



Florida Senate Democratic Caucus Newsletter

Eighth Week of 2023 Session: 4/24/23-4/28/23



WEEK 8: A DRACONIAN ONSLAUGHT

More Unnecessary Changes to Elections Law

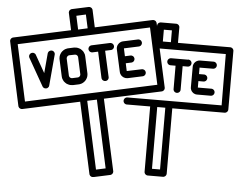
The Florida Senate and House approved and sent the Governor **SB 7050** - an elections bill that targets voter groups that encourage voter engagement with our democratic process.

It also paves the way for the Governor to run for President without having to resign for office - as Senator Jason Pizzo put it: "politically married but continue to date."



"Elections should be accurate, accessible, and fair, and instead we are creating a system of inconsistencies and intimidation. Our voters deserve better than this."

SENATOR TRACIE DAVIS



Democrats filed a handful of amendments to address common sense issues with our voter system - here are 4 of them:

1

Allow any Florida elected official to run for federal public office without having to resign
(not just when the Governor is running for President)

2

Only send voter cards to eligible voters

3

Make vote-by-mail more accessible to voters with disabilities

4

Delete the unfunded mandate for local supervisors to identify registered voters with felony convictions whose rights haven't been restored - a job better left to the state

Anti-Immigrant Bill

The Florida Senate approved **SB 1718** – an anti-immigrant bill pushed by the Governor as he continues to use vulnerable people as pawns in his political game. The bill criminalizes humanitarian aid and stifles economic needs for Florida.



Senator Victor Torres defends his amendment on the Senate floor.

One amendment would have allowed health care providers, family members, attorneys, faith-based providers and school officials to transport undocumented people without fear of being convicted as a human trafficker.

"THIS IS TALKING ABOUT FIRST RESPONDERS, DOCTORS, PASTORS, PRIESTS - IN THE POSITION OF BECOMING CONVICTED FELONS SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY DID THEIR JOB AND PROVIDED AID OR SERVICE TO A CHILD OR UNDOCUMENTED PERSON IN THEIR TIME OF NEED."

SENATOR VICTOR TORRES

Medical Discrimination

SB 1580 allows health care providers and insurers to opt out of treatments on the basis of a conscience-based objection.

"WE SHOULD ENSURE THAT NO ONE IS DISCRIMINATED BASED ON WHO THEY ARE - AND THAT INCLUDES SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY...WE KNOW THAT PEOPLE DO HAVE RELIGIOUS, MORAL AND ETHICAL BELIEFS - BUT WE SHOULDN'T USE LEGISLATION TO ENTITLE THEM TO DISCRIMINATE."



SENATOR LORI BERMAN

"WE DON'T ALLOW FIREFIGHTERS TO CHOOSE WHO THEY SAVE. WE DON'T ALLOW DEFENSE ATTORNEYS TO LEAVE SOMEONE UNREPRESENTED. SO WHY WOULD WE ALLOW A MEDICAL DOCTOR WHO HAS TAKEN AN OATH TO TREAT THAT SICK HUMAN BEING THE ABILITY TO SAY 'YES' OR NO?"

SENATOR TRACIE DAVIS

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in Higher Education

SB 266 – a bill that interferes with **academic freedom, diversity programs and tenure** – passed the Florida Senate.



"What would this chamber look like if we had not deliberately taken some steps to encourage women to run, to help them win? To do the same for African-Americans, for Hispanics - to have diversity, equity and inclusion?"

SENATOR GERALDINE THOMPSON ADDRESSING THE MEASURE PROHIBITING USING FUNDS IN FLORIDA'S HIGHER EDUCATION FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION PROGRAMS

Executive Confirmations

The controversial New College of Florida trustees were confirmed in their final committee meeting.

Senator Polsky requested each of them come to committee and testify - only one did.

Trustee Eddie Spier's comments concerned Senators - from his thoughts on the truth to his vision for the university.



"Please share your 'truths' that may have caused concern."

"Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the light...the truth specifically...would be a tweet I sent out describing trans as a mental disorder."

"How will you separate out your religious beliefs in a public setting that is paid for by the state and not hurt those who don't believe in the same religion as you?"

"The same way I would like the religion of wok-ism to respect me by not forcing pledges of fealty and avoiding dogmatic teachings."

Other agency heads were confirmed in the same committee - including Surgeon General Joseph Ladapo.

JOB PROTECTIONS

Under the new Florida law, there are options for anyone who doesn't want to get vaccinated or provide proof of vaccination for COVID-19.

On November 18, 2021, Governor DeSantis signed legislation that outlines exemption requirements for COVID-19 vaccination mandates.

The Florida Department of Health is working alongside the Office of the Attorney General to oversee compliance with the laws.

Public employers, including educational or governmental institutions, are prohibited from imposing COVID-19 vaccination mandates. Violations for public employers can be reported to the Florida Department of Health through VaxPassFreeFL@FLHealth.gov.

