



NEWS

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Florida TaxWatch Releases The 2009 Turkey Watch Report ***Legislature Shows Restraint in Tight Budget Year***

TALLAHASSEE — Facing the worst revenue projections and budget outlook in perhaps the state’s history, the Florida Legislature showed restraint in funding member projects and other projects historically referred to as “turkeys” in the FY 2009-10 Budget, according to the **2009 Florida TaxWatch Turkey Watch Report** released today.

The annual report, produced by the nonpartisan, nonprofit research institute and government watchdog Florida TaxWatch, spotlights legislative projects placed in the budget without proper opportunity for public review and debate; which circumvent lawfully established procedures; or which non-competitively benefit a very limited special interest or local area of the state. **The “budget turkey” label does not condemn a project’s worthiness,** but instead focuses on the budget process, including instances where the Legislature has not followed its own policies and procedures to ensure the highest standards of taxpayer accountability and government efficiency.

“Although not an entirely turkey free budget, the story here is that the legislature did a pretty good job keeping turkeys out of the budget,” said **Dominic M. Calabro**, President and CEO of Florida TaxWatch. “The Legislature was forced to make a number of very difficult decisions this year because of the state’s financial situation, and they certainly deserve to be commended for keeping the number so low. You also have to remember that the legislature passed \$2 billion in tax and fee increase, and it’s difficult for a legislator to vote for a tax increase without being able to bring something home for the district. That being said, there are still \$15 million worth of turkeys, and we encourage Governor Crist to seriously consider vetoing these projects that have bypassed the normal appropriations process.”

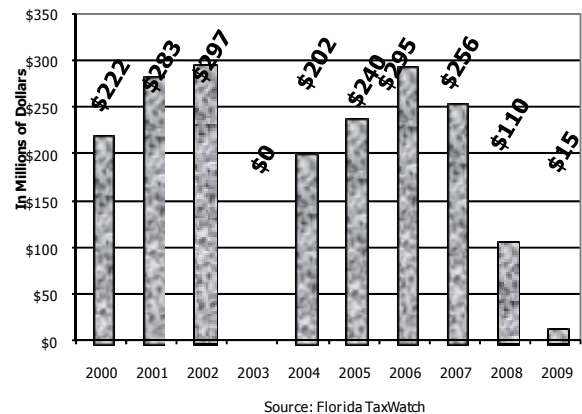
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Going into the session, Leaders instructed other legislative members that there would be no money for funding such items. They largely stuck to their word. Still, this year Florida TaxWatch has identified ten appropriations worth \$15.0 million as budget turkeys.

“The legislature did a good job of limiting member projects and other traditional turkeys this year,” said **Kurt R. Wenner**, Director of Tax Research. “Although this was a tight budget year, the past has proven scarce revenues do not always mean few turkeys, so the relatively low amount of turkeys shows that the Legislature deserves a lot of credit.”

Despite the \$15 million in taxpayer dollars allocated to budget turkeys during this difficult fiscal time, the report notes that the budget is relatively austere especially compared with previous years. In fact, the report points out, except for a couple of “turkey-free” years, this is the smallest number and value of turkeys since TaxWatch began the Turkey Watch in 1994. Since 1999, turkeys in the budget have usually exceeded \$200 million annually. Interestingly, a tight budget year does not always mean few turkeys. Despite similar proclamations of there being no money for member projects during the previous two years, Florida TaxWatch identified \$256 million of such projects in the 2007 Budget and \$110 million worth last year. Despite the dire revenue outlook coming into this session, the addition of federal stimulus money, the tobacco tax increase, and numerous other tax and fee hikes all provided opportunities for turkeys.

**10-Year Turkey History
(turkey dollars by year)**



[Click here to view the full report.](#)

Media Note: Dominic M. Calabro and Kurt Wenner are available for questions and interviews; please contact Robert Weissert at 850-222-5052 to arrange availability. Pictures of the release event are available from Florida TaxWatch.

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Florida TaxWatch is a statewide, non-profit, non-partisan research institute that over its 30-year history has become widely recognized as the watchdog of citizens' hard-earned tax dollars. Its mission is to provide the citizens of Florida and public officials with high quality, independent research and education on government revenues, expenditures, taxation, public policies and programs and to increase the productivity and accountability of Florida state and local government. Its support comes from homeowners and retirees, small and large businesses, philanthropic foundations, and professional associations. On the web at www.FloridaTaxWatch.org.