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Press Release

FLORIDA AFL-CIO: WORKING FAMILIES SEE “ALL PAIN, NO GAIN” WITH THE START OF THE 2010 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Tallahassee, Fla.- With the legislative session well underway and shaping up to be a session of giveaways and bailouts for big businesses, the Florida AFL-CIO, led by President Mike Williams, held a press conference on Monday, March 15 to address the grim reality that working families are seeing: all pain and no gain from their legislative leaders.

“Working families are hurting and it’s simply irresponsible for top legislative leaders to begin the legislative session with more pain for those who are already facing immense challenges,” **said President Williams.** “No Floridian is safe, especially hard working teachers, public safety officers and state employees. It seems that legislative leaders have waged an assault on those the folks who are working hard to provide for their families and do their part to help our economy move forward.”

The winners from this legislative session seem to be the mega and big businesses who are set to benefit from hundreds of millions of dollars in tax cuts and tax breaks under a series of packages advancing through the House and Senate.

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| SB 1680 | Corporate Income Tax Handout | \$193 million |
| HB 173 | Sales tax exemption: aircrafts | \$23.8 million |
| HB 637 | Sales tax exemption: sporting events | indeterminate |
| HB 697 | Sales tax exemption: film industry | \$150 million |
| HB 2125 | Corporate Income Tax Program | \$726 million |
| HB 711 | Sales tax exemption: boats | \$5.3 million |

Williams added, “Over the next three years, Florida taxpayers will see over **\$1.1 billion** in corporate and big business giveaways and bailouts while working families and every day Floridians continue to see pink slips and cuts to critical state and local programs and services. The consequences of these decisions will have lasting effects and the pain will be felt for years to come.”

From teachers to public employees and public safety officers, every day Floridians will feel lots of pain with absolutely no gain if the measures moving along in the legislature become law. Highlights of the major issues that will have draconian impacts on families across the state and will result in the long-term ailment of our economy include:

- **SB 2706 – Blocking Workers’ Rights** - Under the proposed constitutional amendment, employers will not only continue to control the process to organize, they will have a firmer grip on the controlled elections since voluntary recognition of majority pledged cards will forever disappear. This will only elevate harassment & intimidation cases because all efforts to organize will be required to go through an elections process, which is the period of time when harassment & intimidation takes place.

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- **Loss of Collective Bargaining** - The Speaker of Florida House of Representatives has made it clear that one of his top priorities is a proposed constitutional amendment that will forever end the right of Floridians employed by the state to collectively bargaining with the exception of state public safety and health care employees. This is just another example of the direct attack being waged against Florida's teachers, parents and students.
- **Unemployment Insurance Modernization** – The legislature failed to incorporate the alternative minimum base for determining worker eligibility for unemployment compensation into the Unemployment Compensation Tax Deferral for Business legislation. While some in the legislature continue to attempt to label this as anti-business, this program is a proven engine for economic stimulus and would enable unemployed Floridians to provide for their families and invest in our economy. This will undoubtedly have a high impact on construction, agricultural, hospitality and other seasonal workers, given the shorter duration of work opportunities and the extreme fluctuations in wages. Lobbyists for big businesses are still blocking this critical reform.
- **SB 2 / HB 7039– Class Size Reduction Amendment** - The campaign launched to dismantle the voter approved class size requirements will prove to be disastrous and have severe impacts on the state's public school system as school districts will see sharp declines in state dollars.
- **SB 6 / HB 7037 – Assaulting Florida's Teachers and Students** - Florida's parents have long voiced serious concerns over the over-reliance on the FCAT and other standardized tools in our education system because this “one size fits all approach” often leaves many students behind. Over the years, we have forced our children into tighter and tighter boxes, ignoring the fact that every student is special and that there are many approaches that can be employed by our teachers to maximize each student's potential. SB 6 takes this faulty approach even further. This massive bill will fundamentally alter our state's education system and cause irrevocable damage to Florida's ability to recruit and retain the best and brightest teachers for our kids. It eliminates local control, pay increases for the most experienced teachers, eliminates incentives for advanced degrees and board certifications and ties all teacher pay to standardized test scores.
- **HB 4117 / SB 610 – Collective Bargaining for Public Employees** – These bills eliminate any fairness or due process for public sector workers should they reach impasses in contract negotiations. For example, if workers reach impasse with a local sheriff, that sheriff will now have the final say in all negotiations, rather than a third party such as the County Commission or other legislative body. This is clear violation of any basic principles of fairness or due process.
- **SB 660/ HB 413 - Defined Contribution Retirement Program** – These bill change the name of the Public Employee Optional Retirement Program to the Public Employee Retirement Investment Program. They limit the option of enrolling in the State Retirement System's defined benefit program or defined contribution program to public employees employed before January 1, 2011. This legislation deletes any requirements for educational programs to compare retirement programs and reduce opportunities for workers to have real retirement security.

Williams concluded, “I urge lawmakers to think carefully about the decisions they are making this legislative session because our families cannot endure more pain. Our economy cannot sustain more layoffs and cuts to vital programs and services. The decisions of today will shape the future we have tomorrow and unfortunately, the discussions taking place right now paint a very grim and dire one for the people of Florida. There is time to change course and advance priorities that will help everyday Floridians and working families. The Florida Legislature must decide who they want to stand up for, those who still have all the benefits or those who are struggling to get by.”