



# HOUSE MAJORITY OFFICE

FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



REPRESENTATIVE RAY RODRIGUES, MAJORITY LEADER

The Majority Office created the below articles as content for your newsletters. The Majority Office also created the following video that highlights the “Top 5” things that happened in the House throughout the week: <https://youtu.be/ILdtlh1cpfM>.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** All communications distributed in mass, including in electronic format, require review and approval *prior to* distribution. The articles included below have been preapproved. However, please remember that you still need approval from the Majority Office before distributing an article if you change it or if you include it with other unapproved material. Refer to chapter 4 of the Administrative Policy Manual for more information on the House mass communications policy.

## Florida House Passes Proposed Constitutional Amendment for Judicial Term Limits

This week the Florida House passed HJR 1, which proposes to place on the next general election ballot an amendment to the Florida Constitution that would provide term limits for state appellate-level judges. Specifically, these judges would be barred from appearing on a ballot for retention if they have served 12 consecutive years in the same office. If approved by the voters, these new term limits will apply to judges currently in office, but will not include time served in office prior to January 9, 2019.

I believe that term limits will reinforce the important principle that judicial service, like all public service, is about the citizenry, the institution, and rule of law, *not* about the individual.

## Best & Brightest Programs Bill Heads to the House Floor

The House Appropriations Committee passed a bill that would help attract and retain the best teachers and principals in schools throughout our state.

The bill would expand the Best & Brightest Teachers Program. Under the current program, teachers who scored in the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile or higher on the ACT or SAT, at the time they took the exam, are eligible for a bonus of up to \$10,000 if they are rated as highly-effective by teacher evaluations. The bill would expand this good program by lowering the qualifying test score to the 77<sup>th</sup> percentile and recognizing other national, standardized assessments including the LSAT, GRE, GMAT, and the MCAT.

The bill would also create the Best & Brightest Principals Program. This program would provide a financial reward and increased autonomy over personnel and budget decisions to principals that have been with their school for at least two years and have a high number of Best & Brightest teachers.

I support both programs because attracting and retaining the best teachers and principals is essential to our students’ success.

## House Subcommittee Votes to Expand Civics Education

The PreK-12 Appropriations Subcommittee passed a bill this week that would strengthen civics education in our K-12 public schools and post-secondary institutions.



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The bill proposes three primary changes to law. First, the bill would designate September as “American Founders’ Month,” and encourage all public schools to coordinate instruction related to the nation’s founding fathers during September. Second, the bill would require the Just Read, Florida! Office to develop and provide access to sequenced, content-rich curriculum programming, instructional practices, and resources that help elementary students increase their background knowledge and literacy skills. Finally, the bill would require students entering into the Florida College System or State University System in the 2018-2019 schoolyear, or later, to either take a civics course or pass a civic competency test.

If it becomes law, this legislation will help students become civically engaged adults who make positive contributions to their communities.

## **Florida House Subcommittee Passes Common Sense Assessment Reform**

This week the PreK-12 Appropriations Subcommittee passed HB 733 to overhaul how schools administer standardized tests in our state.

Florida’s current testing season begins at the end of February and ends in mid-May. In my view, the current testing schedule interrupts too many classes and unfairly tests students before they have had a chance to be taught a years’ worth of lessons.

HB 773 fixes this problem by moving testing to the end of the school year, giving teachers more time to teach. It also minimizes disruption to students and school schedules by shortening the testing window from approximately nine weeks to three weeks with the exception of the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading assessment.

Additionally, the bill requires local district assessment results to be provided to teachers within one week of administration. I believe this will help teachers better instruct our children by returning the students’ test scores in a timely manner.

Finally, the bill also ensures that parents will be more informed about their child’s progress with an easy to understand, user friendly score report that will include: a clear explanation of a student’s areas of strength and areas for improvement; specific actions and resources to assist parents; and information comparing the student’s score to all students in their district, state, or other states. This would empower parents to be more involved with their child’s educational needs.

I believe these common sense reforms would reduce the stress and anxiety that teachers, parents, and students grapple with during springtime testing. I support this legislation and will keep you up to date as it moves through the legislative process.

## **Subcommittee Passes “Schools of Excellence”**

The PreK-12 Appropriations Subcommittee passed a bill that establishes the Schools of Excellence Program.



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One function of Florida's statewide assessments is to identify and recognize schools that perform well based on school quality metrics established in law. The system has evolved and increased accountability for schools and educators by using student achievement and learning gains data from statewide standardized assessments. Annually, school grades are given on an A through F scale based on the percentage of total points earned by a school in a number of different categories.

The Schools of Excellence Program rewards schools that consistently score in the top 20% of schools based on points earned in school grade calculations. Schools are rewarded with increased administrative flexibilities, which are intended to relieve such high-performing schools from burdensome state or local regulations.

