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### **Governor Crist Signs Fiscally Conservative \$71.5-Billion Budget**

*~ Provides record-high education funding and sets aside money for Florida's future needs ~*

TALLAHASSEE – Governor Charlie Crist today signed the \$71.5-billion 2007-08 budget, providing record-high funding for public schools, continuing Florida's investment in restoring America's Everglades and increasing the safety of Florida's communities. The fiscally responsible budget also sets aside \$7 billion in reserves.

"Since I took the oath of office 143 days ago, I have spoken often about fiscal responsibility and tightening our belts," Governor Crist said. "This is a tight budget year, and we must live within our means, just as the people of Florida must live within theirs. As I carefully considered each item proposed by the Legislature, I focused on the fact that we are spending the hard-earned money of the people of Florida, and we have a responsibility to spend it wisely."

After signing the bill in Tallahassee, Governor Crist will travel to Tampa and Ft. Lauderdale to highlight the budget. In Ft. Lauderdale, he will sign House Bill 593, the Minouche Noel claims bill.

The Minouche Noel claims bill awards \$6.5 million to Minouche Noel and \$2 million to her parents, Jean and Flora Noel, as compensation for the negligence of Children's Medical Services, a part of the former Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services. Additionally, Lt. Governor Jeff Kottkamp will visit the Apopka Chamber of Commerce, the Jacksonville River Walk and Southwest Florida.

Highlights of the state's 2007-08 budget include the following:

#### **EDUCATION**

This budget will provide \$24.4 billion to help us create world-class schools in Florida so that our graduates are qualified to serve in the high-tech, high-wage jobs of the future.

**Public Schools** – The budget provides \$19.3 billion – an increase of \$1.2 billion, or 6.84 percent – for the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP), which funds public schools. This

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allocation increases funding by \$455 per student, or 6.65 percent, for a total of \$7,306 per student. Funding within the FEFP also includes:

- \$116.9 million – an increase of \$5.1 million, or 4.57 percent – for reading instruction, including 80 additional reading coaches. Reading coaches help teachers more effectively improve the reading skills of struggling students.
- \$147.5 million for teacher bonuses that will give five-percent to 10-percent performance bonuses to the state’s educators.
- \$3.3 billion to continue reducing class size. Funding includes \$2.7 billion for operations – an increase of \$600 million, or 28.45 percent – and \$650 million to build additional classrooms.

**Community Colleges** – Community colleges will receive a total of \$1.3 billion, an increase of \$70.4 million. Funds will provide associate degrees as well as increase the number of partnerships with four-year institutions and baccalaureate programs in critical job areas.

**Universities** – The state university system is provided a total of \$3.8 billion, an increase of \$199 million. Funds will provide postsecondary education opportunities, increase the number of grants to promote research and commercial development and expand programs in the fields of medicine.

### **ENVIRONMENT**

Protecting the state’s beautiful natural resources is an integral part of preserving, maintaining and increasing the overall quality of life for future generations of Floridians to enjoy.

**Restoring Florida’s Waterways** – Improving water quality is vital to Florida’s economy and quality of life. This year’s budget provides \$263.1 million, including \$60 million for alternative water supply projects, \$21 million for Small Financially Disadvantaged Communities for Construction of Wastewater Facilities and \$182 million for wastewater and drinking water improvement loans and grants.

**Saving Lake Okeechobee and Its Tributaries** – Recognizing the importance of the heart of America’s Everglades, the budget allocates \$54 million to Lake Okeechobee and estuary recovery. An additional \$40 million is included to restore the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie rivers and estuaries as well as \$6 million to the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services for pollution controls.

**Restoring America’s Everglades** – The Florida Legislature has appropriated \$100 million to continue the state-federal partnership to restore the famed *River of Grass* and return a natural flow of water across the 2.4 million-acre marsh. To date, the state’s commitment toward the \$10.9 billion Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan tops \$2 billion.

### **TAX CUTS**

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Public servants should limit the size of government and return tax dollars to the people; after all, it is the people's money.

**Hurricane Preparedness Sales Tax Holiday** – To encourage and assist Floridians to adequately prepare for the 2007 hurricane season, purchases of certain items used in preparation for a hurricane disaster are exempt from sales taxes from June 1-12, 2007. These items include flashlights, batteries, and portable radios, as well as more permanent devices such as storm shutters and portable generators. This exemption continues the tradition of the hurricane sales tax holiday begun in May 2005 and is expected to save consumers an estimated \$24.3 million.

**School Supplies and Clothing Sales Tax Holiday** – To assist families in getting ready for the new school year, purchases of clothing and books valued at \$50 or less and school supplies valued at \$10 or less are exempt from sales tax for a period of ten days, starting August 4, 2007. Florida families not only will be able to take advantage of this broad-based tax relief for the eighth time within the last 10 years, but also will have one additional day to complete their purchases. This sales tax holiday is expected to save consumers an estimated \$46.6 million.

