



## **Halfway to the Finish Line**

As the 2016 Legislative Session reaches the halfway point this week, as usual bill movement begins to slow as the focus begins to shift toward finalizing a state budget. With no significant action on most bills the AFC team is tracking, this week's edition of Capitol Perception will focus on other matters of general interest.

## **Guns on Campus Passes in the House**

To no one's surprise, the Florida House of Representatives on Wednesday passed a contentious, NRA-backed bill that would allow guns on the state's public college and university campuses. The bill ([HB 4001](#)) is sponsored by Sarasota Republican Greg Steube has been heavily opposed by the AFC and most higher education groups.

Opponents in the House argued that lawmakers should defer to the bill's critics on campus, and advised against mixing guns with the high-stress environments of college campuses. Proponents have argued that if women who are licensed to carry guns were allowed to do so at school, they'd be able to protect themselves against attackers. Rep. Michelle Rehwinkel Vasilinda, a Tallahassee Democrat and TCC professor, reiterated that her support for the proposal stems from personal experience. Someone tried to assault her when she was a college student, and she used her gun to stop the attack, she said. Rehwinkel Vasilinda has proposed another bill that she said aims to prevent university administrators and staff from underreporting sexual assaults in an attempt to protect a school's reputation. But no legislative committees have heard her bill. "Campus carry" is the only state policy legislators have considered that is designed to address the issue of college sexual assault.

The bill passed mostly along party lines in an 80-37 vote, with almost all Democrats opposed. Sarasota Republican Ray Pilon, a former police officer, joined most Democrats in opposing the bill, while Rehwinkel Vasilinda joined Republicans. Democrats Randolph Bracy and Joe Geller switched their votes from yes to no after the vote, which would result in a 78-39 vote count. But Senate president Andy Gardiner said the guns on campus bill and the open carry bill are "in trouble" in the Senate, noting that the chairman of the judiciary committee, Miami Republican Miguel Diaz de la Portilla, has already refused to hear the campus carry bill.

## **College Fixed Capital Outlay Reduced By Half Due To Technical Error**

In an amendment filed in the House on Monday, the FCS proposed appropriation for Fixed Capital Outlay Maintenance, Repair, Renovation, and Remodeling was reduced from \$61,804,669 to \$36,155,369. This was apparently as a result of a "scrivener" error when the data was entered into the budget document. The larger number was intended to be allocated to the State Universities.



## **Bye Bye to Red-light Cameras?**

Red light cameras may be outlawed in Florida based on a bill that squeezed through its first committee last Thursday.

SB 168 was backed by Senate Transportation Committee in a 4-3 vote along party lines, with opposition also coming from local-government lobbyists and the Florida Police Chiefs Association. The measure would repeal a law known as the Mark Wandall Traffic Safety Act of 2010 and, as a result, prevent local governments from using the cameras for traffic enforcement.

Committee Chair Jeff Brandes, R-St. Petersburg, thinks intersections are not made safer by any changes to driving habits related to the cameras. "The simple truth is red-light cameras don't increase safety, that they're essentially a revenue-generation tool," said Brandes, who has repeatedly sought to revamp or unplug the cameras in recent years.

## **Bill Inspired By Outcry Over Pledge Of Allegiance**

A House education subcommittee unanimously passed a bill Monday that would change how schools must notice students of their right to opt out of reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. State law now requires schools to post notices in conspicuous places informing students they aren't required to recite the pledge. The bill, [HB 1403](#), would require schools instead to include the notice in student handbooks.

## **Tenure Threats Breed Union Interest**

Faculty at Florida's newest public university and a community college whose leaders recently eliminated tenure protections are unionizing, labor leaders announced on Wednesday. More than 60 percent of faculty members at Florida Polytechnic University and the State College of Florida Manatee-Sarasota submitted cards to the state Public Employees Relations Commission requesting a union election.

