



The Journal OF THE House of Representatives

Number 3

Thursday, January 11, 2024

The House was called to order by the Speaker at 9:00 a.m. in the Historic Capitol's House Chamber to commemorate the bicentennial anniversary of Florida's Capital.

Prayer

The following prayer was offered by the Honorable Chase Tramont:

Father, God, we thank You for the opportunity to be here to serve others. We pray our special blessing of safety and protection upon our families as we're away from them and to everybody in this room as we travel to and from.

And, Lord, as we gather here today and remember the history of the people that met here, the leaders that met here in the middle, while that may not be our history, Lord, I pray that our story is one of leaders who met our challenges head on, and we overcame them, and we did it with grace, with confidence, yet with great humility, recognizing that our victory is always, is always, will always be in You.

In Christ's name I pray, Amen.

The roll was called and the following 112 members answered to their names:

Speaker Renner	Canady	Gregory	Perez
Abbott	Caruso	Griffitts	Persons-Mulicka
Altman	Cassel	Harris	Porras
Alvarez	Chamberlin	Hart	Rayner
Amesty	Chambliss	Hinson	Redondo
Anderson	Chaney	Holcomb	Rizo
Andrade	Clemons	Hunschofsky	Roach
Antone	Cross	Jacques	Robinson, F.
Arrington	Daley	Joseph	Robinson, W.
Baker	Daniels	Killebrew	Rommel
Bankson	Driskell	Koster	Rudman
Barnaby	Duggan	LaMarca	Salzman
Bartleman	Dunkley	Leek	Shoaf
Basabe	Edmonds	López, J.	Silvers
Bell	Eskamani	Lopez, V.	Sirois
Beltran	Esposito	Maggard	Skidmore
Benjamin	Fabricio	Maney	Smith
Berfield	Fine	Massullo	Snyder
Black	Gantt	McClain	Stark
Borrero	Garcia	McClure	Steele
Botana	Garrison	McFarland	Stevenson
Brackett	Giallombardo	Melo	Tant
Bracy Davis	Gonzalez Pittman	Michael	Temple
Brannan	Gossett-Seidman	Mooney	Tomkow
Buchanan	Gottlieb	Overdorf	Trabulsy
Busatta Cabrera	Grant	Payne	Tramont

Truenow Valdés Williams Yarkosky
Tuck Waldron Woodson Yeager

(A list of excused members appears at the end of the *Journal*.)

A quorum was present.

Pledge

The members, led by the following, pledged allegiance to the Flag: Colin R. Bernard of Tallahassee at the invitation of the Speaker *pro tempore*; Julia Caroline Bonfanti of Tallahassee at the invitation of Rep. Sirois; Safaa Hampton of Tallahassee at the invitation of the Speaker *pro tempore*; and Coy W. Welch of Lakewood Ranch at the invitation of Rep. Killebrew.

Remarks by the Speaker

Members, today we have the privilege of convening session inside the Historic Capitol to celebrate the Bicentennial of Tallahassee as the seat of government in the great state of Florida. This is a special and unique opportunity, and today we make history.

The last time the Florida House of Representatives conducted any official business was the last day they conducted official business in this building on December 13th, 1977. So, welcome back. And this is interesting. Two hundred years ago before Tallahassee was designated as our state capital, Florida's original Legislative Council consisted of members from two capitals: St. Augustine and Pensacola, each representing east and west Florida. In order to conduct business, the delegation from one city would travel to the other by boat around the peninsula. The whole peninsula. I asked.

Sadly, when the Legislative Council met in July of 1822, the boat of one of the members from St. Augustine, Thomas Lytle, who was a nephew of President James Madison, was lost at sea. That event triggered an exploratory committee for a central location for Floridians to meet.

Years later in, two years later in 1824, Tallahassee was chosen as the new capital city, halfway between Pensacola and St. Augustine. And if you look in Cascade Park, you'll see where our real estate, our metes and bounds, and the quadrants are at point zero essentially.

Originally built in 1845, the same year Florida gained statehood, the first stage of this historic capitol building was completed at a cost of 50 thousand dollars. In 1901, the Legislature approved the expansion of the capitol. And the room we are sitting in today looks and feels as it would have when the expanded capitol opened in 1902. Right, Chuck?

