESTABLISHED.

THAT'S ALL THEY DID.

AND THEY ARE SUGGESTING NOW THAT THIS GUY, HE'S NOT PLAYING FAIR, AND SHE KEEPS SAYING, IF WE WERE A REPUBLICAN, I WOULD BE NOMINATED BY NOW.

WELL, NEED TO REMIND HER, SHE'S A DEMOCRAT.

>> AND PAROCHIALY SPEAKING, IT CERTAINLY HAS BEEN OF SOME BENEFIT TO OUR FLORIDA DEMOCRATS WHO ARE UNCOMMITTED BECAUSE, LIKE I MENTIONED, CLINTON AND OBAMA BOTH WERE MEETING WITH MEMBERS OF CONGRESS GIVING US SOME REAL TIME. IF YOU'RE HAVING AN OPPORTUNITY AS A FRESHMAN MEMBER OF CONGRESS, LIKE TIM MAHONEY, YOU'RE GETTING A CHANCE TO, YOU KNOW, HAVE A MOMENT OF STRATEGY TALK WITH POTENTIALLY ONE OF THE BIG LEADERS OF THE PARTY.

WHETHER IT'S OBAMA OR CLINTON, THEY ARE HAVING THE ERA OF THE NEXT PRESIDENT POSSIBLY.

>> JOE, IS IT CLEAR THAT MOMENTUM IS NOW IN BARACK OBAMA'S FAVOR?

>> YES, AND IT HAS BEEN FOR A WHILE.

YOU MENTIONED THE SUPERDELEGATE THING.

THESE FOLKS ARE REALLY STARTING TO BOTHER ME.

I KEEP PICTURING THEM WITH CIGARS IN THEIR MOUTHS IN A SMOKE-FILLED ROOM LIKE THE OLD DAYS.

I MEAN, COME ON.

THIS IS SUPPOSED TO BE A COMPROMISE THEY IMPLEMENTED A FEW YEARS AGO.

I THINK IT'S A BAD THING.

I THINK THEY NEED TO REVISIT THIS AGAIN.

>> THERE WAS ONE SUPERDELEGATE FROM CALIFORNIA THIS WEEK WHO SAID WHAT I WANT YOU TO DO IS SPEND \$20 MILLION IN MY DISTRICT OR CALIFORNIA TO REGISTER MEXICAN-AMERICANS TO GET THEM TO VOTE BECAUSE THEY DON'T VOTE IN LARGE NUMBERS.

>> THERE'S A WORD FOR THAT KIND OF STUFF, WHICH I CAN'T MENTION ON THIS SHOW.

>> TERRY, WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THIS WHOLE STALEMATE OR WHAT APPEARS TO BE A STALEMATE BETWEEN BARACK OBAMA AND HILLARY CLINTON?

>> YOU KNOW, FROM MY PERSPECTIVE, I DON'T HAVE REALLY A DOG IN THAT FIGHT, SO TO SPEAK.

[ LAUGHTER ]

>> BUT YOU ENJOY WATCHING THE FIGHT.

>> I ENJOY WATCHING THE FIGHT.

YOU KNOW, THERE'S A GOOD PART TO IT, FORGET THE FACT THAT I'M A REPUBLICAN.

THERE'S A GOOD PART TO IT BECAUSE IT REALLY DOES DRAW PEOPLE'S ATTENTION TO THE POLITICAL PROCESS.

AND WHEN YOU SEE THE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE WHO ARE REGISTERING TO VOTE AND COMING OUT TO VOTE, I DON'T CARE -- I MEAN, CERTAINLY, BECAUSE I'M A REPUBLICAN, I WOULD LIKE TO SEE A REPUBLICAN CANDIDATE WIN.

BUT I DON'T CARE WHETHER YOU ARE A REPUBLICAN OR DEMOCRAT.

THE RIGHT TO VOTE IS SOMETHING THAT PEOPLE FOR YEARS HAVE FOUGHT AND DIED FOR SO WE HAVE THAT RIGHT.

