



FLORIDA SENATE DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS

2023 *Legislative
Session
Recap*

SPECIAL EDITION MAGAZINE

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Message from the Leader

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Readers,

This was a tough Session – the toughest I have ever been a part of. And while a few bipartisan moments shined through, issues affecting Floridians’ health, safety, and their pocketbooks went largely unsolved due to the GOP’s senseless focus on ‘culture war’ issues that do nothing to solve real problems facing real Floridians.

Despite and in spite of the odds, Democrats showed up and fought hard for everyday people -- even when the chips were down -- because standing up for what’s right will always be our mission. No matter the odds, we will fight to defend Floridians’ rights and personal freedoms – and we will do it again, and again, and again – until the ground we lost is won, because I do believe the pendulum will swing.

In Solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lauren Book".

Senate Democratic Leader Lauren Book

2023 FLORIDA SENATE DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS



From left to right: Senator Tracie Davis, Senator Rosalind Osgood, Senator Geraldine Thompson, Senator Tina Polsky, Senate Democratic Leader Pro Tempore Jason Pizzo, Senate Democratic Leader Lauren Book, Senator Victor Torres, Senator Darryl Rouson, Senator Lori Berman, Senator Linda Stewart, Senator Shevrin Jones, Senator Bobby Powell

Capitol Moments

Opening Day

On the first day of the 2023 legislative session, **Senator Rosalind Osgood (D-Tamarac)** led the opening prayer, **Senator Victor Torres (D-Orlando)** was one of four Senate military veterans to lead the Pledge of Allegiance, and Democratic Senators readied themselves for the next 60 days.



Democratic Senators Darryl Rouson, Geraldine Thompson, Linda Stewart, Lori Berman and Tracie Davis each pose for a photo with loved ones.



Culture War Session⁰³



Senator Rosalind Osgood and Senator Bobby Powell, Jr. have a discussion in the Senate chamber.

It was Tuesday, March 7th in Florida's Capital City. The day had started beautifully - the skies blue, with just enough shade to keep residents and visitors on the ground feeling good. Lawmakers and legislative staff started to arrive at the Florida Capitol Building, an appearance that was more frequent than usual with back-to-back special sessions under their belt. But despite the day outside, a storm was brewing inside the Capitol building.

In the last few days before the legislation filing deadline, a salvo of bills were published, representing an attack on minorities and the vulnerable. And in the last few minutes before the opening day ceremony began, an abortion ban appeared that would set Florida back 50 years in women's reproductive rights.

Over the course of the past few years, the political atmosphere across the nation has turned particularly negative. Florida's leadership has embraced the targeted rhetoric with dangerous policies that attack constitutional rights, freedom of speech, academic freedom, the LGBTQ community, immigrants, and local governments, to name a few. **Florida's Senate Democrats** - a small but mighty group of 12 in the 40-member Senate - took on the challenge to stand up for **everyone's** right to live a free, prosperous and safe life.

This jam-packed breakdown includes the good, the bad and the ugly of session - thank you for reading.



Senate Democratic Leader Pro Tempore Jason Pizzo pokes holes in policies led by the majority.

04 *Permitless Carry*

HB 543, sponsored by Senator Jay Collins in the Senate, **goes against both common sense and public safety. It encourages untrained people to carry guns. While some supporters refer to it as "constitutional carry", Florida has been following the Constitution. Those who want to carry a concealed firearm can do so now, as long as they're trained and legally able to. This new law encourages recklessness – with people's lives as the ultimate price.**

Here are three amendments offered by Democrats that were ultimately rejected:

- Make sure concealed carry holders are trained on gun safety
- Create a community violence task force to review crime and violence in urban communities
- Expose hypocrisy of this law – ask Republicans if they would allow people to carry a concealed weapon for any meeting of the Legislature



"LET'S MAKE SURE THAT WHEN PEOPLE ARE WALKING AROUND WITH LETHAL WEAPONS, THAT THEY KNOW HOW TO USE THEM PROPERLY."

