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Some timely tips for candidate Crist's new aide

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o: Andrea Saul, new communications director for Gov. Charlie Crist's U.S. Senate campaign

From: A concerned political columnist

First of all, welcome aboard. I imagine it's been quite an adjustment, coming from the office of Sen. **Orrin Hatch** of Utah. He's the state's longest-serving senator, having been elected when Pong was a hot new video game. Crist, on the other hand, has bounced around quite a bit in politics and is the first Florida governor not to seek reelection since the state Constitution allowed for a second term in 1968. Hatch has probably led filibusters longer than Crist has held any single public office.

Florida is also very different from Utah, but I'll have to cover that in an upcoming nine-part series.

Anyway, now that you will be in charge of shaping the governor's image on the campaign trail, here are a few pointers.

Tip #1: Tell him to stop fibbing about the economic stimulus package.

Crist needs to look himself in the mirror and say, "I'm good enough, I'm smart enough, and doggone it, I endorsed President **Barack Obama's** stimulus plan." No matter how hard he tries to distance himself from Obama now that he's facing a Republican challenger -- former House Speaker **Marco Rubio** -- Crist can't change the fact that he's on record saying nice things about the stimulus package. Not to mention that they got that darned hug with Obama on tape.

So why is Crist running scared? Though a few Republican governors around the country whined about it, every single one took the stimulus money. Barely a peep came out of the Republican-controlled Legislature, faced with the unpleasant prospect of raising taxes or cutting even more teachers, police officers and firefighters. Senate President **Jeff Atwater**, a candidate for chief financial officer whose conservative credentials have gone unquestioned, took the money. So did the budget chief in the Florida House **David Rivera**, one of Rubio's closest allies. Rubio -- who knows the legislative process inside and out -- has never said how he would have balanced the state budget without the \$5 billion from the federal government.

Back to Crist. No one is better at talking about his deep and abiding love for Florida, Floridians and all things Florida-esque. He needs to tap into that and remember why he endorsed the stimulus plan in the first place. As he told Time magazine back in February, "I

see this package as a pragmatic, common sense opportunity to move forward. I didn't campaign for Obama, we don't agree on everything, but he's my president, and my job is to help Florida stay in the black."

Tip #2: Tell him to stop fibbing about other stuff. Enough of the phony, mixing-apples-and-oranges story line of how Florida schools climbed in Education Week's ratings from 31st to 14th to 10th. Quit bragging about the ``A" he got from the fiscally conservative Cato Institute and omitting the more recent and rather harsh criticism from its tax policy director for raising taxes and expanding the state's insurance risk. No more malarkey about delivering the largest tax cut in Florida history.

Tip #3: If all else fails, hire **Heather Locklear**. Remember how the blonde, miniskirt-rocking actress rescued *Melrose Place* at the end of its first season and made it a hit show in the 1990s? She performed a similar ratings makeover on **Michael J. Fox's** *Spin City*. Perhaps she can do the same for Crist's flagging poll numbers.

And maybe Crist could leave the play-acting to a professional.

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