I support creating this program and believe it would significantly benefit schools throughout the state.

## **House Passes Four Free Market Health Care Reforms**

Your Florida House of Representatives passed four important free market health care reform bills, all of which will help increase access to affordable and quality health care for Floridians: HB 145; HB 161; HB 375; and HB 589.

HB 145 expands the use of ambulatory surgical centers (ASCs) and allows recovery care centers (RCCs) in the state. ASCs are non-hospital facilities that provide surgical care. ASCs have highly skilled staff and surgeons and are less expensive and more convenient than having surgery in a hospital. RCCs provide post-surgical and post-diagnostic, short-term, medical and general nursing care, support, and pain control for patients that do not require hospitalization. RCCs exist in some states, but not Florida.

HB 375 requires all Florida hospitals and ASCs to complete and publish patient safety culture surveys. A "patient safety culture survey" is a survey which asks facility employees about the climate of patient safety and quality of care. The survey helps hospitals identify and fix problems. If published, the survey data can also help Floridians make decisions about which facilities are best for their own care and that of their families.

HB 589 doubles the number of drugs listed on MyFloridaRx.com, which is Florida's prescription drug pricing website. The website currently includes 150 of the most commonly prescribed brand name drugs and associated generic equivalents and allows patients to compare prices of the drugs by location. Floridians can search the website by county, city, and drug. More information provided to the public through MyFloridaRx.com will allow Floridians to make cost-effective choices for themselves and their families. Ultimately, drug price transparency empowers patients and lowers the costs of drugs by encouraging competition.

HB 161 helps expand the use of direct primary care (DPC) in Florida by preventing DPC agreements from being regulated like insurance. DPC is a medical practice model that eliminates third-party payers from the doctor-patient relationship. By contract, a patient or employer pays a monthly fee to the primary care provider for defined services. After paying the fee, a patient can use all services in the agreement at



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no extra charge. One of the most critical problems in healthcare is out of control and unjustifiable costs. Innovations like DPC cut costs by eliminating the administrative hassles of the third-party payer system.

I commend my House colleagues for passing these important bills that will increase access to quality and affordable health care for all Floridians.

## **Subcommittee Passes Responsible Medical Marijuana Bill**

On November 8, 2016, Florida voters passed Amendment 2 to legalize marijuana for Floridians with debilitating medical conditions. The amendment requires the Department of Health (DOH) to adopt rules for patient and caregiver identification cards, caregiver qualifications, medical marijuana treatment centers (MMTCs) and patient supply limits by July 3, 2017. DOH must begin registering MMTCs and issuing identification cards by October 3, 2017.

This week, the Health Quality Subcommittee passed a bill to implement Amendment 2. HB 1397 create a regulatory framework for licensing MMTCs and marijuana testing labs; growing, processing, testing, transporting and dispensing medical marijuana; registering qualified patients and caregivers; certifying patients for medical use of marijuana; and obtaining medical marijuana by a qualified patient or caregiver.

The bill creates a robust regulatory system to meet federal guidance while ensuring patient access and safety. I support HB 1397 because it responsibly implements Amendment 2.

I will keep you updated as the bill moves through the legislative process.

## **House Supports Bills to Restore Trust in Government**

The House passed two ethics reform bills this week that I believe will help hold all elected officials to the highest ethical standard and restore trust in government.

**HJR 7001** proposes an amendment to Florida's Constitution that would extend the current ban on post-service lobbying from two years to six years. This ban would prevent legislators and statewide elected officers from lobbying their former government body. If the resolution passes both the House and Senate, the proposed constitutional amendment would then appear on the 2018 ballot for voter approval.

**HB 7021** reforms ethics guidelines for local governments. Some of the provisions of the bill include: requiring certain elected local officers to file a more detailed financial disclosure; expanding annual ethics training requirements for local officers; expanding restrictions and disclosures when a conflict of interest exists; and requiring lobbyists to register with a statewide database before they can lobby local government bodies.

I was proud to support these bills and will continue to find ways to reform government and hold elected officials to the highest ethical standard.



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## **House Passes Legislation to Hold Government Accountable**

On Thursday, the House passed HB 479, 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 extending the amount of time budget documents for cities and counties must be available online 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.

## **House Votes to Hold Public Employee Unions Accountable**

The House passed HB 11, which reforms the annual public employee union registration process to increase transparency and accountability. HB 11 requires public employee unions to be transparent and accountable by reporting in their annual registration renewal the number of employees eligible to be in the union and the number of employees who do and do not pay dues to the union. If 50 percent or more of eligible union members do not pay dues, the union must reapply for certification. A union that does not comply with these requirements will have its certification revoked. Unions that represent law enforcement officers, firefighters, and corrections officers are *not included* in the recertification changes.

