Is It Time to Recall Rick Scott? | Florida Center for Investigative Reporting

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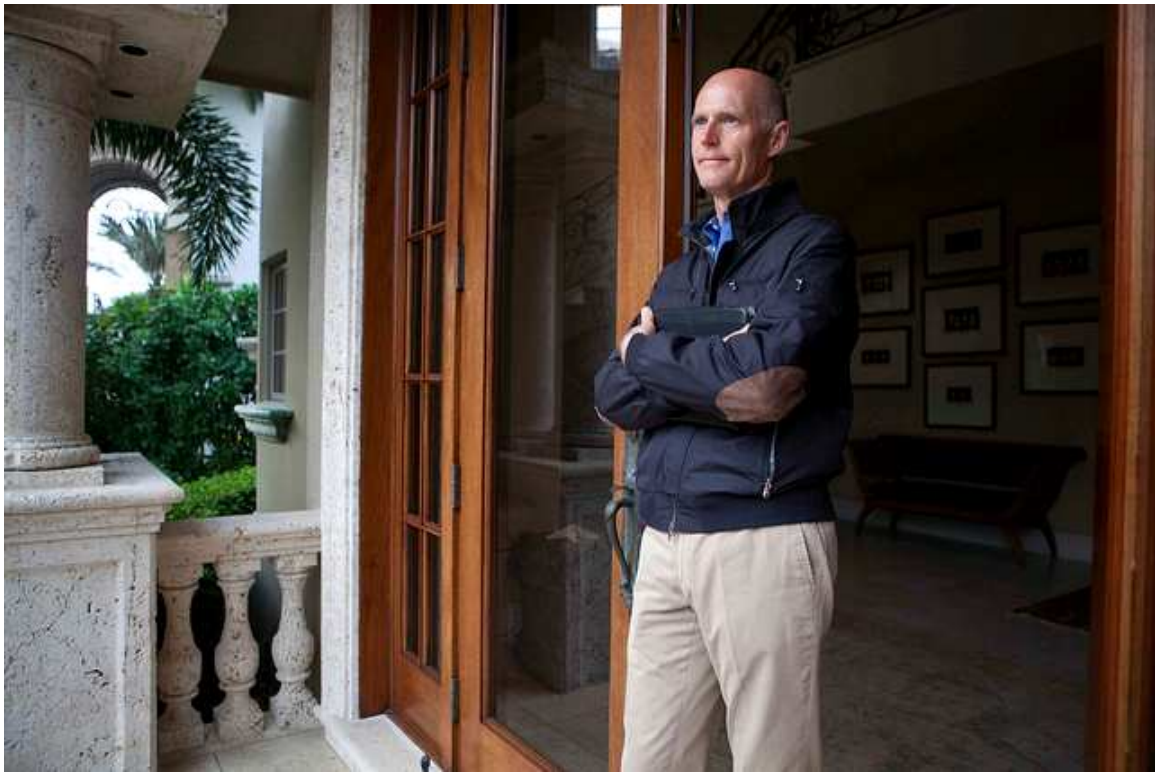

Less than two months into the job, Gov. Rick Scott is already facing a proposed bill that would allow Florida voters to recall him. (Photo courtesy of Rick Scott.)

By **Ralph De La Cruz**
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Rick Scott came into the governor's office without having ever governed. Not even a term on a school board. He never even had to get folks to reach consensus in a precinct.

Scott's main qualification to be governor was that he was CEO of an HMO found guilty of the worst case of Medicare fraud in U.S. history.

He's such a newbie that he doesn't grasp the most fundamental concept about governing: Politics is the art of compromise.

Academics Donald J. Boudreaux and Dwight H. Lee, writing for no less a conservative voice than the Cato Institute, can explain: "Regardless of the terms employed, few doubt that politics is indeed the art of compromise. Politicians unwilling to compromise are typically labeled ideologues — a label not regarded as a badge of honor among members of the political class. Moreover, politicians who refuse to compromise seldom win and hold on to office …"

Being CEO, on the other hand, is the art of applying force and pressure.

Running a company is *nothing* like running a state.

And that's becoming clearer with each passing day of Scott's term.