The name "Tallahassee" is, is derived—sorry, he can take it—the name "Tallahassee" is derived from a word used by the Creek tribe meaning "old town." For two centuries, this "old town" has been at the center of new ideas

with millions of hopeful Americans and Floridians, making Florida the best state in the nation. So, welcome.

Correction of the *Journal*

The *Journals* of January 9, 2024, were corrected and approved as corrected.

House Resolution

HR 8001—A resolution recognizing the Tallahassee-Leon County Bicentennial and envisioning the powerful next chapter of Florida's Capital community.

WHEREAS, the Tallahassee-Leon County Bicentennial presents the capital of the third-most populous state in the country an opportunity to reflect and celebrate 200 years of remarkable achievements by citizens with drive, determination, and ambition, and

WHEREAS, the City of Tallahassee, Leon County, and the surrounding region have a rich human history dating back 15,000 years, with present-day Tallahassee being the site of the Indigenous Apalachee capital of Anhaica, and

WHEREAS, Florida became a U.S. territory in 1821, according to terms of the Adams-Onís Treaty between the United States of America and Spain, and

WHEREAS, the City of Tallahassee was chosen to be the seat of government and Florida's capital for this newly formed territory on March 4, 1824, because of its scenic beauty and enchanting cascade, for the agricultural quality of its rich soils, and because of its strategic geographic position halfway between the historic ports of St. Augustine and Pensacola, and

WHEREAS, the boundaries of Leon County were drawn to encompass the newly designated capital, and the county was established by the Territorial Legislature that same year on December 29, 1824, and

WHEREAS, Florida would later be admitted as the twenty-seventh state in the United States in 1845, with the City of Tallahassee as its capital, and

WHEREAS, the Tallahassee-Leon County community has produced world-renowned authors, artists, and leaders in arts, politics, mathematics, science, civil rights, and sports, and

WHEREAS, the City of Tallahassee and Leon County are home to three world-class higher education institutions, Florida State University, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, and Tallahassee Community College, which collectively serve approximately 70,000 students each year, and

WHEREAS, the Tallahassee-Leon County Bicentennial Commemoration is an opportunity to recognize the impact and contributions of the rich history, natural beauty, ambition, and diversity that the City of Tallahassee and Leon County have had and continue to have on this state, the nation, and the world, NOW, THEREFORE,

Be It Resolved by the Florida House of Representatives of the State of Florida:

That the Florida House of Representatives recognizes and extends greetings and best wishes to all observing the important milestone of the Tallahassee-Leon County Bicentennial and envisions the powerful next chapter of the community.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of this resolution be presented to the Mayor of Tallahassee and the Chair of the Leon County Board of County Commissioners as a tangible token of the sentiments of the Florida House of Representatives.

—was read the second time by title. On motion by Rep. Tant, the resolution was adopted.

Introduction of Special Guests

The Speaker introduced the Honorable John Dailey, Mayor of Tallahassee.

Rep. Shoaf recognized and introduced the following special guests: The Honorable Carolyn D. Cummings, Chair of the Leon County Commission, and Kerri L. Post, Executive Director, Visit Tallahassee.

Rep. Shoaf further recognized the Tallahassee-Leon County Bicentennial Steering Committee, and the following members of the Bicentennial Legislative Task Force: Mark Ard, of the Florida History Museum, Tiffany Baker, Director, Historic Florida Capitol Museum, Candice Grause, Vice President for Communications, Tallahassee Community College, Frank Teraferma, Political Strategist, Associated Industries of Florida, and Courtney Thomas, Director of External Affairs, Office of the Mayor of Tallahassee.

Remarks by the Speaker

And I don't know how many history buffs we have in the room. I know Representative Tant loves this stuff as I do and I'm sure many of you do, to be a part of, really a part of history today in the first time we've returned since this building closed for business. And I have a special gift for each of you in light of that.

So, members, in October of 2011, the copper inside of the Historic Capitol was removed during a painstaking renovation process. When we decided to host our session here, we procured some of that copper and had it forged in fire to a temperature of over a thousand degrees to create the commemorative pin you have on your desk.

So, I hope you will cherish this special piece of history, and as we walk into the future, remember: You will always carry with you a piece of the past rooted in the strong foundation that Florida is built upon. Embrace the challenges and opportunities ahead—there are many. Rely on each other to champion critical issues on behalf of your constituents, for those are the priorities that will set Florida up to succeed for the next 200 years.

