



Florida First

An Interview with The Honorable Rick Scott, Governor of Florida

EDITORS' NOTE Rick Scott is the 45th Governor of the State of Florida. He is the founder of two healthcare providers, Columbia Hospital Corporation and Solantic Corporation. He also started Conservatives for Patients' Rights. As the son of a JCPenny clerk and a truck driver, his family struggled financially at times. When he started public school, his family was living in public housing. After high school and one year of community college, Scott enlisted in the United



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States Navy. He then enrolled at the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC) and, while also working full-time at a local grocery store, purchased two Kansas City doughnut shops. Following graduation from UMKC with a bachelor's degree in business administration, Scott earned a law degree from Southern Methodist University (SMU). He then worked for the Johnson & Swanson law firm, where he specialized in healthcare mergers and acquisitions. In the spring of 1987, Scott put together a \$6-billion finance package and made an offer to purchase HCA, Inc. When the offer was rejected, he started Columbia with his entire life savings of \$125,000. In 1994, he made a successful bid for HCA, Inc, which, at that time, owned approximately 100 hospitals, and the company's name was changed to Columbia/HCA. By the end of 1995, he had added 80 more hospitals to the network and implemented his signature cost-saving practices throughout the organization. Through his efforts to oppose more government involvement in healthcare, Scott has been a guest on dozens of national television and radio programs including CNN's Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer, FOX News' Hannity, and radio's Laura Ingraham Show.

What opportunities does Florida offer when it comes to attracting business to the state?

Here's why we're winning: We have a great environment; it's beautiful; and people like to be here – they like our beaches and our weather, and they don't freeze all winter, so that is a big driver for us.

On top of that, there is no personal income tax and a very low business tax that LLCs and sole proprietors don't pay and most of our C corporations don't have to pay.

We have less regulation than the rest of the country. We have a laissez-faire government. There is just more personal freedom to build a business here, and it's a better environment in which to do that.

We're probably the best melting pot in the world. Something like 36 languages are spoken in our state, we're at a 44-year low with our crime rate, we are winning on K-12 education and on state colleges and universities. If people are going to do business in Latin America,

they're probably going to be headquartered in Florida, so we have all of those drivers in our state.

Tourism is big, manufacturing is growing, and we're doing really well.

You have put a global focus on job creation. Are you meeting expectations?

When I ran in 2010, I had a plan – seven steps to 700,000 jobs over seven years. When I became Governor, the state had lost 832,000 jobs in four years. Many people thought 700,000 jobs in seven years was unrealistic. We're now at 896,000 jobs in four-and-a-half years and, in the past few months, we've even beat Texas in the number of jobs created annually, and they have about 30 percent more people than we do.

Our job growth rate is second in the country. There is only one state that is smaller that has beaten us.

I still have expectations for growth. I want tourism and manufacturing to grow, I want our education system to continue to improve, I want everybody in the country and the world to say, "I want to get to Florida as soon as I can because I know if I'm in Florida, I can get a job, my kids can get a great education, and I can live in a safe environment."

What has been the secret to Florida's success for K-12 reform and, on a broader scale, is this a working model that can be taken across the country?

In Florida, we measure results. We don't have tenure for our teachers in K-12 any longer. Our schools are all ranked each year. We have a lot of charter schools. We have a voucher for our low-income students to go to private schools if they're not going to well-performing schools.

We add those things up and it creates a lot of options for families, and the competition makes all of our schools – traditional public schools, our charter schools, and private schools – compete and be better all the time. Competition makes everybody focused on the education of a child.

Our universities and state college system now have performance funding tied to three things: What does it cost to get a degree? Do students get jobs when they're finished? How much money do they make?

It has even made them more focused on what jobs are out there. We have 47 technical schools that help individuals who want to go into a specific vocation around the state. It's all in an effort to push everybody to think about what the end result is, which is that everybody in Florida has a good paying job. When we have that, we have plenty of state revenues to fund education, the environment, and law enforcement.

Has the dialogue surrounding healthcare been correct and are you optimistic we're going to be able to meet the challenges?

I'm optimistic but to improve healthcare, we need to align more competition. We need to allow individuals to buy the insurance they want, not the insurance government dictates they buy. We need to allow insurance companies to sell across state lines, and need to reward people with lower premiums if they eat right, exercise, and don't smoke. The driver that causes the problem in healthcare is cost, so cost will go down. All people have access to healthcare, which is what we all want.

For someone who is known to go across party lines, how critical is it to find compromise?

It's critical to keep people focused on what is important. People all want jobs; they want a great education for their children; and they want to live in a secure community. Our elected officials, no matter which party, need to focus on those three things. If they do that, they will figure out how to get those things done.

How critical is public/private partnership in meeting those needs?

The business community will put their own capital at risk, and it helps us keep government small, so people can keep their own money and have a chance to live their own dreams without government intrusion. ●