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Job Summit Should Consider Importance of Long Term Care Sector to Florida's Economy

*Ensuring Long Term Care in Florida Remains Strong is Key to Preserving Quality Eldercare,
Ensuring Job Growth*

TALLAHASSEE – In commending Senate President-designate Mike Haridopolos and House Speaker-designate Dean Cannon for convening tomorrow's Florida Job Summit as a positive start toward exploring policies and ideas to help generate new employment and economic growth in Florida, Florida's first and largest advocacy organization for long term care providers urged summit participants and policymakers to remain cognizant that the long term care sector contributes substantially to Florida's economic activity.

"Florida's long term care community is well-positioned to be a significant driver of economic recovery and job creation, and preserving its ongoing economic stability should be a key policy priority," said J. Emmett Reed, executive director of the Florida Health Care Association, which represents nearly 500 long term care facilities. "Nursing homes are not only vital to the economic and employment base of urban, suburban and rural communities across Florida, they are increasingly important to the growing number of citizens who require quality long term care—and the millions more who will need it in the years ahead."

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, health care will generate 3.2 million new wage and salary jobs between 2008 and 2018, more than any other industry, largely in response to rapid growth in the elderly population.

Reed continued, "Preserving and protecting Medicaid funding for nursing homes must be a paramount objective as lawmakers consider ideas to reboot Florida's economy. Doing so will both strengthen seniors' access to quality long term care and assist our efforts to serve as an effective cornerstone in bolstering our ailing economy."

Long term care facilities are an integral part of the economy, with nearly 700 nursing homes in Florida providing skilled nursing care to approximately 72,000 frail elderly and individuals with medical complexities every day. These facilities support \$9.6 billion in labor income, contribute to approximately 272,800 jobs and annually generate \$3 billion in state and federal tax revenue. In some rural communities, nursing homes are often one of the largest employers, hiring well-paying care-giving positions that make a difference in the lives of seniors and which contribute significantly to local economic activity. (Source: American Health Care Association, Lewin Group IMPLAN analysis)

"As we prepare to enter the 2010 legislative session, we want to continue reminding lawmakers that when Medicaid funding for nursing home care is stable, quality of care and services improves.," said Reed. Nursing homes devote a full 70 percent of operating expenses to wages, benefits and other labor costs, and Medicaid funding stability equates to staffing stability, Reed explained. "Any cuts to Medicaid funding, coming on top of Florida's \$78 million in Medicare cuts put into effect last October by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, as well the additional Medicare cuts proposed in health care reform, could mean lost jobs, staffing dislocation and compromised eldercare."

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At a time when Florida continues to struggle with Medicaid funding shortfalls resulting from deteriorating fiscal conditions and an anticipated end to our state's share of federal stimulus dollars, we urge lawmakers to protect the much-needed dollars that preserve the quality of care our seniors receive, he continued. "We intend to keep working with Florida legislators to ensure we are constructive partners in strengthening our state's economy, creating and preserving good local jobs and continuing to provide the high quality care every senior needs and deserves."

ABOUT THE FLORIDA HEALTH CARE ASSOCIATION

The Florida Health Care Association (FHCA) is a federation which serves nearly 1,000 members and represents over 500 long term care facilities that provide skilled nursing, post-acute and sub-acute care, short-term rehab, assisted living and other services to the frail elderly and individuals with disabilities in Florida. FHCA was founded on the premise that its members have a moral obligation to the residents they serve, and since 1954 the Association has worked diligently to improve quality of care and quality of life for the state's growing elder care population. For more information about the Florida Health Care Association, visit www.fhca.org.

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