



WEEK NINE - FINAL SESSION NEWSLETTER

APRIL 28-MAY 2, 2014

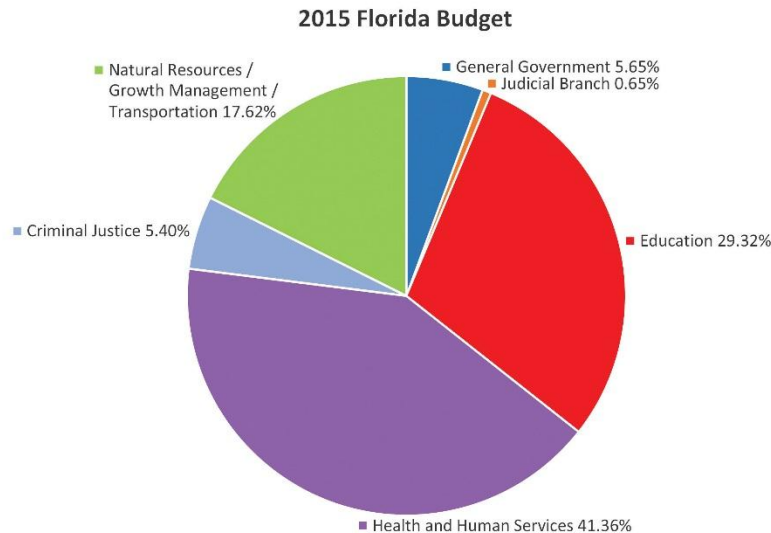
THE BUDGET PROCESS

Every year, all 160 lawmakers of the Florida Legislature assemble for the annual Legislative Session in Tallahassee. According to the state constitution, the sole requirement of the Legislature is to pass a balanced state budget. Using recommendations from the Governor, departments, agencies, and citizen feedback each chamber of the Legislature prepares its own version of the spending plan. In the final days of the Legislative Session, the Senate and House resolved any differences in their respective budgets during joint conference committee. The report of this conference committee becomes the **General Appropriations Act (GAA)**, and presented to both the House and the Senate for a final vote. Once passed, the **GAA** is then presented to the Governor who has the authority to veto any specific budget item. After the Governor completes his line item vetoes, he signs the **GAA** into law, creating the statewide budget for the next fiscal year, which begins July 1.



THE 2014-2015 GENERAL APPROPRIATIONS ACT

The final adopted budget by the legislature for the 2014-2015 fiscal year totals approximately \$77.1 billion and represents an estimated \$2.6 billion increase from last year's - the largest budget thus far. The budget includes \$50 million for child protection services efforts, 5-percent pay increase for state law-enforcement officers, and pay raises for court employees. The budget does not include across-the-board pay raises for state workers or any federal aid to expand Medicaid to roughly 1 million Floridians.



FINAL WEEK OF 2014 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The 2014 Legislative Session has officially adjourned! In addition to the FY 2014-2015 state budget, the final week saw the passage of other important legislation. I am pleased to report that the Senate Democratic Caucus was instrumental this session in passing good legislation and stopping some of the bad such as changes to the FRS Retirement system and a bill relating to Trauma Services. And, while we initially stopped a corporate voucher bill, on the last day of session the voucher bill language was revived in a 140 page amendment filed on to **Senate Bill 850 Education**. The amendment will greatly expand the Tax Credit Scholarship Program, which provides tax breaks to companies in exchange for money the corporations donate to the program. The money - now diverted from the general revenue - is not available for public programs such as infrastructure improvements or even public education because it is then funneled to private schools via student tuition "vouchers." These private schools are not held to the same standards and accountability as public schools and the quality of education differentiates across the board. I strongly opposed the measure. On the contrary, **Senate Bill 850** eliminates the special diploma that are offered to students with disabilities as an alternative to standard diplomas, and creates a scholarship program to reimburse the parents of special-needs students for private-school tuition, tutoring and certain types of therapies. Finally, a measure previously sponsored by Democrats was accepted by the Republican-controlled legislature, which opposed our efforts in the past. **House Bill 851 Postsecondary Education Tuition and Fees** allows undocumented immigrants to receive in-state tuition rates. The bill also does away with automatic tuition increases but allows the preeminent universities, Florida State University and the University of Florida, to request additional tuition increases, up to 6 percent, from the Board of Governors. In addition, **House Bill 755**, which clears the way for the Florida Supreme Court to admit qualified undocumented immigrants to the Florida Bar was successful. Both bills passed with bipartisan support and Governor Scott - now running for re-election - has said he would sign the bills. While we welcome the support, his sudden embrace of undocumented immigrants is a complete turnaround from his stance in 2010 when he catered to the Tea Party by backing an Arizona-style law requiring officers to check the immigration status of anyone they suspect is in the country illegally.



Senator Joyner and students from Dream University - a group of FL students who rallied and lobbied the legislature for the passage of SB 851.

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY CIVIL SERVICE BOARD



Senate Page Warren Stewart and Senator Joyner

House Bill 683 related to Hillsborough County, which I opposed and attempted to block, was passed by The Florida Senate on the final day of the Session with a 27-10 vote. I originally opposed this bill last December when it was first presented to the Hillsborough County Legislative Delegation because it creates an "opt-in / opt-out" provision for agencies operating under the Hillsborough County Civil Service Board. I believe the Civil Service Board is a vital watchdog agency for individuals who both seek employment and work for the taxpayers of Hillsborough County. It also manages changes in the current organizational structure of 21 agencies in Hillsborough County. My greatest concerns are that the changes will lead to inequality in employment opportunities. It opens the prospect for the best jobs and newly created ones to be awarded to friends and political supporters. This will leave many dedicated, hardworking classified employees stuck in dead end jobs with little ability to advance into management positions. It will also

allow these 21 agencies the ability to create new positions, give pay raises, and reorganize their offices with little oversight and less protection of current employees.