God bless you, and God bless the great State of Florida.

This was pretty fun. Pretty fun. Thank you, guys.

Motion to Adjourn

Rep. Perez moved that the House, after receiving reports, adjourn for the purpose of holding committee and subcommittee meetings and conducting other House business, to reconvene at 4:00 p.m., Wednesday, January 17, 2024, or upon call of the Chair. The motion was agreed to.

Excused

Reps. Campbell, Franklin, Plakon, Plasencia

Adjourned

Pursuant to the motion previously agreed to, the House adjourned at 9:26 a.m., to reconvene at 4:00 p.m., Wednesday, January 17, 2024, or upon call of the Chair.

JOINT SESSION

On January 9, 2024, at 11:00 a.m., pursuant to **SCR 1302**, the members of the Senate, escorted by the Sergeant at Arms of the Senate and the Sergeant at Arms of the House, were seated in the Chamber. The President and President Pro Tempore joined the Speaker and Speaker *pro tempore* at the rostrum. The Secretary joined the Clerk at the front desk.

Arrival of the Lieutenant Governor and Cabinet

The Lieutenant Governor, Jeanette M. Nuñez, and Cabinet members Attorney General Ashley Moody, Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services Wilton Simpson, were escorted into the Chamber by the Sergeant at Arms of the Senate and seated.

Arrival of Member of Congress

The Honorable Byron Donalds was escorted into the Chamber by the Sergeant at Arms of the Senate and seated.

Arrival of Supreme Court

Chief Justice Carlos G. Muñoz, Justice Charles T. Canady, Justice John D. Couriel, Justice Renatha Francis, Justice Jamie R. Grosshans, Justice Jorge Labarga, and Justice Meredith Sasso were escorted into the Chamber by the Sergeant at Arms of the House and seated.

The Speaker presented the gavel to the Honorable Kathleen Passidomo, President of the Senate, asking her to preside over the Joint Session.

THE PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE PRESIDING

A quorum of the Joint Session was declared present.

Prayer

The following prayer was offered by Commissioner Mel Ponder, of the Okaloosa County Commission and a former member of the Florida House of Representatives:

Good morning, Lord. What a great honor it is to welcome Your presence, seeking first Your kingdom and Your righteousness before we begin this Session. May the flood plains of these chambers brim over with Your glory.

Now, Lord, bless these great leaders here today. They are all points of light. Help them to see themselves the way You do, for each life has a calling, tells a story, and has purpose. By Your hand, may their actions offer stability for today and hope for tomorrow.

Lord, we thank You for Governor DeSantis, First Lady, our Cabinet; for House Speaker Renner, a man after Your own heart; Senate President Passidomo, one called for such a time as this; our Supreme Court; this full House and Senate.

Bless their homes and fill their joy. May they not lack any good thing this season. May they receive wisdom and blueprints from heaven, understanding and discernment by your spirit. Protect their communities back home and those picking up the pieces this morning in the Panhandle.

Lead them by Your presence, Lord. For even as Moses declared: If your presence does not go with us, we don't want to go.

Lord, crown them, this state, and this year with Your goodness. Later, looking back, may we see even the hard paths overflowing with Your abundance.

Help us, Lord, to honor the significance in others, breathing in these moments, by word and deed, pointing others towards You, the one who changes it all.

Remind us today to be faithful ambassadors of Your call, demonstrating love, honor, blessing, and unity.

Bless our first responders and military, Lord, and all called into harm's way.

Now, arise and shine, Florida Legislature, for the light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. Florida is called to be the orchestra conductors to bring in its sound so that those who live here, work here, and visit here graft into the rhythm the Lord is releasing here this season. Each of you are a significant part of this revival.

Thank you for raising your hand, saying: Here I am, Lord. Send me.

Now may Your kingdom come, your will be done right here today in and through these amazing world changers. When others later ask what did this Session mean, may they see your victories recorded, evidenced by Your goodness, with longings fulfilled becoming the trees of life.

We love you Lord. Help us to taste and see that you are good.

We ask all this in your amazing and unmatched name. And everybody said, Amen.

