

2006 Sunshine State Survey

Introduction by 2006-2007 Leadership Florida Chair Jeff Bartel (XIII)

Leadership Florida is proud to present the first annual Sunshine State Survey – a deep and comprehensive current assessment of attitudes of our fellow Floridians.

As our organization celebrates its 25th year of bringing together Florida’s leaders to build a stronger statewide sense of community, we renew our commitment to doing our part to make Florida a better place to live, work, visit and prosper.

We know that building a stronger Florida can greatly benefit by taking the real pulse of our state and measuring the perspectives of its diverse population.

Toward that end, we commissioned the first annual Sunshine State Survey. Thanks to sponsorship from Kaplan University, whose commitment to Florida and to education made this study possible, we are now able to take a closer look at the opinions and priorities of Floridians...perhaps more than any time in the state’s history.

The past week’s important election, in Florida and across the nation, have swept in a new era of political change. No matter what your politics, the non-partisan nature of this “Sunshine State Survey” provides vitally important information worthy of deeper study and discussion.

By casting a wide net and reaching out to Floridians from all parts of the state, all ages and all walks of life, we were able to get a clear assessment of the hopes, concerns and goals of our fellow Floridians.

We intend to continue carrying out this survey each year, with support of a key sponsor such as Kaplan University, and ask some repeated baseline issue questions to measure changing public attitudes and to establish trends. Each year

we will also add new questions to take a snapshot of Florida's perspective on the issues of the day and other topical matters.

Most importantly, the results of this comprehensive poll and its future editions will be made available to our new governor, cabinet, state legislature, county and city governments, school boards and others as a tool to guide public policy decisions. Florida's universities and scholars will also make wide use of it for further study and examination.

We knew that by taking such a comprehensive and deep-drilling approach to this survey that we would learn a great deal about where we are as a state and the issues that are most important to our fellow residents. And just as we expected there were many interesting results.

Respondents listed K-12 public education as the most significant issue facing the state, followed concern over skyrocketing insurance rates.....with growth management and healthcare tying for third.

More broadly, this groundbreaking study showed us is that Floridians are optimistic about their own neighborhoods, with more expecting improvements in local quality of life than those expecting declines.

It showed us a population that is still hopeful for the future, with 62% saying that they would tell a friend or family member to move to the state. That's a great reflection of the affinity people have for Florida – no matter if they are native or moved here from another place.

Floridians are hopeful for the future, but while they are optimistic, they are also realistic – expressing serious concerns about the broader future of our state. Although they believe that their neighborhoods will improve in the coming years, more respondents said that on the whole they believe Florida will be a worse place to live in five years. That should get the attention of, and concern, our leaders.

Additionally, a majority of respondents did not give favorable rating to the job done by any level of government – federal, state, county, local school board or city.

While this response is certainly surprising, the people of Florida are not simply pessimistic. They are active members of their community, with 43% having attended a town meeting or similar discussion group, 49% having signed a petition for an issue or candidate and 66% having joined or contributed to an organization.

Floridians are also actively involved in the political process with 83% reporting that they are registered to vote in the state and more than 80% of that group saying that they always, or most of the time, vote in every election.

Furthermore, and most encouragingly, respondents did not simply report an abstract sense of worry about the future of our state. Rather, they expressed a great degree of consensus around the issues that need to be addressed.

Not only did Floridians list education as their top priority, they also cited gains in quality, but expressed a strong demand for further improvement.

There was also a strong consensus around the issue of smart growth and development. Respondents expressed concerns about its potential impact on the state and local communities, but said loud and clear that the government has an important role to play in the process.

As our new governor, cabinet, state legislature, county and city governments, and school boards prepare to move forward and serve the people of our state, this state-wide poll will provide an important perspective and guide to the process of how best to lead.

Success in the coming years will mean addressing the concerns of Floridians, focusing on the issues that they have highlighted and working together.

While the poll represents significant challenges for our state's leadership, Florida has a population that is no doubt involved and active in building a stronger and more prosperous state. Residents have expressed their concern, but they are still hopeful for the future and, with this poll, have provided a roadmap of issues that must be addressed to achieve success.