Governor Rick Scott addressed the 2017 Legislature and outlined his legislative priorities for the Legislative Session.

The Opening of the 2017 Legislative Session

Governor Rick Scott addressed the 2016 Joint Legislative Session Tuesday continuing his call for the creation of new jobs through business incentives and $618 million in tax reductions, including eliminating the tax on commercial leases. He argued that funding Enterprise Florida, Visit Florida and other economic incentive programs would result in more jobs. Governor Scott said: “I know what it’s like to be poor. I have lived in poverty. I have watched my parents struggle to put food on the table... If you never lived through these experiences, it may be harder to understand... I was fighting for our state’s job programs because I am fighting for the families just like mine growing up.”

Senate President Joe Negron said his legislative priorities were to create “national destination universities,” to address the Lake Okeechobee pollution discharges, fix the death penalty, and divert youthful offenders from the state criminal justice system. President Negron said: “Every student in Florida, regardless of their financial circumstances – what family they come from – will have an opportunity to attend a university I which she or he is accepted.” The Senate passed CS/CS/SB 2 (36-1) this week, which revises performance metrics, increases student financial aid and tuition assistance, establishes the World Class Faculty and Scholar Program, and creates the State University Professional and Graduate Degree Excellence Program to enhance programs in medicine, law, and business. In the House, the House companion, HB 3 (Avila) has not had a hearing yet.

House Speaker Richard Corcoran outlined his legislative priorities, as well as procedural changes bringing additional transparency to the legislative process that have been implemented. Abolishing the economic development agencies--labeled “corporate welfare,” promoting an additional $25,000 homestead exemption, advocating for a constitutional amendment limiting appellate judges to a maximum of a 12-years in office, were among the Speaker’s priorities.

There are gaps between the House, Senate and Governor’s priorities. The governor’s office believes there is more funding available, and includes the Seminole Compact and LIP funds. Additionally, the governor’s proposed increase in public school spending would come from higher property tax bills on businesses and homeowners as a result of increased property values. The House has called that a de facto “tax increase” and plans to fund the difference.
Health Care Legislation

Certificate of Need Repeal. The House Health Care Appropriations Subcommittee passed CS/HB 7, which eliminates the entire CON review program in Florida. Entities or persons desiring to build or replace a hospital, skilled nursing facility, hospice, or ICF/DD; establish new nursing home or ICF/DD beds; increase the number of complex medical rehabilitation beds; or establish tertiary services in a hospital, including inpatient complex medical rehabilitation beds will only need to be licensed by AHCA. There are 14 states that have no CON requirements. Nine people representing organizations waived in opposition to the bill, one waived in favor, and Sal Nuzzo from the James Madison Institute spoke in favor of the bill and Cathy Adkison, Florida Hospice & Palliative Care Association and Big Bend Hospice, spoke against the bill. Some subcommittee members indicated that although they had concerns about the bill, they would vote for it. The bill passed 9 to 5. A similar bill, SB 676 (Bradley) has not yet been heard in committee.

Long Term Care Waiver. CS/HB 619 (Pigman) passed the House Health Care Innovation Subcommittee unanimously. Florida’s Medicaid program uses various Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) waivers to provide services, not otherwise available through Medicaid, to prevent or delay institutional placement. Some waivers are limited to persons with specific diseases or physical conditions (such as cystic fibrosis); others serve broader groups (such as persons who are elderly and/or have disabilities). CS/HB 619 requires the consolidation of individuals enrolled in three HCBS waivers into the Medicaid Managed Long-term Care (LTC) Program by January 1, 2018: the Brain Injury and Spinal Cord Injury waiver (140 individuals), Adult Cystic Fibrosis (ACF) waiver (140 individuals), and Traumatic Brain Injury and Spinal Cord Injury waiver (350 individuals). When all eligible Medicaid beneficiaries have transitioned to the waiver beneficiaries in the LTC program. The Senate companion bill, SB 694 (Hutson) has not been heard in committee yet.

Senate Appropriations Subcommittees Release Budget Cuts

The Senate Appropriations Subcommittees released their budget cuts this week. The Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Health & Human Services budget target was $170 million in General Revenue and the total cuts were $351,589,130. In the Agency for Health Care Administration (ACHA) budget, hospital rates were cut by 32% – $257.6 M ($100.5 M GR; $157.1 M TF). The annual Social Services Estimating Conference two percent inflationary hospital rate increase was cut – $50.5 M ($19.3 M GR; $31.2 M TF). In the Department of Health budget, $450,000, for the FSU College of Medicine Immmokalee Center for Child Stress and Health was cut. The HHS project cuts amounted to $20,996,131.

The Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Higher Education released budget cuts amounting to $131,249,240. State university cuts included the following:

--FGCU - Academic and Career Attainment Funding $1,500,000
--UCF - Phillips Center for Performing Arts $3,900,299
--UCF - Urban Teacher Institute $250,000
--UCF Health - Crohn's and Colitis Research $337,000
--UWF - FAA Cert. $100,000
--UWF - Office of Economic Development and Engagement $5,000,000
--UWF - Physician Assistance (sic) Program $1,000,000
--UWF - Veteran and Military Student Support $250,000
--UWF- School of Mechanical Engineering $1,000,000
--FIU Health - Neuroscience Centers of Florida Foundation $1,500,000

