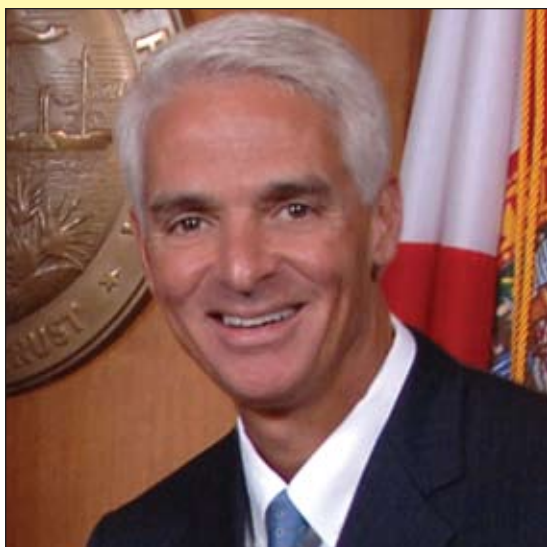


## The People's Governor

### An Interview with The Honorable Charlie Crist, Governor, Florida



The Honorable Charlie Crist

**EDITORS' NOTE** Charlie Crist began his career as an intern in the State Attorney's Office, then served as General Counsel for the minor league division of the Baseball Commissioner's Office. He entered public service as State Director for the former U.S. Senator Connie Mack, before returning to the private practice of law with the Tampa firm of Wood and Crist. Crist won a seat in the Florida Senate in 1992 and for six years served as Chairman of the Senate Ethics and Elections Committee and as Chairman of the Appropriations Criminal Justice Subcommittee. After completing his term as Senator, he served in a number of prominent public service roles, including Deputy Secretary of the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation, Commissioner of Education, and Attorney General. He was elected Governor of Florida in November 2006. Crist holds degrees from Florida State University and Cumberland School of Law.

#### Can you highlight the key priorities for Florida and how you're tackling them?

What we're trying to do is to improve the quality of life for our fellow Floridians, and that has many components. Obviously, education is incredibly important. Plus, we remain vigilant and focused on public safety. In addition, we're very excited about the opportunities that addressing climate change can bring to Florida, not only in cleaning our environment, which is critical, but also in producing economic benefits for our citizens. There truly is gold in green,

especially as it relates to ethanol development. In the Sunshine State, we have a lot of sugar, a lot of citrus waste, and other cellulose-based materials that can be used to produce ethanol. We believe this is not only an environmental issue but a national security issue. We need to try to wean ourselves off foreign oil in order to be independent, as they are in Brazil. So, public safety, education, climate change, and making sure that we protect our state from natural disasters such as hurricanes are priorities. It is an overall quality of life that we strive for.

#### Property tax and insurance reform also seem to be high priorities for Floridians. How challenging are those issues?

They're very challenging – there's no question about it. But I believe that challenges provide opportunities. Let me address the insurance issue first: I'm very encouraged by what our Florida legislature did in January 2007 during a special session, only about two weeks after I was sworn in. They changed the law so that Florida will accept more of the responsibility for reinsurance – the insurance for the insurance companies. In exchange for the savings that they would realize as a result, the insurance companies will be required by law to pass those savings on to Florida consumers. The rates haven't yet dropped as much as we would like, and we think it's very important to determine whether all the companies are adhering to the letter of the law. If they're not, we will take them to court to fight for the people.

On property taxes, I'm very, very encouraged by what has already happened. The legislature has passed bills to reduce property taxes by \$25 billion over the next five years, and the people of Florida voted to give themselves part of this tax break on January 29. So I'm very encouraged on both fronts.

#### How are you addressing the important issue of health care in the state?

Health care is incredibly important to our citizens. We have a wonderful senior population in the Sunshine State. We have enormous respect for them, and we address their related health issues on several fronts. Through our Medicaid program, we partner with the federal government to provide health care for the poor, probably one of the most laudable things that you can do. We've also been working to beef up the antifraud laws, so that the people who need health care actually get it, instead of somebody stealing it from them. Our Department of

Veterans' Affairs is working hard to expand the capacity of nursing homes that serve our more than two million veterans throughout the state.

In addition, we have launched a pharmaceutical prescription drug card for the citizens of Florida who don't have coverage, so they can get significantly reduced prices for prescription drugs. We're working very hard on all these fronts to improve health care, and access to health care, in the Sunshine State.

#### You seem to be very focused on public/private partnerships and engaging the business community and its leaders. How important is that to Florida's success?

It is very important. The business community in our state is very active. We have a great Florida Chamber, and the National Federation of Independent Businesses is very active in Florida. We think it is tremendously important to work with those in the business realm. I understand that there are no employees unless there are employers. I'm a free-market guy, and I think it's very, very important that we nurture businesses, particularly small businesses, to make sure that they have opportunities, are not over-regulated, are not overtaxed, and can flourish so that we provide more opportunity for our people to have jobs. It's all about getting jobs.

#### Are young, talented people today still enthused about going into public service?

They're certainly coming in, there's no question about it. Our administration is a reflection of it. I'm sitting here with two young men named Dane and Thomas. They're in their early twenties, and they're working very hard in our administration. But we can always do better. We need to pursue many additional avenues and opportunities to encourage young people to go into public service. We've already started by holding symposiums at several of our universities. I think it's working, and I hope we're inspiring more young people to come into public service, because pretty soon they're not just going to be at the table, it's going to be their table.

#### You have a job that never stops. Can you ever turn it off?

No, I never really can, but I don't mind that. It is 24/7/365 for my terms in office, and then I'll never be Governor after that. Thanks to the people of Florida, I really enjoy it. I thrive on the opportunity to right a wrong, or make a difference, or improve somebody's quality of life. It's the greatest thrill I have. And God bless the people of Florida for giving me a shot at it. ●