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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

**Florida Council of 100, in Partnership with the Florida Chamber of Commerce,
Releases *Closing the Talent Gap: A Business Perspective***

TAMPA, Fla. (January 14, 2010) – Today, the Florida Council of 100, in partnership with the Florida Chamber of Commerce, released “Closing the Talent Gap: A Business Perspective – What Florida Needs From Its Talent Supply Chain.” As unveiled by Governor Charlie Crist at a press conference this morning, “Closing the Talent Gap” identifies the key factors for investing public dollars in each stage of the education delivery process in order to deliver the highest dividend to Florida’s students and economy.

“Closing the Talent Gap’ takes a unique, comprehensive approach to laying out a plan for a seamless talent-development system in our great state. This report is a continuation of my administration’s long-time commitment to Florida’s parents, students, workers, and employers,” said Governor Crist. “We must step up to the plate and formalize a vision that will close Florida’s talent gap once and for all.”

The report culminates two years of study and discussion, involving numerous stakeholders and subject matter experts, after which the Council and the Chamber concluded that Florida faces an emerging Talent Gap – an urgent shortage of a resource as basic as food, more valuable than gold, and in higher global demand than oil. This crisis in human capital represents a vast and growing unmet need for a highly skilled and educated workforce – our state’s most important resource for driving sustainable economic development and a diversified economy.

“The Florida Council of 100 has always fervently held that Florida needs a world-class workforce infrastructure if our citizens are to have the career tools they need to compete and prosper in the global innovation economy of the 21st century,” said Susan Story, Chair, The Florida Council of 100. “This unprecedented initiative for improving Florida’s Talent Supply Chain will help Florida’s students succeed in the classroom and, thus, in an economy increasingly driven by talent.”

Research shows that, while predicting the future of such economic development is difficult, one fact is certain. The leading companies and clusters that will emerge over the next 20 years will locate themselves wherever they have access to a top-quality workforce. Unfortunately, Florida today is not leading the race in providing its workers with the professional skills and education they need to compete and succeed in the economy of this new century.

“As ‘Closing the Talent Gap’ clearly illustrates, today’s students will be tomorrow’s workforce and business leaders. Together, Florida’s education stakeholders have the potential right now to address the key issues facing our PreK-12 education community – from standards and assessments to effective teaching and helping at-risk students,” said Eric Smith, Florida Commissioner of Education. “We must tackle all of these interrelated issues in a comprehensive manner if Florida’s students are to reach their full potential.”

To begin addressing this challenge, the Council adopted a model developed by Workforce Florida, Inc. – the Talent Supply Chain – by which the full continuum of Florida’s talent-related policies and programs could be assessed. The Talent Supply Chain consists of four key zones: Prekindergarten education, Primary / Secondary education, Postsecondary education, and the Workforce. Ideally, a student would move through each zone of the Talent Supply Chain, which, for optimal performance, must be seamless, integrated and coordinated; access-oriented; market-driven; focused on high standards, accountability and incentives; and cost-effective.

The Council then analyzed Florida’s Talent Supply Chain, zone-by-zone, recommending more than 100 policy changes necessary for improving results each step of the way. The ultimate recommendation is that Florida must have a single, coordinated talent development strategic plan that seamlessly addresses the goals of all of these zones, builds upon existing reform efforts, and drives education policy with a singular mindset.

“The business community recognizes that Florida’s ability to create jobs depends directly on the availability of a world-class workforce,” said Steve Halverson, Chair of the Florida Chamber of Commerce. “‘Closing the Talent Gap’ underscores the Florida Chamber’s long-time commitment to this principle and its devotion to improving the quality of life for all Floridians.”

Today, the Florida Council of 100 and the Florida Chamber of Commerce respectfully asked that the Legislature implement the recommendations of “Closing the Talent Gap” and pledged their continued assistance to the Governor in making his education agenda a reality.

“Closing the Talent Gap” can be downloaded from the Florida Council of 100’s website at fc100.org.

Other Statements of Support

Statement from President Jeff Atwater, Florida Senate

Talent development in Florida has always been a chief priority of the Florida Senate. “Closing the Talent Gap” demonstrates how closely related education and economic development are and how Floridians must embrace transformational change if we are to prosper in the global innovation economy of the 21st century.

Statement from Speaker Larry Cretul, Florida House of Representatives

The Florida House of Representatives knows that jobs and education are intricately related. We must seize on many of the concepts in “Closing the Talent Gap” if we are to ensure that Floridians will successfully compete in cutting-edge fields that will define our economy for generations to come.

Statement from Bill McCollum, Attorney General

Florida has made significant gains in raising student achievement, but we must take every measure possible to improve quality of education so students can be competitive when entering the global workforce. It is incumbent on the state’s current and future leaders to heed this report’s call to raise our talent development system to world-class levels so that we can provide the state’s employers with the highly skilled workers our economy needs to prosper.