SENATOR LORI BERMAN



"BETWEEN 2019 AND 2020...IN BLACK COMMUNITIES, [FIREARM HOMICIDE RATES] INCREASED BY 39%. THE LARGEST INCREASE IN FIREARM HOMICIDE RATES WERE AMONG BLACK MALES AGES 10-24."

SENATOR SHEVRIN JONES



"IT'S INCREDIBLY HYPOCRITICAL THAT YOU WILL OBJECTIVELY PROLIFERATE FIREARMS IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA - BUT NOT IN THE ROOM WHERE WE SIT."

SENATOR JASON PIZZO

6 weeks. That's the maximum amount of time Florida leadership believes women need to make the personal decision to terminate their pregnancy. Reality check: 75% of Floridians disagree with this extreme policy.

Last year, with no scientific explanation, lawmakers shortened the abortion window to 15 weeks. And while the Supreme Court considers whether that law violates Florida's constitutional right to privacy, lawmakers rushed to shorten the abortion window again – to 6 weeks with SB 300, sponsored by Senator Erin Grall.

If the 15-week ban prevails in the Florida Supreme Court, Florida's 6-week ban will take effect.

SB 300 is essentially an all-out abortion ban

More than a dozen amendments were offered, including:



Democratic Leader Lauren Book's amendment would have renamed "The Heartbeat Protection Act" to something more scientifically accurate: "The Electrical Activity that can be Manipulated to Sound like a Heartbeat through Ultrasound Protection at the Expense of Pregnant People's Health and Wellbeing Act".



Senator Geraldine Thompson's amendment would have allowed an exemption for women under threat of domestic violence.



Senator Tina Polsky's amendment would have allowed for a religious exemption.



Senator Lori Berman's amendment would have added regulations for fake abortion clinics, requiring them to at a minimum have a licensed ultrasound tech.



An amendment by Senator Tracie Davis would have diverted money from fake abortion clinics for family planning & minority maternal mortality programs.



Governor DeSantis signed SB 300 quickly, late at night and in the privacy of his office, with anti-abortion supporters clapping on.

"FLORIDA'S NEW ABORTION BAN TURNS BACK THE CLOCK ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND ESSENTIAL FREEDOMS – BRINGING THE GOVERNMENT INTO EXAM ROOMS AND CRIMINALIZING WOMEN AND THEIR DOCTORS OVER PRIVATE HEALTHCARE DECISIONS."

DEMOCRATIC LEADER LAUREN BOOK

Higher Education

SB 266: Higher Education

Sponsored by Senator Erin Grall (R), Fort Pierce

This bill limits academic freedom and impacts hiring practices at Florida's public universities and colleges.

- Bans funding on programs and initiatives that are based on diversity, equity and inclusion
- Reviews academic programs and bans general education courses that are "based on theories that systemic racism, sexism, oppression, and privilege are inherent in the institutions of the U.S. and were created to maintain social, political and economic inequities"
- Revises hiring authorities, preempting tenure review processes to the state instead of each school
- Allows political appointees to govern everyday university hiring decisions

"TO TALK ABOUT RACISM AND SEXISM AND SYSTEMIC RACISM - IT EXISTS, Y'ALL. WHETHER YOU WANT TO BELIEVE IT OR NOT, SYSTEMIC RACISM EXISTS."

SENATOR SHEVRIN JONES



Senator Shevrin Jones shares a powerful debate against SB 266.



Senator Geraldine Thompson delivers her debate against SB 266.

"WHAT WOULD THIS CHAMBER LOOK LIKE IF WE HAD NOT DELIBERATELY TAKEN SOME STEPS TO ENCOURAGE WOMEN TO RUN, TO HELP THEM WIN, TO DO THE SAME FOR AFRICAN-AMERICAN, FOR HISPANICS? SO THAT WE HAVE DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION?"