The tea party's governor came into office in January like a man possessed — and unconcerned about anyone but his business buddies and the tea party set.

He showed little interest in building compromise or coalitions, immediately going after teachers and county and state workers as if they were *his* employees. Pawns to be moved and sacrificed as only he sees fit.

He has shown a disinterest in working with minorities. When Scott met with black lawmakers who were concerned he does not have a single minority in his cabinet, he tried to ingratiate himself by saying he could relate to them: He had grown up in public housing with a parent who had a sixth-grade education. How charming.

Scott, who was viewed with suspicion by Hispanics during the campaign because of his promise to bring harsh Arizona-style immigration enforcement to the state, briefly softened his stance — at least until after his brief appearance at the Hispanic Leadership Network. Then he reverted back to his old rhetoric.

His budget, presented to a tea party rally as if the rest of the state didn't matter, pushed corporate tax cuts onto the backs of teachers, county and state workers, and correctional officers. Maybe if those correctional officers had contributed $100,000 at his inauguration, which was a dolled-up fundraiser for him and the Florida Republican Party, things might have been different. But instead, it was the Geo Group — which runs private prisons and employs Scott's close chum, Bill Rubin, as its lobbyist – handing out the checks. And surprise, one of the first targets of Scott's decimation of the state infrastructure was … the state prison system.

Scott campaigned against the hiring of state lobbyists, then hired state lobbyists. The difference, he explained, was that these were *his* lobbyists. He threw state Sen. Paula Dockery, one of his earliest political supporters, under the political bus (or train) by rejecting $2.4 billion in federal money for a high-speed rail project that she had been working on for years. That decision reportedly occurred after he met with tea partiers in his office.

Hey, appeasing those loyal tea partiers by making an anti-Obama statement comes before political loyalty — or creating upwards of 20,000 Florida jobs.

It is as if we suddenly have en emperor in Tallahassee, issuing policy by decree.

That might be the way to run a corporation. But it's no way to run a state.

The way Scott has acted, running roughshod over constituents and supporters alike, you'd think the man had won his election by a massive margin — what politicians call a "mandate."

But actually, Scott beat a Democrat in a ruby-red Republican state by *one* percentage point. Less than 62,000 votes gave him the keys to the mansion. And that sliver of a margin came after spending $73 million of his personal fortune, avoiding the press and opponents until the very end of the campaign, and relying on his mother and wife to be his political face during the campaign.

Looking back, it was an impressive blueprint for how to win an electoral victory. Not so much for how to be successful at governing.

Now, he occupies office with few allies other than tea partiers and the business elite.

Even Republicans and early political supporters — burned by Scott's sudden, bizarre and illogical decisions such as killing a database tracking addictive pill prescriptions — seem perplexed. Last week, the Senate, overwhelmingly controlled by his party, voted by a veto-proof majority to continue going after the money for the Central Florida rail project. Republican Sen. J.D. Alexander questioned whether Scott had the legal authority to do what he had done, and another Republican senator, David Simmons, vowed to lobby fellow legislators to overturn Scott's decision.

It's hard to find anyone other than tea party zealots who have a kind word to say about Scott.

The other day, a short story in a Treasure Coast/Palm Beach County publication simply announcing a Scott appearance at a Republican fundraiser in Martin County drew a rash of angry comments, such as, "I wonder if Gov. Scott will share the fact that his budget proposal includes increasing his executive office's budget by over $300 million?" And, "If you're a senior citizen attending this event, hide your medicare card. Just saying …"

Citizens have now formed a Facebook group to advocate his recall. This after less than two months in office. But they should probably speak with Rep. Rick Kriseman first.

Last week, Kriseman introduced a bill that would allow the recall of state officials.

I know what you're thinking: Scary that we don't already have that right.

Yep. It's past time. Thank you, Rep. Kriseman.

HB 787 should be automatic, considering the legislature is controlled by Republicans, who often tout accountability as a cornerstone of their party.

We'll soon see whether for them (and their tea party supporters), accountability only applies to teachers and welfare recipients. Or whether it's for all Floridians, regardless of position, pocketbook or political persuasion.