



The legislative process whirred like a well-oiled machine during the third week of the session. Major bills continued to move through the maze of committees and floor debates and the budgets are one step closer to finality.

The House Appropriations Committee approved a \$48.4 billion budget proposal Friday that would spend more than the \$46.8 billion recommended by Governor Bush but less than the Senate proposal. After hearing over one hundred amendments, the committee voted unanimously to advance their version of the budget to the full House. The day before, the Senate Budget Committee approved their \$48.7 billion budget plan. There are major differences in how the House and Senate spend their higher education dollars. Most likely, those differences will be worked out during the conference committee, scheduled to meet in a few weeks. The full Senate will hear their budget on Wednesday, the full House on Friday.

The substantive committees will meet again this week; a few of them will complete their work, others will meet a few days next week and then wrap up their work for the session. The House Committee on Colleges and Universities workshopped the FAMU Law School legislation by **Representative Al Lawson** (Dem. - Tallahassee and FSU Alum) last week (see related story).

Legislators started last week with a State and Federal Issues Summit. The entire Florida Congressional delegation, including Senator Bob Graham and Senator Connie Mack, participated with the 160 members of the State Legislature. They concluded by promising to work together for the betterment of Florida and its citizens.

Session will be in full tilt this week, with the budget amendment deadlines looming in the early part of the week and the committees winding down. Please feel free to contact me if you have questions about bills and their analysis, or any other issues that may concern you. As always, I can be reached at 644-4453 or by e-mail kdaly@goverl.fsu.edu.

Retirement Bills

Although many bills have been filed this Session regarding the Florida Retirement System, three are of particular interest to state employees. **SB 1222, SB 1460 and HB 1641** all deal with creditable service, the number of years of service the employee's final compensation will be based on. These bills would alter the calculation of benefits so that the final compensation will be the 3 highest years of salary rather than the 5 highest. **HB 1641**, sponsored by **Rep. Heather Fiorentino (R-New Port Richey)** and **Rep. Mike Fasano (R-New Port Richey)** has been referred to the House Governmental Operations Committee. **SB 1222**, sponsored by **Sen. Tom Rossin (D-West Palm Beach)**, and **SB 1460**, sponsored by **Sen. Alberto Gutman (R-Miami)** have been referred to the Senate Committee on Governmental Oversight and Productivity.

HB 547, sponsored by **Rep. Al Lawson (D-Tallahassee)**, provides for members of the Florida Retirement System to be vested after 5 years of service instead of 10 years. This practice is reflective of private industry practices and is considered a good recruitment tool to attract young professionals. The bill has been referred to House Governmental Operations.

Session Schedule:

House

Wed., March 24	8:50 – 3:30
Thurs., March 25	10:00 – 12 noon
Friday, March 26	8:50 – 5:00

Senate

Wed., March 24	10:00 – 12 noon
Thurs., March 25	10:00 – 5:30

Quote of the Week: "We dealt with many issues we have not been able to deal with in many years. I think the people of Florida are going to be very, very happy with the results that they see." **Sen. Ron Silver, D-North Miami Beach**, referring to the Senate's \$48.8 billion budget. *- Tallahassee Democrat*



Spotlight on Bills

FAMU College of Law

House Bill 189 establishing a law school at Florida A&M University was workshopped in the House Colleges and Universities Committee last week. The bill, sponsored by Representative Al Lawson (D-Tallahassee) would reestablish a law school that was established at FAMU in 1951, but which was eventually phased out in the late 1960's. In discussing his bill in committee, Representative Lawson pointed out that less than 2 percent of Florida's lawyers are African-American. The Senate has an identical bill, SB 774, sponsored by Senator Betty Holzendorf (D-Jacksonville), which has been referred to the Senate Education Committee.

Naming of State Buildings

Committee Substitute for House Bill 191, also sponsored by Rep. Al Lawson, passed out of the House last week. Currently, Florida law prohibits naming state buildings after living persons, with exceptions specified in statute. However, the legislature has frequently waived the stated exceptions. This bill would add to the statute the phrase "elected public official who is in office" in addition to the phrase "any living person" as an effort to stem tendencies to name facilities after living officials. Over the weekend, Representative Lawson did state he would make one exception to his strict law. He would allow the prospective FSU Medical School to be named for Speaker John Thrasher.

Florida Prepaid College Program

Last week, the House Committee on Colleges and Universities passed HB 1065, sponsored by Representative Annie Betancourt (D-Miami), which slightly changes the Florida Prepaid College Program. Current law provides that a "qualified beneficiary" may transfer the "benefits of an advance payment contract" to an in-state, 4-year institution. This bill would allow the beneficiary to transfer the contract benefits to an out-of-state school, a community college or a technical school. The bill will next be heard in the House Education Appropriations Committee.

Bill Update

HB 407, sponsored by **Representative Bob Casey**, passed the House floor last Wednesday. This bill would restore the Board of Regents' terms of office from 4 years to 6 years.

HB 765, by Representative Evelyn Lynn, passed through the House Committee on Community College and Career Prep last Thursday. This bill supports collaboration between community colleges and 4-year institutions in providing baccalaureate degree programs.



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