Pledge

The members, led by the following, pledged allegiance to the Flag: Senate President Pro Tempore Dennis Baxley and House Speaker *pro tempore* Charles Wesley "Chuck" Clemons Sr.

National Anthem

The President of the Senate introduced K'Imani McCoy from Flagler Palm Coast High School, to sing the National Anthem.

Committee to the Governor

On motion by Rep. Grant, the President appointed Senators Broxson (Co-Chair), Hutson, and Perry, and on behalf of the Speaker, appointed Representatives Payne (Co-Chair), Massullo, Stevenson, Roth, Altman, Benjamin, Skidmore, and Hunchofsky, as a joint committee to notify the Governor that the Legislature has assembled to receive his message. The committee, accompanied by the Sergeant at Arms of the Senate, retired to execute its responsibility.

Introduction of Special Guests

President Passidomo recognized the following guests: First Lady of the Florida House, Adriana Renner, and First Gentleman of the Senate, John Passidomo, who was unable to attend due to inclement weather.

Presentation of the Governor

Upon announcement by the Sergeant at Arms of the House, the committee escorted Governor DeSantis to the rostrum.

President Passidomo presented Governor DeSantis.

Governor's Address

Governor DeSantis: Thank you. Thank you so much. Great to see y'all. Ya'll seem a little restless to start the year. Well, thank you so much Mr. Speaker, Madam President, members of the Legislature, and our fellow citizens: 2024 is going to be a banner year for the free state of Florida.

Now, this is a somewhat of a unique start to the legislative session because every government building except this one is closed in Tallahassee because of the weather, and we've had a lot of weather move through northwest Florida. We've issued an executive order to declare a state of emergency. And we just do what we do in Florida. We respond when these things happen. So those folks who've been impacted, just know the State of Florida stands with you, and we'll handle whatever fallout is from these dangerous tornadoes.

We are, as a country, in the midst of a great upheaval, and we see this throughout the land. Under the current administration in Washington, homelessness is at record levels, 62 percent of Americans are living paycheck-to-paycheck, and the federal budget deficit is expected to hit two trillion dollars this year. Of course, more than eight million illegal aliens have entered the United States across the southern border in the past three years alone. And deaths due to fentanyl that have come across that border have reached record levels.

Cities throughout the land have decayed. Washington, DC has experienced its deadliest year in more than two decades, and San Francisco has fallen into a doom loop whereby crime, homelessness, and drug abuse have eviscerated the quality of life in the city.

Other states have enacted policies that have sparked an exodus of their residents out of their states. In Illinois, residents are saddled with high taxes while spendthrift politicians continue to spend and borrow at some of the highest rates in the nation with massive unfunded liabilities that will require even higher taxes in the future. Of course, soft-on-crime policies have devastated public safety in major cities like Chicago.

California's per capita spending is triple that of Florida and yet they face a 68 billion dollar budget deficit. Their violent crime's up, robberies are up, and the recent Stanford University study shows that businesses are leaving in droves.

Florida now has millions of more residents than New York state, yet New York's budget is twice the size of ours here in Florida. They have a 4.3 billion dollar deficit. We now have more manufacturing jobs than New York and have added twice as many jobs as New York in the past year, and our unemployment rate is close to 50 percent lower than that of New York. So, it's not surprising given this that we've witnessed, and continue to witness, a great migration of Americans away from cities and states pursuing these failed policies, with Florida serving as a refuge of freedom and sanity.

These failures are not the result of chance. They are the result of choices made by elected officials to put ideology over sound policy. In this time for choosing, the State of Florida has chosen well. We have chosen facts over fear. We have chosen education over indoctrination. We have chosen law and order over rioting and disorder. We have chosen fiscal responsibility over debt and profligacy. Our choices have produced results that are second to none in this country. We are, we have earned rankings of number one for education, number one for education freedom, number one for parental involvement in education, number one for talent development, number one for public higher education, number one for domestic in-migration for the third consecutive years, number one in new business formations, number one in GDP growth amongst large states, and better than almost all countries throughout the world. We are number one for entrepreneurship, and we have set the standard for limited government. Florida has the fewest state employees per capita and the lowest state government cost per capita in the entire United States. Our crime rate is at a 50-year low, and we have the lowest unemployment rate of all large states.