HB 11 is a positive step in increasing transparency and holding public employee unions accountable to the workers they represent.

## **House Resolution to Support Israel Passes House**

The House approved House Resolution (HR) 281, which shows our support for Israel. HR 281 shares the Florida House's bipartisan objections to United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334, which states Israel's settlement activity is a violation of international law. Specifically, HR 281 voices our opposition to this position and asks the United Nations to either repeal or change its action regarding Israel.

I strongly support HR 281 and believe Florida and the United States should stand with Israel.

## **House Committee Votes to Reform Elections in Florida**

On Wednesday, the Government Accountability Committee passed a bill that will reform elections in Florida.



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Three provisions of this comprehensive bill stand out. First, the bill gives cities the choice of four dates to hold their elections. Second, the bill requires local or state officers who qualify for federal office to resign from their current elected office before they run for federal office. Third, the bill requires all candidates who qualify as a no party affiliation (NPA) candidate in partisan elections to be registered as an NPA at the time of qualifying.

I believe these reforms will make elections throughout our state more predictable, efficient, and transparent.

## **House Committee Votes to Modernize the Florida Retirement System**

The Florida Retirement System (FRS) offers government employees two options to save for retirement: the pension plan, a traditional defined benefit plan, or the more modern investment plan, a defined contribution plan. The House Government Accountability Committee passed a bill to modernize and improve the system. Some notable provisions in the bill include the following.

First, the bill changes the default from the pension plan to the investment plan for new employees who do not select either plan during the six-month election period after they are hired.

Second, the bill expands survivor benefits for spouses and children of employees who were killed in the line of duty. The benefits for police officers, firefighters, and all other employees would be retroactive to 2002.

Third, the bill prevents newly elected officials initially enrolled in the FRS Elected Officers' Class, on or after July 1, 2018, from participating in the pension plan. They will only have the option to participate in the investment plan.

Finally, the bill allows renewed membership into the investment plan or other optional retirement program for a retiree of the investment plan or other retirement program if they return to employment with an FRS employer.

I believe these reforms will help ensure state employees can select a retirement plan that best fits their particular needs.

## **Subcommittee Passes Motor Vehicle Insurance Bill**

The Insurance & Banking Subcommittee passed HB 1063, which would reform motor vehicle insurance in Florida. The goal of HB 1063 is to increase access to meaningful insurance while bringing accountability and responsibility to the system.

Personal Injury Protection (PIP), also known as Florida No-Fault Insurance, is the only insurance policy required for all Florida drivers. However, the Financial Responsibility Law requires all Florida drivers to be able to respond for bodily injuries or deaths (BI) they cause, up to \$10,000 for one person and



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\$20,000 for two or more persons. BI coverage may be secured through insurance or other means at the time of an accident.

PIP offers up to \$10,000 for various personal injuries that may occur in a car accident, regardless of fault. Legislators attempted to revise PIP multiple times, due to the rampant fraud found in the system. Unfortunately, these efforts have not fixed the problems. Fraud and abuse in the PIP system continue and have caused premiums to rise in recent years, placing additional financial burdens on Floridians.

HB 1063 seeks to resolve these issues in the current system by repealing PIP and replacing it with mandatory BI coverage. The bill focuses on personal responsibility and does away with the flawed no-fault system. Under BI coverage, drivers will have to obtain coverage prior to registering a vehicle and have their policies cover, at a minimum, \$25,000 in damages due to bodily injury or death to one person, or \$50,000 for two or more persons. Thirty-eight states have a similar system.

I support this 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.

## **Committee Passes Bill that Controls Gambling and Invests in Education**

The Commerce Committee passed a bill this week that would authorize the Governor's execution of a new Gaming Compact with the Seminole Tribe of Florida and resolve other issues related to gambling.

The bill will create a new 20 year compact between the State and the Seminole Tribe of Florida. State revenues from the new compact will be used exclusively for education, focusing on recruiting and retaining the best teachers in the K-12 school system, helping under-served students from persistently failing schools, and increasing funding for distinguished faculty in higher education.

The bill also closes loopholes and shuts down card games not authorized by the Legislature, limits gambling to current locations, eliminates inactive and delinquent gambling permits, and prohibits the issuance of new gambling permits. This bill will more effectively restrict gambling in our state to current levels at existing locations, which will protect Florida's national and international brand as a family friendly place to live, work, and visit for many years to come.

I believe this bill strikes a reasonable balance between controlling gambling and establishing long-term certainty and predictability for existing gambling entities in our state, while providing much needed funding for education. I will keep you updated as the bill moves through the legislative process.