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April 7, 2009

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FEA poll shows strong support for protecting public education

TALLAHASSEE – Florida voters believe in protecting funding for public education and are willing to support a penny increase in the state sales tax, if the money will be used exclusively for public education, according to a new poll conducted for the Florida Education Association and released Tuesday.

“Floridians are understandably worried about the impact of continued budget cuts on public education,” said Florida Education Association President Andy Ford. “Further damage to the already battered budgets of public schools at all levels threatens to halt the progress Florida has made on increasing student achievement.

Ford said that further cuts to public education would be disastrous, leading to deep cuts or elimination of school programs in the arts, after school programs and sports. Newly hired teachers are particularly vulnerable to budget cuts and districts throughout the state are considering closing schools to meet their budgets.

The polling, conducted among 800 registered state voters March 11-17 by Hamilton Campaigns, found that there is strong support for the FEA proposal to increase the state sales tax by an additional penny for three years in order to fund Florida schools and avoid cuts to public education. Nearly three-fourths of Florida voters say the Legislature should not cut education spending when balancing the budget, but should find additional sources of revenue like increasing the sales tax. Support for the proposal is strong among Democrats, Republicans and independents and just 18 percent of Florida voters support further cuts to education.

“These polling results confirm that Floridians want to Make Our Schools a Priority,” Ford said. “It is more important than ever that our state’s political leadership make the investment in Florida’s future – it’s children.”

The Florida Education Association is the state’s largest association of professional employees, with more than 140,000 members. FEA represents pre K-12 teachers, higher education faculty, educational support professionals, students at our colleges and universities preparing to become teachers and retired education employees.

B.	Are you registered to vote at this address in Florida? (IF YES) Are you actually registered as a Democrat, a Republican, or something else? (RESPONDENT MUST BE REGISTERED TO VOTE -- TERMINATE ALL OTHERS)	
	YES: Registered Democrat	43
	YES: Registered: Republican	40
	YES: Registered: Independent/something else	17
	NO: Not Registered – TERMINATE	X
	Don't know/Refuse – TERMINATE	X
C.	As you know, there will be an election for Governor and U.S. Senate in November 2010. As things stand now, how likely are you to vote in this election - almost certain, 50-50, or might you not get a chance to vote? (RESPONDENT MUST BE "CERTAIN" OR "50-50" TO VOTE -- TERMINATE ALL OTHERS)	
	Certain	89
	50-50	11
	Might Not – TERMINATE	X
	Don't know /Refuse – TERMINATE	X
1.*	Generally speaking do you think that Florida is moving in the right direction, or do you think that things are off track and moving in the wrong direction?	
	Right direction.....	38
	(VOL) Mixed	10
	Wrong direction	42
	Don't know/Refuse	10



4.* How would you rate the way Charlie Crist (**pronounced like “list”**) is handling his job as Governor — excellent, good, not so good, or poor?

Excellent	15
Good	58
(VOL) Don't know/Refuse	3
Not so good	17
Poor	7

5. How would you rate the way Governor Charlie Crist (**pronounced like “list”**) is handling the state budget — excellent, good, not so good, or poor?

Excellent	6
Good	46
(VOL) Don't know/Refuse	7
Not so good	31
Poor	10

6. Which one of the following issues do you feel is most critical to be dealt with by the Governor and the State Legislature -- (**READ ISSUES – RANDOMIZE LIST**) ?

Improving public education	18
Lowering the cost of homeowners insurance	4
Reducing crime and violence	5
Controlling government spending	17
Stabilizing home values and preventing foreclosures	10
Strengthening the economy and creating jobs	29
Lowering property taxes	5
Making health care more affordable	8
(DO NOT READ) Other	1
(DO NOT READ) Don't know/Refuse (SKIP FOLLOW UP QUESTION)	3

6a. Of the other issues I just mentioned, what would you say would be the next most important? -- (**ONLY READ REMAINING ISSUES IF NEEDED; OMIT FIRST MENTION; RANDOMIZE LIST**)

Improving public education	18
Lowering the cost of homeowners insurance	8
Reducing crime and violence	6
Controlling government spending	12
Stabilizing home values and preventing foreclosures	16
Strengthening the economy and creating jobs	20
Lowering property taxes	7
Making health care more affordable	12
(DO NOT READ) Other	1
(DO NOT READ) Don't know/Refuse	1

7.* Which of the following would you say is the biggest priority for Florida government to address, (**RANDOMIZE CHOICES**) reducing property taxes, improving public education, or lowering the cost of homeowners insurance?