SENATOR GERALDINE THOMPSON

Universal Private School Vouchers

HB 1: Private School Voucher Expansion

Sponsored in the Senate by Senator Corey Simon (R), Tallahassee

What They'll Tell You:

Expands the state's private school voucher program to all K-12 students.

What They Won't Tell You:

No Accountability or Transparency for Private Schools

"WE DO NOT REGULATE THE PRIVATE SCHOOL ADMISSIONS POLICIES - THEY CAN SET ANY CRITERIA THEY WANT. WE DO NOT REGULATE THEIR CURRICULUM. AND THEY HAVE SO MUCH FLEXIBILITY IN HIRING THEIR TEACHERS - THEY CAN HIRE A HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT TO TEACH YOUR STUDENT."

SENATOR TRACIE DAVIS

Taxpayer Subsidies for the Rich

"THIS IS GOING TO BE CORPORATE WELFARE FOR PARENTS WHO WERE **ALREADY** PAYING FOR PRIVATE SCHOOLS. MILLIONAIRES - BILLIONAIRES - WE HAVE NO LIMITS IN THIS BILL AT ALL. ANYBODY WOULD BE ENTITLED TO GET UP TO THE \$8000 WE'RE TALKING ABOUT - WHY WOULDN'T YOU? WHY WOULDN'T WE PUT A LIMIT ON THIS MONEY AS GOOD STEWARDS OF OUR MONEY?"

SENATOR LORI BERMAN

Impact on Traditional Public Schools

"THESE ARE FIXED COSTS THAT ARE GOING TO BE THERE FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS, REGARDLESS OF HOW MANY STUDENTS LEAVE OR STAY...BUT WE CAN'T GET ANSWERS OR NUMBERS WITH REGARD TO WHAT IMPACT THIS WILL HAVE ON TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS."

SENATOR GERALDINE THOMPSON

Bottom line: this bill impacts public education funds. It is an experiment that we've seen fail in other states, with families and students on the line.

Access to Courts

HB 837, sponsored by Senator Travis Hutson in the Senate, **was the first bill signed during the 2023 legislative session. This bill will drastically impact the court system – potentially limiting access to the courts in cases against property, health and car insurers . Some of the changes:**



- Reducing the statute of limitations for negligence from 4 to 2 years
- Raises the bar to pursue bad faith insurance claims litigation
- Limits recoverable damages for medical treatment or service expenses
- Only allows people to recover damages in personal injury or wrongful death claim if they were less than 50% at fault for the harm

Bottom line: this legislation prioritized big corporations over everyday people.



"THIS BILL IS A GIFT FROM OUR GOVERNOR TO BIG BUSINESSES AT THE EXPENSE OF OUR CITIZENS AND SMALL BUSINESSES...THE PEOPLE WHO WON'T BE GETTING ANY GIFTS FROM THIS BILL ARE THE INSURED - THE CITIZENS OF FLORIDA. THE CONSTITUENTS WHO SENT US HERE TO SERVE THEIR INTERESTS AGAINST THE DEEP POCKETS OF LARGE CORPORATIONS."

SENATOR LORI BERMAN

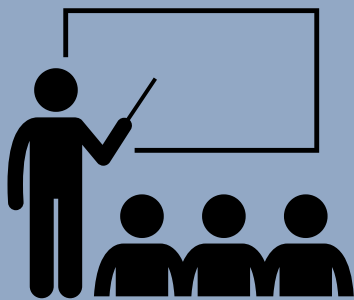
Union-Busting Bill 09

SB 256: Employee Organizations Representing Public Employees

Sponsored in the Senate by Senator Blaise Ingoglia (R), Spring Hill

Types of public sector unions the bill could impact, which includes banning monthly paycheck deductions for union dues and increasing the risk of decertification:

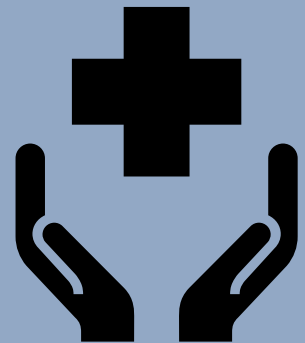
Teacher's Unions



Transportation Unions



Public Health Unions



The union-busting bill targets certain public unions – but it excludes law enforcement, firefighters and correctional officers.



