

# FL DEMS

Florida Democratic Party

*Report of the*  
**LEAD TASK FORCE**

Co-Chaired by  
Senator Bill Nelson and the Honorable Val Demings

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Commissioned by  
the Florida Democratic Party



## LETTER FROM THE PARTY CHAIR

Fellow Democrats,

It's hard to put into words the disappointment we all felt on election night last year, and there's no point in running from that. It was an incredibly tough setback for our Party — plain and simple.

But with so many Floridians depending on us to stand up for our Democratic values, we cannot give up the fight for even a minute. I know the politics of hope will triumph over the politics of fear, and we will keep fighting every day to secure a bright future for Florida's middle class.

To move forward, we have to take a hard look at our past electoral performance to determine exactly why we fell short and how we can best rectify these issues going forward. In November, I commissioned a group of Democrats to contribute their time, energy, and expertise to build a strong foundation upon which our Party can rebuild. The Task Force members come from across the Sunshine State. Some have been elected to high office, others are passionate grassroots organizers. They represent the incredible energy and diversity of Florida Democrats, and the document that follows is the result of their efforts.

Over the past few months, grassroots activists, DEC members, campaign volunteers, donors, consultants, and elected officials came together to hold candid conversations and suggest solutions to the Task Force. The recommendations in this report are a foundation for our Party heading into the 2016 and 2018 elections. Working together, we will retool our campaigns and empower Democratic committees, clubs, and caucuses to be even greater advocates for our cause. Implementing this agenda will require the persistence and dedication of Florida's Democratic leaders, from the grassroots to donors — but I know we are up to the challenge.

I want to thank the tremendous effort given by every single Democrat who participated in this process. This report would not have been possible without the work of the Task Force members and the hundreds of grassroots Democrats who added their voices, stories, and insights. Their passion and support continues to inspire me every day.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Allison Tant". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Allison Tant  
Chair, Florida Democratic Party

## LETTER FROM THE TASK FORCE CO-CHAIRS

Fellow Democrats,

It has been an honor to serve as co-chairs of the LEAD Task Force. Working with our fellow committee members to plot a clear path forward for Florida Democrats simply could not be more vital to the future of both our state and our party.

The work of the Task Force has not been easy. Democrats faced serious defeats up and down the ballot in 2014. While Democrats have proven we can win tough elections in presidential years, we struggle in gubernatorial years, when the electorate is less favorable. We must change, adapt, and learn to succeed in this difficult terrain.

This report is the outcome of rigorous self-examination, and action on its recommendations is crucial for party growth and innovation. The next fight is already with us; the time to act on these recommendations is now.

We want to thank the members of the Task Force, whose passion and hard work is embodied in this report. The recommendations in this report range from modernizing party governance, to employing the latest digital technology, to improving the nuts and bolts of grassroots organizing. We carefully reviewed these suggestions and ideas in conjunction with a deep dive into the available electoral data and extensive consultations with experts from around the country.

We also want to thank the grassroots of the Florida Democratic Party. Those who volunteer to knock on doors or make phone calls to spread the word about Democratic candidates are the heart and soul of our party, and their contributions to this report are significant. Since December, the Task Force has held a dozen listening sessions and received hundreds of comments from the Democratic grassroots. As you will read, several of our recommendations would enhance the role of grassroots and make them more effective.

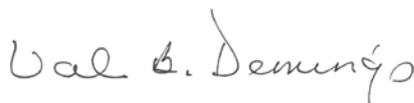
Over the course of the Task Force's discussions, key points of agreement on the path forward emerged, and so did some differences. This report embraces that diversity of opinion, and we are unified in our belief that in doing so we will realize our incredible strength as a political party.

We all know our mission: elect Democrats, fight for our party's values, and improve the lives of all Floridians. There can be no doubt our party needs to change the way we fight in order to win. It is our hope that this report will offer Florida Democrats — from the grassroots to Tallahassee and Washington — a substantive foundation for victory.

Sincerely,



Senator Bill Nelson  
Co-Chair, LEAD Task Force



The Honorable Val Demings  
Co-Chair, LEAD Task Force

## LEAD TASK FORCE

### Co-Chairs:

U.S. Senator Bill Nelson  
Orlando Police Chief Val Demings (Ret.)

