

Press Release

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GOVERNOR BUSH PROMOTES JOBS FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES ~Bush announces budget priorities~

LAKELAND - Governor Jeb Bush today, joined by Senator Paula Dockery, City of Lakeland Commissioner Gow Fields, Director of the Florida Agency for Persons with Disabilities Shelly Brantley and members of the Polk County Business Leadership Network, launched a campaign to encourage employers to recruit and hire qualified individuals with disabilities. At today's event, Governor Bush announced his recommendations for more than \$1.3 billion for fiscal year 2006-2007 to serve persons with disabilities.

"Florida's growing economy and job market should be open to the largest minority group in our state - persons with disabilities," said Governor Bush. "By fostering employment opportunities and providing critical support and services for persons with disabilities, we can empower them to live the American dream. Individuals can become active in their communities, and employers benefit from hiring qualified and hardworking employees."

The 2006-2007 budget provides new funding of \$48.6 million to serve more than 3,000 additional persons with developmental disabilities currently on the waiting list for waiver services and \$7.6 million to provide waiver services to individuals in crisis situations.

Governor Bush is a leading advocate for the rights of individuals with disabilities. He established the Agency for Persons with Disabilities in 2004 to support Floridians with developmental disabilities in working, learning and community living. During the last eight years, Governor Bush has increased funding for developmental disabilities by \$827.8 million or 164.6 percent.

"Persons with disabilities make a tremendous contribution to their communities," said Agency of Persons with Disabilities Director Shelly Brantley. "By offering qualified individuals the opportunity to realize their full potential, employers strengthen their workforce while earning the lucrative and loyal patronage of people with disabilities, their families, and their friends."

An employer-to-employer network, the Polk County Business Leadership Network's mission is to encourage employers to "recruit, hire, train and retain qualified people with disabilities." The network communicates with prospective employers to eliminate common myths about employing people with disabilities. The BLN's Employer Awareness Campaign includes public service announcements aired by Comcast Cable and two billboards in the Polk County area donated by Florida Outdoor Advertising Association in conjunction with Lakeland Outdoor Advertising and Lamar Advertising.

"Our BLN members strive to educate business leaders about the knowledge, skills and abilities of qualified workers with disabilities. Many people with disabilities say "employer attitudes" are their biggest impediment to a job," said Larry Durrence, a charter member of the Polk County Business Leadership Network, president of Polk Community College and chairman of the Greater Lakeland Chamber of Commerce. "We are offering a common-sense solution to a serious worker shortage the United States will face during the next decade as baby boomers begin to retire in large numbers."

The Polk County Business Leadership Network is funded by the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Inc. The Network's kick-off was sponsored by Polk Community College, Greater Lakeland Chamber of Commerce, Verizon, Holland and Knight LLP, Publix, Polk Works, Mid-Florida Society for Human Resource Management, Florida Agency for Persons with Disabilities, TRC and the Lakeland Center. The Polk County Business Leadership Network is organized by Wilson Resources, Inc., affiliated with The Able Trust's Florida Business Leadership Network and the United States Business Leadership Network.

For more information on hiring qualified workers with disabilities or joining the Polk County Business Leadership Network, visit www.MyAbilities.org