AND FOR PEOPLE TO SIT HOME AND NOT VOTE, I DON'T CARE WHAT PARTY YOU'RE IN OR IF YOU'RE NOT IN A PARTY, FOR PEOPLE TO SIT HOME AND NOT VOTE, THAT'S UNAMERICAN AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED.

ANYTHING THAT WILL GET PEOPLE TO THE POLLS, I'M FOR IT.

>> KEITH, LAST WORD.

>> TO BE HONEST, BARACK WASN'T SUPPOSED TO BE THIS FAR ALONG.

HILLARY WAS SUPPOSED TO HAVE IT WRAPPED UP BY TUESDAY AND SHE DIDN'T.

>>> FLORIDA DEMOCRATIC PARTY CLAIMS DEMOCRATS NOW OUTNUMBER REPUBLICANS AMONG FLORIDA HISPANIC VOTERS CITING MONTHLY REPORTS ON VOTER REGISTRATION.

NATIONWIDE, HISPANIC VOTERS LEAN DEMOCRATIC YET FLORIDA HAS BEEN THE EXCEPTION DUE TO ITS LARGE, GOP-ORIENTED ANTI-CASTRO CUBAN COMMUNITY.

IN RECENT YEARS, FLORIDA HAS SEEN AN INFLUX OF MANY OTHER LATINO GROUPS, ESPECIALLY PEOPLE FROM PUERTO RICO WHO TEND TO VOTE DEMOCRATIC.

JOE, ARE WE GOING TO SEE A CHANGE NOW IN FLORIDA AS A STATE THAT WAS ON THE EDGE, A PURPLE STATE OR WITH THIS INCREASE IN HISPANICS WHO BELONG TO THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY?

>> IT ALL DEPENDS ON THE TURNOUT.

I HATE TO USE THAT TERM "HISPANIC" BECAUSE HISPANICS ARE A VERY DIVERSE GROUP.

LIKE YOU SAID, CUBANS TEND TO VOTE DIFFERENTLY THAN PUERTO RICANS IN NEW YORK AND MEXICANS IN CALIFORNIA.

I KIND OF HATE TO LUMP EVERYBODY HISPANIC, QUOTE, UNQUOTE.

ANYWAY, HAVING SAID THAT, IT ALL DEPENDS ON THE TURNOUT.

I MEAN, I KNOW THEY WENT TO BUNCH OF FOLKS IN CALIFORNIA, AND THE TURNOUT WAS DISMAL.

SOMETHING AWFUL.

SO IT ALL DEPENDS.

IT'S ONE THING TO REGISTER.

OH, LOOK AT THE REGISTRATION NUMBERS AND THEN COME ELECTION DAY, OH, MAN.

THAT'S JUST PART OF IT.

>> THAT'S ONE OF THE GOLDEN RULES OF POLITICAL CONSULTANTS THAT I ALWAYS HEAR ALL THE TIME.

VOTER REGISTRATION DRIVES JUST DON'T MEAN MUCH TO THEM IN THE UPCOMING ELECTION BECAUSE THE FIRST TIME REGISTERED VOTER ISN'T A VERY CONSISTENT, RELIABLE VOTER.

SO IT'S KIND OF HARD TO TELL WHETHER OR NOT THESE NEWLY REGISTERED PEOPLE WILL ACTUALLY AMOUNT TO MUCH.

WHAT'S INTERESTING, THE NUMBERS, YOU CAN ALWAYS LOOK FOR SOMETHING IN THESE NUMBERS TO GIVE YOURSELF SOME CONFIDENCE.

I THINK WHAT STOPS ME FROM THINKING THE DEMOCRATS HAVE NOW WON OVER THE HISPANIC VOTE IN FLORIDA IS, WELL, THE

DEMOCRATS HAVE ALSO HAD THE MAJORITY OF VOTER REGISTRATIONS IN FLORIDA FOR THE LAST TEN YEARS.