The 2023 legislative session was monumental, and it's incumbent upon us to build upon those accomplishments as we continue to deliver results for the people that elected us. My message is simple: Stay the course. The state of our state is strong. Let's keep doing what works. Let's continue to make Florida the envy of the nation.

Florida is the education state. We lead the nation in school choice. Last legislative session, under the leadership of Speaker Renner, we enacted the largest expansion of school choice in all of American history. Florida has close to 1.5 million students enrolled full time in various choice programs, from scholarships to charter schools to choice options within individual school districts. Through these programs, we have delivered for people like Hera Varmah, who is here with us today. Please stand. Hera has eleven brothers and sisters, making education somewhat difficult to afford for their parents. But because of our school choice scholarships, she and her siblings have been able to attend high-quality schools. Today, she's a college graduate. Her three older brothers are college graduates. Two of her younger sisters are in college, and the rest are on track to follow in her footsteps. As she likes to say in her own words, "When people say that school choice doesn't work, I simply show them my family." Thank you. Great job.

Florida also leads the nation in protecting the rights of parents. School systems are important, but they exist to serve the students, parents, and the community, not to supersede the rights of parents to direct the education and upbringing of their own children. We were one of the first states in the country to enact a Parents' Bill of Rights and to enact curriculum transparency. We protected women's sports. As the father of two daughters, I think it's important that our girls and women athletes have the opportunity to compete with fairness and with integrity.

Thanks to the legislature, we have protected our children from indoctrination and sexualization of the curriculum, and we stood up for parents against the woke mob. This includes parents like Tia Bess, who's here with us today. Where's Tia? There she is, from the Jacksonville area. She's a mom of three. She's fought for her children to be educated without having an agenda imposed on them. And Tia is proof that what parents in this state want is exactly what we've done. We must always protect the innocence of our children. Let kids be kids. Thank you.

And as we've delivered historic wins for our parents, we have also provided historic support for our school teachers. Over the past four years, we have invested a record 3 billion dollars solely for the purpose of raising teacher pay. My budget proposal for this year includes another 1.25 billion dollars for even more pay increases. And these initiatives are important because they help us recruit and retain great teachers including, who's with us today, our Teacher of the Year, Adrianna Swearingen. Please stand up and be recognized. Job well done. Congratulations. And it is thanks to teachers like Adrianna that our fourth graders are first in the nation on their NAEP scores.

Now, on October 7th, Israel suffered one of the worst terrorist attacks in modern history. We knew the affects would reverberate here in the state of Florida. Many Floridians were stranded in Israel after the war broke out and were not receiving adequate assistance from the US Embassy or the State Department. So, the State of Florida stepped up. We organized evacuation flights, and we rescued more than 700 Americans and brought them back home to the state of Florida. That includes, that includes Allison Zur, her husband, and two children that were on one of the flights that we brought back from Israel. They are here joining us today. They were able to come back safe and sound, and we're glad we were able to help you get back home.

But we didn't stop there. Thanks to the help of the Legislature, we were able to sign legislation during, after a special session where we passed expanded sanctions on the country responsible, ultimately, for these heinous attacks, the Islamic Republic of Iran. They were behind the attacks. They funded the attacks, and the State of Florida has recognized we are going to do everything we can to stop having money flow into the coffers of that regime. Now, as threats of violence continue here at home, we stood up to protect our Jewish day schools, our synagogues, and Jewish students on university campuses. But we realize that many universities outside of Florida have simply failed. This week, Jewish students across the country are returning to campuses that have outright condoned anti-Semitism. Over the coming months they will have a tough decision to make. Do they pack up and leave, or do they stay and continue to endure a hostile environment? And if they do

decide to come to Florida, I can tell you this, we will welcome them with open arms. This includes waiving minimum credit hour requirements for transfers, waiving application deadlines for transfers, and encouraging universities and colleges to use their existing statutory authority to provide in-state tuition for students with a financial hardship.

The pro-Hamas activities and rampant anti-Semitism that we've witnessed throughout the country on these campuses has exposed the intellectual rot that has developed on so many university campuses over the years. In Florida, our universities must be dedicated to the pursuit of truth, the promotion of academic rigor and integrity, and the preparation of students to be citizens of our republic. We reject the modern trend of universities that subordinate high academic standards in favor of promoting an ideological agenda. To this end, we have eliminated so called "DEI" from our public universities. DEI is a highly ideological agenda. In practice, it stands for discrimination, exclusion, and indoctrination, and that has no place in our public institutions and universities.

