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Chris Hart Named President of Workforce Florida

ORLANDO—Workforce Florida Inc.'s Board of Directors today named Chris Hart IV President and CEO of the nonprofit, public-private organization charged with policy-setting and oversight of the state's workforce system.

Hart, a former senior vice president of external affairs and investor relations for Enterprise Florida Inc., assumes his new role immediately. His selection was unanimously approved during today's Workforce Florida Board meeting.

"In his new role, Chris Hart brings the value of his prior experience as a leader in moving Florida to its current public-private workforce system," says Katherine E. Wilson, Chairman of Workforce Florida and Assistant Vice President for Load Engineering and Design Services for CSX Transportation. "He also brings a network that will continue to align the mission and work of Workforce Florida with the legislative intent for a workforce system that is demand-driven and responsive to the needs of Florida businesses for a highly trained and highly skilled workforce.

"Chris has the unique ability to communicate that workforce development is essential to economic development and both are needed to confront our current and future workforce challenges."

Hart is the second president to lead Workforce Florida, which was created by the Florida Legislature in 2000 through the Workforce Innovation Act. The state's mostly federally funded workforce system is recognized as a model for innovation. His new position puts Hart at the center of efforts to ensure the state has the workforce talent to strengthen the global competitiveness of Florida businesses while also assisting Floridians with advancing their skills and qualifying them for better jobs.

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“People want good jobs and employers want talented people,” says Hart. “Workforce Florida, working with our workforce, education, economic development and other strategic partners, is the chief architect of solutions that help bring those two mutually dependent goals to fruition. I look forward to helping to turn our state’s workforce challenges into new opportunities.”

Creating such opportunities is work Hart is familiar with. A two-term state representative from 1998 to 2002, Hart sponsored the legislation that created Workforce Florida and the Agency for Workforce Innovation, the state agency charged with implementing workforce policy and administrative oversight of the 24 Regional Workforce Boards and state workforce programs. He also served on Workforce Florida’s first Board of Directors that was chaired by former Senate President and later Lt. Gov. Toni Jennings.

“If you take a look at any economic development proposal, when you are talking to a business interested in locating in Florida or expanding, the first question from company leaders is about the workforce,” says Hart, who was part of the Enterprise Florida executive team from 2004 until recently. “Next you talk about business climate issues such as permitting, incentives and taxes, but the last question goes back to workforce. It’s clearly the top-of-mind issue for employers.”

During a recent statewide series of workforce forums that attracted more than 500 business, economic development, education, workforce, nonprofit and citizen participants, talent was routinely cited as the leading aspiration among Florida’s most competitive assets in today’s global economy. Florida has a labor force of about 9.3 million people, with a 4 percent unemployment rate (September 2007)—the lowest in the nation among the 10 most populous states. The state also is ranked third in job growth among the most populous states, behind Texas and California, with a 1.3 percent rate, representing 105,700 new jobs in September.

Workforce Florida’s overarching strategic priority is to support economic development in the state that leads to higher-skilled, better-paying jobs that improve Floridians’ quality of life and strengthen the state economy. Among workforce challenges facing the state are continued improvements in career and technical education at the post-secondary level to better prepare young people for high-skill, high-wage job opportunities; the pending transition affecting an estimated 9,500 Florida workers as the nation’s Space Shuttle program is phased out in 2010; and the projected need for more skilled workers in the energy sector to meet the demands of growth and an anticipated increase in reliance on alternative energy sources.

Florida will receive about \$233 million in federal funding for workforce programs this fiscal year, with most of the money going directly to business-led Regional Workforce

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Boards for training initiatives aimed at addressing their communities' workforce needs. Workforce Florida's 34-member Board consists of mostly private-sector business leaders appointed by the Governor, along with legislators appointed by the House Speaker and Senate President, and the heads of seven state agencies including the Agency for Workforce Innovation, Agency for Persons with Disabilities, Department of Education, Department of Elder Affairs, Department of Children and Families, Department of Community Affairs, and the Department of Juvenile Justice. At Workforce Florida, Hart will direct a team of 24 employees.

While at Enterprise Florida, Hart was responsible for corporate communications, government relations, investor relations and board management, defense and military programs, and partner relations programs. Prior to joining Enterprise Florida, he was a founding Partner with Griffin & Hart, LLC, a Tallahassee-based business, political, and communications consulting firm. He also co-founded Classified Technologies Group (CTG), a pioneer in classified advertising sales services and a developer of publishing industry software, and served as the company's Vice President/Chief Marketing Officer from 2000 to 2003. In the Florida Legislature, he represented South Tampa and Town & Country in Hillsborough County. Among other things, Hart also is credited with spearheading the initiative to create Florida's Centers of Excellence at state universities. The centers are designed to enhance the state's ability to move emerging technology concepts from the laboratory into the marketplace.

Hart and his wife, Amy, a former elementary school teacher, have two children, ages 12 and 8. Hart succeeds Curtis Austin, who was named Workforce Florida's first president in 2000. Austin left in July to become an associate vice chancellor at Keiser University.

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Workforce Florida, Inc. (WFI) is the state's chief workforce policy organization and principal architect in the efforts to meet the current and future workforce needs and challenges of Florida's businesses and citizens. **WFI** is a state partner, along with the **Agency for Workforce Innovation**, in the **Employ Florida** affiliate network of 24 business-led regional workforce boards and nearly 100 one-stop centers that provide employment solutions throughout Florida. Learn more about Florida's workforce resources and solutions at EmployFlorida.com.

Workforce Florida is an equal opportunity employer/program.

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The Workforce Florida telephone number in this document may be reached by persons using TTY/TDD equipment via the Florida Relay Service at 711.