



LegisLetter

GOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS



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With the budgets easily clearing the House and Senate Appropriations Committees last week, the two chambers are now turning their attentions to other issues.

Last week, a Senate committee voted to cut in half the time required for state employees to qualify for benefits through the Florida Retirement System. The bill (SB 1026) lowers the vesting period from 10 years to 5 years and provides that pension benefits be calculated on an employee's three peak earning years.

Students under the age of 21 enrolled in cooking schools in Florida will be allowed to taste wine in a classroom setting. The bill has passed both the House and the Senate.

A bill allowing police officers to ticket motorists for not wearing seat belts passed out of a House committee last week. Currently, a motorist can only be cited for not using their seat belt if they are stopped for another traffic offense.

Several important higher education bills will be heard in various committees this week, the fourth of this legislative session. Both appropriations bills are also scheduled to be heard on the floors of their respective chambers.

As always, I welcome your comments and concerns, as well as your requests for bills and their analysis. And a reminder, you can watch the Florida Legislature in action, live, everyday from 8 a.m. - 6 p.m. on the Florida Channel (local cable channel 47).

Student Activity Fee Use Upheld

Last week the United States Supreme Court ruled that state-run schools can subsidize campus groups with money collected from mandatory student activities fees without violating the First Amendment rights of students.

"The First Amendment permits a public university to charge its students a fee for activities used to fund a program to facilitate extracurricular student speech if the program viewpoint is neutral," said the Supreme Court's opinion, written by Associate Justice Anthony M. Kennedy. The amendment protects free speech rights, and the students who felt that their rights were violated by forcing them to contribute to groups that they did not support challenged the mandatory fees.

The court ruled in favor of the University of Wisconsin's student fee system after finding that the school did not choose the funding for the student groups based on the views that the groups advocate.

FSU/SUS Lobbyists

The 2000 Florida Legislative Session began on March 7 and will run through May 5, 2000. FSU employees must adhere to the following University policies.

President Sandy D'Alemberte is the registered lobbyist for FSU, Vice President for University Relations Beverly Spencer, and Director of Governmental Relations Kathleen Daly are registered to lobby for The SUS.

No one on campus except for President D'Alemberte, Ms. Spencer and Ms. Daly are authorized to lobby for the FSU or the SUS. If you have questions about this legislative session, please contact Kathleen Daly 644-4453 or email at kdaly@govrel.fsu.edu.



Spotlight on Bills

Athletic Agents

HB 1521 by Representative Bill Andrews (R-Delray Beach) passed out of the House Committee on Tourism and has been referred to the Committee on Business Regulations and Consumer Affairs. This bill addresses “illegal inducements” to student athletes, making it a second degree felony. It also allows universities to receive “treble damages” in the event of a law suit involving agents who have engaged in illegal behavior.

Drug-Free Work Places

HB 1519 by Representative Evelyn Lynn (R-Ormond Beach) passed out of the Health Care Licensing and Regulation Committee last week. The bill strengthens rules for public and private employers regarding providing a drug-free work environment into The Florida Government Workplace Act. There is no Senate companion bill.

UPDATE:

Rulemaking Authority within the State University System: SB 2062 by Senator Jim Horne (R-Orange Park), was temporarily passed out of the Senate Education Committee. It is schedule to be heard again in the Education Committee today. The comparable House bill, **HB 1567, sponsored by the House Committee on Colleges & Universities and Representative Bob Casey (R-Gainesville)** was unanimously passed out of Governmental Rules & Regulations last week. It now goes to Finance and Tax Committee in the House.

Trust Fund for Major Gifts : SB 2092 by Senator Donald Sullivan (R-St Petersburg), and it’s companion, **HB 2035 by Representative Lee Constantine (R- Altamonte Springs)** have been referred to their respective Education committees of reference. There are some differences between the two bills. The Senate version contains language requiring that donations be ranked, with priority given to gifts supporting libraries, scholarships, fellowships and assistantships. The House bill does not require prioritizing gifts before they’re matched, but it does contain language supporting matches for gifts for scholarships. It also includes a requirement to reserve five scholarships for each state university. Both bills are expected to be heard next week.

Alcoholic Beverages and Student Curriculum: CS/HB 5, by Representative Sally Heyman (D-North Miami Beach) was heard on the Senate floor last week. It was substituted for **SB 234** and was passed by a vote of 31-1.

SESSION SCHEDULE

March 27-31, 2000

HOUSE

Wednesday, March 29 8:50 a.m. - 12 Noon

Friday, March 31 8:50 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.

SENATE

Thursday, March 30 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Friday, March 31 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

On Line Sunshine

Florida’s Legislature has gone to the web! Online Sunshine is a direct resource to Florida’s capitol. The website contains a variety of legislative information, including: bills, calendars, journals, directories, House/Senate Handbooks, House and Senate information, Citizen’s Guides, and a Kid’s page. Online Sunshine is accessible via the internet URL/location <http://www.leg.state.fl.us/>

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