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Hope Scholarship Passes First Committee Stop

Every student deserves to learn in a safe environment. In the 2015-16 school year, over 47,000 Florida public school students were victims of incidents such as battery, bullying, harassment, hazing, physical attacks, sexual assault, battery and harassment.

This week, the PreK-12 Innovation subcommittee passed The Hope Scholarship program that creates a pathway for students who are subjected to an act of violence or abuse at school to pursue their education with hope, dignity, and an opportunity for success.

These students will have the option to attend another public school in or out of their district, or an eligible private school of their choice. If the student is enrolled in a public school outside of the district, they are eligible for a transportation scholarship up to \$750. If they choose to attend a private school, they can receive a scholarship that will be funded through taxpayer donations to a scholarship funding organization by individuals who purchase or register a motor vehicle in Florida.

I support this program because it allows students to get away from an unhealthy situation and empowers parents to choose a school where their child will thrive in an environment that is conducive to learning.

“Rule of Law Adherence Act” Passes the Judiciary Committee

The Judiciary Committee passed HB 9, also known as the “Rule of Law Adherence Act.” The purpose of the Act is to ensure that federal immigration laws are followed in our state.

Here are four important provisions in the Act to accomplish that goal:

- 1) requires state and local governmental entities and law enforcement agencies to comply with and support the enforcement of federal immigration law;
- 2) requires any sanctuary policies currently in effect be repealed within 90 days of the effective date of the Act;
- 3) requires officials or employees of state and local governmental entities or law enforcement agencies to report violations of the Act to the Attorney General or state attorney; and
- 4) allows a person injured by the conduct of an alien unlawfully present in the United States to sue a state or local governmental entity or law enforcement agency whose violation of the Act contributed to the person’s injury.

Florida is a beautifully diverse state, which we should always celebrate. However, it is also true that our nation’s immigration process is dependent on our ability to properly enforce our current immigration



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laws. I support this bill because it will help fix our immigration system, and protect our citizens and the rule of law.

House Committee Passes Legislation to Protect Taxpayers

This week, the Ways & Means Committee passed a proposed constitutional amendment that would protect taxpayers and Florida's long-term economic future by requiring a supermajority vote to impose any new state tax or fee or to raise any existing state tax or fee. I believe this effort compliments the good work your Florida House has achieved over the years by cutting taxes, cutting regulations, and cutting fees. Governor Scott echoed these sentiments when he spoke at the meeting, and committed to working with the Legislature to continue to keep more money in the pockets of Floridians.

I look forward to supporting this bill, and any other measure that prevents future tax hikes that would endanger our workforce and the livelihood of Florida families.

House Committee Votes to Extend Post-Service Lobbying Bans

The House Public Integrity & Ethics Committee passed HB 5 on Tuesday that would extend the current ban on post-service lobbying from two years to six years. The ban prevents legislators and state officers from personally representing a person or entity for compensation before any state agency or state government body. This new six-year ban would be the first of its kind and the strictest ban in the country.

In my view, extending the timeframe of the lobbying ban will help eliminate any actual and perceived revolving door of elected officials profiting off their time in public office. I believe the committee's actions correctly recognize that holding public office is a sacred trust, and I look forward to strongly supporting both measures.

House Committee Passes Legislation to Hold Government Accountable

This week, the Government Accountability Committee passed HB 11, which further increases transparency and accountability in government.

The bill holds government accountable by ensuring state agencies and other government entities have internal controls in place to curb waste, fraud, and abuse and promote efficiency in their operations. The bill increases transparency by requiring budget documents for cities and counties to be available online for a certain amount of time so citizens know how their tax dollars are being spent. Finally, the bill reforms public testimony laws so people will have the opportunity to speak at local board and commission meetings without having to submit their comments in advance.

I support this bill and pledge to continue looking for ways to make government more transparent, efficient, and accountable to taxpayers.



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Public Integrity & Ethics Committee Approves Local Government Ethics Reform

The Public Integrity & Ethics Committee passed a bill this week to reform ethics guidelines for local governments. Some of the provisions of the bill include the following: requiring certain elected local officers to file a more detailed financial disclosure; expanding annual ethics training requirements for local officers; expanding restrictions when a conflict of interest exists; and requiring lobbyists to register with a statewide database before they can lobby local government bodies.

I am proud to support this bill and will continue to find ways to reform government and hold elected officials to the highest ethical standard.

Motor Vehicle Insurance Bill Passes House Committee

The House Commerce Committee passed HB 19 this week, which would reform motor vehicle insurance in Florida. The goal of HB 19 is to increase access to meaningful insurance coverage while bringing personal responsibility and accountability to the system.

