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Renner Opening Day Remarks

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TALLAHASSEE — House Speaker Paul Renner, R-Palm Coast, made remarks to the House on the opening day of the 2023 legislative session. Here are his remarks, as prepared for delivery:

Good morning. Before I begin, I want to recognize our amazing members. There is so much talent in this room and it is an honor to serve with you. I also want to welcome our distinguished guests in the gallery, including our family and friends. Welcome to the Florida House!

And I personally want to recognize three special guests — whose support today and every day is what keeps me going: my wife, Adriana, daughter, Abigail, and son, William.

Someone recently asked how this session would be remembered. Standing together, along with America's greatest governor, and our Senate partners, this session will be remembered for when we fearlessly took on the major challenges and opportunities facing our state and delivered transformational results again and again!

Today begins our regular session, but our ambitious agenda is well underway. When this legislature first assembled, we promised to address the real concerns of Floridians, including recovery from last year's hurricanes and an affordability crisis that strains family budgets. Days

later, in special session, you delivered on those promises, providing toll relief to millions of drivers, immediate support for the victims of Hurricanes Ian and Nicole and bold reforms to heal our property insurance market.

Unlike Washington D.C, in Florida we don't wait around to solve problems; we fix them. So last month, we convened again. Responding to the federal government's refusal to solve the border crisis and the human trafficking and fentanyl deaths that result, we empowered Gov. DeSantis to take action; we made clear that election fraud will be prosecuted in this state; we leveled the playing field for our student athletes; and we ended the notion that a private company should ever have its own governmental powers.

We will continue to address affordability concerns through substantial tax relief for the families and working men and women who need it. We will support President Passidomo's leadership to make housing more affordable. And recognizing that runaway litigation abuse is a tax on every Floridian, we will support meaningful tort reform. Reigning in those costs will make living in Florida more affordable and our businesses more competitive.

We will redouble our commitment to public safety and reaffirm our respect for law enforcement and first responders. We will equip our sheriffs with advanced technology to take down the criminal organizations and career criminals responsible for the vast majority of gun crimes. And we will impose stiffer penalties on those who commit them.

We reject states that use these crimes to justify legal restrictions on the constitutional right of their citizens. Criminals do not follow those laws; they ignore them. Here in Florida, we will protect and expand the rights of law-abiding men and women to defend themselves and others.

We will take additional steps to protect our schools and students from threats; and we will aggressively pursue human traffickers and anyone who sexually assaults or hurts our children. To those offenders, our message is clear: we are coming after you. We will prosecute and imprison you, so that you never again enjoy the happiness you denied to others!

Strong families are far more important than strong governments and healthy, thriving children are the foundation of our future.

This session we will enact an agenda that improves the safety, health and well-being of our children and their families.

Every one of us were children once. Our ability to enjoy life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness-began with life. We must defend the right to life for thousands of boys and girls who deserve to experience life, find love and enrich the lives of others.

Children are a blessing, not a burden. However, there is no question that moms and dads face more costs when they bring their babies home from the hospital. To reduce those costs, we will deliver bold tax relief — from tax free diapers to our back-to-school tax holiday. We'll return money to parents who know better how to spend it than government ever can, delivering the most pro-family tax relief in Florida's history!

Too often, the welfare system punishes working parents by abruptly taking away government benefits when they earn a few extra dollars. No family should ever have to choose between a pay raise and their children's health care, so we will make it easier for moms and dads to move from welfare to work and on the way to their American Dream!

As our youngest Floridians start school, they must learn to read so they can use reading to learn. Yet nearly half of our third graders cannot read on grade level. That is morally unacceptable! We must commit to a future in which every child masters the reading, math and general knowledge needed to reach their potential. To that end, we will improve resources for teachers and students, so that we can bring every child up to grade level.

And to further that success, we must embrace educational freedom and customized learning. House Bill 1 gives every parent and student customized tools to learn and thrive. It also ensures that students with unique abilities have the resources they need to live more independent lives when they reach adulthood. Thanks to our bill sponsors, HB 1 will deliver the largest expansion of school choice in the nation!

Unfortunately, our digitally dominated world is taking its toll on childhood development and mental health, and even targets our children's personal information. Make no mistake, the titans of tech who built social media purposely sowed it with the seeds of addiction. We will pass legislation to help kids disconnect from tech addiction and reconnect to the real world and the learning opportunities in their classroom, and we will also ensure that our children's personal information is never given to big tech by passing robust protections for juvenile data privacy.

Quality sleep is also critical to children's learning and mental health, so we will pursue appropriate school start times as a zero-cost way to improve both academic scores and mental well-being. If the challenges of inadequate sleep and tech addiction were not enough, activists are using schools to indoctrinate and sexualize children rather than focus on the education they need to succeed. Based on the many good bills you are filing; we will end that once and for all!

Parents expect schools to keep their children safe, respect their values, and teach the reading, math and general knowledge that kids need to succeed in life. Those principles will guide us in everything we do in education.

That includes higher education, whose own activists want college campuses to enforce ideological orthodoxy through the Diversity Equity and Inclusion movement. Those terms have become Orwellian — where diversity means conformity of thought and equity means picking winners and losers. Instead, we will promote a return to the highest ideals of higher education: an environment that embraces real diversity of thought, putting all ideas on the table and subject to critical thinking.

The source of political legitimacy comes from the consent of the governed, from "we the people" making the big decisions through those we elect; but the ESG movement completely rejects that most basic democratic principle. The financial elite who are charged with investing on our behalf are using our investments for their own ideological agenda and without our consent.

This session we will stand up for state workers and protect their retirement from political interference. Florida will insist that pension funds invest for the best rate of return possible; and we will also prohibit any ESG interference in public procurement. We categorically reject the use of social credit scores for lending decisions; and for those banks that still choose to discriminate, they will no longer be allowed to hold taxpayer funds. Florida will lead the fight against elitists who impose their agenda on us regardless of what we the people decide at the ballot box!

We will zealously guard taxpayers' money, ensuring it's not spent on programs or agencies that have outlived their usefulness. Enterprise Florida has over promised and under delivered for years and drains funds from higher priorities. If this were Washington D.C., it would live on

forever, unchanged and unchallenged; but the Florida way requires us to retain only what works and eliminate what does not.

And finally, we will continue to look to the future and develop plans to protect our natural resources and infrastructure. We will invest today to secure our long-term needs in water supply and water treatment, preserve the Florida wildlife corridor, and protect the natural treasures of our state, like the Everglades and our world class beaches, rivers, lakes and springs.

These are just some of the issues you have championed, and we will address this session. As a result of your efforts, we will transform Florida for years to come and improve the lives of our constituents.

By sine die, we can answer the question about how this session will be remembered.

Through the principles and courage of the members of this chamber, we will:

Help Floridians keep more of their money because they know how to spend it better than government;

Unleash the power of education to help our students achieve their full potential;

Protect life and support the health and well-being of Florida's children, while giving parents more tools to succeed;

Make Florida more affordable by ending the tort tax, opposing ESG, and creating incentives for affordable housing;

Protect the constitutional rights of law-abiding citizens, support law enforcement, and aggressively pursue anyone who threatens the safety and well-being of our communities;

Make historic investments in our state's infrastructure to prepare for the next storm, for future growth, and for the decades to come; and in the end,

Deliver the kind of real, transformative results our constituents expect and deserve.

So, let's buckle up and get going! God bless each of you and the great state of Florida!