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Governor Crist Invites Floridians to Review Florida's Use of Federal Stimulus Dollars

~ Launches Web site to empower taxpayers to hold government accountable for use of funds ~

www.FlaRecovery.com

TALLAHASSEE – Governor Charlie Crist today unveiled the Florida Office of Economic Recovery's Web site that allows the people of Florida to review state and local governments' use of federal funds coming to Florida as a result of the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. The launch of the FlaRecovery.com Web site comes during Sunshine Week, the annual celebration of Florida's dedication to making state and local government more accessible to the public.

"We will ensure that Florida is using the highest standards of fiscal integrity, transparency and accountability in putting the federal stimulus dollars to work for Florida's families and businesses," Governor Crist said. "I invite Floridians to return to FlaRecovery.com often to check on our progress of getting this much-needed relief to our schools, workforce, transportation projects and most vulnerable residents."

Launched in the early stages of the federal recovery effort, the FlaRecovery.com Web site will evolve as information flows down from the federal level. The Web site is a clearinghouse of all public records and documents related to the implementation of the federal stimulus dollars, as well as a one-stop resource for citizens interested in learning more about assistance made available by the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Visitors to the site will be able to easily connect to information about programs such as unemployment compensation, workforce training, food stamps and cash assistance.

Under the direction of Governor Crist and Don Winstead, special advisor to the Governor for the implementation of the federal recovery act, the Florida Office of Economic Recovery will ensure Florida receives its fair share of the federal stimulus dollars and infuses the funding into Florida's economy as quickly and efficiently as possible. The office's openness and transparency will empower the people of Florida to hold accountable local, state and federal governments, as well as private businesses and non-profit organizations, for their use of taxpayer dollars.

Governor Crist Invites Floridians to Review Florida's Use of Federal Stimulus Dollars

Page 2

Florida's share of the federal stimulus package is estimated to be more than \$13 billion over three budget years. Governor Crist has proposed using \$4.7 billion of the funds for the 2009-10 budget. To receive the funding, appropriate budget authority must be approved by the Florida Legislature. However, Governor Crist has notified the White House that Florida will request and use the funds to create jobs and strengthen Florida's economy and will continue to consult closely with the Florida Legislature to ensure the necessary steps are taken to receive and use the funds.

Over the course of three years, the federal stimulus package will support children and families with critical health and human service needs, improve infrastructure, create jobs and enhance Florida's overall workforce. It is estimated that more than \$4 billion dollars in federal stimulus funds are allocated to Floridians in need of Medicaid, food stamps and cash assistance. Children and families relying on food stamps will benefit from an additional \$879 million. A total of \$1.4 billion will be spent throughout the state on highway and transportation projects, and \$126 million will be spent on programs to promote energy efficiency. Florida's talented workforce will benefit from \$165 million for workforce employment and training programs. As reported by the White House, the stimulus package is expected to create or retain 206,000 jobs statewide.

Governor Crist and the Florida Office of Economic Recovery continue to ensure that state agencies take the necessary steps to qualify for all potential federal stimulus dollars coming to Florida. To date, state agencies have filed a variety of reports and applications that will potentially lead to Florida's receiving the following federal stimulus dollars:

- \$453.1 million in additional federal Medicaid funds for January through March 2009, and \$363.1 million in additional federal Medicaid funds for October through December 2008, totaling \$817 million. Over the span of the recovery effort, federal Medicaid funds will increase to more than \$4 billion.
- \$1.4 million for increased services in the Senior Community Services Employment Program.
- \$393,700 for competitive grants to support vulnerable or eliminated salaried positions in local arts and cultural organizations as a result of the current economic climate.
- \$22.1 million to support Florida's one-stop career centers and re-employment services, and \$143 million to supplement the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Adult, Youth and Dislocated Worker formula programs, for a total of \$165.1 million in training and employment services for unemployed and underemployed Floridians.

Florida's Preparation to Receive Federal Stimulus Dollars

Governor Crist's *Accelerate Florida* initiative, launched in August 2008, is credited with helping Florida stand well-prepared to put federal stimulus dollars to use quickly. Last month, in anticipation of Congress' American Recovery Act, Governor Crist formed the Federal Stimulus Working Group on February 2 to review the best use of federal stimulus dollars.

The first federal stimulus dollars coming to Florida will benefit individuals receiving unemployment compensation benefits. On February 20, 2009, Governor Crist signed an agreement with the U.S. Department of Labor to increase weekly benefits \$25 per week, bringing \$345 million to Florida during 2009. The Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation is currently processing the payouts, and payments will begin by the end of March, including a lump sum retroactive to February 22. Throughout 2009, Floridians who qualify for unemployment compensation will receive the extra \$25

Governor Crist Invites Floridians to Review Florida's Use of Federal Stimulus Dollars

Page 3

per week either electronically transferred or in a check separate from their regular unemployment compensation.

About Governor Crist's Commitment to Open Government

On March 13, 2009, Governor Crist issued "A Week of Sunshine" Proclamation recognizing March 15-21, 2009, as Sunshine Week for the citizens of Florida. The proclamation urges citizens to celebrate Florida's dedication to making state and local government more accessible to the public.

Governor Crist made his commitment to Florida's Sunshine Laws evident in his inaugural address. As Florida's 44th Governor, he made open government a top priority. He quoted President Abraham Lincoln, pledging under his watch that Florida government would be "of the people, by the people and for the people." The next day, in his first Executive Order, Governor Crist established the Office of Open Government and charged it with providing the Governor's office and all state agencies the tools necessary to serve the people of Florida in a professional and efficient manner. The Governor created a dialogue about the importance of open government and freedom of information from day one.

On June 19, 2007, the Governor appointed the Commission on Open Government Reform. He charged the nine-member Commission to review and evaluate the public's right of access to government meetings and records. The commission held three public hearings throughout the state. The commission submitted its findings and recommendations to the Governor, the Senate President and Speaker of the House of Representatives at the end of 2008.

The Office of Open Government has collaborated with 36 state agencies and 11 state universities to assist citizens seeking access to public records and the public servants who work for them. Additionally, Governor Crist changed the clemency process to make it more transparent for clemency applicants. Furthermore, he issued Executive Order 07-294, creating a Citizens Open Government Bill of Rights to support citizen access to Florida state agencies. Governor Crist also created a partnership with Google Inc. to make state agencies' Web sites more accessible to the citizens of Florida.

For more information on Governor Crist's commitment to open government, please visit: www.flgov.com/og_home.

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