### **HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

Recognizing and addressing diverse needs is paramount to ensuring a high quality of life for the most vulnerable Floridians – unique needs will be met with unique solutions.

**Children's Special Health Care** – The budget includes \$56 million to provide comprehensive health benefits and increased access to health care for more uninsured children.

**Mental Health Forensic Treatment Services** – For individuals with serious mental illness who are in the criminal justice system, \$53.4 million will provide appropriate mental health services.

**Florida Senior Centers** – To help increase opportunities for active aging, \$9.1 million is appropriated to construct, repair and maintain Florida's senior centers to offer critical health, social, nutritional, educational and recreational programs and services for Florida's elders.

**Tobacco Constitutional Amendment** – To protect Floridians – especially youth – from addiction, disease and other health hazards associated with tobacco use, an additional \$54 million will provide tobacco education and prevention programs as required by the 2006 voter-approved constitutional amendment.

**Veterans Nursing Home Renovation** – The renovation of a nursing home for veterans will receive \$5 million, providing funding for major flooring and roofing repairs.

**Home and Community-Based Services Medicaid Waiver** – The budget provides \$116 million to address a projected shortfall in funding due to increased use of services by

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developmentally disabled individuals. This program allows people to live in their own homes and communities rather than institutions.

### **PUBLIC SAFETY**

Nothing is more important than protecting the safety of Floridians. In addition to the Anti-Murder Act and the expansion of Florida's CyberCrime unit, this budget will help Florida continue to be a national leader in criminal justice reforms and public safety.

**Prison Beds** – To ensure adequate prison capacity so that offenders serve at least 85 percent of their prison sentences and are not subject to early release, \$164.4 million is provided to begin the construction of 5,139 state-operated prison beds. An additional 2,880 beds will be made available by private prison contractors, bringing the total number of newly funded prison beds to 8,019.

**DNA Testing** – Ensuring that offenders are accurately identified and apprehended is a public safety priority. To this end, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement was allocated \$3 million and two additional staff members to expand their Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) database to include samples from all felons. In addition to this funding, the agency received \$2 million to expedite the processing of over 2,000 pending DNA cases.

**National Guard Armories** – Florida's National Guard is called upon continuously to serve its state and country either through overseas deployment to fight in the war on terrorism or as first responders in the state during emergencies such as wildfires and hurricanes. In support of these men and women, \$11.3 million is allocated to continue refurbishing and repairing Florida's armories. In the last two years, over \$30 million has been targeted for armory renovations at 13 armories statewide.

### **TRANSPORTATION**

Floridians often experience frustration while stuck in traffic. The \$7.5 billion provided in this budget will ease congestion on Florida's highways. Of that, \$85 million was provided to do the following:

**Roadways** – \$35 million will provide matching funds to alleviate congestion along the Interstate 95 corridor. By partnering with the federal government, the road improvement project is a major step toward congestion relief and reducing travel time.

**Seaports** – \$50 million will help ensure that Florida's seaports are globally competitive and efficient in moving goods. Examples of planned improvements include improving cargo handling, expanding operational capacity and addressing infrastructure needs.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Fostering economic growth is essential to the future of Florida. The budget provides the means to continue attracting high-wage, high-value businesses to expand and locate in Florida.

**Film and Entertainment Incentives** – \$25 million will provide incentives for the digital media industry and Florida’s own filmmakers to capitalize on the existing entertainment infrastructure and draw more productions to the state.

**Innovation Incentive Program** – \$250 million will increase Florida’s ability to attract clean, vital industry and high-wage, high-skill jobs to Florida. The goal of the program is to draw cutting-edge, world-class research centers and high-impact business projects to Florida.

**Quick Action Closing Fund** – \$45 million will enable Florida to respond quickly to economic opportunities for business expansion, recruitment and retention. Local economic development organizations working in conjunction with Enterprise Florida and the Office of Tourism Trade and Economic Development will have access to these funds to expand and retain their employment base.

**Space Florida** – \$7 million will keep Florida on course during a time of transformation from the NASA Shuttle Program to the new exploration program.

**ELECTION REFORM**

**Paper Ballots** – There is no greater testament to our nation’s democracy than the people’s ability to choose their leaders and know that their vote has been counted. To purchase optical scan equipment to replace touch screen technology for Election Day voting, \$27.8 million is appropriated to the Department of State. It also provides ballot-on-demand technology during early voting.

“Even in this tight budget year, we have accomplished many great things for the people of Florida,” Lt. Governor Kottkamp said. “We will help Florida’s children by increasing education funding and helping more children access health care.”

“Just as we are living within our means, local governments need to live within theirs. In a few weeks, the Legislature returns, and I look forward to working with them to cut property taxes,” Governor Crist said. “By providing this relief, we will send a sonic boom through Florida’s economy, and then, next year, we will be able to do even more for the people of Florida.

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