

Dear (Senator/Representative)

In an effort to address the recession that is impacting our state and to improve our economy in both the short and long term, I urge you to increase education funding to improve the quality of public education in Florida from Pre-K through the State University System. Florida had been moving in a positive direction. It strengthened the science curriculum last year, increased the number of high school students taking AP courses and the SAT or ACT, implemented Universal Pre-K, reduced class size, increased inclusion rates of ESE students, and improved performance among minority students. Even with these improvements, we are not where we need to be to have a competitive education system and a qualified, employable work force. We cannot afford to let a recession cripple our progress.

Funding our state's education is not a partisan issue, nor is it an issue that only affects parents with children in public schools. A quality education system is an economic issue for the entire state of Florida. We need a highly educated work force to attract corporations from industries other than service and real estate to our state and thereby diversify our economy.

- Florida has a graduation rate of 65% (based on average graduation rate for public secondary schools as of 2004-2005), which puts it 45th and lower than many states that have a higher percentage of children living in poverty than we do. (BusinessWeek, 11/24/08)
- According to the 2006 U.S. Census Bureau, Florida ranked 47 in education spending per \$1000 of personal income. During that time, we went from spending approximately \$7400 per student to \$6900 today.
- At the university level, we are 50th in the nation in faculty:student ratio.

These statistics are unacceptable. An investment in public education is an investment in Florida's future.

Sincerely,

(name)

(address)

To properly fund education in light of a projected increase in the budget deficit expected by next year, I have attached a list where additional funds can be found. NOTE: THIS IS NOT AN ENDORSEMENT OF ANY SPECIFIC TAXES, JUST A LIST OF OPTIONS THAT CAN BE CONSIDERED BY THE INDIVIDUALS WRITING THE LETTERS/POST CARDS.

- Tighten spending by eliminating pork projects such as the \$6 million of education funds for an airport hangar and the \$13.2 million House Speaker Sansom is requesting for Northwest Florida State College, when the Dept. of Education is only requesting approx. \$750,000.
- Get rid of the DROP program, which allows state workers who have 30 years of service or are age 62 with at least six years of service retire, have their pension payments held in a tax-deferred trust fund with interest, but also continue to work for up to five years, drawing full salaries while their pensions grow. These should be the first state workers to be laid off. They already have their pensions and with the unemployment rate reaching a high, we can replace them with lower paid employees. According to the Florida Retirement System it is costing the state \$300 million per year **Note**: see the article below to see how program is being abused.
<http://www.floridatoday.com/article/20081217/OPINION/81216025/1006/news01> .
- The State needs to highlight the finding of the Tax Foundation that we rank 48th in terms of state and local tax burden at 7.4% of a resident's income (only Wyoming, Alaska, and Nevada were lower and ironically, also have lower graduation rates than Florida). Our residents are taxed less than just about anyone in any other state. This needs to be done to address those who keep clamoring for tax cuts. The legislature needs to educate the public on how little we pay in taxes.
- A thorough review of unfunded or underfunded state mandates and that a cost/benefit study be done for each one. These mandates drain needed resources out of districts that could otherwise be spent on teacher salaries.
- Use the FCAT as an assessment tool instead of a punitive/reward system. Re-allocate recognition funds to top performing teachers who have been in the system at least 3 years (studies show that most teachers leave the field after 3 years)
- Find additional sources of revenue for education besides property tax. Property tax reform has had a negative impact on schools. See below.
- If corporations that give money for vouchers receive a tax benefit, extend the same benefit to corporations who want to invest in the public schools. This money should not be in the form of advertising (ie a "donation" in exchange for naming a gym)
- Increase the cigarette tax and close tax exemptions and loopholes, including those for skyboxes and bottled water.
- Collect taxes on internet sales at point of sale not by voluntary form registration of buyer. It is estimated the state is losing between \$2-\$4 billion.
- Shift school construction funds into the operating budget (**note**: this coincides with

MDCPS legislative item)

- Ratify the Governor's agreement with the Seminoles for gambling. It is happening anyway difference is on reservations it isn't taxed. It would bring in \$375,000 million for the first 3 years and \$100,000 million after that.