The Florida Motor Vehicle No-Fault Law, also known as Personal Injury Protection (PIP), requires vehicle owners and drivers to obtain no-fault coverage. PIP coverage of \$10,000, along with property damage coverage of \$10,000, are the only insurance coverages required for all Florida drivers at the time of vehicle registration. In addition, the Financial Responsibility Law requires all Florida drivers at fault in an accident to be accountable for bodily injuries or deaths (BI) up to \$10,000 for one person, and \$20,000 for two or more persons. BI coverage may be secured through insurance or other means following an accident.

Legislators revised PIP multiple times in response to rampant fraud. Unfortunately, these efforts have not fixed the problems and fraud and abuse in the PIP system continue.

HB 19 would resolve these issues by ending mandatory PIP coverage and replacing it with mandatory BI coverage that must be obtained prior to registering a vehicle. The bill focuses on personal responsibility and does away with the flawed no-fault system. Under the bill, drivers will have to obtain BI coverage that covers, at a minimum, \$25,000 in damages due to bodily injury or death to one person, and \$50,000 for two or more persons. Requiring BI coverage in this manner will bring Florida in-line with the vast majority of states.

I support this good bill because it will bring much needed personal responsibility and accountability to our motor vehicle insurance system and will help decrease premiums for Florida drivers.

House Committee Continues to Pass Strong Ethics Reforms

The Public Integrity & Ethics Committee passed a bill Tuesday that proposes important ethics reforms related to conflicts of interest. Some of the proposed reforms in the bill include: prohibiting state and local officers or employees from soliciting a conflicting job; requiring disclosure and reporting on offers of conflicting employment; requiring state legislators and statewide elected officers to disclose changes in employment and pay raises immediately when the employer has interests in the legislative process;



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clarifying regulatory conflict rules; and imposing a two-year ban on former agency directors from lobbying any state agency.

I believe government employees and officers serve the public and should not be able to use their positions for private gain.

Florida House Committee Prepares for the next Hurricane

This week, the Select Committee on Hurricane Response and Preparedness met to identify challenges in preparing our state for the next Hurricane. The committee was briefed on our statewide emergency shelter plans, procedures to prepare vulnerable populations, and the state's role in overseeing the emergency preparedness of health care facilities and health care professionals.

The Committee first addressed issues related to shelters and special needs shelters. The Committee heard presentations from the Interim Director of the Florida Division of Emergency Management, the Surgeon General and Secretary of the Florida Department of Health, two representatives from county school systems, two representatives from local government emergency management offices, and a representative from Florida International University.

Next, the committee addressed the needs of vulnerable populations not in health care facilities. The Florida Department of Elder Affairs Deputy Secretary explained the department's role in emergency management and as the contract manager for Area Agencies on Aging (AAA). A representative from the Orlando area AAA explained the role of AAAs in meeting the needs of Florida's elderly and disabled residents during hurricanes.

The Committee next heard presentations regarding health care facilities and hurricane events, beginning with a briefing from Florida's Agency for Health Care Administration on the agency's emergency preparedness and response activities, particularly as they relate to health care facilities, and an update on the agency's emergency power rule. The Committee also heard from local government emergency management officials, Memorial Healthcare System, and the Director of the University of South Florida's Center on Aging.

Finally, the Surgeon General and Secretary of the Florida Department of Health explained how the department helps mobilize health care professionals to serve patients before and after a storm.

In addition to these formal presentations, the Committee also received public testimony from representatives from several interested parties.

I will keep you updated as your Florida House continues to examine how we can best prepare for the next Hurricane.



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Florida House Prepares for New Policies to combat the Opioid Crisis

Two Health & Human Services subcommittees received briefings on the opioid crisis this week.

First, the House Health Quality Subcommittee received a report on current drug overdose death statistics and challenges the state's Medical Examiners Commission faces. According to the most recent Commission report, 3,044 individuals died with one or more prescription drugs in their system and total drug-related deaths increased by 13.9% (658 more) when compared with the first six months of 2015.

The Subcommittee also heard updates on the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP) from the Department of Health. The PDMP program was created by the 2009 Florida Legislature to make controlled substance prescribing more accountable and reduce prescription drug abuse and diversion within our state. Since then, our state has been able to increase reporting frequency and reduce the number of individuals having multiple provider episodes. However, even with our current success, our state can always improve. Some of the recommendations mentioned included integrating the PDMP into prescribers' and dispensers' electronic records systems, and allowing the PDMP to exchange data with other states.

Second, the Children, Families, and Seniors Subcommittee received a briefing on the opioid crisis and the child welfare system from the Department of Children and Families. The Department shared some statistics I found distressing, such as the increase in the number of children removed from their homes where parental drug abuse was present from 5,695 children in FY 2012-2013 to 7,749 children in FY 2016-2017. The Department and Healthy Start are working with community hospitals and emergency departments to identify families at risk due to opioid use disorders, but more should be done to turn these statistics around.

I support the ongoing efforts of these health care subcommittees as they shed light on this important issue and look forward to supporting legislation that provides much-needed solutions to the opioid crisis.