THEY ARE CLEARLY IN THE MAJORITY AMONG MEMBERS OF CONGRESS, THE LEGISLATURE.

>> THEY ARE IN THE MINORITY.

>> YEAH, IN THE MINORITY, ON EACH ONE OF THE LEVELS.

THE NUMBERS TELL YOU SOME STUFF, BUT I TELL YOU, IN FLORIDA, MORE THAN ANYPLACE I'VE EVER SEEN, OUR NUMBERS DON'T QUITE REFLECT WHAT MAY BE HAPPENING ON THE GROUND.

I WOULD BE INTERESTED TO SEE AS WE GET INTO THE ELECTIONS IF THOSE --

>> PART OF THE EXPLANATION OF THAT IS THAT CUBAN AMERICANS WHO TEND TO BELONG TO THE REPUBLICAN PARTY TEND TO VOTE MORE HEAVILY.

THEY ARE MORE RELIABLE VOTERS, MAINLY BECAUSE, YOU KNOW, I GATHER FROM THEIR EXPERIENCE IN CUBA.

SO THEY COME HERE, AND THEY USE THAT VOTE AS OFTEN AS THEY CAN.

>> AND THAT'S BECOMING A SMALLER SEGMENT OF THE HISPANIC VOTE AS WE GET AN INFLUX OF PEOPLE FROM ALL OVER THE COUNTRY, OBVIOUSLY.

OBVIOUSLY, WE'VE HAD -- PEOPLE HAVE MOVED TO FLORIDA FOR ITS SUNSHINE AND WHAT HAVE YOU, THEY ARE COMING IN, THEY ARE SETTING UP SHOP IN OTHER PLACES, SO THAT CUBAN AMERICAN VOTE IS NOT SUCH A LARGE PERCENTAGE THAT IT ONCE WAS.

IT'S STILL A BIG PERCENTAGE.

YOU STILL HAVE TO WIN THAT CUBAN AMERICAN VOTE.

YOU CAN'T IGNORE IT.

NOW, YOU CAN SEE IT IN THE REPUBLICAN PRIMARY EVEN, WHEN THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE WAS GOING, YOU KNOW, YOU WANT TO WIN THE CUBAN VOTE BUT THERE WAS AS MUCH CONCERN ABOUT THE I-4 CORRIDOR HISPANIC POPULATION BOOMING, HOW DO WE WIN THOSE GUYS?

>> I SEE A BIT OF A GENERATIONAL CHANGE.

YOU HAVE YOUNGER CUBAN AMERICANS WHO REALLY WANT A POLICY THAT ENGAGES THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT.

PRESIDENT BUSH RECENTLY MET WITH SOME DISSIDENTS IN CUBA, AND THEY WERE TELLING HIM, HEY, YOU NEED TO RELAX SOME OF THE LAWS THAT WE HAVE WITH REGARD TO TRAVELING TO CUBA, WITH REGARD TO HOW MUCH MONEY YOU CAN SEND TO CUBA.

OF COURSE, PRESIDENT BUSH WAS AGAINST THAT.

I THINK GOP POLICY IS GOING TO FORCE SOME OF THOSE YOUNGER CUBANS TO LOOK TOWARD THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY.

>> I WONDER WHERE THAT POLICY GOES AND JUST HOW MUCH MORE IT CHANGES AS CASTRO, SEEMINGLY AT THE END OF HIS REIGN, IT WILL BE INTERESTING TO SEE WHAT IMPACT IT HAS, ESPECIALLY IN THE MIAMI DISTRICT WHERE THE CUBAN AMERICAN VOTE CLEARLY IS JUST HUGE THERE.

I WONDER IF WE'LL SEE ANY SHIFT OF THAT VOTE MOVING TOWARD DEMOCRATS.

>> TERRY, DO YOU SEE A SHIFT COMING, OR ARE YOU PRETTY SATISFIED THAT YOU THINK THAT THE GOP WILL CONTINUE TO DOMINATE HISPANIC POLITICS?