### Members:

Dwight Bullard, State Senator, Miami-Dade County  
Patricia Byrd, State Committeewoman, Bay County  
Alan Clendenin, First Vice Chair, Florida Democratic Party  
Ana Cruz, Floridian Partners  
Joe Falk, Miami  
Joy Friedman, Political Action, AFSCME International  
Deborah Gianoulis-Heald, Jacksonville  
Steve Hemping, State Committeeman, Collier County  
Andrew Korge, Young Leaders Council  
Nick Maddox, Commissioner, Leon County  
Amanda Murphy, State Representative, Pasco County  
Jeremy Ring, State Senator, Broward County  
Terrie Rizzo, Chair, Palm Beach County Democratic Executive Committee  
Monica Russo, Executive Vice President, SEIU  
Jose Javier Rodriguez, State Representative, Miami-Dade  
Vivian Rodriguez, President, Florida Democratic Hispanic Caucus  
Rod Smith, immediate past chair, Florida Democratic Party  
Ashley Walker, Managing Director, Mercury Partners  
Jeff Wright, Director of Public Policy Advocacy, Florida Education Association

**A note from the authors:** The development of this report involved much discussion among the Task Force members. While all the members agree on the values and principles articulated in this report, some may hold differing views on specifics.

# REPORT OF THE LEAD TASK FORCE

Co-Chaired by Senator Bill Nelson  
and The Honorable Val Demings

*Commissioned by the Florida Democratic Party*

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	6
Field and Turnout Operations .....	7
Party Operations and Structure .....	9
Empowering DECs, Clubs, and Caucuses .....	10
Candidate Recruitment .....	11
Messaging .....	12
Digital Media and New Technology .....	13
Conclusion .....	15

## INTRODUCTION

*In the end, the American dream is not a sprint, or even a marathon, but a relay. Our families don't always cross the finish line in the span of one generation. But each generation passes on to the next the fruits of their labor.*

– Julian Castro

After victories across Florida and across the nation in 2012 and 2013, the results of the 2014 elections were an enormous setback for Florida Democrats. Democrats lost 6 seats in the Florida State House and failed to beat weak incumbents for Governor and Attorney General, despite fielding solid candidates. Our strong gains in 2012 were almost completely wiped out.

Even more troubling, this most recent setback came at a time when Democratic values seem to be flourishing in Florida. Many of Florida's biggest cities, including Ft. Lauderdale, Orlando, Tampa, St. Petersburg, and Tallahassee, are governed by Democrats who are working successfully to promote middle class prosperity. Not only do Democrats outnumber Republicans, but in county after county Republican registration numbers have even fallen behind those who register as independent. The enthusiasm of the African American community to vote outpaces any other — in 2012 nationally, over 66% of eligible African Americans voted, while only 64% of white voters did. Florida's growing Hispanic population voted for President Obama by 21 points over his challenger in 2012, and for Governor Charlie Crist by 20 points over the incumbent in 2014. When choosing a party, Hispanics are three times more likely to chose the Democratic Party.

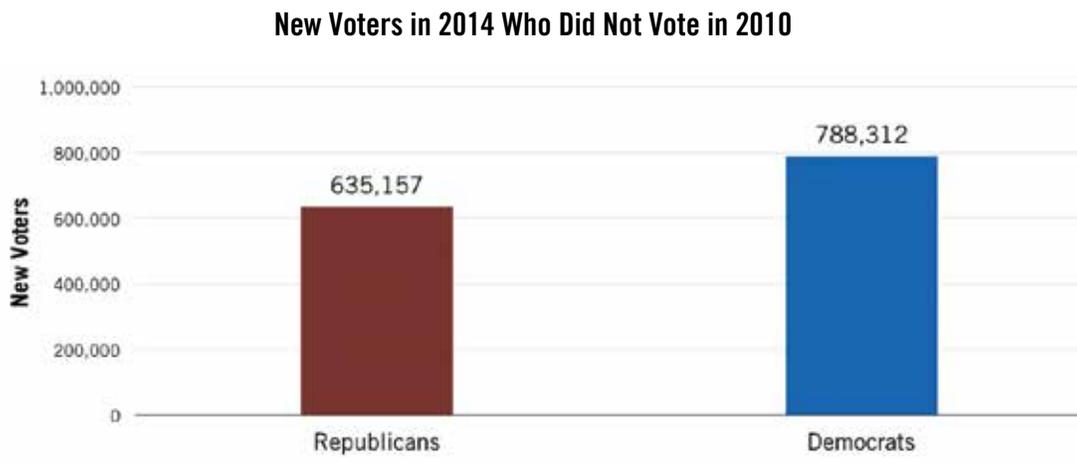
The need for a thorough analysis of Florida Democrats' strategy is clear. For this purpose, Chairwoman Allison Tant assembled the LEAD Task Force, made up of twenty-one Democrats selected for their expertise, their backgrounds, and their dedication to helping our party succeed. Led by Co-Chairs Senator Bill Nelson and former Orlando Police Chief Val Demings, the Task Force engaged in a comprehensive review of the election results, the strategies, the tactics, and the trends that led to 2014's disappointing outcome.

