

My fellow citizens.

Seven years ago, I stood on the steps of the Old Capitol building to articulate a new vision, launch a bold agenda, and make a promise to produce big results.

Today, I stand here in this chamber to report that, together, we have made good on that agenda.

We have been faithful to that vision.

We have delivered big results.

And we have set the standard for the rest of the country to follow. We are the free State of Florida.

This year marks the commemoration of America's 250th birthday.

As we reflect on that transformational revolution, we can proudly claim that it is our Free State of Florida that best represents that enduring spirit of 1776.

Of all the 50 states, it is our Sunshine State that best fulfills the founding fathers' vision of a republican government that protects freedom, promotes opportunity, and provides an open field and fair chance for people to make the most of their God-given ability.

The central question the founding fathers sought to answer was not about taxation, representation or even the legit, the legitimacy of monarchy—as important as those issues were, but it was even more fundamental than that.

The founding fathers were students of history.

They studied the history of every republic that had ever existed. They recognized the common thread that united the experience of each and every one of those prior republics, and it was simply this: every one of them had failed.

The founders believe in the words of Alexander Hamilton that it fell to the United States of America to determine whether societies of men are really capable or not, of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they're forever destined, depend on their political constitutions on accident and force.

These were big questions. Could people actually govern themselves?

Could a nation based on natural God-given rights long endure?

Could government power be successfully limited by the rule of law in a written constitution or was mankind destined to live under various forms of despotism?

The United States was founded to be that last, best hope on earth—to be the country that would once and for all answer those questions.

Now, the founders also knew that the ideals articulated in the Declaration of Independence and the framework of government contained in the Constitution were necessary, but not sufficient conditions to ensure the success of the American experiment.

In fact, a decade after the call for independence was made, Benjamin Franklin walked out of the constitutional convention having worked in Philadelphia to craft a proposed constitution.

He was approached on the street because they had been meeting in secret, and he was asked, “Dr. Franklin, have you given us a republic or a monarchy?” His response was “a republic, if you can keep it.”

The best Declaration of Independence and Constitution in the world do not run on autopilot. As President Reagan reminded us, freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. It is not passed along in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, it must be protected, and it must be handed on to future generations.

Now, as elected officials, we're tasked with dealing with important issues affecting the lives and liberties of our people—from taxes to education, to crime and the environment, and everything in between.

But on the most basic level, we and the people we represent as inheritors of the American legacy of liberty are charged with answering that original question about the capacity of “We the People” to govern ourselves.

And you look around the country right now, and there is—no doubt—some reason for pessimism.

In the past decade, we've seen cities like Chicago and San Francisco be destroyed by failed ideologies. We've witnessed once dominant states spark an exodus among their own citizens due to their own harmful policies. And even as we cheered the removal of a Marxist dictator in Venezuela, we saw the election of a Marxist mayor in our nation's largest city.

Yet here in Florida, there is cause for optimism.

We are showing that it can be done.

We're proving that freedom can be preserved, that order can be maintained, that opportunity can be expanded, and that self-government can in fact endure.

We lead with clarity, conviction, and courage.

We recognize that while words can be meaningful, it is deeds that are ultimately the most powerful. Results are what matter the most, and we more than any other state have delivered those big results.

Seven years ago, Florida had a weak rainy-day fund and modest budget reserves.

Today, working together, we have more than tripled our rainy-day fund and more than doubled our budget reserves.

In the past seven years, we've retired almost half of all of Florida's taxpayer-supported debt that had been accumulated throughout the entire history of our state.

And because the legislature has supported efforts to accelerate repayment of this debt, we've saved more than a billion dollars on principal and interest costs.

Florida has spent conservatively; we have one of—if not the—lowest levels of spending per capita in the entire nation. And the number of state government workers per capita are less than half the national average and the lowest in all of these United States. We've proven that fiscal responsibility and limited government work.

For the past three years, Florida's economy has been ranked #1 in the nation by CNBC. Florida represents about 6.5% percent of the US population. Yet since 2020, our economy has accounted for more than 14% of all new jobs produced throughout America.

Seven years ago, Florida's economy was roughly \$1 trillion. Today, it is approaching \$1.8 trillion, an increase of close to 80%. If you stacked that \$800 billion our economy has grown in these last seven years in the year using \$100 bills, that stack would extend 543 miles high, more than twice as high as the International Space Station.

