

Governor Jeb Bush: A Record of Leadership and Policy Accomplishment

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In his two terms as Florida's 43rd governor, Jeb Bush challenged the status quo and reshaped state government in order to lead Florida, the nation's fourth most populous state, towards a prosperous future. Summing up his legacy in *The Washington Post*, Governor Bush said:

"This office has more authority to create the agenda and implement it...My gift is that we've shown that governors can be activists, they can be reformers, if they want to."

While many two-term governors leave office with slumping favorability ratings, Governor Bush enjoys favorability ratings of 63 percent among Floridians. Governor Bush proposed and signed into law meaningful education, spending and taxation, health care, and environment policies that have set a transformative course for the state.

Health Care

As governor, Jeb Bush initiated innovative Medicaid reforms. *Empowered Care: Putting Patients First* is a consumer-driven program that has fundamentally altered Medicaid's power equation. Rather than bureaucrats deciding what health care individuals receive, Bush's reforms allow consumers to decide for themselves. Medicaid beneficiaries are given the opportunity to choose coverage that best meets their needs, including private options. Each recipient is risk-rated and provided with a medical allocation based on that rating. In a *Philadelphia Inquirer* letter to the editor, Bush explained the plan as one that:

"...respects and trusts people to make decisions about their health based on their personal needs, instead of having bureaucrats arbitrarily do it for them."

Education

Governor Bush is often referred to as Florida's "education governor." He is a long-time champion of school choice. Prior to his election, he founded Liberty City Charter School in Miami, which was Florida's first public charter school.

"When I left office there were 223,000 more Florida students reading successfully and 234,000 more students doing math on grade level or higher than when I became governor. Their progress and increased chances for a successful future are what I am most proud of."

Governor Bush established the *A+ plan for Education*, which enacted tough standards, required testing of all students and awarded "grades" to all schools. This increased level of accountability has resulted in a dramatic increase in student achievement in Florida, with Florida students well outpacing national average increases in standardized test scores. For example,

scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress 4th grade reading test went up an average of 2.5 points nationally from 1998 to 2005, while scores on the same test increased by more than 11 points in Florida.

He also implemented several innovative scholarship programs. One of those programs was the *McKay Scholarship Program*, which allows parents of students with learning disabilities to enroll their child in a school of their choice, paid for with a voucher, if they are unhappy with how their child is doing in a public school. Today, over 17,000 Florida students make use of the program, receiving scholarships worth an average of \$6,200 each.

Governor Bush also developed the *A+ Opportunity Scholarship Program*, one of the nation's most ambitious school voucher programs. Under the program, parents of students in failing schools could receive a voucher for use in another public school or private school of their choice. Before the law was struck down by the Florida Supreme court in 2006, hundreds of Florida schoolchildren were able to escape failing schools under this program.

He was also responsible for creating the *Corporate Income Tax Credit Scholarship* program, which “allows corporations to receive a dollar-for-dollar tax credit up to 75 percent of their state income tax for donations made to Scholarship Funding Organizations, which must, in turn, spend 100% of those contributions on scholarships for low-income students to use at the public or private school that best meets their needs.”

Spending and Taxation

Every year in office, Governor Bush is credited with cutting taxes, with a cumulative reduction of \$19 billion. Notable reductions include the elimination of the intangibles tax and conforming the state's death tax to the federal phase-out.

Through executive order, Governor Bush established the *Center for Efficient Government* to “promote fair and transparent best business practices in government in order to foster accountability, competition, efficiency, and innovation in the way state agencies deliver services to Florida's citizens.” Through greater competition created by this initiative, Florida saved more than half a billion dollars and was able to reduce more than 6,500 positions.

In the aggregate, over his two terms, Governor Bush reduced the number of state government employees by 13,726, a 6.6 percent reduction of the 210,209 state employees employed in 1999. Additionally, Governor Bush vetoed over \$2 billion in new spending initiatives. Under Governor Bush's leadership, Florida earned Wall Street's highest possible bond rating.

Environment

In 2000, Governor Bush signed into law the *Everglades Restoration Act*, which, through a 50-50 partnership with the federal government, established a comprehensive restoration plan for Florida's renowned wetlands. In addition to the \$8 billion restoration project, during his governorship, Florida has set aside more than one million acres of land for conservation through the *Florida Forever* land-buying program.

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