

LegisLetter

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY GOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Volume Eleven / Number Six • April 9, 2001

Last Wednesday marked the halfway point of the 2001 Legislative Session and most of this year's major issues remain unresolved.

The most important of these is the state budget. Each chamber of the Legislature passed its spending plan and legislators now await the recommendations of the budget conference committee (see related story).

The battle over the Governor's "Service First" proposal continues to dominate headlines. Although this legislation is very likely to pass both the House and the Senate, lawmakers from our local delegation continue to wage war on the proposal, which will move 16,000 Career Service workers to the Selected Exempt class. As such, these workers would not have appeal rights for a firing or demotion; in addition, the burden of proof for such actions would be placed on the employee - rather than the state - in any appeal. In protest to this legislation a mass rally is planned by the state employees' union, which will take place at the Capitol today.

Bills eliminating the second primary in Florida passed last week in an effort to reform elections in Florida. The bills also set up a loan program for counties to buy election equipment similar to that used currently in Leon County.

In education news, the State University System governance bills will be heard again this week. **Senate Bill 2108** will be heard tomorrow in the Senate Governmental Oversight Committee, where it is expected to pass with additional amendments. **House Bill 1533** is scheduled for a hearing on Wednesday morning in the House Education Appropriations Committee. Again, several amendments will be offered, but the bill is expected to advance to the House floor by sometime next week. Another significant bill allowing prayer at high school graduations and other non-sporting -related school events passed a House committee last week. (See **Spotlight on Bills**).

Florida State University was again represented by its outstanding alumni last week at the Capitol. Heisman Trophy winner and quarterback **Chris Weinke** was honored by the House of Representatives last Wednesday. Chris was on the House floor to speak briefly and sign autographs for the lawmakers. And, last Monday, two Florida State University officials, both former astronauts, joined their peers on the House floor to connect with crew members of the International Space Station. **Dr. Norm Thagard**, Executive Director for the Challenger Center and **Captain Winston Scott**, Vice President for Student Affairs attended the live event as part of "Space Day in Florida"

The Legislators will finish their business a day early this week, leaving Tallahassee on Thursday in observance of Good Friday and Easter. Although it will be a short week, it is expected to be very busy. As always, please feel free to contact me at kdaly@govrel.fsu.edu or at 644-4453 with questions or comments on issues that may concern you.

Kathleen

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 conferees 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*

SESSION SCHEDULE April 9 - 12

Senate

Wednesday, April 11 9:45 a.m. - 12:45 p.m.
Thursday, April 12 9:45 a.m. - 12:45 p.m.

House

Tuesday, April 10 1:30 - 4:30 p.m.

Spotlight on Bills

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 Mealor** (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.

SB 1636, Community Colleges/Program Approval, by **Senator Ken Pruitt** (R- Port St. Lucie), passed unanimously out of the Senate Education Committee last week. The bill will next be heard in the Appropriations Subcommittee on

Education. This bill will allow community colleges to offer baccalaureate degrees in certain areas.

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.