Ultimately, the grassroots are at the heart of the Task Force's work. Several members of the committee are past or current community leaders, and the Task Force conducted a series of open listening sessions and town hall meetings across the state. These listening sessions provided an important opportunity for grassroots Democrats to share their feedback and ideas from the past cycle, and make recommendations for how the party can move forward. The committee also solicited comments from thousands of Democrats online and received hundreds of responses about how the Party and its campaigns can improve. The feedback provided by the grassroots can be seen on every page of this report.

This report represents the best efforts of the LEAD Task Force to deliver concrete, achievable recommendations that will enable the Party to compete and win in 2016, in 2018, and beyond. It is a foundation upon which Florida's grassroots Democrats will be able to build an exciting, dynamic Party that will win elections, thus securing Florida's future for years to come.

## FIELD AND TURNOUT OPERATIONS

The Task Force reviewed the operations of the field and turnout program run by the Party, legislative campaigns, and gubernatorial campaigns in 2014. Between the Party and the gubernatorial campaign, Democrats had about 150 field staff operating out of 40 offices in seven targeted counties. Due to limited funding, the program focused on seven populous counties: Pinellas, Hillsborough, Orange, Osceola, Palm Beach, Broward, and Miami-Dade. Where these field efforts were present, Democratic performance measurably improved over 2010. Where these efforts were absent, in Central and North Florida, we suffered large declines of over 100,000 votes.



**Figure 1.** Democrats turned out 788,000 new voters in 2014 who did not vote in 2010 while Republicans turned out 635,000. Democrats improved 8 percentage points relative to Republicans among voters who traditionally vote in presidential-year elections, but do not show up in gubernatorial-year elections.

Democrats had little presence in North Florida or any of the Central Florida ex-urban and rural counties,<sup>1</sup> which represented approximately 45% of voters in 2014. Neither the campaigns nor the Party had the money or staffing to compete in all areas of the state. Winning efforts look considerably different: in 2008 and 2012, the Democratic presidential nominee spent between \$18 and \$20 million on field and turnout efforts. In 2014, Democrats spent less than \$5 million. Florida Democrats have yet to find the middle ground between presidential year and gubernatorial year spending on turnout. The necessary spending to achieve victory in a gubernatorial year is likely substantially higher than the amount spent in 2014, and may require investment of upwards of \$12 million.

**Gubernatorial Efforts.** A strong and effective field program can move the needle as much as 2%, and in our targeted counties we performed 1.5% better on average than in the 2010 gubernatorial race. Field efforts emphasized enrolling sporadic voters and off-year drop-off voters with high a likelihood of supporting Democrats through direct appeals in the field, direct mail, and a vote-by-mail online sign up tool. These strategies allowed the Party to enroll 150,000 new vote-by-mail voters, and led to a 160% increase in vote-by-mail voting over 2010.

1. That is, all the counties south of the Panhandle except Pinellas County, Hillsborough County, Osceola County, and Orange County.

