

March 12, 2009

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

This past Monday and Tuesday, Kevin Cooper and I participated in the Florida Hospital Association's annual legislative caucus in Tallahassee. There we listened to Gov. Charlie Crist and met with our local team, including Sen. Garrett Richter and Representatives Tom Grady, Denise Grimsley, Matt Hudson and Trudi Williams.

Kevin and I came away from the meetings with a sense of optimism that, in the midst of distressing economic news, our legislators understand and are up to the tremendous challenges to our state and our healthcare system. As Gov. Crist put it in his opening statement, "*We have real concerns that will be addressed responsibly.*"

**First, let me share some of those "concerns."** (Don't despair—I'll follow with better news!)

- Florida has slipped over the past four years from the 2<sup>nd</sup> fastest growing state in the nation to the 47<sup>th</sup> today.
- Florida has experienced a negative 0.3% income over the past year
- Unemployment statewide is 8.6% and 8.8% in Collier County. (The nationwide rate is 8.1%.)
- Florida's budget has a shortfall of \$5 billion, growing at a rate of \$100 million a month.
- In 1999, Florida's population grew by 400,000 people. In 2007, the state's population grew by 126,000.
- Florida's tax revenue is anticipated to drop from just under \$32 billion in 2006-2007 to just under \$23 billion in 2009-2010.

**Now for the *better* news:**

- Florida will soon receive \$817 million from the federal government for healthcare.
- This reverses a trend that saw Florida sending more money to Washington than we received.
- Gov. Crist has initiated a program through which any Florida citizen can buy health insurance for \$155/month. This will provide insurance to people previously unable to afford coverage.

The governor called Florida "a beacon for the rest of the country." And even though Gov. Crist campaigned actively for the President's opponent, he acknowledged the Obama Administration "cannot afford to fail." As to healthcare, Gov. Crist concluded by reminding all of us that Florida's citizens could continue to count on good health care remaining "a building block for our state."

I'm convinced that the people we have working for us in state government understand the importance of the work all of us do. Saving lives *is* a "higher calling." And I also came away assured, through private conversations, that our legislators are committed to helping NCH grow as all of us navigate through these trying times.

Bottom line, I'm still optimistic and agree with Warren Buffet who recently said, "It's never paid to bet against America."

Respectfully,



Allen S. Weiss, M.D., President and CEO

P. S. Feel free to share *Straight Talk* and ask anyone to email me at [allen.weiss@nchmd.org](mailto:allen.weiss@nchmd.org) to be added.