Reducing property taxes	21
Improving public education	54
Lowering the cost of homeowners insurance	22
Don't know /Refuse	3



8. Thinking ahead, over the course of the next year, do you expect Florida’s economy to get better, stay about the same, or get worse?

Get better.....	31
Stay about the same.....	37
Get worse.....	30
(VOL) Don’t know/Refuse.....	1

9. As you may know, President Obama and the Congress recently passed a federal stimulus package to help improve the economy and create jobs. Based on what you know, do you favor or oppose the stimulus package? **(IF CHOICE)** Do you strongly **(favor/oppose)** it or only somewhat **(favor/oppose)** it?

Strongly favor.....	29
Somewhat favor.....	23
(VOL) Don’t know/Refuse.....	5
Somewhat oppose.....	12
Strongly oppose.....	30

11. Now I would like to read you a few statements with which some people agree and others disagree. I’d like your own opinion. Here’s the first one -- **(READ ITEM)** -- do you agree or disagree with this statement? **(IF CHOICE)** Do you strongly **(agree/disagree)** or only somewhat **(agree/disagree)**?

(RANDOMIZE)

	STRONGLY AGREE	SWHAT AGREE	DON'T KNOW	SWHAT DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
a. My home is currently worth less than the remaining mortgage.	22	6	18	10	44
b. Investing in education will help improve the economy.	49	20	4	14	13
c. My property taxes are about the same as they were a year ago.	38	21	6	13	21
d. Overall, taxes in Florida are lower than in other states.	33	23	17	12	15
e. The Florida legislature should protect the current level of public school funding, even if it means some tax increases.	42	23	3	11	21

12. How would you rate the job the local public schools in your area are doing— excellent, good, not so good, or poor?

Excellent.....	13
Good.....	43
(VOL) Don’t know/Refuse.....	10
Not so good.....	20
Poor.....	14



13.* Generally speaking, do you think funding for public education in Florida should be increased, kept at the same level, or decreased? **(ASK IF INCREASED)** Would you support increased funding for public education in Florida even if it meant higher taxes?

- Increased, even if it means higher state taxes 50
- Increased, but not if it means higher state taxes 10
- (VOL) Increased, don't know 1
- Kept at same level 30
- Decreased 6
- Don't know/Refuse 3

14.* Which of the following statements is closest to your own opinion about how the state should implement the final phase of the class size amendment ... **(READ AND ROTATE)?**

- The state **SHOULD** implement the final phase of the class size amendment now, to make sure that taxpayer dollars are spent to improve education instead of wasted on other things 49
- OR,
- The state **SHOULD NOT** implement the final phase of the class size amendment now, because forcing schools to meet strict class size standards in these tough economic times does not make sense 39
- (DO NOT READ)** Both 1
- (DO NOT READ)** Neither 1
- (DO NOT READ)** Don't know/refuse 11

15. From what you have heard of the state budget, would you say Florida's state budget has minor problems, major problems, or no real problems at all?

- Minor problems 33
- Major problems 58
- No real problems at all 1
- (VOL) Don't know/Refuse 8

16. As you may know, Florida is required to have a balanced budget. Currently, the budget is not balanced and the legislature is working to decide how to balance the budget. Which one of the following statements reflects what you believe the legislature should do in order to balance budget **(READ AND ROTATE STATEMENTS)**

- To balance the budget, the legislature should cut spending on education, which is the biggest part of state budget, to protect public safety and repair bridges 18
- OR,
- To balance the budget, the legislature should not cut education, but should find other sources of revenue like increasing the state sales tax by one penny. 74
- (DO NOT READ)** Both *
- (DO NOT READ)** Neither 5
- (DO NOT READ)** Don't know/refuse 3



18.* In your opinion, **(READ ITEM)** in Florida too high, about right, or too low? **(ASK IF TOO HIGH)** Are they much too high, or just a little too high? **(REPEAT AS NEEDED)**

(RANDOMIZE)	MUCH TOO HIGH	A LITTLE TOO HIGH	ABOUT RIGHT	TOO LOW	(VOL) DON'T KNOW
a. Are combined state and local sales taxes...	6	7	75	8	3
b. Are property taxes...	25	20	48	3	5
c. Are taxes that go to public education...	6	8	50	28	9

19. As you may know, Florida's public schools, community colleges and universities have seen funding cuts of over \$3 billion dollars and face the prospect of additional funding cuts. Hearing this, would you favor or oppose a one-cent increase in the state sales tax for the next three years if the revenues generated were invested exclusively into Florida's public education system? **(IF CHOICE)** Do you strongly **(favor/oppose)** this or only somewhat **(favor/oppose)** this?