Senator Shevrin Jones and Senator Rosalind Osgood debate the union-busting bill.

"THESE ARE THE SAME PEOPLE - THAT WHEN YOUR FAMILIES WERE IN NEED DURING COVID - THEY STEPPED UP AND TOOK CARE OF YOU. IF THIS IS HOW WE SAY THANK YOU TO THEM - SHAME ON US."

SENATOR SHEVRIN JONES

"NOW THESE HARDWORKING INDIVIDUALS HAVE TO GO TO WORK AND JUMP THROUGH A LOT OF HOOPS JUST TO EXERCISE A CHOICE TO BE A MEMBER OF A UNION. I THINK THEY DESERVE BETTER."

SENATOR ROSALIND OSGOOD

Anti-LGBTQ Bills

HB 1069: Don't Say Gay 2.0

Sponsored in the Senate by
Senator Clay Yarborough (R), Jacksonville

Roberto Clemente book removed from Florida public schools pending review over discrimination references

"His story is his story. He went through racism. It's something that can't be changed," Clemente's son, Roberto Clemente Jr., told NBC News.

EDUCATION

Florida says AP class teaches critical race theory. Here's what's really in the course

January 22, 2023 · 9:16 AM ET



Juliana Kim

EDUCATION

K-12 education

Add Topic +

Florida school bans elementary students from reading Amanda Gorman's 'The Hill We Climb' poem



Kayla Jimenez
USA TODAY

Published 7:50 p.m. ET May 23, 2023 | Updated 10:33 a.m. ET May 24, 2023

We've seen the headlines – banned books, altered courses – all because of the state's restrictions on LGBTQ+ and race instruction in the classroom.

HB 1069 expands those laws:

- Expands restriction on sexual orientation and gender identity to 8th grade
- Discourages respectful use of personal pronouns
- Expanding book banning policies



Several amendments focused on parental rights that were rejected by Republicans:

- Allow parents to opt their child out of certain materials & books – instead of opting out the entire school
- Requiring challenged books stay on the shelves until after a review
- Allow only parents of students at a school to challenge books

"WE TALK ABOUT THE PARENTS WHO OBJECT TO THINGS - WHAT ABOUT THE PARENTS WHO LIKE THE BOOKS? DON'T THEY HAVE JUST AS MUCH RIGHT TO ALL THE MATERIALS AND INSTRUCTION THAT ANOTHER PARENT OPPOSES?"

SENATOR TINA POLSKY

SB 254: Gender Affirming Care Ban for Minors

Sponsored in the Senate by
Senator Clay Yarborough (R), Jacksonville

Anti-LGBTQ Bills

This bill is about government intrusion in Floridians' personal medical decisions. It goes against freedom and parental rights, restricting trans children from seeking trans treatment, medicine and care.

And it doesn't stop at young people – it restricts where trans adults can get treatments.

Despite the many testimonies from trans people and allies against the bill, it still passed.



**"WE HEARD THAT THIS BILL RESTRICTS
ACCESS TO GENDER AFFIRMING CARE...THE
TARGET IS ON THE BACK OF THE QUEER
COMMUNITY...TRANSPHOBIC...EXTREME
OVERREACH BY THE GOVERNMENT...
ALL I COULD HEAR WAS "LOVE ME AS I AM."**

SENATOR TRACIE DAVIS

Anti-LGBTQ bills

HB 1069: Bathroom Bill
Sponsored in the Senate by
Senator Erin Grall (R), Fort Pierce

This bill targets the trans community – making it a second-degree misdemeanor crime for trans people to simply use the bathroom.

