



NEWS

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MORE REVENUE BRINGS MORE BUDGET TURKEYS ***But Not As Large A Flock as Feared Given Unprecedented Budget***

TALLAHASSEE — Following a second straight year of record revenue, Florida's budget has another big batch of budget turkeys this year. That's the finding of Florida TaxWatch, which identified 489 budget turkeys costing \$295-million, turkeys that the non-partisan, non-profit taxpayers research institute urges the Governor's consideration for his line-item veto.

"It could've been worse, as the Legislature didn't spend everything it had," said Dominic M. Calabro, President of Florida TaxWatch, at a morning news conference. "This was another windfall year for Florida, with an extra \$1.2-billion in unanticipated revenue available to spend late in the budgeting process, which followed another \$5.6-billion surplus before the session," he said. "The 2006-07 budget has much in it to commend. However, with all that money, it not surprising it has a lot of turkeys too."

A Budget Turkey, under the procedural criteria of Florida TaxWatch, is a project that meets one or more of the following criteria:

- Projects that did not go through review and selection processes that are established in state law or rule. Examples include transportation, school construction and local parks. Projects that go through the process but are funded ahead of higher priority projects (as determined by the process) can also be turkeys.
- Appropriations that were inserted in the budget during conference committee deliberations, meaning they did not appear in either the Senate or House final budget.
- Subsidies to private organizations, councils or committees that can and should obtain funding from private sources.
- Local government projects benefiting local area residents but lacking significant local funding support and/or overall benefit to the state as a whole.
- Appropriations that circumvent competition and mandate that a specific vendor or project receive funding.
- Projects or programs added late in the process that bypass legitimate review and proper evaluation because they were not in an agency budget request or the governor's recommended budget or were not heard in legislative committees.
- Other turkeys may include: appropriations from inappropriate trust funds, duplicative appropriations and appropriations contingent on legislation that did not pass

To allow for legislative initiative, any items that were funded in both the House and Senate budgets that serve a legitimate state function were not designated as budget turkeys, except under special circumstances, such as bypassing an established competitive selection process for local projects.

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“Budget Turkeys are examples of appropriations of taxpayers’ hard-earned money that violate the integrity of the budgeting process and the transparency in budget decisions,” said Calabro. “If it has the review by the Legislature and has transparency, competition, prioritization, and accountability, it may not be a desirable budget expenditure, but it’s not a ‘budget turkey’ under TaxWatch’s rigorous criteria.”

Of the \$295 million in turkeys, \$174.5 million were found in General Revenue and \$120.5 million in Trust Funds. This amounts to approximately four-tenths of one percent of the \$71.3 billion state budget. This year’s turkeys cost \$40 for each Florida family and cost every man, woman and child in Florida \$18.

The Governor has vetoed as many as 80% of Florida TaxWatch Budget Turkeys in past years’ budgets.

Examples of some of the more questionable expenditures this year:

- \$4 million for relocation of the Salvador Dali Museum
- \$2.6 million for the Institute for Human and Machine Cognition
- \$1 million for the Hialeah Racetrack

The “Budget Turkey” label doesn’t condemn the budget item’s worthiness. “There are some projects of tremendous public benefit, which makes you wonder why they get funded as an after-thought, in what is supposed to be a thoughtful, deliberative process,” said Calabro. “The Governor has to weigh these concerns and question whether this is the best use of Florida taxpayers’ dollars, given our state’s vast and pressing needs and limited resources.”

Florida TaxWatch researchers pointed out that the \$295 million in turkeys could be better spent elsewhere to:

- **Build Schools.** \$100 million could build two elementary schools, two middle schools and two high schools.
- **Hire Teachers.** \$100 million could hire 2,500 additional teachers (at an average salary of \$40,000).
- **Student Funding.** \$50 million could increase per student funding for K-12 by \$20.
- **Healthy Kids.** \$45 million could provide the state and federal share for more than 31,250 children to have health insurance.

The Legislature is to be commended for not spending all the money it had. Though it had more money than any legislature before it, and history has shown that the temptation to spend it all is great, it did not. In addition to the required investment in the Budget Stabilization Fund, this budget leaves \$2.5 billion in cash reserves for future years.

“Some of these Budget Turkeys appear to be meritorious projects,” said Calabro. “But often they were never compared as they should have been with like-minded projects. Instead, some were added in the 11th hour with little discussion or debate,” said Calabro.

The state budget totaled \$71.3 billion, an increase of 9-percent or \$5.9 billion over last year’s spending, outpacing all measures of Florida’s substantial economic growth. The state budget grew at a rate more than double the combined economic growth rate of 4.1-percent. The final budget number will be bigger when all appropriations in substantive bills are included.

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MEDIA NOTE: You may view the 2006 Turkey Watch Report online at www.floridatxwatch.org along with a breakdown of the turkeys sorted by line item number and by county.

Florida TaxWatch is a private, non-profit, non-partisan research institute that over its 25 year history has become widely recognized as the watchdog of citizens' hard-earned tax dollars. Our 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 Government. On the web at www.floridataxwatch.org