>> WELL, YOU KNOW, IF YOU LOOK OVER THE LAST COUPLE OF YEARS, WE'VE SEEN A LOT OF PEOPLE DRIFT -- EITHER DRIFT FROM THE REPUBLICAN PARTY TO INDEPENDENT OR SWITCH FROM REPUBLICAN TO DEMOCRAT.

A LOT OF IT'S BECAUSE OF DISSATISFACTION WITH SOME OF THE THINGS THE REPUBLICANS DID PRIOR TO 2006.

I MEAN, I'M NOT A POLITICAL PUNDIT, SO I CAN'T SAY.

I CAN LOOK IN MY CRYSTAL BALL AND SEE DOWN THE ROAD IT WILL BE ONE WAY OR THE OTHER.

BUT I THINK EITHER PARTY, IF THE ELECTED OFFICIALS, WHOEVER THEY ARE, OF THAT PARTY, DON'T REALLY TOE THE LINE THAT THE PARTY ESTABLISHES, THEN YOU'LL SEE SHIFT FROM ONE SIDE TO THE OTHER.

AND I WOULDN'T BE SURPRISED IF WE SAW SOME MAJOR CHANGES IN THE HISPANIC VOTE.

>> WELL, TO BE FAIR, I THINK THE STATE REPUBLICANS ARE TRYING TO ADDRESS THAT.

THEY HAVE AN EVENT GOING ON THIS WEEKEND IN ORLANDO TO ADDRESS --

>> AND THEY DID IT -- WHEN THEY RAN MEL MARTINEZ.

>> THEY ARE RECOGNIZING AT LEAST THEY HAVE AN ISSUE THAT THEY NEED TO GO AFTER HERE.

>>> MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT RULED THIS WEEK THAT THE MICHIGAN LAW BANNING GAY MARRIAGE ALSO PROHIBITS SAME-SEX BENEFITS OFFERED TO GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES.

THE DECISION IS ENERGIZING OPPONENTS OF A SIMILAR AMENDMENT THAT WILL BE ON THE BALLOT HERE IN FLORIDA THIS FALL.

THOUGH THE WORDING OF MICHIGAN'S SAME-SEX MARRIAGE BAN IS NOT IDENTICAL TO FLORIDA'S PROPOSED AMENDMENT TWO, OPPONENTS SAY IT WILL RESULT IN THE SAME BAN ON DOMESTIC PARTNERSHIP BENEFITS.

DOMESTIC PARTNER BENEFITS IN MICHIGAN WERE BANNED BASED ON MICHIGAN'S LANGUAGE, THE LANGUAGE IS, "THE UNION OF ONE MAN AND ONE WOMAN IN MARRIAGE SHALL BE THE ONLY AGREEMENT RECOGNIZED AS A MARRIAGE OR SIMILAR UNION FOR ANY PURPOSE."

THE FLORIDA LANGUAGE SAYS, "THE UNION OF ONE MAN AND ONE WOMAN AS HUSBAND AND WIFE, NO OTHER LEGAL UNION THAT IS TREATED AS MARRIAGE OR THE SUBSTANTIAL EQUIVALENT THEREOF SHALL BE VALID."

TERRY, DOES FLORIDA FOLLOW MICHIGAN IN THAT IF FLORIDA PASSES A BAN ON GAY MARRIAGE, THAT ALL SORTS OF DOMESTIC PARTNERSHIPS WILL BE BANNED HERE IN FLORIDA?

>> ROB, THERE ARE TWO SIDES TO THE ANSWER.

THE FIRST ANSWER IS, THERE ARE 27 STATES THAT HAVE PASSED MARRIAGE AMENDMENTS.

MICHIGAN IS THE ONLY ONE WHERE THERE'S BEEN ANY KIND OF -- THERE'S ONE OTHER STATE THAT HAS SOME THINGS GOING THROUGH

THE COURT, BUT MICHIGAN IS THE ONLY ONE WHERE ANY KIND OF DECISION LIKE THIS HAS COME.

