



THE 2015 LEGISLATIVE SESSION BEGINS

SESSION OPENS WITH HOUSE, SENATE LEADERS SHOW SIGNS OF AGREEMENT, DIFFERENCES - from the THE NEWS SERVICE OF FLORIDA

House Speaker Steve Crisafulli and Senate President Andy Gardiner entered the legislative session Tuesday with a set of shared priorities --- dubbed "Work Plan 2015" --- that includes cutting taxes, crafting a water policy and boosting education spending. But as Crisafulli and Gardiner addressed their chambers before Gov. Rick Scott's State of the State address, they showed signs of having some priorities that don't quite line up. For example, Crisafulli, R-Merritt Island, touted the need to reform state and local government pensions. While the Senate has supported efforts to revamp local pensions, it has not gone along with past House attempts to change the Florida Retirement System. Those attempts involved moving away from traditional pensions and toward 401(k)-style plans for state workers and others, including teachers. Crisafulli said lawmakers need to take steps to overhaul pensions to avoid the possibility of future benefit cuts for retirees and tax increases. "It's an issue we can't afford to ignore," Crisafulli said.

Meanwhile, on the other end of the Capitol's fourth floor, Gardiner said a Senate committee this week will explore the possibility of expanding health-care coverage for low-income Floridians. House Republicans have refused to accept tens of billions of dollars in federal money under the Affordable Care Act to expand Medicaid. The Senate Health Policy Committee on Wednesday will hold a workshop to discuss possibilities, including an idea that involves using the federal money to provide coverage through private health insurers. Gardiner said the Senate has an "obligation" to look at the coverage issue, particularly because the state might lose about \$1 billion in federal funding for a health-care program known as the Low Income Pool. "I don't know how it ends, I haven't read the last chapter on this one," Gardiner, R-Orlando, said of the coverage issue. "But we, at least in the Senate, will have the discussion if that is the best way to go for Florida." Crisafulli said after the State of the State address that House Republicans are "not interested in expanding Medicaid as we know it." The idea that would use federal money to provide coverage through private health insurers is backed by a coalition known as "A Healthy Florida Works," which includes Associated Industries of Florida and other business groups. "For us, we've looked at that particular plan --- obviously, they (senators) may have a hybrid of it of some sort --- but there's still a lot of unanswered questions on that, and certainly it's their prerogative to workshop something like that," Crisafulli said.

As the "Work Plan 2015" suggests, Gardiner and Crisafulli agree on at least the outlines of several major issues. The plan, for instance, calls for "broad-based meaningful tax relief initiatives." Crisafulli said Tuesday he hopes to pass a tax-cut package that will surpass \$500 million. Another part of the leaders' shared agenda will be to increase educational and job opportunities for people with disabilities. Gardiner, whose son has Down syndrome, has long championed such issues, and Crisafulli has backed the effort.

"Our society is stronger when opportunity for success exists, especially for those who need it most," Crisafulli said

SCOTT TOUTS FLORIDA 'EXCEPTIONALISM' AS SESSION STARTS

Gov. Rick Scott kicked off the annual legislative session Tuesday with a State of the State address that pointed to Florida "exceptionalism." Scott largely focused on familiar themes, such as cutting taxes, holding down higher-education costs and boosting public-education spending. Earlier, House Speaker Steve Crisafulli, R-Merritt Island, and Senate President Andy Gardiner, R-Orlando, addressed their chambers. Crisafulli discussed issues such as school accountability and pension reform, while Gardiner touched on topics including Medicaid expansion and

problems at the Department of Corrections. The News Service will have full stories later Tuesday about the State of the State address and the legislative leaders' comments.

LEGISLATIVE ISSUES SUMMARIES

BUDGET

2015 -16 Department of Education Legislative Budget Request for the Florida College System – State Funds

- \$ 938,585,390 from General Revenue
- \$ 219,460,923 from Lottery

TOTAL = 1,158,046,313 Total (+2.2%)

2015 -16 COLLEGE PRESIDENTS BUDGET REQUEST – \$ 100 million in new funds

Performance funding - \$30 million Rewards colleges whose performance on metrics meets and exceeds levels for prescribed measure. The DOE request for this is \$5 million. (see below)

Equity (compression) funding - \$35 million Compensates colleges whose per credit total funding level has fallen abnormally below the statewide median due to unintentional anomalies from the funding formula over time.

