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Springtime in Southwest Florida is a beautiful time of year. I always enjoy the warm weather and the opportunity to spend time outdoors with my wife and son, whether we are strolling through a park or taking a walk on the beach. It is amazing to see all the plants and flowers that are in bloom, and I look forward to this beautiful display each year.

In Tallahassee, our state capital, springtime is just as exciting, but in a very different way. With the beginning of spring comes the beginning of Legislative Session, when legislators travel to Tallahassee to begin tackling the challenges facing our state.

During session, there is a sense of optimism and excitement in the air that attracts Floridians from all regions of the state interested in watching firsthand their government at work. By meeting with legislators and other state leaders, they make their voices heard. I consider it an honor to interact with Floridians each and every day, and it is a privilege I do not take lightly. Governor Crist and I both go to work each day with the understanding that it is the people of Florida who are in charge and whom we serve. We gladly refer to all Floridians as "our boss."

Throughout my professional career I have found this to be true: There is no greater calling than that of public service. This philosophy is evidenced each spring in Tallahassee. We have the opportunity to shape the future, and it is one of the most rewarding and challenging experiences of my life. It is a priority to me to teach future generations about the value of serving our state, nation, and world. Serving others, whether it is as an elected official or a community volunteer, is a calling open to all Floridians, regardless of age or background.

Each spring in Tallahassee brings its own unique challenges and triumphs, and I look forward to another Legislative Session. I also look forward to another



springtime in Florida, and the stories in this issue of *Times of the Islands* help usher in that spectacular season. Readers can learn how to add color to their landscapes with blooming trees and about the art of bonsai. They can discover some of the area's "wild kingdoms," such as the Naples Botanical Garden and the Hillsborough River. And they can get a better understanding of questions surrounding red tide and what could be done to try to prevent it.

Serving as an elected official humbles me each day, as I remember that I have been entrusted by the people of Florida to work for them to achieve what is important to them. Thank you for the opportunity to serve all who live in our great state; it is truly an honor.

Jeff Kottkamp
Lt. Governor, State of Florida