FPU, which the Legislature established in 2012 and which will graduate its first class this year, is the only one of the state's dozen public universities whose faculty is not unionized. Each of the other universities has formed a local chapter of United Faculty of Florida, an affiliate of the Florida Education Association. The new chapter of UFF will represent FPU faculty in negotiations with administrators over "future decisions impacting working conditions, university policies, and compensation," according to a news release. Chris Coughlin, associate professor of nanotechnology and multifunctional materials, said in a statement the university is "in flux," and faculty members need a union to ensure "a sense of stability and confidence in their situation."

Faculty at SCF decided to unionize after the Bradenton institution's board of trustees voted in September to end continuing contracts for new hires starting July 1. Carlos Beruff, a wealthy developer and supporter



of Gov. Rick Scott who the governor appointed to the board in 2012, championed the contentious change, which the college's president opposed. Jeff Grieneisen, associate professor in the college's Department of Language and Literature, said in a statement the board's vote showed "a blatant disrespect to faculty and our current and future students." Another professor, Del Jacobs, director of film and media studies at SCF, said the faculty "has never been mobilized to this degree."

Faculty at 11 of the state's 28 community colleges are unionized; SCF would become the 12th. Union elections will be scheduled soon for both schools. Florida is a right to work state, so workers are not required to join unions.

### **Remember Recess? Well, It's Baaaack!**

The House Education appropriations subcommittee on Tuesday approved a bill that would mandate recess in elementary schools. Florida mothers from around the state who have been the chief proponents of the recess bill — they call themselves "recess moms" — delivered emotional testimony to the committee, arguing that schools have emphasized test preparation at the expense of play. During debate, lawmakers said they worried the bill would undermine local control, but they ultimately concluded that schools weren't listening to parents who are demanding recess and wouldn't acquiesce unless it was mandated.

Democrats on the committee asked the bill's sponsor, Rep. Rene Plasencia, an Orlando Republican who is also a teacher, to work with school stakeholders on amendments that provide some flexibility from the bill's requirements. They warned against creating unintended consequences. Rep. Elizabeth Porter, a Lake City Republican, raised concerns about whether schools would offer students less time to eat lunch in order to comply with the recess requirements. She later registered her strong support for the bill.

Ultimately, the panel unanimously passed [HB 833](#), which would require schools to provide 100 minutes of "supervised, safe, and unstructured free-play recess" per week for kindergarteners through fifth graders as well as sixth graders who are enrolled in schools that include elementary grades. Recess could not be revoked for disciplinary or academic reasons. The bill is now headed to the House education committee, its last stop before the floor. An [identical bill](#) in the Senate has been referred to the pre-kindergarten to 12th grade education committee, the education appropriations subcommittee and the full appropriations committee.

### **Car-hail companies regulatory bill ready for final vote**

A bill that would create a regulatory framework for car-hailing companies like Uber and Lyft cleared its penultimate House hurdle on Tuesday and is now ready for a final vote by the full chamber. The bill ([HB 509](#)), sponsored by Fort Walton Beach Republican Matt Gaetz, would preempt local entities from regulating the services and create a \$5,000 annual permit fee that would let them operate legally



statewide. They currently operate illegally in some Florida cities and are regulated differently around the state — a fact that has bothered backers since the industry came to Florida.

**Other Bills of Interest (click on the bill to read in full)**

[HB 191](#), would prohibit local bans on fracking.

[SB 228](#), would eliminate aggravated assault from the list of crimes that qualify for the state's 10-20 life mandatory minimum law.

[SB 386](#), would change the age at which juvenile records are kept from 24 to 21.

[SB 130](#), would make the recreational shooting of a gun in a residential neighborhood a first-degree misdemeanor.

[SB 344](#), would shift the burden for defenses raised under the state's Stand Your Ground law from defendants to prosecutors.

[SB 330](#), would require unanimous juries to find the "aggravating circumstance" required for a death penalty sentence.

[SB 832](#) and [HB 707](#), would legalize and regulate fantasy sports in the state.

[HB 7043](#), would award bonuses to teachers who scored highly on the SATs or ACTs.

(Content Sources: Politico and the News Service of Florida)