



# The Florida House of Representatives

**Paul Renner**  
Speaker

## NEWS RELEASE

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## Speaker Renner Kicks Off 2024 Legislative Session

*Speaker Renner offers a look at his agenda for the 2024 Session focused on protecting children, investing in infrastructure, and improving health care for all Floridians.*

**TALLAHASSEE, Fla.** (January 9, 2024) — Today, Florida House Speaker Paul Renner (R-Palm Coast) opened the 2024 Legislative Session of Florida's 91st House of Representatives. In his remarks, Speaker Renner gave a glimpse of his priorities for the Session ahead. He also referenced submitting a letter to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) which is attached. Remarks below are provided as prepared for delivery:

Good morning! To our friends and guests in the gallery, welcome to the Florida House!

I want to specially recognize my three favorite people whose patience and support keep me motivated and focused: my wife Adriana, daughter Abigail, and son William. I love you guys!

We achieved many long-standing goals last Session. We protected life and the constitutional right of self-defense, reformed property insurance and ended Wild West litigation, closed Enterprise Florida as a source of corporate welfare, pushed back against ESG, and created more affordable housing for hard-working Floridians.

Perhaps our biggest victory came through numerous measures and funding to protect children, defend childhood, and create an environment in which every boy and girl can thrive. By passing HB 1, you made Florida the undisputed champion of educational freedom and provided every child the opportunity to succeed in the classroom.

This Session, we'll ensure adequate funding for students with unique abilities and a more efficient system for parents and students who embrace educational freedom. We will also provide our students greater support to reach grade level in the critical subjects of reading and math.

As good stewards of taxpayer money, we balanced our budget, paid off debt ahead of schedule, and set aside 11 billion in reserves, all while returning 2.7 billion dollars to people who know how to spend their money far better than government: Florida's taxpayers.

By rejecting unnecessary spending, we were able to invest record amounts in infrastructure, including transportation, land conservation, and water quality. We raised salaries for teachers and other state workers and approved record spending for our best-in-the-nation education system.

Despite our successes, new challenges and opportunities confront us. Florida's long-term infrastructure needs far exceed current funding. In collaboration with our Senate partners, we will commit new funds from the Seminole Compact to support Florida's environmental infrastructure and protect our natural resources for the future.

Speaking of our Senate partners, we continue to enjoy a close relationship with colleagues across the rotunda, and I continue to appreciate President Passidomo for her leadership and thoughtfulness on the big issues facing our state.

One of those important issues is health care, including mental health. We aim to bring greater transparency to the price and quality of health care. We will look for ways patients can save money using that information. And we will remove protectionist barriers so healthcare professionals from outside Florida can move here, relieving critical shortages and providing more healthcare access to Floridians.

We will support the Senate's proposal for a teaching hospital to help those facing severe mental illness. House members have proposed Baker Act reforms that lead to meaningful treatment and propose new solutions to homelessness for which mental health is often a cause.

We can fund new initiatives to improve health care, including mental health, but only if we restrain spending elsewhere. This means we must eliminate what remains of corporate welfare, avoid taking on new debt, and lower discretionary spending across the board. We must also build a budget that can withstand economic downturn tomorrow while protecting essential services.

As we did last Session, we will prioritize the unique needs of children. We'll help parents with children in poverty overcome the fiscal cliffs of public assistance programs and support other healthcare initiatives that benefit children, both before and after they are born.

Fortunately, most children start life physically healthy and ready to reach their potential. Unfortunately, they face daily threats to their mental health that even the most involved parents struggle to confront. Children have always faced mean girls and boys, but social media has changed the game and causes unprecedented damage to children's mental health. And here's the truth - the social media companies know this. They also know that they designed social media to be as addictive as possible. Before social media, those mean kids barely made a dent in our children's mental health. But the rise of social media has hollowed out what should be a childhood of happiness and big dreams.

Recent surveys of high school girls prove its devastating effects. When asked, "Have you experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness within the past year?" 57%, yes. "Have you experienced poor mental health during the past 30 days?" 41%, yes. And when asked, "Have you seriously considered suicide within the last year?" 30%, yes.

This is the legacy of social media, and it is a global problem. But it cannot be the fate of our children - we must act! We will take bold steps like age verification to rescue our children from technology that cripples their sense of self-worth and purpose.