We have also overhauled faculty hiring to avoid ideological litmus tests and require all tenured professors to undergo review every five years so poor performers can be terminated.

JT Leanos is here. He's a freshman baseball player at New College in Sarasota—take a stand—which is well on its way. New College is well on its way to being the premier classical public liberal arts college in America. The reforms instituted by the New College Board of Trustees and by President Richard Corcoran have transformed the college from an outpost of ideological indoctrination into an institution rooted in truth.

Now, we have insured that higher education in Florida is affordable, freezing tuition for the past decade. Our out-of-state tuition is less than in-state tuition in many states across this country. And we've also supported Bright Futures scholarships that make it even more affordable for our top students in Florida to attend school.

Now, while higher education is important, a degree from a four-year brick-and-ivy university is not the only path to success. And for many, it is not the best pathway to success. When I took office in 2019, I set the goal to make Florida number one in workforce education by the year 2030. And, with the support of the Legislature, we are well on our way.

Since 2019, Florida students have earned more than 365 thousand rapid credentials. And just last year, more than 235 thousand students earned an industry certificate before they graduated high school. We have more than tripled our state's capacity to train truck driver's with CDL licenses, and this year set a record for CDL program completion. And, we have now set a record of 229 thousand students enrolled in career and technical education at Florida colleges. There is no question, that on this trajectory and with your continued support, Florida will soon be number one in the nation for workforce education.

Florida is the state for fiscal responsibility and for economic freedom. The recklessness of spending, borrowing, and printing of money over the past four years by the federal government has driven up the costs of everything from groceries to housing and has saddled Americans with high interest rates. The national debt now stands at an astounding 34 trillion dollars. In New York City there is a famous debt clock that shows the national debt going up in real time. I'd like to see one of those made for Florida's debt. Only a Florida debt clock would be counting down, not up, because we have paid down nearly 25 percent of our state's debt over the past four years. Imagine that. Indeed, if you took the share of the national debt and apportioned that to every individual American, it would be 100 thousand dollars a pop that each American would owe. Florida? The average individual Floridian share of our state debt isn't 100 thousand dollars. It's 661 dollars, the lowest per capita debt in all of these United States. That is the way you do this.

Now we're able to reduce debt because we've been fiscally responsible, but also because we have embraced smaller government. Florida has the lowest

number of state employees per capita and the lowest cost per state resident for state government in the entire United States, and yet we deliver services better than most states. In fact, when people move from places like New York, the first thing they tell me is that our roads are better, our services are better, and we know now our schools perform better as well.

This year, my budget proposal reduces the budget by 4 billion dollars from the previous year, placing 16.3 billion in reserves and paying down another 455 million in state debt ahead of schedule. We have run budget surpluses and paid down debt while also enacting record-setting tax reductions. And even with these tax savings given to our residents, we have still brought in 1.3 billion dollars in revenue over the projections just since the start of the fiscal year on July 1st.

Last year, I asked the legislature to reduce taxes on families as a way to mitigate the effects of the federal government-induced inflation, and you delivered. We have made it tax-free to raise a child in Florida by permanently removing sales taxes on all baby items: cribs, strollers, diapers, wipes, children's clothing, shoes, among other items. We say we're family friendly. We didn't just talk the talk. We walked the walk and families are benefitting as a result of what you did in last legislative session.

We also provided very timely relief for commuters in the state of Florida. In 2023, the Toll Relief Program reduced commuter costs by almost half a billion dollars, helping nearly 1.2 million Floridians save hundreds of dollars each on tolls. Mike Honeycutt is here with us today. He is the founder and owner of Jet I.C.U., an air ambulance company that recently located to Tampa from Hernando County, and he's up there, there. Now, their business moved. Mike and his employees are still commuting to Tampa while in the process of relocation, and he's taken on the burden of paying not only his tolls, but also the tolls of his staff, as well, and through our Toll Relief Program his staff and he were able to save almost 4 thousand dollars in toll savings. So, congratulations on that, and keep doin' a great job.