## Change in Democratic Margin, 2010 to 2014

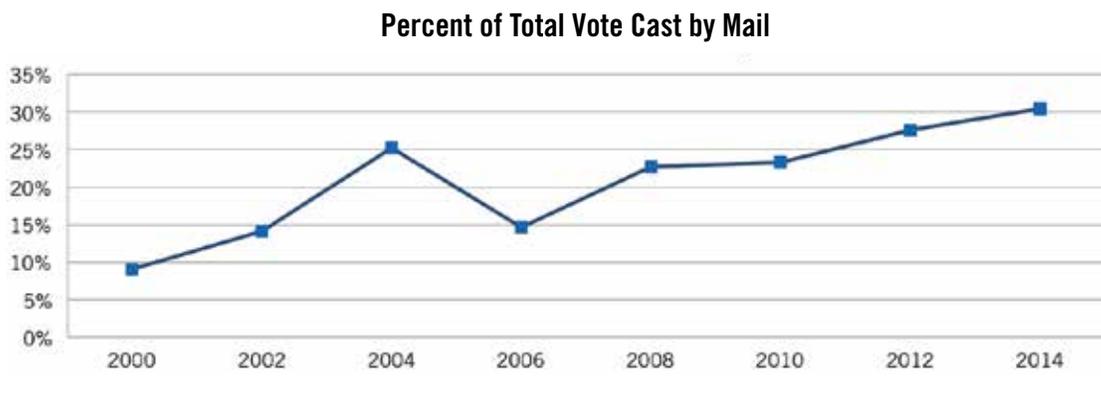
Region	Democratic Margin (Votes)	Change from 2010
North	-253,962	-101,496
Central	-163,989	+1,608
South	353,806	+97,293

**Figure 2.** Heavy losses in North Florida overcame gains in Democratic turnout in South Florida. Republican turnout in the ex-urban and rural central Florida counties outweighed Democratic performance in the urban counties of Pinellas, Hillsborough, Osceola, and Orange Counties.

**Legislative Efforts.** House Victory put in place aggressive field programs in 10 targeted legislative races. With limited resources, House Victory made the decision to focus on vote by mail (VBM). To improve VBM performance, House Victory used door-to-door canvassing, mail pieces, and direct appeals from volunteers. Overall, these strategies — which were not pursued in 2010 — led to an increase in VBM and overall Democratic turnout by 1% to 8% in targeted districts. The districts with the highest proportion of VBM Democratic voters also saw the largest increase in Democratic turnout in 2014.

### Recommendations:

**Intensify Vote By Mail Campaign.** The Task Force recommends campaigns aggressively continue their focus on the two elements of encouraging voting by mail, (1) enrolling voters locally and (2) pushing those voters to return their ballot. To accomplish this, campaigns must continue the effective use of statistical models to determine the likelihood of individuals to vote and their likelihood to vote Democratic. This focus will allow all campaigns to identify the most efficient targets, regardless of party registration.



**Figure 3.** Absentee voting is increasing in popularity in Florida, increasing as a percent of the electorate in all general elections dating back to 2006.

**Renew Focus on North and Central Florida Voters.** Most Democratic campaigns did not successfully appeal to North and Central Florida voters. Two bright spots were Rep. Patrick Murphy's and Rep. Gwen Graham's campaign performance over well-funded opponents. These successful candidates invested their time and field resources in communities that are sometimes skeptical of Democrats, and the results speak for themselves. Their efforts outpaced Democratic performance at the top of the ballot, Rep. Murphy by over 12 percentage points and Rep. Graham by over 4 points.

**Build Strong Staff Support Structures for Targeted Campaigns.** House Victory must expand regional staff to support campaigns throughout the cycle. The Party will be able to quickly provide campaigns with strategic guidance, assist with the inevitable problems that arise on the campaign trail, and be able to provide Party leaders with up-to-date intelligence.

## PARTY OPERATIONS AND STRUCTURE

The Task Force reviewed the Party's governing structure and its present day operations. To prepare for the work ahead, the Task Force identified recommendations for modernizing the Party's bylaws and governance structure and growing its operational staff outside its headquarters in Tallahassee.

### Recommendations:

**Party Bylaws.** The Task Force recommends the State Executive Committee review the Party bylaws to update the governance of the Party. The rules and bylaws should be updated and streamlined to be more inclusive of all Democrats throughout Florida. Changes must be made that empower Democrats to be more engaged with the local parties and the state party, including creating new opportunities to serve in leadership positions. Barriers should be removed to ensure the Party's governance is more open, transparent, and inclusive.

**Expand Regional Outreach Staff.** The Task Force recommends the Party expand its regional staff operations to include Hispanic and African American outreach positions in Central and South Florida. These positions are critical to the expansion efforts of the Party to properly engage with key constituency groups. The Party will need the full support of donors and local Democratic parties to raise the necessary funds to cover this crucial staff expansion program.

## EMPOWERING DECS, CLUBS, AND CAUCUSES

The LEAD Task Force worked to identify “Best Practices” of DECs in the 2014 election. These guidelines will help county parties of all sizes campaign more effectively. Input has been received from DECs across the state, offering valuable insight applicable to Florida’s varied political landscape.