This bill is bound to encourage discrimination and cause confusion based on how people look.



Senator Tina Polsky
(D) District 30, Boca Raton

"I saw a trans man testify who has a full beard in every way, shape and form...Is he supposed to go into the women's restroom?"



Senator Erin Grall
(R) District 29, Fort Pierce

"The law as written in the bill would require a person to use a facility of their sex at birth or use a unisex facility."



Senator Tina Polsky
(D) District 30, Boca Raton

"So the security guard is supposed to say 'Get out, you're in the wrong bathroom' – and the trans man says no – is that the way the scenario will go?"



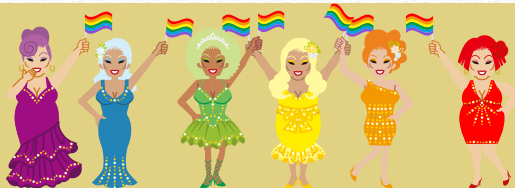
Senator Erin Grall
(R) District 29, Fort Pierce

"That is left to each facility, each property owner to develop protocols."

SB 1438: Drag Show Ban

**Sponsored in the Senate by
Senator Clay Yarborough (R), Jacksonville**

Anti-LGBTQ Bills



This bill is about silencing the drag community, taxpayers that contribute to our economy – and we won't stand for it.

This bill puts a target on drag performers and Pride festivals – political targets of the Governor to cater to a conservative base.

U.S. Court Blocks Florida Law Restricting Drag Performances

By Reuters | June 23, 2023, at 5:42 p.m.

Miami Herald

Undercover agents saw nothing 'lewd' at Orlando drag show. Florida is going after venue anyway



Hundreds of drag queens and supporters rallied at the Capitol with lawmakers, including Senators Linda Stewart and Shevrin Jones, against this bill that vilifies their art.



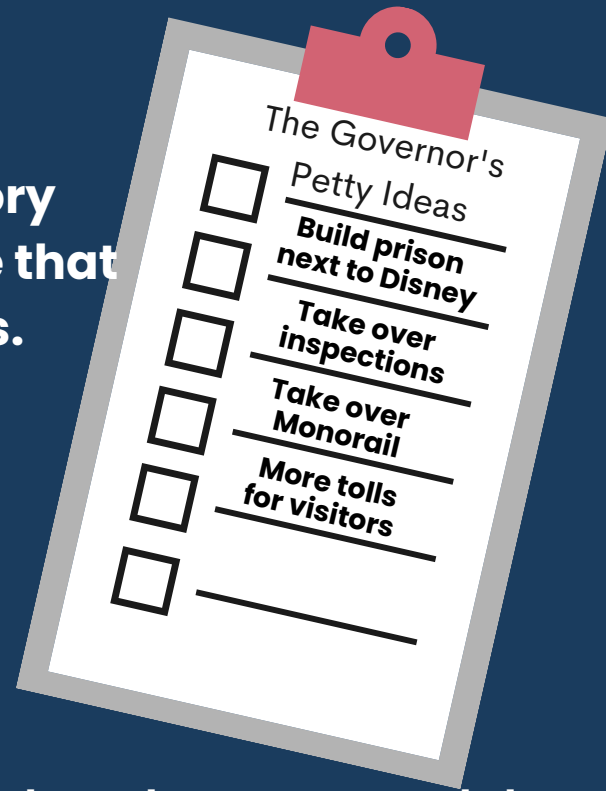
DeSantis vs. Disney

The Governor continued to use the Legislature in his anti-business, anti-freedom, relentless and retaliatory pursuit against Disney – an odd battle that doesn't serve Floridians' best interests.

