

**Remarks from House Speaker Cretul
Special Session 2010C
July 20, 2010**

Members please take your seats,

I'd like to take a few minutes to update you on where we are and what we plan to do. As you know, The Florida Constitution authorizes the Governor to call the Legislature into special session for any legislative purpose. When the call is issued, we are compelled to assemble.

By assembling here today, you have performed your duty as the Governor may demand. But from the moment a quorum assembled here, the agenda in this House is and always will be set by its membership.

The Governor has no direct authority to propose constitutional amendments to voters. The Governor has no veto power over proposed constitutional amendments. The fact remains that he has called us here at the last possible moment to consider a constitutional amendment for which he never proposed language and permitted far too little time for reflection and review. That is a terrible way to propose constitutional changes.

President Atwater and I have been monitoring the situation in the Gulf continually. Senator Gaetz and a Senate select committee have been aggressively examining possible remedies and legislation that may assist recovery along the Gulf. President Atwater and I agree that the situation is changing daily and that greater clarity is required before the House and Senate can know what legislation is required to respond to the accident. We are working toward a session, likely in September, to consider ways to streamline recovery from the oil well blowout for both private and public interests. But we agree that there is nothing we can do this week to improve the situation more than we could in September.

When the Governor made his surprise Proclamation, I was visiting the Panhandle areas affected by the BP oil well blowout. I wanted to meet with Floridians who have been affected by this disaster and hear from them the issues they have been facing.

Let me share those concerns.

- They are concerned about an oil well that blew out 5,000 feet below federal waters many miles off of the Louisiana coast.
- They are concerned with the federal response.
- They are concerned with being made whole by those who are responsible for the accident and for its mitigation and cleanup.

These are the concerns, that they have asked us to tackle. But unfortunately, these are not the issues that the Governor has decided to address in this special session.

The Governor's sole proposal to amend the constitution

- won't put a single new skimmer off our beaches
- won't produce any new boom to protect our coasts
- won't save a single business or create a single job
- The Governor's proposal won't help us force BP to be any more accountable, speed up the claims process, or prevent another disaster hundreds of miles from our shores from impacting our state.

It would only ban an industry that is already banned while neglecting the real needs of Florida and its people.

I've discussed these concerns about the Governor's Proclamation with President Atwater and he and the Senate leadership fully understand. He has asked, and I have agreed, to concentrate our efforts to identify legislation that may be passed this fall to assist Florida's coastal communities. In setting our course, we have to agree that this tragic oil spill does not present the typical challenge that a state Legislature faces in setting public policy. There are at least three reasons this is true:

- While the people of Florida are among the victims of this spill, the Louisiana blowout is occurring hundreds of miles from our state outside our jurisdiction, and under the exclusive control of a foreign corporation, the federal government, and the United States Coast Guard. Meanwhile, local governments within Florida are burdened with responsibilities for funding their own urgent responses.
- We have no way of knowing how long the spill's effects will last, what exactly has occurred and what the extent of its damage will be.
- And finally, this is no hurricane, no tornado, no wildfire. This oil spill is a deep sea monster we've never met before. No state government knows how to defend against it.

So we simply can't conduct business as usual. For the House, this is not the time for traditional committee meetings, hearings and roll-call votes. Instead it's time to roll up our sleeves and figure out what state government can do to help.

Therefore, today I am establishing six workgroups with specific assignments. The workgroups will be expected to uncover problems and offer meaningful legislative solutions, if possible, and report to me by the end of August.

Many of you will be invited to participate in these workgroups. The House workgroups will address the following topics:

- Short-term assistance to impacted communities, to be led by Representative Marlene O'Toole.
- Private sector damages claims and compensation processes, to be led by Representative Steve Crisafulli.
- Recovery of damages to and expenditures by state and local government, to be led by Representative Matt Hudson.
- Strengthening Florida's civil and criminal penalties for environmental injuries, to be led by Representative Chris Dorworth.
- Long-term economic recovery and economic diversification for the impacted regions, to be led by Representative Paige Kreegel.
- Disaster response and preparation for potential future events, to be led by Representative Trudi Williams.

Additionally, I've asked Representative Gary Aubuchon to work with the leaders of each workgroup and to help coordinate their efforts. These workgroups are designed for members to dive deep into the relevant law and policy, to identify real problems and search for responsible solutions. Expect the work to be too serious to garner publicity, but directed exclusively toward achieving results beneficial to Floridians.

In addition, I and President Atwater have directed the Legislature's Office of Economic & Demographic Research to contract for specialized studies of the BP oil spill's indirect and passive losses suffered by the state and local governments. Such information is absolutely necessary to appropriately remedy the long-term impacts.

We're taking this action today in order to return the focus where it needs to be, on creating jobs as well as economic assistance and development for the Panhandle. We were called here today because of politics. But we are leaving today with a concrete workplan to provide real aid for those who are most in need.

Those of you returning next year may then think it is a good idea to amend our constitution, to prohibit energy exploration and production in Florida waters. If so, in the calm after the crisis, I trust your judgment whether or not to submit such a question to the people of Florida for their ratification at the 2012 general election. But I trust the flexibility and deliberative process in regular session far more than this process through which a Governor may very specifically and precisely limit the alternatives that may be considered by the Legislature.

Members, what I heard from our neighbors in the Panhandle was serious, and we are instituting a serious approach to addressing them.

As your Speaker, I have always been frank with you, and let me continue to be so: The gulf oil well blowout is a tragedy for millions of Americans along the Gulf Coast, and its impacts will be

felt for years to come. It is a long-term environmental disaster that has had dramatic economic effects.

There is no silver bullet or quick fix to this problem, and anyone who tells Floridians differently simply does not respect our citizens.

Simple solutions designed to produce sound bites, photo-ops and political attacks will do nothing to help Floridians in need recover. Floridians already know this recovery is serious business, and the sooner all our state's leaders realize this, the sooner we can start the recovery in a meaningful way.

Again, I thank you for doing your duty. If I were an advisor to the Governor, I would have encouraged him to focus on creating jobs, and on helping Floridians in need recover and not call this session at the last possible moment. But having assembled at his call, we have fulfilled our constitutional obligation.

I expect that we will shortly entertain a motion to adjourn this session sine die. As a co-equal branch of government, it is our prerogative to consider the Governor's suggestion and to dispose of it in the manner that we see fit.

Representative Hasner, you are recognized for a motion.