

ANDY FORD SCRIPT

Good morning.

Thanks for joining us. I'm Andy Ford, president of the Florida Education Association, and I've asked you here today to discuss the real ramifications of Senate Bill 6.

First, I'm going to tell you a few things about Florida schools.

A decade ago, our schools ranked at the bottom nationally. Press reports told us that our third graders couldn't read on grade level, close to half of our fourth graders were functionally illiterate, and far too many of our kids were dropping out.

That's all changed.

In recent years, we've been told Florida's made great strides to improve the quality of education and raise student achievement.

Here's what former Governor, Jeb Bush – the chairman of the *Foundation for Florida's Future* – wrote recently (and I'm quoting here...):

“Florida's elementary and middle school students are reading above the national average. Math proficiency is on the rise. The graduation rate has jumped double digits and fewer students are dropping out. ***Florida is now a model for the nation.***”

You'll find similar statistics posted on the Florida Department of Education's website. For example, a 2009 press release boasts that the “Number of Florida schools earning 'A's has climbed to an all-time high.”

In fact, 2009 was a banner year for education in Florida.

Despite deep budget cuts, 1,822 public schools earned an “A.” That's an increase of 237 schools, compared to the previous year.

When those results were released, Florida Education Commissioner Eric Smith said, ***“These are tremendous results for our schools, and every teacher, student, parent and administrator should be proud of the work they’ve done this year.”***

Governor Crist said, ***“Florida is truly blessed to have such high quality teachers who have made our education system one of the best in the nation.”***

You know, you don’t hear me say this often, but Governor Bush, Commissioner Smith, and Governor Crist are right.

Florida ***IS*** blessed to have such high-quality teachers, and we should be ***VERY*** proud of them.

Which brings me to Senate Bill 6.

SB6 punishes the teachers who ***DELIVERED*** these stunning educational gains.

It lashes out at the teachers who have made Florida schools a “model for the nation,” the ***SAME*** teachers Governor Crist says we’re “blessed” to have in our classrooms.

Well, if SB6 passes, they won’t be in our classrooms much longer.

The bill’s sponsors have told you that SB6 would rid our schools of incompetent teachers, the ones who underperform, who have no business standing in front of a classroom.

But that’s not what it does.

SB6 doesn’t distinguish between subpar teachers and highly effective teachers.

The teachers who, just a few months ago, Governor Crist and Commissioner Smith ***COMMENDED*** for their hard work and dedication are the teachers this bill puts at risk – our best and brightest.

Let me be clear, FEA is committed to effective teaching.

Ineffective teachers who fail to improve even after receiving help **SHOULD** be dismissed.

And under Florida law they **CAN** be dismissed. At any time.

We **ALREADY** have that system in place.

But SB6 doesn't target that small group of bad teachers.

It targets every teacher in Florida.

Its provisions would allow principals to fire teachers at will.

And I'll tell you right now, many of the teachers who'll be fired will be among our most effective and experienced teachers, the ones who have chosen to serve in high-poverty schools or teach in hard-to-serve subjects, like science, math, special education and English language acquisition.

THOSE are the teachers who will be judged inadequate and incompetent based on their students' scores on standardized tests.

Governor Crist and our legislative leaders say they want to continue to improve student learning and increase graduation rates. In fact, on – and off – the campaign trail, they've promised to make our schools a priority.

If that's true, then we share a common goal.

If that's true, they should be drafting legislation that provides our teachers with the tools and the resources needed for students to succeed.

Instead, our lawmakers have given us SB6.

I'd like to introduce a few of Florida's outstanding teachers. These are the teachers every parent wants for his or her child. They're going to talk about the effect SB6 will have on the profession.

[ANDY INTRODUCES TOM LENTZ]

Thomas Lentz teaches English at Ridge Community High School in Davenport.

TOM LENTZ REMARKS

Thank you, Tom.

[ANDY INTRODUCES JOSEPH UNDERWOOD]

Joseph Underwood teaches film at Miami Senior High School.

JOSEPH UNDERWOOD REMARKS

Thank you, Joseph.

[OTHER INTRODUCTIONS TBA]

It's teachers like you who ensure our children get a first-rate education.

And it's teachers like you, whose jobs are at risk if Senate Bill 6 passes.

[PAUSE]

Florida schools **HAVE** made great strides.

Education Week just ranked our schools 8th in the nation for educational quality, **despite the fact** that we rank 31st in education spending!

Our student learning gains are the **ENVY** of other states.

*So why would our lawmakers even propose – let alone pass! – a bill that betrays teachers like Tom who **PRODUCED** those gains?*

[PAUSE]

On behalf of the 170,000 public school teachers in Florida, I'd like to thank Governor Crist and our state lawmakers for their kind words.

For publically and repeatedly recognizing our teachers' outstanding work and acknowledging ***THAT IT IS*** our teachers who have delivered these education gains.

But the time for backslapping and praise is over.

Now, it's time our legislators deliver on ***THEIR*** promise – to Florida teachers and to the millions of children attending Florida public schools.

Thank you. I'll take questions.

###