Similarly, where pornography is concerned, the rules for adults cannot be the same for children. We cannot stand by and allow children to access hardcore pornography, and we plan to do something about it.

Call it a culture war if you want, but it is another battle to defend common sense against those who want to obliterate the distinction between adulthood and childhood. It's a battle we intend to win.

We should begin each legislative Session by applying the wisdom we learn from experience. The Florida Way embraces the timeless wisdom found in our nation's core foundations and common-sense cultural norms. More than two centuries of American history and our own experience prove that the Florida Way delivers a safe and prosperous society in which everyone can thrive. Years of experience also demonstrate that when states and nations adopt policies that reject those foundations, the result is the collapse of public safety, economic decline, and centralized control over every aspect of life. In our own country today, we see a rejection of common sense and the rule of law, causing the kind of collapse in public safety that we have only seen in other countries.

The nation of Colombia is a good example. They took the wrong path and allowed leftist guerillas to effectively control large parts of the country.

When America suffered a crisis of confidence, Ronald Reagan provided a vision for restoring America as a shining city on the hill. When the Nazis set their sights on invading the United Kingdom, Winston Churchill led his nation to victory. And when Colombia faced imminent dangers from leftist guerilla groups, they turned to Álvaro Uribe. As President of Colombia, his leadership truly saved his nation.

Members, it is my privilege to recognize former President Uribe. Due to weather, his visit is delayed. But you will have an opportunity to hear from him and other special guests tomorrow.

We are also privileged to have as our guests the mayor of Tuluá, Colombia, Mayor Gustavo Vélez, and his wife, Luz Elena. Mayor Vélez knew first-hand the risk that leadership posed for him and his family. It would have been easy for him to walk away from the fight. Instead, he is leaning in, putting his community ahead of his family's own safety, believing that his local community and his country are worth saving. His leadership is proof that one person can make a big difference. Mayor Vélez recently won his election running on a platform of public safety and holding the corrupt accountable. Mayor Vélez and Mrs. Vélez, welcome to the Florida House!

I know about Tuluá because someone very special to me was born there, my wife Adriana. She suggested we invite these leaders to share the challenges Colombia overcame under President Uribe, but now face again.

With help from Representative Borrero and others, we are happy to host the public to attend Colombian-American Day and hear from these leaders beginning tomorrow at 10 am in the Cabinet Room on the lower level.

Our Colombian guests know too well that public safety must be government's first priority. Once lost, it is hard to regain.

This Session, we will continue our commitment to keeping Floridians safe, empowering law enforcement to combat human trafficking, punishing flash mobs that target retailers, and taking a hard line against juveniles who steal guns and use them to commit crimes.

Last Session, we delivered better benefits for law enforcement and first responders. This Session, we will extend penalties for anyone who commits violence against law enforcement and bring an end to citizen review boards that are weaponized by defund-the-police activists.

Meanwhile, for schools that refuse to follow common-sense steps like locking their doors, we will pass new measures to protect our children.

Members, there is a new threat to public safety in the dangerous explosion of antisemitism. I have sent correspondence to FDLE requesting the formation of a special task force to investigate and prosecute antisemitic acts in our state. Holocaust survivor David Schaecter recently warned us that intimidation, if left unchecked, leads to open violence. We must all speak and act with moral clarity now against those who give aid and comfort to groups who advocate a new Holocaust. In Florida, we will say clearly, "Never, never again!"

Florida's success is built into our constitution. Our balanced budget requirement protects our state's fiscal health, and we benefit from new ideas and better governance with constitutionally mandated term limits. The federal government completely lacks fiscal discipline, and national financial collapse is certain unless we change direction by enacting clear, constitutional spending limits.

Article 5 of the U.S. Constitution sets the process by which states can propose amendments. Later today, we will vote to reaffirm Florida's support for imposing term limits and a balanced budget on the federal government, changes that are needed to save our country.

Amid significant national and international challenges, Florida rises above the rest with an unbreakable commitment to our nation's core foundations. By remaining faithful to those foundations, Florida has become a place of great prosperity, opportunity, and quality of life.

This Session, we will continue our work to help every Floridian reach their full potential and make Florida the envy of the nation today and for years to come.

God bless each of you and the great State of Florida!

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