In the Governor's budget recommendations, I'm proposing that we return another 1.1 billion dollars to the people through additional tax cuts that will provide even more relief to families, individuals, and retirees that are just trying to get by during these uncertain times. Let's reduce the cost of homeowners insurance through tax relief. Let's continue our record-setting sales tax holidays, and let's provide permanent tax relief for Florida small business.

In DC, they're failing to get inflation under control. While we cannot control federal monetary or fiscal policy here in the state of Florida, we can take what is already one of the lowest per capita tax burdens in the entire country and make taxes even lower.

Now, our low tax burden, AAA credit rating, and great business environment has attracted families, businesses, and retirees alike, but so, too, has the fact that in Florida we are proudly the law and order state.

Our policies to support law enforcement personnel, to combat riots, to keep criminals off the street, and to remove lawless prosecutors from office have kept Florida at a 50-year low in the crime rate and have brought new law enforcement recruits to Florida from all of the other 49 states. Law enforcement officers like Rachel Richardson, who is here with us today.

Now, Officer Richardson left her home and her job in Illinois to come to Florida for a new career with the Venice Police Department. She wanted to work for a state that valued the difficult work that police officers do every day to protect and serve. Officer Richardson, we welcome you to the great state of Florida. Thank you for your service.

And I haven't met any police officer that's regretted relocating to Florida yet, so we must be doin' somethin' right. This year's budget proposal includes an additional 20 million dollars to provide signing bonuses so we can recruit even more officers to the Sunshine State.

Now, to help our police officers and others achieve their dreams of home ownership while here, we also created the Hometown Heroes program. Recipients of this program include Detective Frank Jones, who is here with us today. Where you at? Stand up, Frank.

So, in 2020, when you saw a lot of places try to defund the police, Detective Jones moved from Chicago to Collier County to work in a state where he knew his efforts would be respected and supported. Thanks to our Hometown Heroes program, Detective Jones was able to achieve his dream of home ownership. And thanks to the leadership of President Passidomo, through the Live Local Act and record housing funding, countless police officers as well as other staples of the community like teachers and nurses will now be able to live in the communities in which they serve. Good job, Senator Passidomo.

And we're proud of our successful efforts to provide law and order, but we still see the impacts of the open southern border that's made its way all the way to the state of Florida. Here today is Bryan Ramos, who was the victim of a hit-and-run that tragically also took the life of his friend, Nico Bagalihog, at the age of 28. Where are ya? Stand up. OK.

The driver who ran over Bryan and Nico was here illegally, and when the suspect was arrested by the Florida Highway Patrol they found that he had been previously deported three times and had no right at all to be in this country. If the federal government had simply done its job, this would not have happened in the first place.

Also here today is Paula Frederick, the mother of Amy Frederick, who was killed by fentanyl at just 25 years old—fentanyl that has undoubtedly been trafficked across our southern border. We're sorry for your loss and, unfortunately, this is a loss that's all too common throughout these United States of America.

Every community has become a border community. The fentanyl is laced in pills that people don't even realize would be in that, and they take one pill with the fentanyl laced, and that could be enough to poison somebody to death. We're on your side, and we're doing everything we can to combat this scourge of the fentanyl epidemic. So, God bless you. Thank you.

We can't just sit idly by while we continue to see a massive invasion across this country. Federal government is not doing anything to stop this. We in Florida are picking up the slack. We've now sent over one hundred Florida State Troopers and dozens of Fish and Wildlife officers to help Texas with border operations. Through your support we have banned sanctuary cities, and we've also instituted policies to deter illegal immigration into our state in the first place. The Biden border crisis has made every state a border state and thanks to your efforts, Florida is fighting back on behalf of our people.

Florida is also the preparation state. Last year, hundreds of Floridians had their homes destroyed or rendered uninhabitable by Hurricane Idalia. We rallied resources to the Big Bend region before, during, and after this powerful Category 3 storm made landfall. At my direction, nearly 30,000 utility linemen were staged for preparation for the storm, and among thousands of first responders and National Guard who prepared to respond, there were members of our newly reformed Florida State Guard that deployed for the first time since 1947. As a result of our preparations, in less than one week, 96 percent of power was restored, a record for such a rural part of the state.

We have with us today Citrus County Sheriff Mike Prendergast. If you could stand up and be recognized back there. We stood side-by-side with the sheriff in the immediate aftermath of the storm, and we'll continue to stand by Citrus County and the Big Bend as the communities rebuild over these next weeks, months, and years.