Strongly favor	50
Somewhat favor.....	22
(VOL) Don't know/Refuse.....	2
Somewhat oppose.....	7
Strongly oppose.....	19

20. I'm now going to read you a list of positions that some people say helps them decide whether to support or oppose increasing the sales tax by an additional penny. For each statement please tell me whether it makes you MORE likely to support a penny increase in the sales tax, LESS likely to support a penny increase in the sales tax, or if it makes no difference in your support? Here's the first one ... **(READ ITEM)**... Would that make you MORE likely or LESS likely to support a penny increase in the sales tax? **(IF CHOICE)** Would that make you much **(more/less)** likely to support it, or only somewhat **(more/less)** likely?

(RANDOMIZE)	--- MORE LIKELY ---		NO DIFF/DON'T KNOW	--- LESS LIKELY ---	
	MUCH MORE	SWHAT MORE	NO DIFF/DON'T KNOW	SWHAT LESS	MUCH LESS
a. Some people say increasing the sales tax by an additional penny is the best way to prevent deep cuts in funding to Florida schools.	39	28	8	11	14
b. Some people say increasing the sales tax now will only hurt average Floridians who are struggling to make ends meet	15	16	16	31	22



21. Now I would like to read you some proposals that some people have suggested to maintain funding for public schools. Here is the first one... **(READ ITEM) (REPEAT AS NEEDED)** Do you favor or oppose this proposal? **(IF CHOICE)** Do you strongly (**favor/oppose**) this proposal or only somewhat (**favor/oppose**) it?

(RANDOMIZE)		<u>STRONGLY FAVOR</u>	<u>SOMEWHAT FAVOR</u>	<u>DON'T KNOW</u>	<u>SOMEWHAT OPPOSE</u>	<u>STRONGLY OPPOSE</u>
a.*	Collecting sales tax on things that are bought and sold on the internet.	35	19	6	12	29
b.*	Increasing gambling revenue by allowing slot machines at race tracks and additional casinos.	45	19	4	7	25
c.*	Taxing services such as dry cleaning, haircuts and lawn maintenance.	15	16	3	17	50
d.*	Implementing an additional penny sales tax.	39	27	2	8	24
e.	Increasing the tax on cigarettes and other tobacco products by \$1.00 per pack.	60	10	2	5	23

22. Now I would like to read you some potential cuts to education that some people have said should be made to balance the state budget. Regardless of your opinion about cutting education funding, for each of the following items please tell me whether you think that this statement is very concerning, somewhat concerning, not too concerning, or not at all concerning? **(READ ITEM) (REPEAT AS NEEDED:)** Do you find this statement to be very concerning, somewhat concerning, not too concerning, or not at all concerning?

(RANDOMIZE)		<u>VERY CONCERNING</u>	<u>SWHAT CONCERNING</u>	<u>DON'T KNOW</u>	<u>NOT TOO CONCERNING</u>	<u>NOT AT ALL CONCERNING</u>
a.	Reducing the school week to four days a week.	59	19	1	10	11
b.	Firing all newly hired teachers.	75	18	2	3	3
c.	Eliminating after school sports and programs like football and band.	66	22	*	7	5
d.	Layoffs of support personnel like bus drivers and teachers aides.	57	33	1	6	4
e.	Scaling back FCAT (SAY F-CAT) testing so the test is given only in certain grades.	22	21	3	21	33



Now I would like to ask you some questions to make sure we have all kinds of people in our survey.

23. Generally speaking, do you consider yourself a Democrat, Republican, or an Independent? **(IF IND)** Well, which party do you normally support in elections- the Democrats or the Republicans? **(IF DEM/REP)** Would you say you are a strong **(Democrat/Republican)** or not a very strong **(Democrat/Republican)**?

Strong Democrat	28
Democrat (Not strong)	10
Independent/Democrat	7
Independent.....	9
Independent/Republican.....	11
Republican (Not strong).....	10
Strong Republican	23
Other.....	1
Don't know	*

GO TO DEMOGRAPHICS ON FRONT PAGE.

REGION: (FROM SAMPLE)	
Miami	18
Orlando.....	20
Panhandle/Northeast.....	20
South Central.....	17
Tampa	25