In the past seven years, Florida has attracted more income than any other state has ever attracted over a similar period of time in the entire history of the United States of America.

We continue to lead the nation in new business formations year after year. And one of the reasons we do that is because we are friendly to the taxpayers.

Over the past seven years, we have delivered a record of almost \$10 billion in tax relief, nearly three times the relief that had been enacted in the previous eight years.

We've eliminated taxes on baby items, disaster supplies, and completely eliminated the tax on business rent. We've also provided rebates on tolls for our commuters and a sales tax holiday on firearms and ammunition for our Second Amendment enthusiasts. We do not—and will never have—an income tax in the Sunshine State.

I don't think there's any question that working together, we have made the state of Florida the most taxpayer-friendly state government of all 50 states.

Now, seven years ago, Florida's school choice options were capped, they were limited. Today, we have universal school choice and rank as the number one state in the union for parental empowerment and education freedom to better measure performance, we replace high stakes testing with more reliable and consistent progress monitoring.

In fact, today I can announce that the high school graduation rate for the 2024-2025 school year was 92.2%. That is the highest graduation rate in Florida history.

Seven years ago, Florida had a modest approach to civics education and limited availability for speech and debate programs. Today, we are leading the nation with a renewed emphasis on civics education, and we offer the most robust speech and debate initiative in America.

Back then, there was no state mechanism to ensure higher pay for our schoolteachers. We've since established a dedicated provision within the education budget solely for increasing teacher salaries, and Florida now has the highest average minimum teacher salary in the southeast region. All told, we have provided a record of almost \$6 billion towards this effort to better compensate our teachers. We also codified a teacher Bill of rights that guarantees the right to teach in an orderly classroom. Enacted paycheck protection against automatic school union dues and prohibited students from using cell phones in the classroom. And that was not popular at the time, but it sure as heck is popular today.

Seven years ago, many took for granted that education was held captive by the ideological fads championed by the political left, not us. We've defeated attempts to force boys into girls' sports, to inject gender ideology into elementary schools, and to deny parents the right to direct the education and upbringing of their children.

We have ensured that our schools have a duty to educate, not a right to indoctrinate.

We have leaned into difficult issues such as child welfare. We started a faith and community initiative to lay the groundwork for a new approach that recognized government is not the solution to lifting people up.

Under the leadership of our First Lady, this idea was put into practice through our Hope Florida initiative that linked children and families in need with resources exterior to the government, including our churches and our charities.

By leaning into our faith community, we have seen a historic 47% reduction in the number of children entering our child welfare system. And seeing more than 33,000 Floridians reduce their reliance on public assistance, netting a budgetary savings of almost \$130 million on an annual basis.

We have proven that a hand up is better than a handout.

Florida has the #1 ranked public higher education system in America, and we have—by far—the lowest resident tuition in the nation.

We were the first state to eliminate DEI to spearhead accreditation reforms and to authorize the termination of tenured professors who perform poorly.

Seven years ago, our universities had no special emphasis on the traditional missions of higher education. Now we have programs like the Adam Smith Center for Economic Freedom at Florida International University, as well as the Hamilton School for Classical and Civic Education at the University of Florida.

These programs embrace the values that comprise the foundation, not just of the American Republic, but of Western civilization itself.

We reject the ideological fads that have diminished the value of higher education. We require our universities to be dedicated to the pursuit of truth, the honoring of merit, and the preparation of our students to be good citizens of this republic. We promised reform, and we delivered the most far-reaching higher education reforms in the entire nation.

Seven years ago, the momentum for the restoration of the Everglades had stalled and our state was reeling from coastal algal blooms in 2016 and 2018.

We made a pledge to jumpstart Everglades Restoration, protect our coast from harmful discharges, and leave Florida to God better than we found it.

Together, we have more than quadrupled the funding for Everglades restoration and water quality. We've completed a record number of projects, tripled the water storage capacity throughout the glades, and advanced the completion of the EAA reservoir by 5 years.

Now, as that Seminole wind blows from the Okeechobee all the way up to Micanopy, water flows south to Florida Bay, where salinity levels are the healthiest, and decades, and coastal communities are protected against the discharging of polluted water into the surrounding estuaries.

