



RESEARCH THAT GETS RESULTS

1980

State Retirement Fund. The first major report issued by the Citizens Council For Budget Research (CCBR) -- renamed Florida TaxWatch in 1984 -- recommended actions that helped the state pension fund increased returns by \$6 billion over the next eight years.

TRIM. The Legislature passed a CCBR-recommended "Truth In Millage" (TRIM) law to keep taxpayers informed and increase public participation in the property tax process.

1981

State Universities. Following a CCBR report that expansion requests from four upper level state universities were not adequately documented, the Legislature withheld funding for three of the requests.

Contracted Services. A CCBR investigation of professionals who serve on the state payroll for limited periods of time resulted in reducing one attorney's salary from \$100,000 to \$38,000.

1982

State Facilities. CCBR research that raised concerns about expenditures and management decisions at the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind were substantiated by Florida's Auditor General, saving \$102,400.

Computer System. A CCBR examination of a proposed mainframe computer system for the University of South Florida resulted in changes that saved \$3.2 million over five years.

1983

Air Fares. CCBR research recommended that the state competitively bid air fares and other travel services, saving nearly \$20 million over the next five years.

Insurance Field Offices. CCBR research disclosed that Florida had more Department of Insurance field offices than all other states combined and the size of that network was unwarranted. The Legislature agreed and reduced field offices from 26 to 10 for annual

savings of \$1.8 million.

Budget Turkeys. CCBR identified more than \$100,000 in state budget appropriations by the Legislature that circumvented the normal planning and budgeting process designed to ensure transparency and proper public review.

1984

Note: The Citizens Council For Budget Research (CCBR) became Florida TaxWatch (FTW) in May 1984.

Energy Conservation. A FTW report showing that the sales and use tax on cogenerated energy discouraged energy conservation prompted the Legislature to repeal the tax. Savings over the next ten years totaled \$329 million.

Judicial Accountability. The Legislature implemented FTW recommendations to separate court system administration and accounting functions from those of state attorneys and public defenders, and to increase Auditor General audits.

1985

Prison Labor. The Legislature enacted a FTW recommendation to increase the use of prison labor for governments and non-profit organizations for added value of \$165 million through 1994.

Low Flow Showerheads. Following a FTW recommendation, all new state institutions were required to install low flow showerheads that save two to five gallons of water per minute, saving \$14.5 million by 1989.

1986

TRIM. The Legislature closed a loophole in the Truth in Millage law, first reported by FTW, that effectively “hid” property tax increases from up to 80% of Florida taxpayers.

Gas Tax. A FTW report recommending ways to pay (and not pay) for growth management contributed to legislative defeat of a bill that would have allowed counties to levy an extra five cent gasoline tax.

1987

Health Screening. The Legislature approved a FTW recommendation to save \$23.4 million in Medicaid health costs by increasing the frequency of preventative check-ups for indigent children.

Mass Transit. A FTW report questioning the Florida DOT’s plan for a “Park and Ride” program along Interstate 95 in South Florida helped reduce its cost by more than \$50 million.

Partners in Productivity. Florida TaxWatch and The Florida Council of 100 spearheaded this new program to implement and reward major government cost

savings and performance enhancements.

1988

Land Purchases. The Legislature adopted a FTW recommendation to limit the price of land purchased jointly by the state and local governments.

1989

Prison Industries. The Legislature adopted six FTW recommendations to improve program competitiveness and accountability, and increase taxpayer cost savings.

Loan Pooling. A FTW recommendation to offer low cost, long-term, tax-exempt capital financing to community service providers for the developmentally disabled was adopted by the state's welfare agency.

Partners in Productivity. This government cost savings effort expanded to include a first-in-the-nation productivity and performance measurement system for improving state government and implementing a government employee cash awards program, which would later become the Davis Productivity Awards.

1990

Transportation Funding. A FTW report on the economic impacts of Florida's 1985 Growth Management Act helped the Legislature approve a controversial gasoline tax increase, with performance-based safeguards, necessary to pay for road and bridge improvements to handle Florida's tremendous population growth.

Lottery Department Expenses. Legislative action on a FTW recommendation to reduce the Florida Lottery's expense budget and increase the Department of Education's share of ticket sales produced an additional \$10.8 million for schools.

1991

Medicaid. A FTW recommendation helped prompt the Legislature to require agencies to save state General Revenue by using federal Medicaid funds to refinance eligible programs and activities.

Cost Savings. A FTW/Florida Council of 100/State of Florida "Partners in Productivity" interim report card documented savings of \$99 million from implementation of its recommendations by the state's four largest agencies.

