



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: October 26, 2009

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Senate President Jeff Atwater Joined by 100 Business Leaders to Honor Florida's Tax Credit Scholarships

MIAMI — Senate President Jeff Atwater and more than 100 business leaders united on Oct. 26 in Miami to celebrate eight years of corporate support of Step Up For Students, which has made it possible to provide the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship to underprivileged students in Florida.

The Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program was the vision of Florida's legislators who dreamt of empowering low-income parents succeed in finding the best school for their children while increasing the overall graduation rates in Florida.

Senate President Atwater was among the Florida leaders whose vote gave birth to this innovative program that has given thousands of Florida's children a second chance at a quality education and renewed hope for the future.

"The Tax Credit Scholarships are a catalyst for change—we need to broaden our choices for educational opportunities so we can effectively compete on an international scale," said Senate President Atwater said. "Step Up For Students Scholarships are helping us to diversify our education system to achieve greater results and provide our children and future workforce with a world-class education."

Since 2002, corporations, like US Century Bank, with a Florida Income Tax or Insurance Premium Tax liability have redirected more than \$500-million to the Step Up for Students Scholarship Program.

"Through Step Up For Students, corporations are given the opportunity to invest in our most valuable asset—our children," Atwater said. "Without the generosity of these corporations, this program wouldn't be possible and the dreams of many children would be put on hold."

Last year, these companies collectively funded scholarships for nearly 25,000 low-income students in grades K-12 throughout the state, and one of them, Antonio Trigo, was close to failing until he found a new school that

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turned his educational life around.

Trigo ended up serving as valedictorian of his eighth-grade class last spring and joined professional leaders at the "Toast Education" reception where he thanked business representatives from US Century Bank and other supporting corporations for giving him a second chance at success.

"The scholarship program has opened the door for us to provide financial resources that benefit Florida's underprivileged children," said Octavio Hernández, President and CEO of US Century Bank. "We are proud to give back to those families who make our community *strong* – because our companies couldn't exist without them."

US Century Bank first joined Step Up For Students in 2008 and has donated \$75,000. The corporate donations provide annual private school tuition scholarships of up to \$3,950 or transportation scholarships of up to \$500 to out-of-district public schools for students whose families meet the federal guidelines for free and reduced lunch.

"We are constantly humbled by the generosity of our corporate partners who share our vision of providing equal opportunity in education to Florida's underprivileged children," said John Kirtley, founder and chairman of Step Up For Students. "Hearing from students like Antonio Trigo who has felt the power of a quality education is true testament to this program and the great vision of our state's leaders."

About US Century

Established in 2002, U.S. Century Bank is one of the 10 largest community banks headquartered in Miami, with assets of \$1.8 billion. Through its network of 24 branch locations and its online banking platform, it offers its customers a wide range of financial products and services. U.S. Century Bank is the recipient of the 2008 Beacon Award in Financial Services and a 2009 and 2008 Outstanding Minority Business Award from the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce. U.S. Century Bank has received the highest ratings from independent bank analysis agencies. For more information or to find a U.S. Century branch near you, call (305) 715-5200 or visit www.uscentury.com.

About Step Up For Students

The Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program – also known as Step Up For Students – currently provides K-12 scholarships for more than 24,800 low-income Florida students to attend a private school or out-of-district public school. Step Up For Students Scholarships are funded by corporations that redirect up to 75 percent of their corporate state tax liability or insurance premium tax liability to a qualified Scholarship Funding Organization in exchange for a dollar-for-dollar tax credit. For more information, visit www.stepupforstudents.org.

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