



LegisLetter

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY GOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

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Tax reform was the clear headline grabber during the second week of the regular session. The Senate endorsed this sweeping over-haul of the state sales tax system by a vote of 31-9. The measure would require voters, in November, to vote on a constitutional amendment to lower the sales tax, from 6 to 4.5 percent, and remove the exemptions on a host of products and services. The bill now heads to the House, where it will not receive a warm welcome, and will most likely sit and stew for the bulk of this session.

The proposal that will rewrite the education codes and laws had its preliminary airing in the Senate Education Committee last week. The current draft includes, among other things, the following priority issues: universities would be allowed to obtain non-state-agency status; a university's trustees would be made its employer; and, universities would be allowed to deposit funds outside of the state treasury. An additional SUS priority, which would allow trustees to appropriate tuition and fees, does not, however, appear in the current draft. The Chairman of this Education Committee, **Senator Alex Villalobos (R, Miami, FSU Alum)**, along with Senator Ron Klein, (D, Boca Raton) plan to add a provision, which clarifies that university presidents fall under the sunshine law when meeting as a group. Meanwhile, in the House, the Lifelong Learning Council will unveil its reorganization proposal later this week.

President D'Alemberte and Provost Abele were invited to testify before the Senate Education Appropriations Committee last week (**see related story**). Both made an appeal for more adequate funding of the state university system.

Both education budget committees will begin their budget workshops this week, although updated revenue estimates have not yet been announced. Those estimates may not come until later this month, or even early next month.

Planning has started for FSU Day at the Capitol, which is scheduled to take place on March 5, from 10:00 to 2:00. Mark your calendars and please plan to participate, or at least attend.

As always, I value your comments and suggestions during this busy time. Should you be called to the Capitol to testify, please let me know in advance by filling out a legislative contact form, which can be found on our website – www.fsu.edu/~govrel – or by contacting me at either kdaly@govrel.fsu.edu or 644-4453.

Kathleen

Funding and Enrollment Report

Last Wednesday, President D'Alemberte and Provost Abele were asked to testify before the Senate Education Appropriations Committee on SUS funding, and on the enrollment plan for state universities.

President D'Alemberte conveyed to the Senate panel how Florida State University has managed the cuts imposed during last December's special session.

"Our priority has been to protect those programs that directly impact our students, and we have accomplished that," reported the president. He added that at this point we have tapped into all of our reserve funding, and that any further cuts this session would require drastic reductions.

Provost Abele focused on defining the term "enrollment," and on adequate funding for all of the state universities. He offered that current "over-enrollment" policies create punishment for success.

"No university would intentionally over-enroll because we do not receive funding for these students," said Dr. Abele. He offered some solutions to this enrollment problem, including the installation

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of a system-wide admissions deposit policy. With such an enrollment deposit, students would be required to send no less than \$300 upon acceptance at a state university. If they enroll at that university, the funds would be credited against their fees. But if they do not show, the deposit is not refunded and would be used for student advising and services. The FSU Board of Trustees has endorsed the

passage of such a deposit by the Legislature.

Provost Abele offered additional, long-term solutions to access, including completion of the educational reorganization plan, the devolving of authority to the Trustees, and allowing market forces, including supply and demand, to operate in higher education.

SESSION SCHEDULE

HOUSE

Tuesday, February 5
2:00 - 5:00 PM

Spotlight on Bills

HB 75, Florida Bright Futures Scholarship by Representative Marco Rubio (R-Miami), was introduced in the House last week. It addresses the testing for Florida Bright Futures Scholarships. It requires the Articulation Coordinating Committee to set the required scores, credit, and the courses for which students can get credit. Specifies that a student may be awarded credit for as many as five subject areas, specifically English, humanities, mathematics, and natural and social sciences. The bill adds the Florida Gold Seal Vocational Scholars to the list of testing programs. The Department of Education is required to pay for the exams, as well as provide a \$50 incentive to students for each passed exam, with funding to come from the Education Enhancement Trust Fund. The bill also changes the number of credit hours for which a Bright Futures Scholarship may be awarded: no

more than 120 credit hours from an AA or baccalaureate program and no more than 90 credit hours from a technical program. There is currently no Senate companion bill.

HB 1241, Education and Training/State Employees by Representative Lorraine Ausley (D-Tallahassee) was introduced in the House last week. The bill would grant tuition waivers to state employees, excluding university employees, for work-related courses at public universities, community colleges or technical schools. An employee would be able to take up to 6 semester hours per term with enrollment on a space available basis beginning July 1 of this year. The bill also appropriates funds for reimbursement of administrative costs to educational institutions. A similar Senate bill, **SB 1356 by Senator Al Lawson (D-Tallahassee, FSU alum)**, is

scheduled to be heard Tuesday in the Committee on Governmental Oversight and Productivity.

HB 799, Ramiro 'Toti' Mendez Act by Representative Gustavo Barreiro (R-Miami), requires universities and community colleges to perform physical exams, including an EKG, on each student participating in organized athletic programs. However, the bill leaves several points unclear, such as whether the requirement would apply to private schools, and whether the student or the college or university would pay for the exam. It also does not outline a standard for passing or failing the physical. The bill will be heard Tuesday in the House Colleges and Universities Committee. The identical Senate bill, **SB 628 by Senator Ron Silver (D-North Miami)** will be heard today by the Senate Education Committee.