

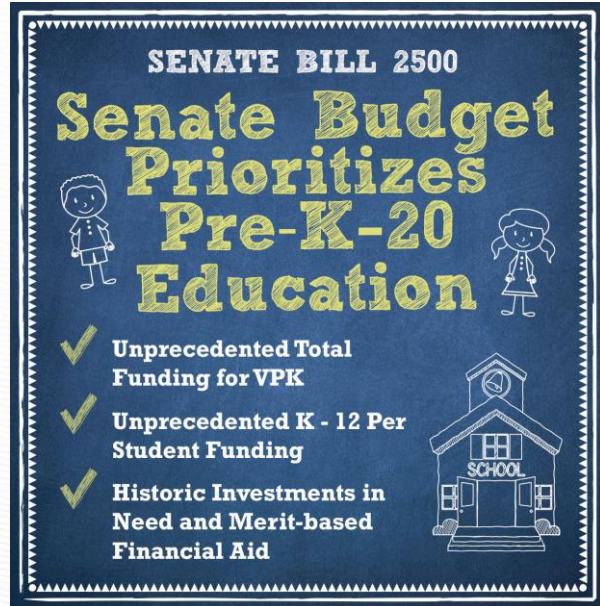
THIS WEEK IN THE FLORIDA SENATE

APRIL 3 - 7, 2017

Senate Committee on Appropriations Passes Budget Focused on Education Investments, Raises for State Employees, and Reserves

The Senate Committee on Appropriations passed Senate Bill 2500, the 2017-18 General Appropriations Act. The bill prioritizes funding for Florida's Pre-K-20 public education system, while setting aside more than \$3 billion in total reserves, and making critical investments in Florida's state workforce with salary increases for state employees.

The Senate's budget ensures that we live within our means and set aside ample reserves. This budget meets the needs of our growing state in a manner that reflects the priorities of Floridians. The link between education and our economy is clear. The best thing we can do to invest in Florida's future is to make certain all Florida children have access to a great education from voluntary pre-kindergarten, all the way through our excellent institutions of higher education.



SENATE BILL 2500

Senate Budget Prioritizes Pre-K-20 Education

- ✓ Unprecedented Total Funding for VPK
- ✓ Unprecedented K - 12 Per Student Funding
- ✓ Historic Investments in Need and Merit-based Financial Aid

The Senate budget includes all key components of the Senate's Excellence in Higher Education Agenda, including historic increases in need and merit-based student financial aid. This budget demonstrates the Senate's commitment to investing in Florida's students from Pre-K through college, thus encouraging a competitive workforce for the future, promoting long-term benefits to our economy.



Senate Bill 2500

Investing in Florida's State Employees

- \$1,400 Increase**
for employees making \$40,000 or less
- \$1,000 Increase**
for employees making more than \$40,000

Additionally, the budget makes critical investments in Florida's state workforce with salary increases for state employees. For far too long, the honorable and dedicated state employees who guard prisons, protect our highways, care for abused and neglected children, and provide many other critical government services, have gone without an increase in their pay.

The most significant investment is in occupations where the state is seeing a high amount of turnover. We want to make sure that we keep the most talented and dedicated professional staffers in our state workforce. The Senate budget makes it clear to our state employees that we see you, and we appreciate your hard work and contributions to our state.

Plan for Major Expansion of Southern Water Storage Heads to Senate Floor

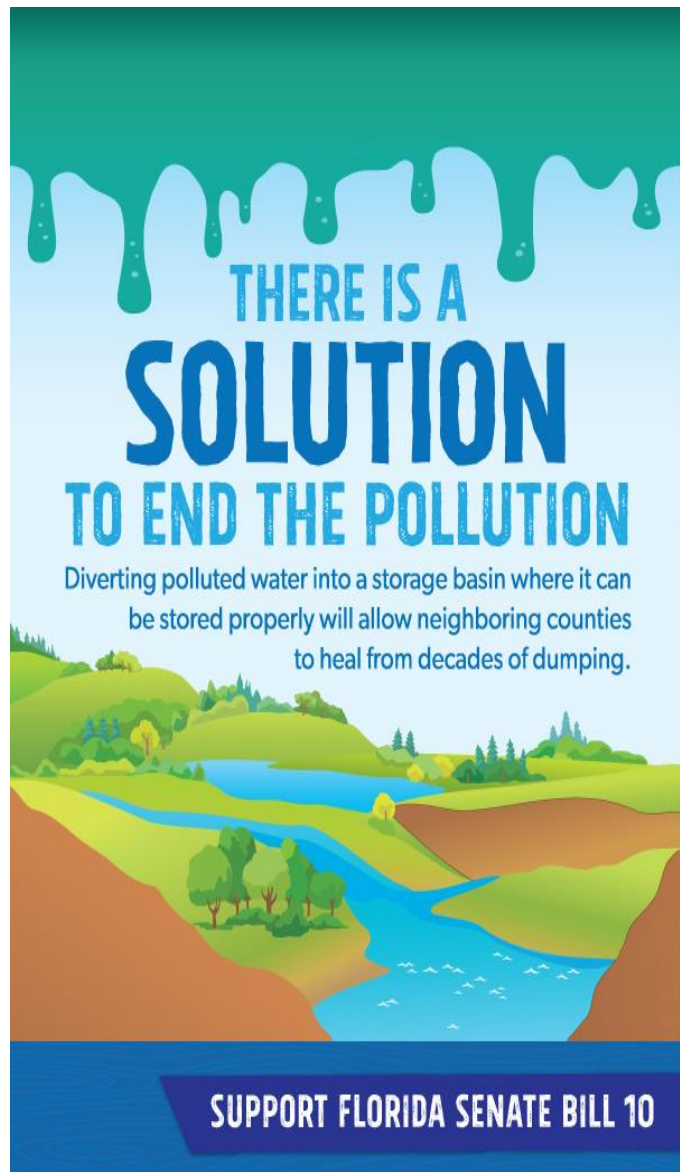
The Senate Committee on Appropriations passed Senate Bill 10, Water Resources. The legislation furthers the goal of reducing, and eventually eliminating, harmful releases from Lake Okeechobee.