"IF THE GOVERNMENT OF FLORIDA WILL DO THIS TO ONE OF THE LARGEST EMPLOYERS IN THE STATE - WHAT WOULD IT DO TO A SMALLER ENTERPRISE THAT DOESN'T HAVE THE RESOURCES TO STAND UP AGAINST GOVERNMENT OVERREACH?"

SENATOR GERALDINE THOMPSON

SB 1604 – Retroactively cancels any legally adopted contracts made by Disney before the Reedy Creek District transitioned to the DeSantis-controlled board



ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance)

HB 3, sponsored by Senator Erin Grall in the Senate, is another unnecessary battle in the Governor's "war on woke" – it interferes in private businesses by dictating who their customers must be. This bill:

- limits where the state can invest funds
- could result in higher interest rates



"IT IS THE HEIGHT OF HYPOCRISY TO BAN CUSTOMERS AND INVESTMENTS BASED ON POLITICS WHEN THE GOVERNOR CONSTANTLY GOES AFTER COMPANIES FOR POLITICAL REASONS."

SENATOR TINA POLSKY

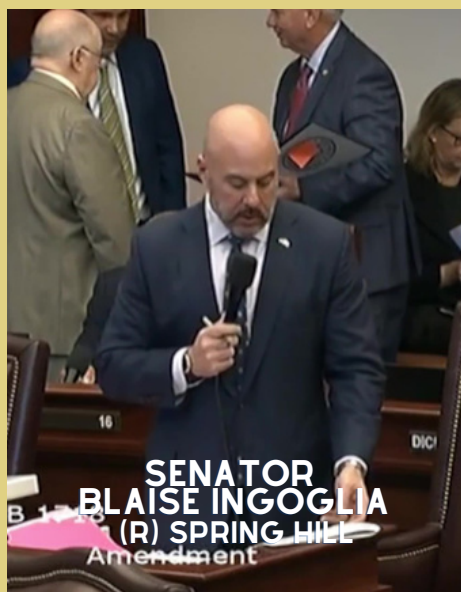
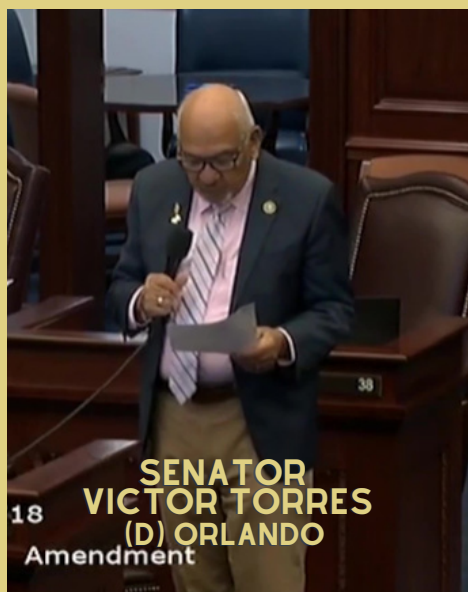
Anti-Immigration Bill

SB 1718, sponsored by Senator Blaise Ingoglia, is an anti-immigrant bill pushed by the Governor in his quest to use vulnerable people as pawns in his political game.

Some of the changes:

- Creates stricter penalties for private businesses that hire undocumented workers
- Invalidates out-of-state licenses given to undocumented immigrants
- Requires hospitals to collect data about undocumented patients
- Adds another \$12 million for the misguided migrant flight program

one of the amendments offered:



"THIS AMENDMENT PROVIDES AN EXEMPTION FROM CRIMINAL FELONY PENALTIES FOR HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS, FIRST RESPONDERS, SCHOOL OFFICIALS, CLERGY AND OTHERS ASSISTING OR TRANSPORTING UNDOCUMENTED MINORS OR RESIDENTS IN FLORIDA."

"THIS AMENDMENT CREATES A HUGE LOOPHOLE - IT WOULD ALLOW DRUG CARTELS TO TRANSPORT PEOPLE FROM THE SOUTHERN BORDER SIMPLY BY PUTTING A CHRISTIAN OR JEWISH SYMBOL AND CLAIMING RELIGIOUS LIBERTY."