Even the flamingos have returned inside the glades.

This has been the largest environmental restoration in the entire country—you can now walk into the swamp, sit on a cypress stump, and see nature healing—the ghost of Osceola need cry no more.

Seven years ago, we were charged with improving Florida's response to natural disasters. We enhanced coordination with local partners, facilitated more rapid power restoration, and surge needed relief to affected areas. We've gone through four major

hurricanes in the last four years, and each storm has witnessed the most robust response on record rapid rescue missions, massive resources, marshaled and deployed, and the fastest power restorations in state history. We even rebuilt a bridge that had been destroyed in just a matter of three days. We've saved lives, and we've helped our people rebuild their lives after these life-changing events to our first responders and emergency management personnel.

I say very simply, job well done.

And we have made Florida the top law-and-order state in the nation.

Public safety is paramount. Our law enforcement personnel deserve our support—and they have received it. We have blocked jailbreak policies and ensured that our state and local law enforcement officers get the backing that they need.

We've enacted the death penalty for pedophiles and treated the fentanyl dealers that have poisoned our people as the murderers that they are.

We rejected the movement to defund the police, refuse to kowtow to rioting and looting, and have the strongest laws against retail theft in the nation.

When a member of a group of thieves was interviewed on CNN, and they asked, "Why do you steal in New York even though you like spending the money in Florida?" The response was very simple from the thief, "because in Florida, they put you in jail."

You're doggone right we do!

Upholding the rule of law includes protecting our nation's sovereignty and enforcing laws against illegal immigration.

Seven years ago, Florida didn't prohibit sanctuary cities and even provided taxpayer benefits, such as in-state tuition.

Today, sanctuary cities are banned, those benefits have been repealed, and incentives to come illegally have been reversed. Florida's the only state in the country that requires state and local cooperation with federal interior enforcement efforts. In the past nine months alone, Florida's responsible for the apprehension of nearly 20,000 illegal aliens that have been turned over to the Department of Homeland Security to be returned to their home countries. Our people are safer because of these efforts.

And we've accomplished so much more.

- Record support for congestion relief and accelerated transportation projects.
- The restoration and expansion of Second Amendment rights.
- Protections for the sanctity of human life.
- Ranked number one for religious liberty amongst the states.

- Unprecedented support for cancer research and funding the largest gulf red snapper season on record. And we're now working to expand that to the Atlantic.
- The most sweeping election integrity measures in the country.
- The kneecapping of ESG in our investments and within our electric grid.
- And working with President Ben Albritton, the most investment in rural Florida in history.

Not to mention four Stanley Cups, a Super Bowl, and a college basketball national championship. And on Monday, God willing we're going to have the University of Miami play for a national championship in their home stadium.

Now I've got a lot more in the tank, but you guys only have 60 days, and so I think it's best we get on with it.

In short, we've held true to Benjamin Franklin's admonition that well done is better than well said. These results are what matter—and are what sets Florida apart.

Over the past seven years, we witnessed a great experiment as different approaches to government have been tried in different states. States that have followed Florida's approach have seen population and business growth and have maintained a healthy fiscal and budget posture.

States that have pursued a different course have hemorrhage, population income, and businesses, and many of them are in the midst of dire fiscal and budget crises.

The results of this grand experiment are in. People have voted with their feet. We can confidently say that Americans prefer the warmth of Florida freedom to the frigidity of New York collectivism.

Results must remain our focus throughout the country.

You see, people get elected to office, and they elevate superficialities over substance. It's almost as if accumulating media hits and social media likes is an end unto itself.

Look no further than the U.S. Congress, where there seems to exist an inverse relationship between the number of strongly worded press releases issued and the amount of tangible accomplishments actually produced. We see so much bluster on cable news—yet so little follow-through when it counts.

As Calvin Coolidge once said: "The government cannot be run successfully by substituting the power of entertainment for the power of accomplishment."

We have followed through and produced results on the promises we made to our voters, but we can't rest on our laurels.

I'm reminded of Winston Churchill's response when he was chastised by the leader of the women's temperance movement in Britain.

