BUDGET NEWS

Last Tuesday, both chambers unanimously adopted their vastly different spending plans. The budgets are now ready for the conference process, which may not begin until after the holiday break next week because the conference committees have yet to be named. The conference committees are made up of both House and Senate lawmakers to hammer out the differences in the budgets. And the differences are many. The biggest is the $350 million gap between the plans due to the tax exemption issue. The Senate did not include money to buy tax exemptions in its budget and instead uses the additional dollars to fund education, health care and transportation programs. The House, with the support of the Governor, endorses cutting the tax on stocks and bonds, and supports continuing the popular sales tax holiday, a nine-day reprieve from the sales tax levied on clothing and other items. Rumors of an extended session because of the tax cut issue are already circulating through the Capitol.

For a summary comparison between the House and Senate budget proposals, please go to www.houseprioritybudget.state.fl.us.

REMINDER

Catch the legislative action live every day from 8:00 am until 6:00 p.m. on WFSU-TV/The Florida Channel, Cable 6. Please make a note that Comcast Cable changed the channel location last week for the Florida Channel. Live legislative coverage can now be found on local cable channel 6.

Quote of the Week

"I don't have to be in Scotland until August. There is no hurry."

– Senator John McKay (Republican Senate President from Bradenton- FSU Alum) commenting on the possibility of an extended session due to budget differences.

Tallahassee Democrat, Thursday, April 5, 2001
SB 1046, Student Financial Aid, by Senator Ken Pruitt (R- Port St. Lucie), will be heard this week in the Senate Education Committee. The bill creates the Teach Florida Program, which is designed to attract students to the teaching profession by offering a scholarship equal to the cost of tuition and fees at a state university plus a $3,000 stipend. Maintaining a 3.0 GPA is required. The student must commit to teaching in the Florida public school system for the same length of time as they received the scholarship. A comparable bill, HB 1375 by Representative Heather Fiorentino (R-New Port Richey), will be heard in the House Colleges and Universities Committee this week. This bill deletes the previously established scholarship provisions for lower division undergraduates and provides forgivable loans for upper division undergraduates and graduate students who intend to teach in "critical teacher shortage" areas.

SB 2188, Education Investment Act by Senator Betty Holzendorf (D-Jacksonville), will be heard this week in the Senate Education Committee. This bill provides legislative intent for specific educational enhancements and investments so that universities can "expand undergraduate student recruitment, retention and support services for students from low-performing high schools" as part of the "Talented Twenty Percent" admission policy. Specific enhancements would include:

- early orientation and personal advising;
- waivers for Florida residents who start a graduate degree at a public university within 2 years of graduating from a state institution where they had received a Pell Grant or Stafford Loan as an undergraduate;
- free LSAT prep courses for university graduates originally from under-performing high schools.

Note that all enhancements detailed in the legislation are dependent upon funding.

UPDATES

HB 271, Corporate Income Tax, by Representative Joe Negron (R-Stuart), has been received by the Senate from the House and referred to committees, but is still awaiting a hearing. A similar bill, CS/SB 1136 by the Committee on Commerce and Economic Opportunities, passed its committee of origin and will next be heard by the Regulated Industries Committee. The bill provides businesses with a tax credit for contributions to nonprofit scholarship funding organizations.

SB 746, Math & Science Teacher Education, by Senator Donald Sullivan (R-St. Petersburg), was withdrawn from the Senate Appropriations Committee and went straight to the Senate Special Order Calendar. It is now on third reading. SB 746 creates a program to improve the skill of K-8 math and science teachers.

SB 986, designates New College in Sarasota as the 11th state university, by Senator Donald Sullivan (R-St. Petersburg), passed unanimously out of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Education last week and will be heard this week by the full Appropriations Committee.

HB 989, Universities Designations, by Representative David Mealer (R-Lake Mary) has been placed on the Special Order Calendar for Tuesday, April 10. The Senate companion bill, SB 2054 by Senator Jim Sebesta (R-St. Petersburg), will be heard in the Senate Education Committee this week.

SB 1404, Program in Medical Sciences, by Senator Kendrick Meek (D-Miami), is scheduled to be heard in the Senate Education Committee this week. The bill no longer creates a PIMS Program at FAMU. It was amended last week to only study the possibility of a PIMS program at FAMU.

HB 1511, relating to student fee increases and student government, by Representative Leslie Waters (FSU alumni; R-Largo) passed unanimously out of the House Colleges and Universities Committee last week. It will next be heard in the Education Appropriations Committee.

CS/SB 2108, Education Governance, by Senator Ken Pruitt (R- Port St. Lucie), will be heard this week in the Senate Committee for Governmental Oversight and Productivity. The House companion, HB 1533 is scheduled for a hearing on Wednesday, April 11 in the House Education Appropriations Committee.