In January, the House and Senate Appropriations Committees identified target reduction amounts that the subcommittees should meet to avoid a shortfall in out the following fiscal years and fund new priorities of the current legislators. The House reduction amounts are larger than the Senate amounts. For Target Reduction A, the House Appropriations Committee identified a total General Revenue (recurring and nonrecurring) target reduction amount of $1,058.7 billion, with $144.8 million total in higher education and $275.8 million total in health care. For Target Reduction B, the House Appropriations Committee identified a total General Revenue (recurring and nonrecurring) target reduction amount of $2,213.9 billion, with $304.8 million total in higher education and $573.8 million total in health care. The House did not release their reductions this week. The cuts in House Health & Human Services (HHS) will be almost four times as large as the Senate HHS cuts. Next week should be fun.
Immokalee Center for Child Health & Stress - Statewide Impact

The Senate Appropriations Subcommittee has recommended elimination of the FSU College of Medicine’s Center for Child Stress and Health. Dr. Elena Reyes has overseen the creation and development of the Center in Immokalee. Based at the FSUCOM Immokalee Health Education Site, the Center serves patients and providers throughout the state of Florida. The Center:

• Provides a resource website for patients and families in English, Spanish and Creole. The website offers information as well as evidence based interventions for youth and parents.
• Provides a professional website for clinicians with resources for use in their clinics and with their patients that includes:
  • Latest research on toxic stress
  • Guidelines for use of screeners for Toxic Stress in primary care clinics
  • Promotora/community health worker training curriculum
  • Provides training on Toxic Stress for primary care clinics, health departments, school based clinics and schools across the state
• Offers consultative services to clinics on implementation of screeners, staff training, and orientation to resources and behavioral interventions
• Trains medical students, health psychology fellows and residents on Toxic Stress and integrated care within primary care clinics
• Links to FSUCOM’s six regional campuses to train faculty and medical students across the state on Toxic Stress and integrated care
• Develops health campaigns targeting prevention in high risk rural and underserved communities and provides state-wide dissemination
• Conducts research on impact of toxic stress, culturally and linguistically appropriate interventions, and implementation in community clinics.

If the Center is abolished these services in Immokalee will end.

FSU College of Medicine’s Proposal to Study Florida’s Behavioral Health System

Dr. Heather Flynn and Dr. Patricia Babcock co-direct the FSU College of Medicine’s Center for Behavioral Health Integration and are asking the legislature to provide funding to begin a study of Florida’s Behavioral Health System.

The request is for $489,619 in the College of Medicine budget to begin a multi-phased research and data gathering and analysis project. This project will bring together University experts and key partners to develop and measure current practice and quality of behavioral health care, as well as expenditures. The first phase (Year 1) will provide information on the sources and adequacy of data needed to evaluate the behavioral health system in a standard and coordinated fashion. The second phase will recommend metrics, models and outcomes known to work (i.e. evidence-based). The final phase will include recommendations for an evidence-based, accountable system, prioritizing ongoing evaluation and continuous quality improvement. Deliverables will also include recommendations for standard and coordinated performance metrics, training plans, and dissemination / reporting to stakeholders statewide.

Dr. Flynn presented the proposal to the Senate Subcommittee on Higher Education Appropriations in February. Senator Galvano is the sponsor. The House companion request, HB 2219, has been filed by Rep. Elizabeth Porter but has not been heard yet.
Doctor of the Day in the Florida Legislature
Christie Alexander, M.D.

Opening Day in the Florida Senate. FSU College of Medicine grad and faculty member, Dr. Christie Alexander was honored to serve as “Doctor of the Day” for the opening day of the Legislative Session on March 7, 2017. The “Doctor of the Day” is present for the legislative chamber action and available for the day to provide needed medical care to legislators, staff or others in the Capitol Clinic.

Senate President Negron’s Remarks. The Senate President introduced Dr. Alexander saying: “Our doctor of the day is Dr. Christine Alexander, who is here at my invitation. Dr. Alexander graduated in the inaugural class of the FSU College of Medicine. She is currently a full-time faculty member at the University. And Dr. Alexander specializes in Family Medicine, which is the doctor most of us in the real world are most likely to see. So I wanted to have a family medicine doctor here to show the contribution that they make every day in our lives when we have situations where need their assistance. So Dr. Alexander, thank you for being here. Congratulations on your career.”

Photos & Credits: On page 1 Colin Hackley, Governor Rick Scott addresses the Joint Session of the House and Senate, “2017 Session Opener in Photos,” Sunshine State News, March 7, 2017; on page 2 photo of the leaning state Capitol; on page 3 Dr. Heather Flynn, Co-Director of the FSU COM Center for Behavioral Health Integration, provides information to the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on the proposed study; also, Dr. Elena Reyes with students in Immokalee; on page 4 photos of Dr. Christie Alexander and Senate President Joe Negron; and on page 4 adorable Fluffy Sexton, “son” of Christine Jordan Sexton. Sources included articles by the following: Brandon Larrabee, Kristen M. Clark, Jeremy Wallace, Lloyd Dunkelberger, Christie Jordan Sexton, the Florida Channel and House & Senate bill analyses.

Additional Resources:
Advocate for Florida State:
http://www.advocateforfloridastate.fsu.edu/site/PageServe r?pagename=deploymenthome
FSU Governmental Relations: http://govrel.fsu.edu/
The Florida Channel: http://thefloridachannel.org/
Florida Senate: http://www.flsenate.gov/
Florida House of Representatives:
http://www.myfloridahouse.gov/
Florida Governor’s Office: http://www.flgov.com/
Daily Political news articles:
http://www.sayfiereview.com/
Sunburn: http://www.saintpetersblog.com/tag/sunburn

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