Private employers are prohibited from mandating COVID-19 vaccines for employees without opportunity for the employees to obtain an exemption. Florida employees can choose to be exempt from private employer vaccine mandates. Those forms can be found below:

- Medical Exemption from COVID-19 Vaccination
- Religious Exemption from COVID-19 Vaccination
- Exemption from COVID-19 Vaccination Based on COVID-19 Immunity
- Exemption from COVID-19 Vaccination Based on Periodic Testing
- Exemption from COVID-19 Vaccination Based on Employer-Provided Personal Protective Equipment

FLORIDA

Florida surgeon general altered key findings in study on Covid-19 vaccine safety

Joseph Ladapo defended the move, saying revisions are a normal part of assessing such analysis.

Senator Tina Polsky's 3 reasons not to re-confirm Dr. Ladapo

1. Undermines public trust in vaccines
2. Altered key findings in COVID-19 study
3. Politicizes health care

"GOD FORBID WE HAVE ANOTHER PANDEMIC WHEN HE IS THERE - I DO NOT BELIEVE THAT HE WILL TAKE OUR HEALTH INTO CONSIDERATION OVER POLITICS OR JUST BEING CONTRARY - BECAUSE THAT SEEMS TO BE WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT."

SENATOR TINA POLSKY



Disney vs. DeSantis



Senator Linda Stewart shares her thoughts on the Governor's fight

"The Happiest Place on Earth" has filed suit against the Governor for his retaliatory actions against the entertainment giant's opposition to the "Don't Say Gay" law



DeSantis' overseas trip overshadowed by fight with Disney

Stewart says DeSantis' anti-Disney comments are getting more petty. The governor this month pointed out that the Disney district the state took over controls a lot of undeveloped land. He told reporters the land could go to a prison, a competing theme park or some other project.

"Really? A prison? A nuclear plant? A new theme park? I mean, what kind of rationale is he putting out there?" Stewart said. "It doesn't even make any sense."

DEMOCRATIC BILLS ON THE MOVE

On Its Way to the Governor

Three claims bills are on their way to the Governor - including **SB 8** - a claims bill for Leonard Cure, who was wrongfully incarcerated for 16 years. The bill was sponsored by Senators Shevrin Jones and Representatives Michael Gottlieb and Ashley Gantt.



Leonard Cure waiving to the Florida House after his claims bill passed.

The Senate passed **SB 734 - Saltwater Intrusion Vulnerability Assessments**, sponsored by Senator Tina Polsky. The bill focuses on the threat of saltwater intrusion in our coastal communities. It allows the Department of Environmental Protection to provide grants to coastal counties to conduct risk assessments of saltwater inclusion - including a projection of its impact over the next decade.



The "**Tyre Sampson Act**" sponsored by Senator Geraldine Thompson would create safety standards for amusement rides, requiring permanent amusement rides operated for the first time in this state to have a ride commissioning and certification report on file with the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. The bill passed unanimously and heads to the Florida House.

Here's a glance at other bills filed by Senate Democrats heard during Week 8:

SB 174 - Protection of Specified Personnel - Senator Polsky

Protects justices, judicial assistants, family members, and law enforcement from threats.

SB 424 - Time Limitations for Prosecution of Certain Sexual Offenses - Senator Davis

Eliminates the statute of limitations for a first or second degree felony offense of sexual battery, if the victim is 18 years of age or older at the time of the offense and they report it to law enforcement within 21 days.

SB 430 - Abandoned and Historic Cemeteries - Senator Powell

Creates a Historic Cemeteries Program within the Division of Historical Resources.

SB 836 - Theft from Nonprofit Organizations - Senator Powell

Reclassifies the crime of theft, whenever a person is charged with committing theft from an organization that person knows or has reason to believe is qualified as charitable

SB 858 - Benefits, Training, and Employment for Veterans and their Spouses - Senator Torres

Provides numerous benefits to veterans and their families, including expanding the duties of current entities to provide assistance with seeking benefits, services, and employment.

SB 1012 - Certified Peer Specialist Gateway Pilot Program - Senator Rouson

Creates the Certified Peer Specialist Pilot Program within the Department of Corrections.

SB 1352 - Sickle Cell Disease Medications - Senator Rouson

Among other things, requires the Agency for Health Care Administration to review sickle cell disease medications, treatments and service for Medicaid recipients.

SB 1408 - Sickle Cell Program - Senator Davis

Establishes a grant program within the Department of Health for the prevention, care, and treatment of sickle cell disease.

SB 1440 - Juvenile Court Proceedings - Leader Book

Authorizes A/V technology for dependency & delinquency proceedings.

SB 1564 - Year-round School Pilot Program - Senator Stewart

Directs the Department of Education to conduct a pilot program relating to the cost and benefits of Year-round School.

HB 27/SB 1574 - Judgment Liens - Representative Benjamin/Senator Rouson

Makes changes to judgment lien law and processes.

Budget Meetings Begin



The Legislature has one job required by the Constitution:
Pass a state budget.

Capitol Happenings



Drag queens and members of the Pride community rallied on the Capitol steps with state lawmakers, including Senator Linda Stewart and Senator Shevrin Jones, against legislation that attacks their freedom of expression and demonizes their community.



"Our existence has been here for a long time. I need y'all to walk bold and proud and make it clear - that we've done this before and we're going to do it again."

SENATOR SHEVRIN JONES

Student Town Hall

Senate and House Democrats led a Student Town Hall to listen to concerns from Tallahassee university and college students - including concerns about the DEI bill.



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