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Editorial: Merit behind the vetoes

Governor Crist showed refreshing independence in rejecting bad lawmaking.

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What's next for Gov. Charlie Crist in the wake of his vetoes last week of a good chunk of the Legislature's business last session?

Impeachment? Incarceration?

That's about what some pious GOP legislative leaders suggested would suit the Republican-turned-independent governor.

House Speaker Larry Cretul said Crist's vetoes amounted to an "abuse of power."

Senate budget chief J.D. Alexander said Mr. Crist "prefers a drive-by, hit-and-run approach to governing." "Hit and run" – that's criminal, isn't it?

Mr. Crist on Friday vetoed \$371 million from the state's \$70.2 billion budget. While some of the cuts appeared questionable, several were right on the money. For Mr. Cretul and Mr. Alexander to summarily dismiss them — while sermonizing how they don't constitute good government — is at once amusing but also the definition of gall.

Mr. Cretul, for example, railed sanctimoniously against Mr. Crist's veto of the Legislature's \$160-million raid on a transportation trust fund — money set aside each year for road and bridge improvements but which the Legislature grabbed to sprinkle on a budget area it annually neglects: schools.

So is robbing a trust fund set aside specifically to build and maintain roads just a bad habit, Mr. Cretul? We'd be remiss if we didn't also mention that the \$160 million in trust fund dollars would create thousands of construction jobs. And the Legislature said jobs topped the agenda this year.

By the way, it wasn't really \$160 million that the House tried robbing from the trust fund, but more than \$400 million. Only the Senate refused to go along with recklessness on so grand a scale, right Mr. Cretul?

We suppose Mr. Alexander should know a drive-by, hit-and-run approach to governing when he

sees one. Mr. Alexander drove an amendment onto a bill last year that few of his colleagues got the chance to glimpse, but which ended public hearings on significant water-withdrawal applications.

But describing the governor cutting millions of dollars worth of pork projects as a "petty vendetta" — some of them funded by the Legislature without first giving them a public review — seems, well, petty. Some pork appeared destined for Mr. Alexander's district.

Mr. Crist nevertheless could have been less discriminating. He didn't veto \$750,000 for a health clinic in Pasco County, coveted by a stalwart supporter of the governor, Sen. Mike Fasano. It appeared on a list of dubious legislative projects compiled by Florida TaxWatch, along with other turkeys, including a \$500,000 rowing facility for Brevard County. Why stomp some of the projects and not others, governor?

But Mr. Crist did well to get rid of so much else on Friday. He vetoed the Legislature's ban on using tax dollars for human embryonic stem cell research — noting the ban would harm scientists' ability to better understand genetic diseases and find potential cures. A ban also would harm Florida's ability to compete with other states in attracting resources and jobs in the life sciences.

He killed a futile appropriation supposedly promoting strong marriages. And put a rope around Rep. Chris Dorworth's outrageous bill that could have kept agencies from imposing meaningful rules on developers.

We'd have liked if Mr. Crist had taken a more serious run at containing costs during the regular session. Transitioning Medicaid to managed care would benefit more people than his move Friday to restore \$199 million in Medicaid money to nursing homes.

But Mr. Crist showed Friday what an independent can more easily do than some party-shackled polls: Decide the fate of some bills not merely on political calculus, but on their merits.