MICHIGAN'S LANGUAGE IS QUITE BROAD IN WHAT IT COULD COVER, FLORIDA'S LANGUAGE IS NARROWLY DEFINED SO THAT IT COVERS ONLY MARRIAGE BEING BETWEEN ONE MAN AND ONE WOMAN.

ACTUALLY, THE FLORIDA SUPREME COURT WHEN THEY WERE FIRST REVIEWING IT, THE ACLU SUED SAYING IT WOULD BLOCK BENEFITS AND THE SUPREME COURT SAID, NO, THAT'S NOT THE CASE.

BUT THE FACT IS THAT MICHIGAN IS THE ONLY STATE OUT OF 27 WHERE THIS HAS COME UP.

AND IN MICHIGAN, THIS IS AN AP REPORT FROM YESTERDAY, AT LEAST -- THEY SAY AT LEAST -- AT LEAST 375 GAY COUPLES ARE AFFECTED IF THE REWRITE THAT THEY DID TO THE WAY THAT THE LAW IS WRITTEN DOESN'T CHANGE IT SO THAT IT WILL BE COVERED -- LET ME FINISH PLEASE -- THAT IT WILL BE COVERED UNDER THE -- YOU KNOW, THAT THE BENEFITS WON'T BE TAKEN AWAY.

AND KNOWING THE AP, IF THEY SAID AT LEAST 375, THAT MEANS THAT THEY DUG EVERYWHERE THEY COULD FIND TO GET THOSE 375 GAY COUPLES THAT WOULD BE AFFECTED BY THIS.

>> BASICALLY, YOU DON'T THINK DOMESTIC PARTNERSHIPS ARE GOING TO BE DISRUPTED OR IF DIFFERENT SEX PARTNERSHIPS, YOU DON'T THINK THOSE WILL BE DISRUPTED, TOO.

SENIOR CITIZENS WHO LIVE TOGETHER AND LOST A SPOUSE.

>> ABSOLUTELY NOT.

THIS IS AN EFFORT BY THE PROPONENT -- THE OPPONENTS OF AMENDMENT TWO TO TRY AND FRIGHTEN SENIOR CITIZENS AND DOMESTIC PARTNERS INTO VOTING AGAINST THE AMENDMENT BY TELLING THEM A FABRICATED STORY THAT IT'S GOING TO AFFECT THEIR BENEFITS.

THERE IS NO WAY -- THE FLORIDA MARRIAGE AMENDMENT IS ABOUT ONE THING, ONE MAN AND ONE WOMAN.

>> KEITH, WHAT'S YOUR TAKE ON THIS?

>> LET'S SAY IT DOESN'T AFFECT THE BENEFITS OF ELDERLY COUPLES.

FORGET THAT.

THIS IS A WASTE OF TIME AND IT'S A WASTE OF MONEY FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO BE INVOLVED IN THIS PROCESS.

IF YOU THINK ABOUT IT, THIS IS REALLY A RED-MEAT ISSUE DESIGNED TO BRING REPUBLICANS OUT TO VOTE IN THE FALL.

THAT'S WHAT IT IS.

LET'S CALL IT WHAT IT IS.

LET ME FINISH.

NOW, IF YOU REALLY WANT TO BE SERIOUS ABOUT SUPPORTING ONE MAN AND ONE WOMAN, WHY DON'T WE PASS AN AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION THAT SAYS DIVORCE IS LEGAL?

THERE'S NO --

>> WE'RE OUT OF TIME, KEITH.

AND WE WILL COME BACK TO THIS.

I PROMISE.

WE'LL GIVE IT MORE TIME AS WE GET CLOSER TO NOVEMBER.

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

JOE, YOUR OTHER BIG STORY OF THE WEEK?

>> I'LL PIGGYBACK ON WHAT WE WERE JUST TALKING ABOUT.

ONE WEEK AGO FRIDAY, MILDRED LOVING DIED.

