



The Conferees worked last week (the seventh week of the session) to eliminate the differences in the almost \$49 billion state budget. They were able to "close-out" most of the issues before "bumping up" the remaining items to the Chairs of the full budget committees. Senator Locke Burt (Republican, Ormond Beach) and Representative Ken Pruitt (Republican, St. Lucie) worked all weekend to finalize the budget. Although a few items remain unsettled for the Speaker and the Senate President to conclude, most of this year's budget is in place. The University System fared very well this year (see related story), however a few issues remain open at the time of this writing, including some items for Florida State University.

Only two weeks remain in the 1999 Session. The budget should be on its way to the printer this week, and several "big" issues, such as tort reform, election reform, education reform and readiness will be finalized this week. Legislators will spend the majority of their time deliberating potential laws on the floors of their respective chambers. The Speaker is predicting a lunch-time ending of this session for next Friday, April 30.

Remember, you can watch the legislative action live on local cable channel 47, from 8:00 a.m. - 5:30 pm Monday through Friday. Please feel free to contact me if you need any information or copies of bills and their analysis. I can be reached, as always, at 644-4453 or by e mail at kdaly@govrel.fsu.edu.

Budget Update

Many of the SUS budget items have been settled and only a few unresolved issues are being negotiated. The following budget items are closed out:

Enrollment: The conference applied the 5% corridor law, which resulted in cuts for FAMU, USF, FAU and FIU, representing a \$10.6 million reduction.

Enrollment Growth: The conference settled on 1444 lower division FTE, 700 upper division FTE and 500 graduate level FTE, distributed by the BOR based on the university's mission.

Alternate admits: Out-of-state alternative admits will no longer be eligible for state funding.

Tuition: A 5% across-the-board tuition increase has been approved along with a differential tuition increase up to 5%.

Libraries: \$5.9 million in non-recurring funds.

Plant, Operations and Maintenance: \$6.8 million

State Employee Free Courses: \$9.5 million

Meanwhile, these issues are still unsettled:

Enhancement funding: The most recent offer funds enhancements at \$68 million (\$40 million for undergraduate education, \$28 million for graduate education).

Challenge Grant Program/Deferred Maintenance: These issues were combined for funding purposes early in the budgeting process. Currently, there is a \$6 million difference between the House and the Senate (Senate \$48.6 million, House \$42.6 million).

Salaries: The House and Senate are negotiating for a \$10 million incentive fund, based on performance measures. The money would be used to fund TIP, PEP and merit raises. A 2.6 percent across the board raise for state employees, effective on July 1, 1999, is also still in play.

Spotlight on Bills

HB 1793, Nonclinical Social Work Practice, sponsored by **Representative Rudolph Bradley (D-St. Petersburg)**, passed favorably out of HealthCare Licensing & Regulation and is now in Governmental Rules and Regulations. FSU's Dean Dianne Montgomery of the School of Social Work helped to craft this bill, which sets separate regulations for social workers from those regulations applied to marriage and family or mental health counselors. The bill also provides for competency training for those who are working in the social work field but do not qualify for licensure. An identical bill in the Senate, **SB 1726** by **Senator Kendrick Meek (D-Miami)**, will be heard this week in Health, Aging and Long Term Care Committee.

HB 9, School Districts/Patriotic Programs by the Judiciary Committee, passed out of the House last week and has been received by the Senate and referred to the Education Committee. The bill allows school districts to provide curriculum which encourages patriotism. Specifically, it allows boards to require that students say the pledge of allegiance and stand at the playing of the national anthem. The Senate companion, **SB 330**, co-sponsored by **Senator Burt Saunders (R-Naples)** and **Senator Tom Lee (R-Brandon)**, has been retained on the Special Order Calendar.

\$1 Billion in Tax Relief

Last week, Governor Bush signed the first part of a \$1 billion tax relief package negotiated by House and Senate leaders. **SB 140**, Florida Residents Tax Relief Act, co-sponsored by the Fiscal Resource Committee and **Senator Anna Cowin (R-Leesburg)**, was the vehicle for the plan, which also combined **SB 318**, co-sponsored by the committee and **Senator Tom Lee (R-Brandon)**, and **SB 172**, co-sponsored by **Senator Jim Horne (R-Orange Park)** as well as parts from the House tax package. Included in the plan were reductions in the rate of intangible property taxes, reduction in property taxes, a period of tax-free shopping, and increased benefits for the unemployed.

Source: *The Tallahassee Democrat and the Florida Senate*

BILLS OF INTEREST UPDATE

HB 61 by **Representative Evelyn Lynn, R-Ormand Beach**, regarding the Florida Retirement System passed favorably out of the House General Appropriations Committee last week. The bill would allow employers of FRS Senior Management Service Class members to discontinue payment of unfunded liability contributions for those members who opted to participate in a non-state annuity plan. The committee also passed **HB 1883** regarding State Administered Retirement by the Committee on Governmental Operations and **Representative Bill Posey (R-Rockledge)**, which clarifies previous legislation as well as lowers contribution rates for the Florida Retirement System.

Session Schedule

House

Wednesday April, 21
* 1:50 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Thursday April, 22
* 8:50 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Friday April, 23
* 8:50 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Senate

Wednesday April, 21
* 9:30 a.m. - 12:00 noon

Thursday April 22
* 9:30 a.m. - 12:00 noon

Friday April 23
* 9:30 a.m. - 12:00 noon

Quote of the Week

*"They told me to vote my conscience.
I'm a freshman, so I did."*

- Rep. Chris Hart, R- Tampa
(FSU Alumnus)

In response to criticism he received
from voting against a popular
bill.

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