

Florida Voices launches to spotlight issues that matter to you this election year

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Florida Voices is a project of the USA TODAY Network-Florida that spotlights the 2018 election issues that matter to Floridians. LEAH VOSS/TCPALM Leah Voss, leah.voss@tcpalm.com



(Photo: JEREMIAH WILSON/TCPALM)



The last time Floridians elected a new governor, our state was clawing its way out of the Great Recession.

Florida's foreclosure rate was the third-highest in the nation. Unemployment was 11 percent.

Not surprisingly, two former business executives — Rick Scott and Alex Sink — emerged as front-runners in the race for governor, pitching themselves as savvy leaders who could deliver economic stability to the Sunshine State.

The top issues during Florida's 2010 election were clear: jobs and the economy. This year, as Floridians consider the best candidate to replace Scott and whether to keep U.S. Sen Bill Nelson, the issues are more complicated.

That's why we're asking you to help us define them.

Today marks six months until Election Day. With that in mind, the six newspapers comprising the USA TODAY Network-Florida — FLORIDA TODAY in Melbourne, The News-Press in Fort Myers, Naples Daily News, Pensacola News Journal, Tallahassee Democrat and TCPalm on the Treasure Coast — are launching a statewide effort to identify which issues matter most to Floridians.

The initiative, called Florida Voices, has a straightforward goal: to listen to you, and to share what we hear.

It's something the news business has not done well enough in recent election years.



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Florida Voices is a project of the USA TODAY Network-Florida that spotlights the issues that matter most to Floridians as the 2018 election approaches. (Photo: LEAH VOSS/TCPALM)

In the coming weeks and months, we will ask you to weigh in on informal polls about what issues are most critical to your life in Florida. We also will conduct scientific polling with our partners at [Florida Atlantic University's Business and Economics Polling Initiative](#).

And every week, we will tell the story of a different Floridian who embodies one of these issues.

Florida Voices will not be driven by ideology or party. It's not about the horse-race coverage of candidates (there will be plenty of that elsewhere).

It's a sincere effort to understand what matters to Floridians — understanding we are a diverse lot with varying concerns and interests.

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We want to know what qualities you're looking for in a new governor. We want to know what your hopes are for this peninsula we call home.

Change is coming

Much is at stake for Florida this election year.

Consider a handful of the changes we've witnessed since Scott was elected governor almost eight years ago:

- [Medical marijuana was legalized](#) by Florida voters.



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May 4, 2018, 4:08 p.m.



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May 4, 2018, 6:02 p.m.



- The courts [ruled same-sex marriage was legal](#), reversing a statewide ban.
- State and local government employees [were required to start contributing to their own pensions](#).
- The space industry has not only rebounded, [it's reignited the country's imagination](#) in a manner not seen since 1969.
- Florida refused to expand Medicaid coverage and [has one of the country's highest rates of uninsured residents](#).
- Two major hurricanes struck Florida, one of them, [Irma](#), causing [unprecedented damage](#).
- [Red tide](#) and [toxic algae](#) have fouled Florida's waters.
- [Gun laws were tightened](#) after two of the deadliest mass shootings in U.S. history occurred in Florida.

As governor, Scott — more than any other individual — had a hand in addressing those developments. In some cases, including pension reform, he was an impetus.

The next governor of Florida will have significant impact, too.

Policy formulated in the Governor's Mansion impacts the daily lives of almost 21 million residents and [116.5 million annual visitors](#).

The outcome of this year's U.S. Senate race, in which Scott is trying to oust incumbent Nelson, also will be of huge consequence.

We know how important this election is to the future of Florida. That's why we're launching this project six months ahead of the election — so we can get a diverse picture of what Floridians value.

And we want to talk about it with you.

We hope you will join the conversation on our [Florida Voices Facebook group](#) and [Twitter account](#), and follow our [Instagram account](#), where we will post images of the Floridians we profile each week.



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