Capacity to Serve- \$35 million Assures that without tuition increases, state funding is adequate to our capacity to serve students and assure program costs are not a burdensome to them.

TOTAL COLLEGE PRESIDENTS ‘ NEW FUNDING REQUEST = \$100 million

DOE New funding requested = \$28 million

Performance Funding Metrics being considered include measures within the following categories. Levels and rates within each category are currently being developed in conjunction with the Division of Florida Colleges.

1. Job Placement Rate
2. Cost per degree
3. Graduation Rate
4. Retention Rate
5. Pell Recipient Graduation Rate
6. Entry-level wage
7. Time to Degree
8. Local Measure determined by DBOT

PROPOSED BILLS BEING MONITORED

The AFC legislative team will monitor approximately 500 proposed bills during the 60 day legislative session. Bills that could in any way impact our colleges, students, and programs are continually tracked throughout the session. Select bill updates will be provided in each *Capital Perceptions*.

COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY

[SB 938](#) (no companion) regarding Postsecondary Education Affordability

This bill would exempt textbooks required for a course offered by a public or nonpublic postsecondary educational institution from state sales tax. It requires the Board of Governors and the State Board of Education to identify strategies and initiatives to reduce the cost of higher education by other means. The bill also includes language prohibiting resident tuition at a college or state university from exceeding a specified amount per credit hour. The bill is currently referred to the Senate Higher Education Committee.

DUAL ENROLLMENT

[HB 0713](#) and [SB 0874](#) (similar) regarding Dual Enrollment Program;

Both of these bills address exempting dual enrollment students from paying certain fees, including technology fees. The bills also would delete the requirement that a home education secondary student be responsible for paying for his or her own instructional materials in order to participate in the dual enrollment program. The bills are waiting to be heard in the House Higher Education Workforce Subcommittee and the Senate Education Pre K-12 subcommittee.

GUNS ON CAMPUS

[HB 4005](#) and [SB 136](#) (identical) regarding Concealed Weapons Carry on Campuses

These bills would remove a provision in FS 790.96 that prohibits concealed carry licensees from carrying and open or concealed handgun into a college or university facility. Currently only allows for firearms in a vehicle in the parking lot. The bills have passed the House (Jan.21) and Senate (Feb.16) Criminal Justice Committees. The AFC is strongly opposing this. Next stop for the House bill is the Higher Education and Workforce Committee, and the Senate bills moves to its Higher Education Committee.

BACCALAUREATE DEGRESS

[SB 1252](#) (no companion bill) regarding Baccalaureate programs

This bill removes the moratorium on the State Board of Education from approving Florida College System institution baccalaureate degree program proposals. The bill also includes a provision to add the Chancellor of Career and Adult Education to the membership of the Higher Education Coordinating Council. The proposal also addresses revising accountability measures and adopting rules regarding career education to include program standards that reflect the quality 13 components of the career and technical education programs. The bill also provides for deleting the provision in statute authorizing the Board of Trustees of St. Petersburg College to establish baccalaureate degree programs as its sees feasible. This provision was provided to SPC when it piloted the college baccalaureate programs in the early 2000's. For several years SPC has been following the same approval process as required of other colleges. The bill has been referred to the Senate Higher Education Committee.

FINANCIAL AID

[SB 1484](#) and [HB 1031](#) (identical) regarding Student Loan Default Rates.

This proposal would require certain state colleges, universities and institutions under the Commission for Independent Education to maintain a federal student loan cohort default rates below a specified percentage of 30% over 3 years, or under 40% any given year. The bill provides for penalties for failure to maintain below the required default rates. The bill also revises the minimum standards the Commission for Independent Education must use to evaluate an institution for licensure to include the institution's federal student loan cohort default rate. Referred to the Senate Higher Education Committee.

PUBLIC RECORDS

[SB 0182](#) and [HB 0223](#) (similar) regarding Postsecondary Education Executive Searches

The proposal would provide an exemption from public records requirements for any personal identifying information, including the name, of an applicant for president, provost, or dean of a state university or Florida College System institution. The bill also provides an exemption from public meeting requirements for any portion of a meeting held for the purpose of identifying or vetting applicants for president, provost, or dean of a state university.