County DECs are the standard bearers for the Democratic Party, and are a crucial component of the Party’s “Get Out The Vote” activities. Over the past decades, local parties have suffered as television ads, political action committees, and super-PACs have overshadowed traditional neighbor-to-neighbor outreach. However, the DECs remain the heart of the Florida Democratic Party, and if the local parties are not healthy, neither is the state Party. It is time to build up DECs by empowering the grassroots with the right training, tools, technology, and benchmarks to carry out their mission.

### Recommendations:

**Voter Registration.** DECs must promote voter registration, particularly in the off-years. This is most effectively accomplished door-to-door.

**Vote by Mail Promotion.** DECs must enroll voters in their communities to vote by mail. This can be done effectively by phone banks, by mail, and door-to-door.

**Ballot Chase.** During elections, DECs must focus on “chasing” ballots that have been mailed to voters by the local Supervisor of Elections, but not yet returned. This can be done effectively by community phone banks, precinct operations, DEC-generated robo-calls, and should be pursued by all other possible methods.

**Engage the Local Volunteer Base.** During off-years, DECs must focus on expanding their local volunteer base. While specific issues vary by county, this can include petition drives, phone banking for municipal elections, and engagement in the state Legislative session.

**Expand DEC Trainings.** After reviewing the effectiveness of past Party efforts to train DEC members in the latest campaign tactics, the Task Force recommends that the Party take the following steps to empower the Democratic grassroots.

- **Voter File Training.** The Task Force recommends the Party conduct more regional trainings on the voter file. The voter file is one of the most crucial tools of any campaign, and increasing proficiency among activists, campaign volunteers, and DEC members across the state is paramount.

- **Vote By Mail Training.** The Task Force recommends that DEC's be trained to promote voting by mail.
- **Precinct Development Trainings.** The Task Force recommends that DEC's be trained to promote precinct operations. Precinct operations are a building block of DEC's, and increasing DEC effectiveness at the precinct level will improve turnout and build the Democratic base.

DEC leadership must fully embrace these additional trainings in order to be effective.

## CANDIDATE RECRUITMENT

The challenge of recruiting quality candidates and winning elections is twofold. At the local and legislative level, a plethora of strong candidates are competing for a small number of competitive seats, a problem exacerbated by a gerrymandered map that strongly favors Republicans. At the cabinet level, Republican candidates have a fundraising advantage of tens of millions of dollars, making Democratic recruitment efforts that much more difficult. In reviewing these challenges, the Task Force identified key tasks that will lay the groundwork for success.

### Recommendations:

**Create Regional Recruitment Councils.** The Task Force recommends the creation of regional recruitment councils to identify local and legislative candidate recruitment opportunities. The councils would regularly discuss races in their region and recruit viable candidates to run for those offices. The councils would report on a regular basis to the Party on progress being made within their region.

**Build the Bench at the Local Level.** The Task Force found that a more strategic and methodical engagement process for local races throughout the state will further bolster recruitment efforts. The Task Force recommends the creation of Municipal Victory with funding dedicated to winning municipal and county races targeted by the Party.

**Establish Candidate Support Levels.** The Task Force recommends the ranking of candidates by levels of support the Party is able to offer, based on open and transparent metrics. These metrics include viability, grassroots appeal, and fundraising ability. Higher performance from campaigns would be matched by an increased level of assistance from the Party.

## MESSAGING

The Task Force reviewed the messaging used by Democratic campaigns in 2014. While this message proved powerfully persuasive to many groups, it failed to connect in north and rural Florida, where Democrats fell to new lows. In 2014, Democrats did not talk to Floridians clearly enough, long enough, or specifically enough about their real-life economic circumstances. The national economy, fueled by the hard work of everyday people from Miami to Seattle, has rebounded since the Great Recession. But middle-income Floridians are still struggling to make ends meet, squeezed by stagnant wages and the rising cost of living. Their hard work is resulting in record profits for American corporations, but the middle class is not seeing the results of their effort.

### Recommendations:

**Refine the Message to the Middle Class.** Florida Democrats need to lead with a new economic narrative grounded in middle class values. The Task Force heard from a variety of progressive voices, and recommends that our Party message be refined to include:

- Restoring the fundamental promise of America’s economy: that your hard work will earn you a place in the middle class and enable your kids to do better than you did.
- Fighting for an economy that rewards the people who do the hard work, not just those at the top.
- Building an economy where, if you work hard and play by the rules, you can get ahead.
- Empowering women by making workplaces work for modern families.
- Breaking down the barriers, financial and otherwise, to the twenty-first century education necessary to make it into — and succeed in — the middle class.

