

# Tampa Bay Times

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## THE BUZZ

From the staff of the Tampa Bay Times

### Scott warns that Matthew 'still has time to make a direct hit'



Mary Ellen Klas, Times/Herald Tallahassee Bureau

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With Hurricane Matthew continuing its approach up the coast, Florida **Gov. Rick Scott** said Friday that the South Florida recovery efforts have begun but the eyewall remained 20 miles east of Cape Canaveral and warned North Florida to remain vigilant.

"This is still a 120 mph storm. While the eye has not made direct landfall, it still has time to make a direct hit," he said at the first public briefing of the day as the storm continued to pummel the northern half of the state.

He said an estimated 600,000 Floridians are without power and the major concern remains in the low-lying areas of Duval and Nassau Counties where there is potential for a 10-foot storm surge that could do lead to major flooding, into downtown Jacksonville.

Scott said that Florida Fish and Wildlife, the National Guard and local authorities in South Florida are doing initial assessments and there have been no reports of fatalities and all major roads have been cleared. Tolls remain suspended and there were no major damage or hazards.

In an email Friday morning, Miami Dade Expressway authority Executive Director Javier Rodriguez asked the state for permission to "resume toll collections today at 11 a.m. "because the county had been cleared of all weather-related warnings."

But Scott said he rejected the request.

"Tolls will remain suspended for 24 hours after the storm passes each county," he said. "We denied MDXs request to reinstate tolls this morning. The Department of Transportation will continue to review this on a county-by-county basis."

Power was restored in most of South Florida but by 9 a.m., 7,600 customers remained without power in Miami-Dade, 8,880 in Broward and 47,140 in Palm Beach.

Half of the residents in Martin County remain without power; one-third of those in St. Lucie County and FPL has restored 27 percent of initial outages with about 500,000 homes left without power, Scott said.

"But look, we're only halfway through, there will be more outages," he said.

The state has a five-day fuel supply and "we have plenty of fuel in the state," he said.

Scott conceded that having the eye remain east of the coast was good but he reminded Floridians "we're not out of it yet."

"There's no victory lap here. The victory is when the storm leaves our state," he said. "We could still have a direct hit but, for the southern part of the state where it stayed off shore, that's been a positive."

The state has more than 145 shelters open with more than 22,000 people in the shelters. He declared the evacuation effort a success.

He said the South Florida Water Management District was "still holding water" to keep water levels down in Lake Okeechobee.

Asked why he would refrain from extending the deadline on voter registration and face criticism that he has politicized the storm, Scott said he has not changed his mind.

"I'm focused on the storm and every life," he said.

Leo Lachat, head of the state's Bureau of Response, told emergency managers at a briefing Friday morning that the state now has two missions: above Brevard County the priority is "protecting Northeast Florida as the storm continues on" and below the Space Coast, teams are doing reconnaissance to determine where they can move in to employ recovery teams.



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