

# CAPITOL UPDATE

WEEK 6 | APRIL 6 – 10, 2009

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

**TRANSPARENCY FOR TAXPAYERS** 2

**SUNRAIL ROLLING** 2

**FORMER SUPREME COURT JUSTICE VISITS** 2

**ON THE AGENDA** 3



## BUDGETS READIED FOR FLOOR DEBATE

The primary appropriations councils in both the House and Senate convened this week to put the finishing touches on their respective budget proposals. The spending recommendations of the 10 separate House committees were combined into two bills: one addressing health care and general government (HB 5001), and the other education and economic development (HB 5101). The Senate took similar action, crafting the work of six appropriations com-

mittee into a single bill (SB 2600).

The House budget totals \$65.078 billion, and the Senate budget is \$65.628 billion, a difference of almost \$550 million that will be negotiated in budget conference. While the monetary variation is small relative to the full amount of the budget, there are important policy decisions that will have to be factored as well, such as including potential gambling

revenue, the use of new cigarette and other fines/fees, and the closing of any sales tax exemptions. Both spending plans infuse \$3.5 billion of federal economic stimulus funds this year, and an equal amount in the next fiscal year.

Each chamber's spending proposals will be presented, debated, and voted on before their respective membership next week, followed by budget conference negotiations.

## DEBATING NEW REVENUES

As part of the budgeting process and in consideration of the current economic climate, many legislators and organizations have been searching for new revenue sources with which to blunt the effect of declining sources of traditional state revenue. This exercise has proven arduous in most cases, exposing philosophical and political differences among members, parties, and branches of government.

This week, Senate Finance and

Tax Committee chairman Thad Altman (R – Brevard Co.) announced that the idea of repealing any of the state's 240 sales tax exemptions, worth an estimated \$250 million annually, was off the table for the remainder of session. House Finance and Tax Council chairman Ellen Bogdanoff (R – Ft. Lauderdale) has announced that an increase in the cigarette/tobacco tax is dead. The two chambers have significantly different gambling bills that

could potentially generate between \$100 million for the House plan, and revised estimates of \$500 million in the Senate version.

Meanwhile, public education advocates and the teacher's union are floating the idea of a new one cent sales tax increase dedicated to public schools, and some firefighters proposing their own one penny sales tax revenue stream in exchange for ad-valorem funding.

## DID YOU KNOW...

- "Old Ironsides," so nicknamed because the hull was so strong that enemy balls bounced off her sides, in the War of 1812, was built from Florida live oaks?

## TRANSPARENCY FOR TAXPAYERS

SB 1796 by Senator J.D. Alexander (R – Polk Co.) seeks to create a state website to provide citizens a window into how state government receives and spends money. The bill was filed in response to complaints by legislators and citizens alike that they could not under-

stand how funds flowed in and out of state agencies, and what resources were employed by and for those dollars.

The bill also contemplates including information on local governments in the future. An amendment is being proposed and support by local

governments that would give them a voice in the scheduling and determination of what data is included to ensure a smooth and accurate process.

The bill cleared its final committee of reference this week, and is available to be considered by the full Senate.

## FORMER SUPREME COURT JUSTICE PROMOTES CIVICS

Sandra Day O'Connor, the first female to serve on the United States Supreme Court, spoke to a joint session of the Florida Legislature on Tuesday morning about the importance of civics education.

Justice O'Connor promoted a web-based civics instruction program called "Our Courts," where students can access legal cases to research and debate. She cited statistics showing that three-quarters of the population are unable to distinguish between judges and legislators, and that and that today half the states do not require civics and American history in schools.

## SUNRAIL STEAMS FORWARD AGAIN

The central Florida commuter rail system, commonly referred to as SunRail, is on the move again. The bill moved swiftly through its first two committees of reference, but was held for an extended period of time before being scheduled for a hearing next week in the Senate Transportation and Economic Development Appropriations Committee in order to assuage

the concerns of some legislators.

SB 1212 by Senator Lee Constantine (R – Orange Co.) and HB 7009 by Representative Dave Murzin (R – Pensacola) gives direction to the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) on the development of the commuter rail corridor, and liability indemnity to CSX Corporation, who is selling the 61 miles of

track to the state for the project and will be a contracted user of the line. The legislation also instructs FDOT to provide technical assistance for the future development of commuter rail in the Tampa Bay region.

This issue has been and continues to be contentious, and will likely be one of the final issues resolved at the end of session.

To learn more about a particular bill, the budget, or members of the Florida Legislature, visit *Online Sunshine* at: [www.leg.state.fl.us](http://www.leg.state.fl.us)



Former Supreme Court Justice  
Sandra Day O'Connor

**HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY  
OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

Edith M. Stewart

Public Affairs Administrator

813.276.2640 Office

813.334.6787 Cell

stewarte@hillsboroughcounty.org

R. Brandon Wagner

Intergovernmental Relations Manager

813.276.2640 Office

813.220.2768 Cell

wagnerb@hillsboroughcounty.org

**ON THE AGENDA**

Next week promises to be very active legislation is pushed through committees with only three week remaining in the 2009 Legislative Session, and the attention focuses on completing a balanced budget. Legislation addressing issues from growth management to environmental permitting to public safety will be considered, including:

**Prescription Drug Monitoring:** SB 462 by Senator Fasano (R – Pasco Co.) will be heard in its final committee of reference, Senate Health and Human Services Appropriations on April 15.

**Homelessness:** SB 1054 by Senator Victor Crist (R – Hillsborough Co.) will be heard in its second of three committees on April 14. Its companion, HB 597 by Representative Betty Reed (D – Tampa) has passed all its committees of reference, and is available for consideration by the full House.

**Red Light Cameras:** SB 2004 by Senator Thad Altman (R – Brevard Co.) will be heard in Senate Criminal Justice on April 15.

**Environmental/Agricultural Preemption Bills:** HB 1133 by Representative Ralph Poppell (R – Titusville) will be considered in the House Finance and Tax Council on April 13. SB 1556 by Senator Carey Baker (R – Lake Co.) will be debated in the Senate Community Affairs Committee on Tuesday.