**Regularly Distribute Talking Points to DECs.** The Task Force reviewed the distribution of a Party message to DEC members, and found success in the dissemination of the key messages during the campaign season. However, regular talking points on specific issues were lacking. The Task Force recommends the Party provide regular talking points to grassroots Democrats on an ongoing basis.

**Expand Candidate Messaging Training.** The Task Force reviewed the Party’s efforts to provide training for incumbent legislators, legislative candidates, and municipal officials. While these efforts were generally successful, they were provided piecemeal in 2014. Going forward, these trainings must be expanded and systematized, with more training sessions for candidates on a broad range of topics, including messaging and fundraising.

## DIGITAL MEDIA AND NEW TECHNOLOGY

The Task Force reviewed the activities of both the Party's and Democratic campaigns' utilization of new digital technologies. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other social media have dramatically expanded the channels through which Democrats can talk to voters, while the proliferation of mobile devices has allowed campaigns to reach voters in more places than ever before. These technological developments have created new challenges that the Task Force recommends Democrats tackle head-on.

In analyzing these challenges, the Task Force found high and low points. The latest technology is well integrated into statewide campaigns and the Party communications department. The Party Facebook and Twitter accounts lead all state Democratic parties in the country, and the Party website is optimized for viewing on mobile phones, tablets, and traditional computers. These outreach efforts reach over one million users every day. The Party's fundraising through email now reaches over 300,000 people and raises considerable funds.

However, the Task Force found that state legislative and local races seldom make use of new digital tools and communications tactics, including social media and fundraising through email. To resolve these shortcomings and ensure this vital communications channel is utilized, the Task Force makes these recommendations.

### Recommendations:

**Continue FDP's Successful Investment in Digital Media.** The Task Force recommends the Party continue its successful investment in social media and email fundraising. This will require buy-in from donors and grassroots leaders, and means focusing on key areas:

- **Full Time Digital Director.** For the first time, in 2014 the Party hired a full-time digital director responsible for social media. The Task Force believes the Party's successes in this area are largely due to this increased staff capacity, and recommends this investment be maintained.
- **List Growth.** The Task Force recommends that the Party grow its email list with paid advertising, which experts advise will likely pay for itself in increased fundraising revenue.

**Social Media Toolkit for Legislative and Local Campaigns.** The Task force recommends the Party provide legislative and municipal campaigns with a toolkit to conduct successful communication and outreach using social media. This toolkit would include a guide to best social media practices, a list of recommended third-party services to bolster digital efforts, and instructions on how to get the most from a social media advertising campaign.

**Ensure Campaign Websites are Mobile-Friendly.** The Task Force found that the majority of legislative and local campaigns do not have websites that function well on mobile phones and tablets. With over 30% of website traffic coming from cell phone and tablet users, the Task Force recommends all campaigns embrace this clear trend. The Task Force recommends the Party develop a list of turnkey website vendors that can provide this functionality.

**Digital Media Training for DEC's and Campaign Managers.** The Task Force recommends DEC officers and local and legislative campaign managers receive a digital media training to ensure campaigns are able to deploy an effective digital strategy. The training would include email fundraising, social media, data analysis, and voter targeting.

## CONCLUSION

The American Dream — that you can go as far as your own hard work can take you, that your children will have a chance for a better life — should shine brightest in the Sunshine State. Strong Democratic gains at the grassroots and local level are not being translated into consistent victories in the legislature or statewide. Florida's middle class, and millions struggling to get into the middle class, deserve better from Florida Democrats.

The recommendations of the Task Force are essential to the future success of the Democratic Party. This report does not attempt to solve every problem. Victories in Florida will always be earned by countless hours of hard work, however, and the right strategies will make the difference. The time to act is now. We must change the way we campaign, with a bold economic message, with the latest technology, with energetic and empowered grassroots, and with inclusive outreach to every region of our great state.

The challenges facing Democrats in Florida will require the cooperation of the grassroots, elected leaders, staffers, and donors. We believe the recommendations in this report can make the difference for Democrats, and chart a clear path toward electoral success in elections to come.

# FL DEMS

Florida Democratic Party

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