



While the opening day of this year's Legislative Session may have looked similar to ones in the past, with the flowers and usual fanfare, the 1999 session was unique to this century. For the first time in over 100 years, Republicans control the governor's office as well as both houses of the Florida Legislature.

Last Tuesday, Governor Jeb Bush opened the sixty day session echoing his campaign themes to a friendly audience. He asked lawmakers to overhaul the public school system, support "opportunity scholarships," increase spending on social services for children and the elderly, and help pass a \$1 billion tax break package. By week's end, Legislators had already sent Governor Bush his first bill to sign, one which increases benefits for Florida's police officers and fire fighters. It seems even the Governor is surprised by the rapid pace of this session so far.

This week, members of the appropriations committees will work to have their budgets ready for a hearing by Friday. For weeks members have been telling us how they intend to spend their allocations, so now we'll finally get a peak at what they actually will be doing to, I mean for, us!

Education reform and readiness bills passed out of the House and Senate, respectively (see related story). These will no doubt be two of the hottest issues as the session continues. On Tuesday, the House plans to hear their version of a tort reform bill, which should be an interesting debate. Governor Chiles vetoed the legislation last year. You can watch this and other legislative action on local cable channel 47, weekdays from 8:00 am to 6:00 pm.

The first week of the session came to an electrifying end. On Friday morning, while the Senate was passing bills on the chamber floor, the power suddenly cut off in the Capitol. As everyone evacuated calmly, some lobbyists took the opportunity to talk to members and staff. During these 60 days of session, it appears that nothing can deter this process!

Please feel free to contact me if you need information about bills and their analysis. I welcome your comments and can be reached at **644-4453** or by e-mail at kdaly@govrel.fsu.edu.

Education is a Priority in 1999

School Readiness

CS/CS/1ST ENG/SB 366, SB 382, SB 708 was passed by the Senate last week. This committee substitute, sponsored by Senators Kirkpatrick and Holzendorf, combines three Senate bills that address preparing children age 0-5 for school. The bill creates the Florida Partnership for School Readiness, Inc., whose purpose will be to form the state's policy on school readiness, and makes provision for the School Readiness Governing Board to oversee the partnership. The bill creates local coalitions within each county to develop plans to ensure the quality of local preschool programs, and creates incentive grants for this purpose. With this bill, the State Coordinating Council for Early Childhood Services is reconstructed to serve as a coordinating council for readiness programs and would remain in effect until the year 2002.

Transforming Schools

CS/HB 751 was passed last week out of the House Select Committee on Transforming Florida Schools. This committee substitute combines HB 751, HB 753 and HB 755, which were sponsored by Representatives Diaz de la Portilla, Lynn and Melvin. The bill addresses the issues of educational accountability, teacher quality, school safety and truancy reduction. Specifically, it expands the state's student assessment program; recommends funding for professional development for teachers, and expands the compulsory school attendance age to 5 years. The bill will now proceed to the floor.

Session Schedule March 8-12, 999

House

Tuesday, Mar. 9 8:50 am – 12:00 pm
Wednesday, Mar. 10 8:50 am – 12:00 pm

Senate

Tuesday, Mar. 9 9:00 am – 1:00 pm
Wednesday, Mar. 10 12:00pm – 3:00 pm
Thursday, Mar. 11 1:30 pm – 3:00 pm

Spotlight on Bills

Industrial Partnership Professorships

Another university related bill, **House Bill 483** by Representative Rob Wallace (R-Tampa), provides for the establishment of professorships that are to be filled with personnel from the industrial sector whose experience and training differs from that of traditional university personnel. These professorships may be created in any discipline and within any state university, and will be established through contracts with corporations who agree to act as sponsors by providing up to 70% of the professorship's yearly cost. These contracts would last for at least 3 years, and could be renewed for a period of up to 3 years. This bill also provides a tax credit for participating corporations. The bill passed the House Colleges and Universities Committee last week and is moving to the Committee on Finance and Taxation.

Site Determined Baccalaureate Degree Program

House Bill 765, by Representative Evelyn Lynn (R- Ormond Beach) was introduced last week and has been referred to the Colleges & Universities, Community Colleges & Career Prep and Education Appropriations committees. This bill is identical to **SB 664** by Senator Don Sullivan (R-Pinellas), which was featured in last week's *Legisletter*. Both bills support community colleges contracting with 4-year institutions to provide access to baccalaureate degree programs. The Postsecondary Education Planning Commission, in consultation with the BOR and the State Board of Community Colleges, would approve the proposed degree programs and institutional agreements. The bill will be heard in the House Colleges and Universities Committee on Wednesday, March 10.

Board of Regents Terms

House Bill 407, by Representative Bob Casey (R-Gainesville), passed favorably last week out of the House Governmental Operations Committee. This bill restores the regents' terms of office to 6 years, thereby reversing the reduction to 4 years affected by the Legislature in 1998. The bill is now available to be calendared for hearing on the floor.

Skybox Tax Exemptions

House Bill 375, by Rep. Constantine, provides tax exemptions for skybox proceeds if the skybox is run by a non-profit organization. The bill has been referred to Finance and Taxation but has not yet been heard in committee.

We're Here to Assist You!

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