She said she admires Sir Winston for his statesmanship, but not for his drinking habits. "If we added up all the brandy and whiskey and champagne you've imbibed over the years, she told them it would fill up almost three-quarters of the ballroom that we're in right now." Churchill kind of up in yers looked up at the ceiling and said, "Well, how little time left? And so much more to do and let's get onto it."

Well, we have fulfilled our promises.

We have more time, and we need to make the most of it. Florida might have the lowest taxes at the state level in the nation, but our citizens have been squeezed by escalating property tax assessments and millage increases at the local level.

Seven years ago, local governments throughout Florida took in about \$32 billion in property tax revenue last year. That number rose to a whopping \$56 billion. We have residents that are locked into their homes because they can't afford the taxes on a new residence. Others have been priced out of the market entirely, and there are obviously other issues that affect affordability. The legislature, for example, has done very difficult but important work to enact reforms to stabilize Florida's insurance markets. And the results have been positive, as witnessed by the recent announcement of historic rate decreases for citizens homeowners insurance, and the consistent filings we're now seeing for rate reductions for both homeowners and auto insurance providers.

But those markets involve a lot of factors beyond the control of state government. Taxes are solely the province of government.

Tax relief is at the discretion of the people acting through our constitutional amendment process.

You should be able to own your home without paying perpetual rent to the government.

The Legislature has the ability to place a measure on the ballot to provide transformational relief for taxpayers—let's resolve to all work together. Get something done, and let the people have a say.

Florida's recent successes would not have been possible without taking a firm stand against the medical authoritarianism that swept the nation. During the Coronavirus pandemic, we chose facts over fear. We refused to allow Florida to descend into a Fauci dystopia where our freedoms were curtailed, and livelihoods were destroyed.

The use of coercion regarding medical treatments has been philosophically wrong and tactically counterproductive. People must have the right to make personalized choices about which medical products to consume or which medical interventions to undergo.

Informed consent must be the touchstone. Let's make that the law of the land in the free state of Florida!

Now we're in the midst of major technological changes that will permeate our society for years to come. Artificial intelligence is touted as being the key to curing cancer and expanding America's military edge over rivals.

And perhaps this will be true, but this technology also threatens to upend key parts of our economy in ways that could leave many Americans out of work. And with consumers footing the bill for the cost of power-intensive data centers.

It presents real perils for children and parents.

As AI chatbots have already been linked to teen suicides, it can also further devolve our society into a focus not on substance, but on online slop. Ultimately, these technologies will be designed by human beings. As Ecclesiastes instructs us, there is nothing new under the sun. The technology may change, the window dressing may be different, but human nature is what it is.

An AI tool is only as good as the data that is inputted: garbage in, garbage out.

Whoever controls the data inputs will have immense power to shape the reality for hundreds of millions, maybe billions of people, in ways that could make the truth a foreign concept. Some have even suggested that this technology will displace human beings.

As the central players on earth stage, we have a responsibility to ensure that new technologies develop in ways that are moral and ethical, in ways that reinforce our American values, not in ways that erode them.

We welcome technologies that enhance the human experience, but not those purporting to supplant it. We can never relieve ourselves of our responsibilities to think for ourselves—as Floridians, as Americans, and most importantly as the human beings that are made in the image of God.

Now, there have also been many great ideas that have already been filed in the legislature as proposed bills, legislators have proposed eliminating DEI and local governments, further disincentivizing illegal immigration, expanding Second Amendment rights, and blocking the creep of Sharia Law.

And President Allbritton is continuing his efforts to bolster Florida's rural communities.

My message is simple. Get the bills to my desk and in the spirit of 1776, I'm happy to put my John Hancock on those pieces of legislation!

Now Ben Franklin told us we could have a republic, but only if we could keep it. We are doing our part here in Florida to keep it, to keep what George Washington called the sacred fire of liberty, alive and well, to keep government within its proper limits, to keep the safety and wellbeing of the public at the forefront of all we do, to keep our public fisc in a healthy and sustainable condition.

We are the keepers of the flame of liberty that burned in Philadelphia in July of 1776.

We will not allow the flame to go out.

We will answer the call.

We will go forward with courage.

We will take bold action.

We will get the job done.

God bless the free state of Florida, and God bless these United States of America.

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