

**From:** [Peel, Jackson](#)  
**To:** [FLHouseDems](#)  
**Subject:** Embargoed Script: Leader Fentrice Driskell  
**Date:** Tuesday, March 7, 2023 8:50:08 AM

---

**EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERED**

March 7, 2023

**CONTACT**

Jackson Peel  
Communications Director  
House Democratic Caucus  
[Jackson.Peel@myfloridahouse.gov](mailto:Jackson.Peel@myfloridahouse.gov)  
850-717-5297

**\*\*\* EMBARGOED Until Delivered \*\*\***

**Leader Driskell's State of the State Response Speech**

**Tallahassee, FL** –Today, **Leader Fentrice Driskell (D- Tampa)** will deliver the following speech via prerecorded video following the Governor's State of the State speech. The Joint Session begins at 11:00 EST, with responses from the Senate and House leadership to follow.

**A Tale of Two Floridas**

Hello, I'm Fentrice Driskell, and I am the Leader of the Florida House Democratic Caucus.

I grew up here in Florida... in Lakeland, between Tampa and Orlando. My mother was a school teacher and my father was a dispatcher.

All my life, I have been proud to be from Florida. Being from the Sunshine State meant that our home was... unique. Southern hospitality blended with snowbirds from up north and immigrants from the Caribbean. You could hear New York accents ordering sweet tea or Cafecito. And despite being one of the most diverse places in America, we were all Floridians. Imperfect, maybe a bit eccentric, but one people.

Lately, it's getting harder and harder to feel like that.

Lately, it seems like the story of our state is really... **The Tale of Two Floridas.**

**In one Florida... Ron DeSantis' Florida...**

It **feels like** we are constantly being told to be angry about something, some new enemy to fear or hate.

And lately, the policies coming out of Tallahassee have become more and more shocking, unconstitutional, and downright ridiculous.

Democrats aren't the only ones saying so, even Conservatives are starting to react in horror to some of the ideas floating around the halls of the Capitol.

It is **embarrassing**. Our home doesn't **need to be** a punchline because of hurtful and backwards political stunts.

We are **FLORIDA**, we should be better than that.

There was a time when this process was different. When important **bipartisan** bills outnumbered the clearly unconstitutional legislation that grabs national and international headlines lately... When the legislature was a check on the executive branch... when **even Lawton Chiles and Jeb Bush** didn't get their way all of the time.

Those days are gone, unfortunately.

We've seen **our own** state government punish teachers, families, local leaders, and businesses that want **something different** from the DeSantis vision of Florida.

Ron DeSantis has proven time and time again that he is either unaware or uninterested in addressing the kitchen table problems Florida families are struggling with every day.

How to pay their rising property insurance bill or rent, find affordable health care, and make sure their kids are getting a quality education... These are the issues that families talk to us about back home.

But we have a Governor who is so obsessed with 'woke' that he is asleep at the wheel.

And all of his Culture War victories have defeats built into them...

Books are banned and librarians are terrified. He attacks AP African American history and DEI. The Governor whitewashes our history, rewriting what Floridians know to erase Black and Brown people... and all the while our teachers are still among the lowest paid in the nation.

He talks about empowering parents, yet he stands looking over the shoulder of every parent and doctor in the state, shutting down gender-affirming care and targeting our transgender youth.

He is literally trying to force LGBTQ Floridians out of public life and into the closet.

He gets headlines for attacking ESG... but it could cost Florida taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars, and the free market be damned.

He spends our tax dollars on illegal political stunts to fly migrants from Texas to Massachusetts... but the Legislature can just rewrite laws to make it ok. He will attack President Biden and Congress over and over again... but won't mention that one of every three dollars he spends comes from the federal government.

They **will** pass their unpopular Permitless Carry bill... but we are in a gun violence crisis and this will only make things worse. Republicans have traded our safety for an A+ rating from the NRA.

Families can't make enough money to get ahead and thrive in this state... but he made sure Disney knows who's in charge.

He wants to campaign on COVID anger... but never mentions that he locked down Florida, that he cheerily promoted the vaccine, or that the state's unemployment system completely collapsed, leaving countless Florida families desperate during the worst crisis most of us have ever experienced.

And finally, Ron DeSantis has promised to further restrict abortion access in Florida. I now have fewer rights than my mother did. And what about Florida's young daughters and granddaughters? What rights over their own bodies and health will they have left?

Floridians have real problems, and they're not the **divisive fights** picked by the **Presidential Hopeful** living in our Governor's Mansion, who treats Florida as just the audition for his next job.

In Ron DeSantis' Florida, every conflict is a political opportunity to crush those who disagree with you, and you never let go of a good grievance.

**But then there's the Other Florida,**

The **real** Florida where families live, love, and struggle every day. Not the Florida of headlines or punchlines.

Every Culture War battle is a **missed opportunity** for Florida's government to do something to improve our lives.

Floridians are being crushed under an affordability crisis.

We pay the highest homeowners insurance rates in the country. Two special sessions and still no relief for Floridians.

**Rent prices** are out of control, and for too many, saving enough to **buy** a home is just a dream. And that's before the **utility bills are due!**

Florida Republicans have spent two decades **ignoring** the housing problem, taking money intended for affordable housing to fund their tax breaks for the wealthiest Floridians. Over \$2 billion and counting has been taken from housing funds, fueling the problem we have today.

We could make the common-sense decision to **expand Medicaid**, so that low income Floridians could get access to affordable health care for themselves and their families. Florida is one of only 11 states that still rejects this federal money. This would reduce health care costs by millions of dollars and would be life changing for hundreds of thousands of our neighbors. All we need to do is say, "Yes."

Our caucus will spend this upcoming session pushing back as hard as we can against the bad bills that are coming. We will be the loyal opposition, speaking for our constituents back home and Floridians across the state.

**We have a different vision for Florida.**

We believe every Floridian deserves the freedom to be healthy, prosperous, and safe.

We **all deserve** to be free of government overreach into our lives.

We **deserve** access to the best health care possible, so that our families stay healthy and an illness or injury doesn't mean financial ruin.

We **deserve** a fair shot at success and prosperity. To have good jobs with fair wages, so we can provide for our families and give them the foundation for their own success. And for our kids, prosperity starts by having a good, high quality education to prepare them for the modern workforce.

We **deserve** to be able to live in safe communities. That means free from gun violence and from the devastating storms made stronger and more frequent by climate change.

Assuming Ron DeSantis wins the GOP nomination for President, he's going to leave Florida with all the problems he has ignored or created.

The state of the state of Florida, **is that we are on the edge.** DeSantis has picked divisive fight after fight, all for his own political ambitions. His vision for Florida is that it is his springboard to Washington D.C.

Our path is not carved in stone. We can get back to more reasonable times, when Tallahassee functioned as more than one man's publicly-funded campaign apparatus.

We can get back to the business of the people, finding ways to improve the lives of those who sent us here.

We can get back to the Sunshine State we know and love. Our unique blend of ideas, cultures, languages, and people that we have always called...home.

Thank you.

###