Statement from Alex Sink, Chief Financial Officer

As a former business leader and member of the Florida Council of 100, I know that a skilled workforce is key for the success of any enterprise, large or small. “Closing the Talent Gap” drives that point home and helps lay the groundwork for education reform that Florida must undertake to build a stronger economy for the future.

Statement from President-Designate Mike Haridopolos, Florida Senate

Florida’s ability to create and sustain jobs depends directly on the availability of talent, and improving our workforce through investments in education is the key to our economic prosperity as a state. The beauty of “Closing the Talent Gap” is that it is a living document that balances short-term recommendations with longer-term solutions that the Florida Senate can work with on a continuous basis.

Statement from Speaker-Designate Dean Cannon, Florida House of Representatives

I look forward to advancing the ideas in “Closing the Talent Gap” over the next several years. The concept of data-driven analysis coupled with visionary thinking is one that will enable Florida to develop a world-class Talent Supply Chain and generate jobs for countless Floridians.

Statement from Allan Bense, Vice Chair, Enterprise Florida, Inc.

As the state’s primary economic development organization, Enterprise Florida is on the front line in terms of trying to recruit, retain, and grow business in the state. In extraordinary fashion, “Closing the Talent Gap” emphasizes what companies and site selection consultants always tell us -- that the availability of a highly skilled workforce is the biggest determinant in whether they stay or come to Florida.

Statement from Belinda Keiser, Chair, Workforce Florida, Inc.

“Closing the Talent Gap” takes our Talent Supply Chain concept to a new level. Florida now has the opportunity to install a talent-development framework that can serve Florida for generations to come.

Statement from Sheila McDevitt, Chair, Florida Board of Governors

The recommendations of “Closing the Talent Gap” crystallize the need for a strong, vibrant higher education system in Florida. Both the jobs of today and tomorrow depend on Floridians having the advanced education that innovative companies demand.”

Statement from Frank Brogan, Chancellor, Florida Board of Governors

We are gratified that the business community recognizes the pivotal role our State University System has in transforming Florida’s economy into one that is globally competitive in the 21st century. The Florida Council of 100 report provides a sound, collaborative strategy that will work -- it will fill the talent gap and will prepare our citizens and our state for high achievement in the innovation economy.

Statement from Will Holcombe, Chancellor, Florida Department of Education, Division of Florida Colleges

Florida’s state and community colleges are the proverbial workhorse of Florida’s Talent Supply Chain, providing services ranging from career and technical education to 2+2 articulation to employment-related baccalaureate degree programs. The recommendations of “Closing the Talent Gap” strike the appropriate balance between maintaining our historical mission and promoting the programs of the future.

Statement from Ed Moore, President, Independent Colleges & Universities of Florida

Florida’s private colleges and universities annually produce thousands of highly skilled graduates who contribute greatly to the state’s economy. “Closing the Talent Gap” recognizes this and rightly shows that private-sector educators, at all levels, must play a key part in furthering the success of Florida’s talent development system.

Statement from Peter Rummell, Chair, Florida Council of 100 Higher Education Committee

After analyzing 75 years of data from 48 states, a 2006 study by the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland found that a state’s knowledge stocks – the innovativeness of its firms and the education and training of its workforce – are the three key determinants of its per capita personal income. Thus, it is clear that Florida’s economic growth and individual opportunity are based on attaining higher education – this is the foundation for innovation and prosperity.

Statement from Marshall Criser Jr., Vice Chair, Florida Council of 100 Higher Education Committee

Education is more important to an individual's economic success than ever before. Florida's postsecondary system has an obligation to our students and employers to provide a world-class education that will enable our citizens to excel and prosper in the international economy.

Statement from Marshall Criser III, Chair, Florida Council of 100 PreK-14 Education Committee

Continued enhancement and development of Florida's talent is the leading determinant of the state's ability to build a vibrant and innovative economy. Improving our workforce through investments in education is the foundation our future will be built upon.

Statement from Kathleen Shanahan, Vice Chair, Florida Council of 100 PreK-14 Education Committee

As a business owner and Florida Council of 100 member, I know there are many workforce challenges facing Florida's economy today. Our ability to generate jobs depends directly on the availability of talent – a point made clear in "Closing the Talent Gap."

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Formed in 1961, the Florida Council of 100, which consists of business, government and academic leaders, serves as an advisory council to the Governor and focuses on public policy that enhances the quality of life and economic well-being of all Floridians. Visit www.fc100.org.

Established in 1916 as Florida's first statewide business advocacy organization, the Florida Chamber of Commerce is the state's largest federation of employers, chambers of commerce and associations, representing more than 139,000 employers. The Chamber works within all branches of government to affect those changes set forth in the annual Florida Business Agenda, and which are seen as critical to the continued improvement of Florida's business environment. Visit www.FloridaChamber.com.