

THIS WEEK IN THE FLORIDA SENATE

MARCH 20 - 24, 2017

Legislation to Cut Commercial Lease Sales Tax Passes First Senate Committee

The Senate Committee on Finance and Tax passed Senate Bill 378, Taxation. This legislation repeals the insurance premium tax credit and replaces it with a dollar-for-dollar reduction in the sales tax on commercial leases.

When originally put in place thirty years ago, this narrow corporate subsidy for insurance companies was well intentioned, but times have changed and we need to reprioritize. By replacing this outdated subsidy that benefits only one industry, with a revenue-neutral, meaningful, and permanent tax relief, we are continuing the Senate's commitment to reducing the tax burden facing Florida families.

Since 1987, Florida has provided a tax credit that insurance companies can take against their premium tax liability of up to 15 percent of salaries paid to employees located or based within Florida. The same benefit is not provided for other industries. Florida is the only state in the nation to tax businesses in this way. Cutting this business tax will help the small, local businesses in our communities who lease property.

Senate Bill 378 is intended to be revenue neutral and provide a permanent reduction to the sales tax charged on commercial leases. This legislation revises distributions to ensure that local governments are not impacted by the rate changes in the bill. Reducing this burdensome tax promotes the private sector job creation we need to maintain a strong economy.



The Senate Passes Florida Student and School Personnel Religious Liberties Act

The Florida Senate passed Senate Bill 436, the “Florida Student and School Personnel Religious Liberties Act.” This legislation specifies that a school district may not discriminate against a student, parent, or school personnel on the basis of a religious viewpoint or religious expression.

Freedom of Religion is a central right protected by our Constitution. Students of any faith, or no faith, have a right to free speech. By passing this legislation, we are taking the steps necessary to protect this important constitutional right of public school students, parents, teachers, and school administrators.

Senate Bill 436 authorizes students to express religious beliefs in written and oral assignments, free from discrimination. Students may also wear clothing, accessories, and jewelry that display a religious message or symbol to the same extent secular types of clothing, accessories, and jewelry that display messages or symbols, are permitted in public school dress codes. Further, students may pray, engage in, and organize religious activities before, during, and after the school day, to the same extent student engagement in secular activity or expression, and the organization of secular activities and groups, are permitted.



Legislation to Notify Public of Pollution Contamination Passes Second Senate Committee

The Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Environment and Natural Resources passed Senate Bill 532, Public Notification of Pollution. The “Spill Bill” would hold both the government and businesses to a higher standard, while ensuring the public is notified in a timely manner when a potentially health threatening contamination occurs.

Florida’s aquifers are one of the state’s most important resources, providing millions of people with clean drinking water. We trust that these sources are safe, but they could be vulnerable to pollution caused by chemicals spills. These spills happen in many ways, but the results are often the same: potentially harmful contaminants seeping into our drinking water. Florida’s families deserve to know once the contamination has occurred.

Senate Bill 532 requires the operator to notify the Department of Environmental Protection in the first 24 hours after a spill occurs, providing pertinent information such as the location and cause of the release, as well as other facts important to determining the extent of risk to the public. Within 24 hours of receiving the notice of the spill, the Department of Environmental Protection must publish a notification on its public website and alert the media and public about the spill.

Within 48 hours, the public would learn when their health is potentially threatened by chemical contamination. This will give Florida’s families peace of mind, knowing they will receive the information they need to keep themselves and their loved ones safe.

The Florida Constitution Revision Commission Holds Opening Meeting in Senate Chamber

Every 20 years the Constitution Revision Commission (CRC) is formed to review the Florida Constitution, hold public hearings, and possibly recommend changes to the Constitution for voter consideration. The Governor appoints 15 members, the Senate President and House Speaker each appoint nine members, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court appoints three members, and the Attorney General is an automatic member. The 37-member panel held its opening meeting in the Florida Senate Chamber. The CRC will meet for approximately one year, traveling the state for a series of public hearings and gathering input from citizens. Any proposed changes to the Florida Constitution will be on the ballot in 2018 for voter decision.