And as the Big Bend recovers from this past year's storm, we still remain focused on the long-term recovery that is still going on in southwest Florida after Hurricane Ian. While the news cameras have long since left, we are still

there to support residents like Rachel Pierce, a Sanibel-based artist whose art gallery was destroyed by the storm. Rachel, thank you for coming here.

After receiving a grant from the Florida Disaster Fund just a few months ago, Rachel was able to reopen her art gallery in November. Congratulations, Rachel.

Florida is also the conservation state. With your support we have made good on our promise to leave Florida to God better than we found it. As the fishing capital of the world and home to more than 1,300 miles of world-renowned coastline, Florida's economic success is tied to a healthy environment. Since 2019, we've invested 5 billion dollars to support Everglades restoration and water quality efforts, but, I'm calling for another 1.1 billion dollars to continue these great efforts.

In much of our state, the great outdoors is a way of life, and we must preserve that way of life for generations to come. Which is why I'm calling for 125 million dollars to protect Florida's conservation lands and waterways. While across the nation activists have attempted to take away our God-given rights to hunt, fish, and enjoy our great outdoors, in Florida we will continue to honor and protect those important traditions.

Now, before I close, it's worth pointing out some more accomplishments that we've been able to deliver, and I gotta run through these pretty quickly, otherwise we'll be here all day.

We have protected Floridians against COVID authoritarianism. You have a right to breathe without having someone put a mask on your face, and you can always count on that in the free state of Florida.

We have expanded Second Amendment rights with the Constitutional Carry bill from last session. We have kneecapped so-called ESG: environment social governance. We are not gonna let these woke corporations impose radical policies on our citizenry.

Together we worked and passed legislation to protect the sanctity of life.

We have banned China from buying land in the state of Florida. No farm land. No land near military bases. Nothing.

We have provided hundreds of millions of dollars in relief for Florida homeowners and instituted long-needed reforms that have, against all odds, attracted new insurance companies into the state of Florida.

We have enacted a digital bill of rights to protect Floridians online privacy.

We passed the best election integrity measures in all of the United States of America.

We created a program to accelerate repayment of our state debt.

We have protected Floridians against the imposition of a central bank digital currency.

We authorized the death penalty for pedophiles.

We have brought accountability and transparency to pharmacy middlemen to lower drug costs for Florida consumers.

We won the fight, finally, after years and years with the federal government to be able to purchase less expensive drugs from Canada, and we will save 100 million-plus dollars a year by doing that.

Recognizing that we're a growing state, we passed the Moving Florida Forward initiative to dedicate 4 billion dollars to accelerate road projects so that we can alleviate traffic throughout the state of Florida.

Uh, and that is just scratching the surface of what we have accomplished. Let's see some other state match that list of achievements. I think you guys did very, very well.

Now just outside of this capitol building, there sits a replica of the Liberty Bell that rang in what is now known as Independence Hall, where our founding fathers signed the Declaration of Independence and later crafted the US Constitution. On that bell is inscribed a verse from Leviticus: "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof." The replica sits here in Tallahassee, a thousand miles away from Philadelphia, reminding us of our task: to proclaim liberty.

Here in the Sunshine State we've delivered good government that protects liberty and maintains public order. We have won the backing of a populace reflective of the country at large. And we have put forth a blueprint for America's revival that has instilled hope into the hearts of millions that a new birth of freedom can emanate from this land once more.

We are the heirs to the spirit of 1776, represented by that Liberty Bell.

Over the next two months let's enact policies that focus on Florida's future and that keep faith with our nation's founding ideals. Together, we will keep

Florida free and provide hope for a revival of the American spirit throughout these United States.

Thank you. God bless you. And best of luck in this legislative session. Thank you so much.

Following his address, Governor DeSantis was escorted from the Chamber by the committee. The members of the Supreme Court were escorted from the Chamber by the Sergeant at Arms of the House. The Lieutenant Governor, Cabinet members, and the Congressional Delegation were escorted from the Chamber by the Sergeant at Arms of the Senate.

Motion

On motion by Senator Mayfield, the Joint Session was dissolved at 12:11 p.m., and the Senators were escorted from the Chamber by the Sergeant at Arms of the Senate.

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