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Client Alert: Governor Ron DeSantis Delivers State of the State Address

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This morning, Governor Ron DeSantis addressed a joint session of the Florida Legislature to present the State of the State Address to kick off the 2024 Regular Legislative Session in Tallahassee. Legislators also heard remarks from Senate President Kathleen Passidomo and Speaker of the House Paul Renner in their respective convening sessions.

The Governor spent much of his 35-minute speech highlighting the successes of Florida compared with other states, touting that Florida has set the standard for limited government with the fewest state employees per capita and the lowest state government cost per capita. Additionally, the State has the lowest crime rates in 50 years and the lowest unemployment rate of all the large states.

He attributed this success to the work done in the 2023 legislative session: "The State of our State is strong. Let's keep doing what works. Let's continue to make Florida the envy of the nation."

Governor DeSantis offered praise to the legislature's work in education in recent years, commenting that the state school choice program has almost 1.5 million students enrolled, granting these students various private scholarships. He also emphasized the work done to protect the rights of parents pertaining to their child's education, including issuing the first-ever Parents Bill of Rights, expanding curriculum transparency, and eliminating diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) from public universities.

The State has also notably invested \$3 billion to increase teacher salaries over the last four years, allowing for the recruitment and retention of high-quality teachers. Additionally, Florida currently holds the number one spot for education, education freedom, and parental involvement in education.

As violence persists in the conflict between Israel and Hamas, the Governor applauded the Legislature for using its recent special session to pass sanctions on those responsible for the attacks and ensure security, protecting Florida's Jewish Day Schools, Synagogues, and Jewish students on university campuses.

Another of Governor DeSantis's goals is to ensure that Florida will become number one in workforce education by 2030, and Florida has made strides in Career Technical Education (CTE) and other workforce initiatives. "Since 2019," the Governor remarked, "Florida students have earned more than 365,000 rapid

credentials, and just last year, more than 235,000 students earned an industry certificate before they graduated high school.”

In spite of billions of dollars in tax cuts for Florida residents in recent years, the State brought in \$1.3 billion more than the revenue projection from the start of the fiscal year. Moreover, the upcoming budget is reduced by \$4 billion from the previous year and still pays off \$455 million of state debt early. The upcoming fiscal year budget includes an additional \$1.1 billion in tax cuts to mend the effects of inflation.

Governor DeSantis is proud of Florida’s continued efforts in resilience, boasting that storm preparations on behalf of the State ensured power restoration at a record pace after Hurricane Idalia. Florida also continues to work with local governments to continue repairing the long-term effects of Hurricane Ian and its devastating damages.

Governor DeSantis wrapped his address by stating that "Together, we will keep Florida free and provide hope for a revival of the American Spirit throughout these United States."

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Speaker of the House Paul Renner praised the Legislature’s accomplishments over the past year in his remarks, highlighting its success in protecting the right to life, enforcing the right to self-defense, and establishing universal school choice to best serve Florida’s children.

For the upcoming legislative session, he remarked that the House will focus on efficiency in the school choice programs, funding to support critical environmental infrastructure and natural resources, health care costs and transparency, social media restrictions for minors, public safety, and more.

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Senate President Kathleen Passidomo has made her priorities clear through already-moving measures dubbed the “Live Healthy” and “Learn Local” proposals. In her opening day remarks, she emphasized that these bills are a culmination of public input and stakeholders’ ideas.

She also highlighted that they address the need to expand Florida’s health care workforce, bolster health care innovation, deregulate public schools, and continue funding acquisition and management of conservation lands across the state.

With that, the 2024 Regular Legislative Session has commenced. Over the next 60 days, lawmakers will work tirelessly to pass laws and a state budget for the year before session concludes “Sine Die” on March 8th.