



WEEK 3

MARCH 16-20, 2015

The third week of the legislative session found the latest Secretary of the Florida Department of Corrections once again on the defensive regarding allegations of corruption and abuse within her agency. Julie Jones insisted that the problems besetting the prisons were not a "crisis" and dismissed many of the allegations as the work of "disgruntled employees." Secretary Jones' responses followed testimony last week before the Senate Criminal Justice Committee by employees in the agency's Inspector General Office, in which they reaffirmed the problems throughout the prison system.

The Senate has responded with legislation that would create an independent commission to provide oversight of the DoC and impose strict new policies intended to protect both inmates and employees. SB 7020 would give the commission the ability to investigate criminal and administrative complaints against DoC with investigators who would answer to the Governor's Chief Inspector General.

Also this week, Governor Scott was similarly thrown on the defensive following news reports that his administration has banned the use of the term "climate change" in agencies including the Department of Environmental Protection and the Department of Health. The governor may need to rethink his "ultimate denial," however, as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) recently issued new requirements for states to qualify for federal disaster preparedness funds. No state, including Florida - which has received \$260 million from the FEMA assistance funding over the past four years - will be eligible for additional preparedness money without a plan to mitigate the effects of climate change.

2015 LEGISLATIVE SESSION MAJOR ISSUES

The Senate Higher Education Committee voted along party lines to approve Senate Bill 176- Licenses to Carry Concealed Weapons or Firearms. This highly controversial bill would allow students with concealed-weapons licenses to carry guns on the campuses of state colleges and universities. Every single college president, and the Board of Governors, agree that it is a bad idea, but the NRA, which has been pushing this bill, along with a number of Republican leaders think otherwise. At a hearing on the legislation this week, a number of university police chiefs attended to voice their opposition to the bill. I strongly agree with them; these officers are on the front lines of maintaining safety on Florida's campuses, and they are the ones who will have

to live with the bill's consequences to the students and to the officers under their command should a tragedy occur.

The Senate Ethics and Elections Committee approved legislation Tuesday that would create an online voter registration system for registering first-time voters and updating existing voter registrations. Senate Bill 228 Online Voter Application would allow Floridians with driver's licenses or state-issued identification cards to submit applications online, using signatures on file with the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles, as long as the voters' names and dates of birth match the agency's records.

Committee Assignments

Appropriations Subcommittee on Criminal and Civil Justice, Vice Chair
Appropriations, Health Policy, Higher Education, Judiciary, Rules
Joint Legislative Budget Commission

JUVENILE SENTENCING

During the 2014 Legislative Session, legislation which addressed two U.S. Supreme Court rulings dealing with juveniles sentenced to life sentences without any chance for parole, was signed into law. However, the law only addressed juveniles who committed homicide after July of that year; it left untouched the question of juveniles sentenced prior to that time.

On Thursday, the Florida Supreme Court weighed in on the 2014 law as it was applied under the U.S. Supreme Court's decision. The unanimous ruling said that the automatic life sentences of all juveniles for homicide cases must be reconsidered, and that the judge must take several factors into consideration in determining the new sentence. The new ruling is expected to affect an estimated 250 individuals currently incarcerated in Florida's prisons.

MY BILLS

Senate Bill 630 - Transfers to Minors would allow a person to make a gift to a minor, which may be held by a custodian, until the minor reaches the age of 25 instead of 21 under current law. My bill passed the Banking and Insurance committee unanimously.

Rolled to Third Reading on the Senate Floor: Senate Bill 94 - Expanding the "Closing the Gap" grant program to include sickle cell disease; and Senate Bill 132 - easing the requirements for disabled veterans to renew their disabled parking permits.

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