1992

Taxpayers' Bill of Rights. The Legislature, three years after creating a Taxpayers' Bill of Rights Task Force chaired by FTW, enacted most of its recommendations. It simplified the rights of all Florida taxpayers and created a Taxpayer Advocate within the Department of Revenue

Seventh Period. An FTW recommendation that the state's high schools replace seven periods of 50 minutes with six periods of 60 minutes was implemented by most districts, improving student achievement and saving money.

1993

Prison Expansion. Following a FTW report on the unreliability of recurring revenue from raising the state cigarette tax, the Legislature appropriated state welfare system savings to fund a 10,000 bed prison expansion.

1994

Revenue Limitation. Voters approved a constitutional amendment that limits government growth by tying revenue collections to growth in personal income, similar to recommendations made by Florida TaxWatch for more than a decade.

State Budgeting. The Legislature approved FTW recommendations for implementing the 1992 constitutional amendment on performance-based budgeting and performance measures.

1995

Tax Compliance. FTW research helped prompt the Department of Revenue to crack down on tax evaders, collecting an extra \$6 million from the intangibles tax alone.

Government Operations. FTW research documented implementation of more than 200 "Partners in Productivity" government service delivery improvement recommendations worth a cumulative \$715 million.

1996

Sales Taxation of Groceries. A FTW report helped to achieve consistent, correct application of the state sales tax to grocery items.

Computer Software Taxation. FTW research helped clarify a law that computer software owned by businesses would not be taxed as tangible personal property.

1997

Telecommunications Tax. Following a FTW recommendation that any tax increase should not put Florida at a competitive disadvantage, the Legislature exempted internet access from taxation.

Property Assessment. FTW reports helped shape legislation to level the field for taxpayers who challenge property appraisers' decisions.

\$6.2 Billion Results. Florida State University's Office For Needs Assessment and Planning documented and verified that initiatives recommended by FTW since 1979 had added \$6.2 billion to the value of state service delivery.

1998

Intangibles Tax. The Legislature passed a bill containing the majority of FTW Task Force recommendations to begin eliminating Florida's intangible personal property tax, which is unfair, outdated and harmful to Florida's economic development and competitive position.

Lottery Advertising. A legislative proposal reducing and restricting Florida Lottery advertising that could have reduced lottery sales and funding for education was scrapped following a FTW report.

1999

Taxpayer Fairness. The Legislature enacted long-standing TaxWatch recommendations to increase taxpayer fairness by reducing the statute of limitations on audits from five to three years; tying interest on delinquent taxes to the prime rate, not 12%; and paying interest on late refunds to taxpayers.

Alcoholic Beverage Surcharge. FTW recommended repealing the "by-the-drink" alcoholic beverage tax because it was unfair and difficult to administer and enforce. The Legislature reduced the tax by a third in 1999 and cut it by half again in 2000.

2000

Property Taxpayers' Bill of Rights. The Legislature enacted the property taxpayers bill of rights recommended and drafted by Florida TaxWatch's Ad Valorem Tax Task Force to codify the rights available to taxpayers in one statutory location and in plain, understandable language.

Intangibles Taxation. For the third straight year, the Legislature passed legislation implementing recommendations of FTW's Intangibles Tax Task Force that reduced the rate from 1.5 to 1.0 mills and completed phase-in of an exemption for accounts receivable.

2001

Economic Recovery. FTW recommendations to stimulate Florida's economy and tourism industry following the September 11 attacks became the cornerstone of the Governor's economic stimulus plan enacted in a special legislative session.

Civil Service System. The Legislature approved an act embodying reforms recommended by FTW since 1986 to modernize the state workforce and improve service delivery.

2002

Constitutional Amendment. A FTW legal challenge helped remove from the ballot a proposed constitutional amendment that would have authorized as few as 5% of state lawmakers to raise sales and use taxes.

Sales Tax Holiday. FTW research helped assure the passage of a tax holiday by showing it provides a real economic stimulus while benefiting consumers

2003

Tax Amnesty. FTW-suggested tax amnesties in 1987-88, 1992 and 2003 generated more than \$200 million, plus additional money as evaders were added to the tax rolls.

City of Tallahassee Productivity Improvements. FTW documented more than \$2 million worth of added value to service delivery by winners of awards patterned after the Prudential Financial – Davis Productivity Awards program.

2004

Constitutional Amendments. The Florida Supreme Court removed two General Election ballot proposals (The FAIR Amendment & Doubling of Homestead Amendment) opposed by FTW because they would have imprudently eliminated sales and use tax exemptions and exclusions, and unfairly shifted property taxes onto people who do not own their own homes.

Turkey Watch. FTW annually points out where the Florida Legislature does not follow its own policies/procedures for reviewing proposed appropriations. Florida's Governors have vetoed more than \$700 million worth of spending items from FTW Turkey Watch lists since 1983.

Prudential Financial - Davis Productivity Awards. FTW has documented \$4.8 billion added value for Florida taxpayers in cost savings ideas and practices by state employee winners since 1989.