"THIS IS NOT ABOUT CARTELS. THIS IS TALKING ABOUT FIRST RESPONDERS, DOCTORS, PASTORS, PRIESTS - IN THE POSITION OF BECOMING CONVICTED FELONS SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY DID THEIR JOB AND PROVIDED AID OR SERVICE TO A CHILD OR UNDOCUMENTED PERSON IN THEIR TIME OF NEED."



**BILL
IMPACTS:**

POLICY AND POLITICS

New immigration law sparks fear and worker exodus from Florida

Medical Discrimination

SB 1580: Protections of Medical Conscience

Sponsored by Senator Jay Trumbull (R), Panama City

This bill allows doctors, nurses, residents, and groups that provide health coverage to opt out of providing or paying for a health care service on the basis of a conscience-based objection based on a sincerely held religious, moral, or ethical belief.

It also prohibits medical boards from disciplining doctors based on their speech.



Three Amendments:

Protect Patients From Discrimination

This amendment would have added "pregnancy, age, disability, marital status, sexual orientation or gender identity" to section outlining what doctors couldn't discriminate against

"WE SHOULD ENSURE THAT NO ONE IS BEING DISCRIMINATED AGAINST BASED ON WHO THEY ARE."

SENATOR LORI BERMAN

1	Senate Amendment
2	
3	Delete line 145
4	and insert:
5	<u>sex, national origin, pregnancy, age, disability, marital</u>
6	<u>status, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Additionally, a</u>
7	<u>health care payor may</u>

Ensure Patients Know Their Doctor's Beliefs Ahead of Time



"THIS AMENDMENT WILL HELP AVOID A SCENARIO WHERE SOMEONE HAS TAKEN WEEKS OR MONTHS TO GET AN APPOINTMENT."

SENATOR VICTOR TORRES



Remove Unconstitutional Statute to Ensure Doctor's First Amendment Rights

The amendment would have removed "Docs vs. Glocks" law from statute, years after a federal appeals court ruled it was unconstitutional



"LET'S REMOVE THE CONFUSION A DOCTOR MAY HAVE...SO THERE'S COMPLETE CLARITY THAT A DOCTOR MAY SPEAK TO A PATIENT OR THEIR FAMILY ABOUT FIREARM SAFETY."

SENATOR TINA POLSKY

Elections Bill

Another year, another complicated & unnecessary bill to change Florida's elections system. Here's what SB 7050, sponsored by Senator Travis Huston, **does:**

- **Targets voter engagement groups**
- **Adds more unfunded & burdensome requirements for local Supervisors of Elections**
- **Paves the way for the Governor to run for President without resigning to run**

Four common sense amendments offered by Democrats:



Senator Jason Pizzo
(D) District 37, Hollywood

Parity on resign to run - allow any Florida elected official to run for federal public office without having to resign



Senator Rosalind Osgood
(D) District 32, Tamarac

Only send voter ID cards to eligible voters



Senator Tracie Davis
(D) District 5, Jacksonville

Make vote-by-mail more accessible to voters with disabilities



Leader Lauren Book
(D) District 35, Davie

Delete unfunded mandate for local supervisors to identify registered voters with felony convictions whose rights haven't yet been restored - a job better left to the state

Secret Governor Flights

SB 1616, sponsored by Senator Jonathan Martin, is a public records exemption that will essentially shield all information related to "security and transportation services" for the Governor.

Senator Jason Pizzo questioned the bill sponsor about potential impropriety:



State Senator Jason Pizzo
(D) District 37, Hollywood



State Senator Jonathan Martin
(R) District 33, Fort Myers



State Senator Jason Pizzo
(D) District 37, Hollywood



State Senator Jonathan Martin
(R) District 33, Fort Myers

"Doesn't the public have the right to know if he (the Governor) hitched a ride on a billionaire's jet who has business before the Legislature?"