IMPORTANT LEGISLATION HEADING TO THE GOVERNOR'S DESK

- **House Bill 5601 Economic Development** creates four temporary "tax holiday" periods. The back-to-school sales tax holiday would last from August 1-3, 2014. Under the bill, shoppers would not have to pay sales taxes on any clothing costing \$100 or less, school supplies costing \$15 and no taxes on the first \$750 of a personal computer. The bill also includes a three-day sales tax holiday in September on the purchase of energy efficient appliances, and a nine-day sales tax holiday from May 31-June 8 on the sale of hurricane preparation supplies such as batteries and generators. The tax package also includes a permanent elimination of the taxes on college meal plans.
- **House Bill 7023: Economic Development** makes certain changes to the unemployment process by making the skills assessment optional and providing for other means to apply for assistance rather than solely online. The U.S. Department of Labor found that Florida violated the civil rights of unemployed individuals in 2011 by requiring applicants to apply online for benefits and take an assessment before receiving any unemployment benefits.
- **House Bill 977 Motor Vehicle Insurance & Driver Education for Children in Care** will make it easier for foster children to get auto insurance and allots \$800,000 a year to help cover the costs of driver's licenses for foster children.
- **House Bill 7035 Juvenile Sentencing** addresses two U.S. Supreme Court rulings dealing with the issue of juveniles serving life sentences in prison without any chance for parole. The legislation provide certain conditions under which such sentences would be reviewed.
- **Senate Bill 224 Tobacco and Nicotine Product Regulation** bans the sales of electronic cigarettes to minors.
- **House Bill 523 Licensure to Carry a Concealed Weapon or Firearm** would allow tax collectors offices to handle concealed-weapon license applications.
- **House Bill 525 Pub. Rec. /Personal Identifying Information/Licensure to Carry Concealed Weapon or Firearm** expands a public-records exemption that protects the identities of people who apply for and receive concealed-carry licenses from the state.
- **Senate Bill 424 Discriminatory Insurance Practices** would seek to make sure insurance companies do not deny coverage or increase rates based on policyholders owning guns or ammunition.
- **House Bill 7029 Code of Student Conduct (Pop-Tart bill)**, clarifies that students should not be disciplined for simulating a firearm or weapon while playing or wearing clothing or accessories, which depict a firearm or weapon or an opinion regarding Second Amendment rights. The nickname is a reference to a headline news story about a 7-year-old boy from Maryland who was suspended from school for chewing his pop tart into the shape of a gun.
- **House Bill 7031 Education** clarifies the graduation requirements for high school students. Last year, legislators eliminated the Algebra II requirement for high school graduation, but the bill did not include those students who had entered high school during the 2012-13 school year. The bill exempts those high school students.
- **House Bill 977 Motor Vehicle Insurance and Driver Education for Children in Care** would direct the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to create a program to pay specified costs of driver education, licensure, and motor vehicle insurance for a foster child who meets certain qualifications.
- **House Bill 227 Victims of Wrongful Incarceration** would assist James Richardson, who spent 21 years in prison, including 4 years on death row after being wrongfully convicted for the murders of his seven children, to receive compensation from the state. In 2008, the Legislature passed the Victims of Wrongful Incarceration Compensation Act, which I sponsored, to compensate persons determined

to be innocent of a felony offense they were accused of committing and for which they were wrongfully convicted and imprisoned. Mr. Richardson was denied compensation under the act because while he had been ordered released from prison following an investigation into his trial, he was never acquitted. Decades after the crimes, witnesses had died, evidence had been lost and there was no DNA to exonerate him. The bill exempts certain petitioners, like Mr. Richardson, from proving their actual innocence, and complying with various other eligibility and procedural requirements when applying for compensation under the Act.

- **Senate Bill 1666 Child Abuse and Child Welfare Services** improves the quality of child investigations conducted by the Department of Children and Families. For instance, the bill mandates immediate investigation in the event of deaths or major incidents involving children with a previous history with DCF investigations. It would also define "medical neglect" when investigating cases involving children with intricate medical histories.
- **Senate Bill 1030 Low-THC Marijuana and Cannabis** allows Florida-licensed physicians to order low-THC cannabis for a patient suffering from a physical medical condition, or treatment for a medical condition, that chronically produces symptoms of seizure or severe and persistent muscle spasms. The bill was amended to include cancer patients.

SESSION MEMORIES



2014 Legislative Session Intern Sanite Ermat and Senator Joyner. Sanite graduated from USF last week with honors and has been accepted to FSU, Georgetown, Stetson, and American Law Schools.



Senator Evers and Senator Joyner



(L-R) Senator Joyner, an Equal Pay Supporter, and Representative Cruz



Members of the Turkic America Federation of Southeast and Senator Joyner

HALL OF FAME INDUCTION



(L-R) Dr. Deborah Austin, Senator Joyner, and Estrellita "Lo" Berry



(L-R) Sonja Bexley, Claretha Davis, Senator Joyner, and Katrina Billups



(L-R) Dr. Deborah Austin, Senator Joyner and Yvonne Fry



Senator Joyner & Legislative Staff (L-R)
Kassandra Timothe, Randolyn Rosete, Senator
Joyner, Sanite Ermat, and Rosalie Smith



Senator Joyner and Fassil Gabermariam

On Wednesday, May 7, 2014 I was honored to have been inducted into the Hillsborough County Women's Hall of Fame.

Your Senator,
Arthenia L. Joyner
Serving District 19

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