

# **Gov. Rick Scott says competition will make Florida economically healthy**

By RYAN MILLS

NAPLES — Gov. Rick Scott touted his recent budget proposal in Naples Wednesday morning, saying his proposed tax cuts and budget cuts will allow Florida to better compete with other states and countries.

Florida, he said “could be the model for the country.”

Scott, a former health care executive and businessman who makes his home in Naples, was the keynote speaker at a policy perspective luncheon hosted by the libertarian Cato institute.

“We have got to compete,” Scott told the generally friendly crowd, “and I believe all that competition is going to make us a much better state and a much better country. We are going to win. The state of Florida will win this competition.”

On Monday, amid a \$3.6 billion deficit, Scott proposed lopping off nearly \$5 billion from the state’s \$70.4 billion budget; cutting the business tax from 5.5 percent to 3 percent, on its way to zero; cutting property taxes by \$1.4 billion over two years; and cutting 8,681 jobs from Florida’s 126,764 person state workforce.

Fifteen high-ranking Department of Corrections officials were let go Wednesday.

As in business, Scott said Florida needs to get better every day or risk being overtaken by the competition — in this case 49 other states and other countries. He talked about freezing hundreds of regulations after he was sworn in, going on foreign trade missions to bring business to Florida, and streamlining government.

“I’m putting a lot of time and effort and money into economic development,” Scott said. “Some states have done a great job; Alabama, Mississippi, Texas in particular. Those three states have done a really good job of getting companies to move to their state. So whatever they’ve done, we’ve got to do a little bit better.”

Scott also talked about “having a ball” as governor.

“People who take these jobs, you better go ahead and have a lot of fun because you can have a dramatic, positive impact on your states and on the nation if our governors will do the right thing,” he said.

The luncheon, part of Cato’s City Seminar series, was held at the Ritz-Carlton resort on Vanderbilt Beach Drive. About 600 people from around Florida attended the event at \$100 a head or \$700 for a table of eight.

Cato President Edward Crane spoke about “taking freedom seriously,” while Cato Senior Fellow Jerry Taylor talked about “the truth about renewable energy.”

“I’m not a hater. I don’t dislike wind or solar power or anything of the kind,” Taylor said. “But if and when those technologies make economic sense, if and when they are promising, if and when technological breakthroughs look realistic, then profit happy capitalists on the make will be

happy to park tremendous amounts of dollars in every one of those investments that make sense.”

Nationally syndicated talk radio host and libertarian Neal Boortz closed the event. He told a story about going to lunch with WGUF radio host Bob Harden about a year ago.

“We walked into the clubhouse, and there’s this skinny, bald-headed guy sitting at the table,” Boortz said. “And my first thought was, ‘My God, we’ve got to get this guy to eat something.’ And then Bob introduces him to me as Rick Scott. He’s going to run for governor. Oh God, 40 years on talk radio and how many people have I met that are going to run for something.

“So we talked for awhile and I liked him immediately.”

During a break, Gordon Rockwell, 66, of Fort Myers Beach, said he thought Scott was “terrific.”

“Every state should be so lucky,” Rockwell said.

Sue Schulte of Naples was also impressed.

“I think he’s been very busy. I think he’s been leading us on the right track,” she said of Scott. “What he can accomplish remains to be seen.”

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