LOVING WAS INVOLVED IN THE CASE OF LOVING VERSUS VIRGINIA, SUPREME COURT CASE WHICH FINALLY BANNED THE BANS AGAINST INTERRACIAL MARRIAGE.

SHE HAD A QUOTE, AND I WANT TO READ PART OF IT.

ON LAST JUNE 12th, ON THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE CASE, SHE SAID, "I BELIEVE ALL AMERICANS NO MATTER THEIR RACE, NO MATTER THEIR SEX, NO MATTER THEIR SEXUAL ORIENTATION SHOULD HAVE THE SAME FREEDOM TO MARRY.

GOVERNMENT HAS NO BUSINESS IMPOSING SOME PEOPLE'S RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OVER OTHERS ESPECIALLY WHEN IT DENIES PEOPLE'S CIVIL RIGHTS."

THAT'S SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT WHEN WE GO TO THE POLLS IN NOVEMBER.

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

>> WELL, I THINK FORECLOSURES, U.S. CONGRESS FINALLY STARTED TO ADDRESS THIS ISSUE.

BUT THE SEVERITY OF THE PROBLEM FACING HERE IN SOUTH AND CENTRAL FLORIDA WITH THE NUMBER OF FORECLOSURES CAUSED VERN

BUCHANAN, THE REPUBLICAN IN SARASOTA, TO SWITCH OVER TO THE DEMOCRATIC SIDE AND VOTE FOR THE BILL.

TIM MAHONEY AND KATHY CASTOR BOTH ALSO WITHIN THIS REGION BOTH TOOK LEADERSHIP ROLES ON THIS THING.

I THINK WE'RE SEEING AT LEAST IN THE FLORIDA'S FORECLOSURE PROBLEM AT LEAST HAVING SOME SORT OF IMPACT ON HOW THE DEBATE IN WASHINGTON IS GOING.

>> KEITH, WE HAVE ABOUT 30 SECONDS FOR YOU.

>> FUND HIGHER EDUCATION PROPERLY.

THAT'S WHAT THE STATE OF FLORIDA NEEDS TO CONCENTRATE ON DOING.

AND THEY NEED TO KEEP THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS INDEPENDENT SO THEY ARE NOT POLITICIZED SO WE CAN HAVE A STRONG UNIVERSITY SYSTEM.

>> TERRY KEMPLE.

>> IN PINELLAS COUNTY, ABOUT TWO WEEKS AGO, THEY INCLUDED SEXUAL ORIENTATION IN THE HUMAN RIGHTS ORDINANCE.

NOW THEY ARE LOOKING AT INCLUDING GENDER IDENTITY IN THE HUMAN RIGHTS ORDINANCE.

WHAT THAT MEANS IS, IF I'M A CHRISTIAN AND I OWN A RENTAL PROPERTY, EVEN THOUGH IT'S AGAINST MY FAITH TO HAVE SOMEBODY PARTICIPATE IN THOSE ACTIVITIES, I CAN'T SAY I CAN'T RENT TO THEM.

>> HOW SOON DOES THAT COME UP BEFORE THE PINELLAS COUNTY --

>> WE DON'T KNOW WHEN THE GENDER IDENTITY ONE WILL COME UP

BUT THE SEXUAL ORIENTATION IS ALREADY IN.

>> THANK YOU, JEREMY WALLACE, TERRY KEMPLE, JOE BROWN AND  
KEITH BERRY.

THANK YOU FOR WATCHING "FLORIDA THIS WEEK."

WE WANT TO HEAR YOUR COMMENTS ABOUT THIS PROGRAM.

SEND AN E-MAIL TO FTW@WEDU.ORG OR CALL OUR TOLL FREE LINE AT  
800-335-9338.

YOU CAN WATCH THIS SHOW ONLINE AT WEDU.ORG BEGINNING EARLY  
NEXT WEEK.

PLEASE SHARE THAT ADDRESS WITH YOUR FRIENDS AROUND THE STATE  
WHO FOLLOW FLORIDA POLITICS.

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

FROM ALL OF US AT WEDU, HAVE A HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY!

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