



WEEK FIVE

MARCH 31-APRIL 4, 2014

The fifth week of the 2014 Legislative Session marked a tumultuous midpoint segment. On Thursday, the floor debate was particularly heated as two bills came up for votes that rekindled memories of troubled histories. The first, expanding the state's controversial Stand Your Ground law, opens a new Pandora's box by allowing people to fire so-called "warning shots." I foresee the same problems that will arise from this bill as I did when I voted against Stand Your Ground in 2005. The second was a last-minute amendment to the Senate's budget proposal splitting in two the joint FAMU-FSU College of Engineering which has stood as a testament to diversity and equal education for more than 30 years. More on both a little later.

The Senate will not meet during the Passover/Easter weekend (April 14-18), and with three weeks left to go, a number of major issues critical to Florida's families remain unresolved. There are bills relating to Medicaid Expansion, Equal Pay, and Raising Minimum Wage that haven't been heard in any committee. On a positive note, one of the Democratic Caucus' priority bills, **Senate Bill 1400-Postsecondary Student Tuition** by Senator Latvala passed its second committee stop. The bill would provide undocumented immigrants with in-state tuition at colleges and universities if he or she spends three consecutive years in this state before graduating from high school. In addition, the bill clarifies that U.S. citizens who are dependents of undocumented immigrants may not be denied in-state tuition solely based on the immigration status of their parents. Currently, undocumented immigrants and U.S citizens with undocumented parents pay out of state tuition. I voted for the bill when it came before the Judiciary committee.



Senator Joyner and Students from FL celebrate after SB 1400 passed in committee

MY BILLS AND PRIORITIES

Every year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) releases its annual *Health Disparities and Inequalities Report*. The report highlights health disparities and inequalities across a wide range of "diseases, behavioral risk factors, environmental exposures, social determinants, and health-care access by sex, race and ethnicity, income, education, disability status and other social characteristics*." My bill, **SB1428 - Reducing Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities** creates a study focused on identifying obstacles and barriers and providing recommendations for strategies to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in the state. The bill passed unanimously in the Health Policy committee.

* <http://www.cdc.gov/minorityhealth/CHDIRreport.html>

BILLS ON WATCH

- **Senate Bill 918-Termination of Pregnancies by Senator Flores** prohibits an abortion if the physician determines that the fetus has developed the ability to live outside the womb and sets criminal penalties if one occurs. I voted against the bill in the Health Policy Committee because I firmly believe that women should have the right to govern their own bodies.

- **Senate Bill 550-Traveling Across County Lines to Commit a Felony Offense by Senator Hukill** makes it a third degree felony for a person who resides in Florida to travel any distance and cross a Florida county boundary with the intent to commit a felony offense in a Florida county that is not their residence. The bill also makes the crossing of a county boundary with intent to commit a felony a factor to be considered in bail determinations.
- **Senate Bill 1618-Chauffeured Limousines by Senator Brandes** creates the Chauffeured Limousines and Services Safety Act which would preempt the rules, and regulation that Hillsborough County currently has in effect. The bill provides requirements and guidelines for licensing and regulations, rules of operation, and penalties. Currently, local governing bodies control regulation of for-hire vehicles in Florida. Counties are granted the authority to license and regulate taxis, jitneys, limousines for hire, rental cars, and other passenger vehicles for hire that operate in the unincorporated areas of the county. If this bill becomes law, our local taxi, limousines, and chauffeured businesses in Tampa could be affected and potentially forced out of business.
- **Senate Bill 670-Nursing Home Litigation by Senator Thrasher** changes legal provisions relating to lawsuits against nursing homes. This bill would prevent investors from being named in a lawsuit unless a court determines they have had an active role. But the legislation would allow low-level nursing home employees - like those who empty bed pans and clean the rooms - to be named as defendants, a provision I strongly oppose. With our population aging, I believe stronger measures need to be in place to ensure the quality of care nursing home residents receive, and this bill, in my opinion, disproportionately protects those at the top responsible for the operations of the facilities.

ACTION IN THE SENATE CHAMBERS

Session convened on Thursday, April 3, 2014. As I mentioned, above, the Senate took up a fully loaded agenda jammed packed with controversial bills, especially Threatened Use of Force, and an amendment filed by Senator Thrasher which would result in the decoupling of the joint FAMU-FSU College of Engineering. I strongly opposed both. The Threatened Use of Force, which passed the Senate, I predict will unleash more violence, create more innocent victims, and leave more grieving families; it will not make us safer.



Despite assurances from Senator Thrasher, who sponsored the amendment allowing FSU to establish its own, separate engineering school that it will lead to an increase in FAMU's number of engineering students, I am not convinced. On the contrary, I believe as it currently stands it could likely lead to the school's demise. As a FAMU law school student back in 1965, the Legislature closely mirrored the actions we saw this week. It defunded the law school and transferred the money, along with the books and other assets, to create the FSU College of Law. As a product of segregated schools, this week's divisive move was particularly alarming because I lived the results of the last one. And, as I cautioned the supporters of the amendment, I will not stand by to see it repeated in 2014.

Finally, both the Senate and House passed their respective spending proposals for the next fiscal year. The task, now, is to reconcile both budget plans before session ends in May. The budget conferences to negotiate a final product are expected to begin next week.

Committee Assignments

Appropriations Subcommittee on Criminal and Civil Justice, Vice Chair;
Joint Committee on Public Counsel Oversight, Chair; Appropriations;
Appropriations Subcommittee on General Government; Ethics and Elections;
Health Policy; Judiciary; Transportation;
Select Committee on Indian River Lagoon and Lake Okeechobee Basin

VISITORS TO THE CAPITOL



Members of the Turkic American Federation of Southeast and Senator Joyner. It was my honor to serve as a host for Turkish American Day at the Florida Capitol.



Session convened on April 1 to recognize FSU day at the capitol and to congratulate the members of FSU Football Team, The 2013 BCS National Champions

Your Senator,
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