This past year, record rainfall resulted in unseasonably high water levels in Lake Okeechobee, which threatened the integrity of the Herbert Hoover Dike. To maintain safe water levels, the Army Corps of Engineers authorized the release of billions of gallons of water from the Lake to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee Rivers.

Such freshwater releases cause significant environmental damage by lowering the salinity levels of the estuaries and introducing pollutants into coastal waters. Due to the releases this summer, massive amounts of toxic algae that originated in Lake Okeechobee were sent to the estuaries and coastal waterways.

As a result of the high volume releases, coastal communities experienced enormous harmful algal blooms with devastating impacts not only to the ecology of local waterways, but also to residents, fishermen, and local businesses. The extent and severity of the blooms resulted in Governor Scott declaring a state of emergency in four Florida counties.

After twenty years of talking about southern storage, the time to act is now. This legislation will make an important difference to families, communities, and the economy east and west of the Lake, as well as southern communities who have waited too long for investments in meaningful economic development to expand workforce training and job opportunities.



Senate Bill 10 was amended to expressly prohibit the use of eminent domain, leveraging land already owned by the State of Florida and the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD), land swaps, and purchases, to minimize impacts on agricultural workers while achieving 240,000 to 360,000 acre feet of storage. The bill also provides grants to establish training programs for agricultural workers.

The goal of this legislation was to explore all available options to deliver this much needed and long anticipated storage south of Lake Okeechobee. Senate Bill 10, now advancing to the Senate floor, provides a solution to the plague of harmful, polluted releases and toxic blue-green algae that respects the interests of the agricultural community and the rights of private landowners, while achieving our goal to dramatically increase southern storage.

Senate Passes Mandatory Recess Legislation

This week, the Senate unanimously passed Senate Bill 78, Public School Recess. The legislation requires each district school board to provide at least 100 minutes of supervised, safe, and unstructured free-play recess each week for students in kindergarten through 5th grade. Such recess must involve at least 20 consecutive minutes of free-play per day in the public elementary school setting. Senate Bill 78 ensures that recess time is kept separate from standard physical education course time.

Senate Passes Student Loan Debt Information Legislation

The Senate unanimously passed Senate Bill 396, Student Loan Debt, which requires colleges and universities to provide students information regarding their student loans on an annual basis. Information provided annually to the student includes an estimate of the student's total amount borrowed, an estimate of the student's total potential loan repayment amount, and the percentage of the borrowing limit the student has reached at the time the information is provided.

Senate Bill 396 ensures students will be provided with up-to-date information about the debt they are incurring via their student loans. The information provided will help students be better prepared regarding their financial future and help with decision making concerning their post-graduation goals.

Transportation Network Companies Legislation Advances

The Senate Committee on Rules passed Senate Bill 340, Transportation Network Companies, the last Senate committee stop for this legislation. This bill fosters innovation by eliminating the patchwork of local regulations regarding ridesharing by establishing a statewide standard for the operation of Transportation Network Companies (TNCs).

Senate Bill 340 protects consumers by outlining specific vehicle insurance requirements for TNC drivers, and will also require background screening for those drivers, including their driving history. Under this legislation, TNCs must disclose to riders the fare for a ride before the trip begins, provide riders with a detailed electronic receipt, adopt a policy for nondiscrimination, and must comply with all laws relating to the accommodation of service animals. Furthermore, TNCs would be prohibited from charging any additional fees or different rates to individuals with disabilities.