2005

Substitute Business Communications Tax Repeal. The legislature repealed this tax following a TaxWatch task force recommendation to do so, outlining the negative effect on the state's economy and competitiveness resulting from this large unintended tax increase.

Constitutional Revision Reform. The legislature created a proposed constitutional amendment (which was passed by voters the next year) that would implement a long-standing Florida TaxWatch recommendation to require a 3/5 vote of voters voting on an amendment instead of the current simple majority.

2006

Full Repeal of Tax on Intangibles. TaxWatch began its push for a phased-in repeal of this unfair, outdated tax in 1988, through the work of its Intangibles Tax Task Force, with effective stepped reductions of the rate beginning in 1998 through full repeal in 2006.

Repeal of Alcoholic Beverage Surcharge. The legislature repealed this “by-the-drink tax,” following two TaxWatch publications that outlined how costly and complicated it was to administer, audit and enforce, and was unfairly burdensome to merchants.

Joint and Several Liability. TaxWatch provided key research and testimony quantifying the limited impact repeal would have on the state’s Medicaid budget. The legislature passed a bill abolishing the legal doctrine of joint and several liability, ensuring that parties to a lawsuit will not be liable for damages in excess of their percentage of responsibility.

Sales Tax Exemptions on Equipment. The legislature provided a sales tax exemption for machinery and equipment used for research and development, as well as space flight and expanded the partial exemption for machinery and equipment used to increase output to a full exemption. These actions followed TaxWatch research outlining the competitive disadvantages that existed without these exemptions.

2007

Championed True Property Tax Reform. TaxWatch brought relative, data-driven research and recommendations to urge true property tax reform – not just relief – to the legislature and the incoming constitutional Taxation and Budget Reform Commission. The Florida TaxWatch Center for Local Government Studies helped local citizens evaluate the operations of their local government.

Streamlining Government. Florida TaxWatch provided the House Speaker specific suggestions to eliminate duplication and to streamline government operations. One outcome was the legislature passing a bill eliminating the use of DOR form 219 (collection of property sales information), estimated to save more than \$12 million annually.

2008

Amendment Five Defeated. Florida TaxWatch filed an amicus curiae brief with the Florida Supreme Court, arguing that the amendment’s proposed property tax-sales tax swap ballot title and summary may mislead voters. Research revealed that the replacement money required would result in a nearly \$3 billion net tax increase. The court agreed and struck the amendment from the November 2008 ballot.

Unitary Taxation Defeated. A bill to create a unitary corporate tax system was voted down, following TaxWatch testimony before a House committee that unitary taxation through combined reporting of corporate income would be complicated and costly to administer for taxpayers and the state.

Value Adjustment Board Reforms Passed. The legislature passed a TaxWatch-recommended bill to make local Value Adjustment Boards more uniform and accountable in their makeup and policies, together with loosening the “highest and best use requirement”, a long-standing TaxWatch recommendation.

2009

Cost Savings. TaxWatch released 42 cost savings, cost avoidance, and revenue maximization ideas worth \$6.2 billion dollars to help the legislature meet its budget during recession. The legislature passed bills implementing 11 of the ideas, worth \$800 million in long-term savings.

Burden of Proof in Property Tax Challenges. The legislature approved long-standing TaxWatch recommendations to change the burden of proof in property assessment challenges to level the playing field for taxpayers.

Indigent Court Filing Fees. The Legislature waived court filing fees for the indigent as TaxWatch recommended in 2008.

2010

Cost Savings. A Florida TaxWatch Task Force developed 88 cost savings, cost avoidance, and revenue maximization ideas worth more than \$3 billion annually to help the legislature meet its budget during the recession. The legislature implemented 28 of the ideas immediately during the session, worth nearly \$2 billion dollars, helping avoid further cuts to core services and additional taxes and fees.

Amendment Four Defeated. TaxWatch provided key research that helped defeat this proposed constitutional amendment. The econometric analysis revealed that requiring voter approval of all local comprehensive plan changes would cost Floridians 250,000 jobs, \$227 million in lost property taxes, upwards of \$83 million annually in special election costs, and add more than \$1 billion in extra legal costs to local governments.

Marine and Aviation Tax Incentives. Following a TaxWatch research recommendation, the legislature passed a series of sales tax incentives, limiting the tax due on fractional aircraft ownership to \$300 and providing a sales tax exemption for parts and labor used in repairing and maintaining such aircraft. The legislature also capped the sales tax on boat purchases to \$18,000, another TaxWatch recommendation.

Cost and Benefit Analysis of Legislation. The legislature provided new cost-benefit, return on investment, and dynamic scoring into the bill impact estimating conference, to allow a more complete picture of the economic benefits of proposed legislation, a long-standing recommendation of Florida TaxWatch.