RETIREMENT

[SB 0696](#) and [HB 333](#) (identical) regarding Re-employment after retirement

These bills essentially remove the provisions that disallowed the rehiring of a person after retiring by a public agency. Referred to House Government Operations and Senate Government Oversight and Accountability.

[HB 1054](#) and [HB 565](#) (similar) regarding Reclassification of Senior Management Positions

These bills co-sponsored by the AFC would allow for the reclassification of vacant senior management positions during a six-month period, once every five years. Referred to the Senate Government Oversight and Accountability Committee and House Government Operations Committee.

MORE FROM THE NEWS SERVICE OF FLORIDA WIRE....

HOUSE TO TAKE UP PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY, ADOPTION BILLS

The House appears likely next week to approve moving back the date of the state's presidential primary and to back a plan aimed at increasing adoptions of foster children. House members are scheduled to take up both issues during a floor session Tuesday. The presidential-primary proposal ([HB 7035](#)), filed by Rules Chairman Ritch Workman, R-Melbourne, would set the date of presidential primaries as the third Tuesday in March, which would be March 15 in 2016. Under current law, the state's primaries are set for the first Tuesday allowed under party rules; in 2016, that would be March 1. Moving back the date would allow Florida Republicans to hold a winner-take-all primary, which could help former Gov. Jeb Bush or U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio if they are running for the GOP presidential nomination next year. Republican primaries held at earlier dates require delegates to be allocated proportionally. Meanwhile, the adoption bill ([HB 7013](#)), filed by Rep. Jason Brodeur, R-Sanford, is a priority of House Speaker Steve Crisafulli, R-Merritt Island, and Senate President Andy Gardiner, R-Orlando. In part, it would provide financial incentives for state workers to adopt children who are in the foster care system.

HOSPITALS TO SEEK \$20M FOR RESIDENCY PROGRAMS

Armed with a study showing projected shortages of doctors in Florida, teaching and safety-net hospitals said Friday they are asking lawmakers to spend an additional \$20 million a year on medical-residency programs. The Teaching Hospital Council of Florida and the Safety Net Hospital Alliance of Florida, which represents teaching, public and children's hospitals, said the \$20 million also would draw \$30 million in federal matching funds. It would be added to the current \$80 million a year in state and federal funding for graduate medical-education programs. "We are not, to put it bluntly, training enough physicians," Steven Sonenreich, chairman of the Teaching Hospital Council of Florida and president and chief executive officer of Miami's Mount Sinai Medical Center, said in a prepared statement. "Florida has fallen seriously behind in our obligation to provide an adequate supply of physicians to keep our families and communities healthy." The request comes as lawmakers prepare to draw up a budget for the fiscal year that starts July 1. Health-care funding will play a critical issue in budget negotiations. The hospital groups last month released a study that indicated Florida will face continued shortfalls of physicians in the future in some specialties, with the problems expected to be particularly severe in rural areas. The groups sponsored the study, which was conducted by the firm IHS Global.

FPL TO BUY, CLOSE COAL-FIRED PLANT

Pointing to what it says will be long-term savings for customers, Florida Power & Light said Friday it is seeking to buy a coal-fired power plant in Jacksonville --- and then shut down the plant within two to three years. FPL, which is asking for approval from the Florida Public Service Commission, entered into a long-term contract in 1988 to purchase power from the Cedar Bay Generating Plant. But the utility said in a news release that it can now generate electricity at a "much lower cost" than what the contract requires it to pay. As a result, FPL said it plans to spend \$520.5 million to buy CBAS Power Inc., which it describes as the "indirect owner of the plant," from CBAS Power Holdings LLC. FPL then would end the purchased-power contract and reduce the plant's operations by 90 percent before ultimately shutting it down. It estimated that the plan eventually could save customers about \$70 million. "Although years ago it made sense to buy this plant's power to serve our customers, times have changed," Eric Silagy, FPL's president and chief executive officer, said in a prepared statement. "We have invested billions of dollars to improve the efficiency of our system, reduce our fuel consumption, prevent emissions and cut costs for our customers. Now we're in a position to take ownership of the facility and effectively buy out an outmoded contract with the goal of ultimately phasing the plant out of service, which will mean reduced carbon emissions and millions of dollars in savings for our customers."