



MCCOLLUM: I WON'T RAID TRANS TF AS GOVERNOR

By KEITH LAING
THE NEWS SERVICE OF FLORIDA

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla., July 8, 2010.....Republican gubernatorial candidate Bill McCollum told transportation officials Thursday that he will not use gas tax revenue to balance the state budget if he is elected in November.

McCollum, who GOP primary polls show in a tight race with former Columbia/HCA Healthcare CEO Rick Scott, pledged to protect the State Transportation Trust Fund during a speech at the Floridians for Better Transportation Summit at the Disney World Resort in Lake Buena Vista, which wrapped up Thursday. Lawmakers had used \$160 million from the transportation trust fund to balance the state's \$70 billion budget, but Gov. Charlie Crist vetoed the sweep.

McCollum said Thursday that he would do the same if a sweep came to his desk.

"This is not only the right thing to do for improving Florida's infrastructure, it is also the best way to ensure immediate job growth," McCollum said in prepared remarks. "Today Florida is in a state of 'economic emergency.' As governor, I will expedite projects to help get people back to work right away."

McCollum made the pledge during a speech touting a wide-ranging transportation plan. McCollum told the assembled group, a mix of road builders, public transit supporters and driving safety officials, that his transportation plan, titled "Interconnected, Multimodal Transportation Solutions: A Roadmap for Florida's Future," was part of his larger economic plan.

"Transportation and infrastructure are central to Florida's quality of life and economic growth. As governor, my number one priority will be to get Florida's economy back on track and get Floridians back to work," he said in a statement. "I have released an economic agenda proposing to lower taxes, lower regulations and attract more diverse industries to Florida. But without a reliable, safe, interconnected transportation system, our goals for job creation and long-term prosperity cannot be accomplished."

McCollum cited statistics that are a familiar fan for the faithful at the Floridians for Better Transportation Summit: that every dollar spent by the state on transportation yields more in development. A Department of Transportation study said that the state pocketed about \$6 for each dollar it spends on roads.

"The good news is that the return on investment for transportation funding is extraordinary," McCollum said. "Every dollar spent to improve Florida's infrastructure will bring significant return in benefits to the state and direct job creation."

McCollum's transportation plan also includes proposals to create a Florida Infrastructure Tax Credit, restart the "Future Corridors" process for long-term road planning, increase state investment in seaports and increase the use of aviation fuel tax money on airports. McCollum's plan calls for declaring a "state of economic emergency" to expedite transportation projects.

McCollum's campaign had hinted that the fact that he was the only major party gubernatorial candidate to speak to the transportation summit was a sign he thought the issue was more important than Scott and presumptive Democratic nominee Alex Sink.

In a statement provided to the News Service, Florida Transportation Builders Association president Bob Burleson said that McCollum's plan could have a huge impact on the state.

"His proposal illustrates the economic potential our industry can provide when properly funded and displays an understanding that transportation funding creates jobs," Burleson said.

-END-
7/8/10