"If it's for political purposes or for personal purposes – then it's exempt. If it's for official purposes, then we get to know who is involved – as long as it doesn't relate to something...that could be used for nefarious purposes."

"Tell me...we're not protecting and covering up the free flights, the favors of donors to the Governor with this bill."

"That's not the reason for this bill."

"THIS IS THE SUNSHINE STATE FOR A REASON...THERE ARE A LOT OF PEOPLE WHO LIKE TO BRAG ABOUT THE FACT THAT THEY GAVE A RIDE ON THEIR JET TO THE GOVERNOR...THERE IS NO RATIONAL PURPOSE FOR WITHHOLDING WHO IS GIFTING AND WHO IS GRIFTING."

SENATOR JASON PIZZO





Democratic Fighters

There are 12 Democratic Senators in the 40-member Florida Senate. Despite the numbers, Democrats took on the challenge.

Here are the lessons, highlights and challenges from the Florida Senate Democrats, in their own words.



Democratic Fighters

LEADER LAUREN BOOK DISTRICT 35, DAVIE

Highlight From Session

"Permanent tax breaks for diapers and incontinence products! I have been working on this since my very first session, when my own kids were in diapers. President Passidomo presented the bill for me during a committee week when I was on maternity leave. And now, here we are — after years and years of fighting, I could not be more proud of this bipartisan work!"

Challenge From Session

"Watching the Legislature dismantle women's reproductive rights in Florida was frustrating to witness. It is a scary time for women's bodily autonomy and we must do everything we can to fight these oppressive and extreme abortion restrictions."



SENATOR JASON PIZZO DISTRICT 37, HOLLYWOOD

Lessons From Session

"This legislative session was sadly overshadowed by the aspirations of an absentee Governor.

While there were glimpses of nonpartisanship on important issues this session – **we need to let the light of transparency shine through, ditch the senseless attacks on the vulnerable, and re-establish the autonomy of the Legislature.** Despite the resources to spin the narrative, the Governor's agenda has not been resonating well in the polls, nor in the Senate chamber."



Democratic Fighters

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SENATOR LORI BERMAN DISTRICT 26, BOYNTON BEACH

Highlight From Session

"The highlight of this session for me was final passage of **Greyson's Law**, a proposal we've worked very hard on with countless stakeholders. Further protecting both the parent and child, Greyson's Law will ensure courts consider all patterns of abuse, whether threatening, intimidating or controlling behavior, however short, when determining detriment to the child and in a petition for injunction against domestic violence."

Challenge From Session

"The biggest challenge was the slate of dangerous, divisive laws. This was a particularly bad session. Civil liberties and constitutional rights were eroded. Reason gave way to rightwing extremism. A near total abortion ban, permitless carry, attacks on queer children and Floridians, universal private school vouchers, and union-busting legislation all passed. But Democrats did what we could with the tools we had – we used our voice to awaken reason and lead others to act."



SENATOR TRACIE DAVIS DISTRICT 5, JACKSONVILLE

Highlight From Session

"The Senate was definitely a different experience and landscape coming from the Florida House. I had a great team that helped me navigate the process! I also went out of my comfort zone on some legislation - for example, the airport transparency bill! It wasn't anything I had ever done - but that's the Senate for you!"

Challenge From Session

"The challenges we encountered were expected, being a member in the superminority party fighting divisive legislation. Being on nine committees was probably the biggest physical challenge!"



Democratic Fighters

Highlight From Session

"I am extremely proud that we were able to get **Curtis' Law (SB 490)** signed this session. **Families who lose a minor to homicide will now have the right to detailed information about the case as the investigation takes place.** In the aftermath of such a tragedy, the families are left to pick up the pieces and while no policy could ever take away the hurt they feel, Curtis' Law will help families receive the closure they deserve so that they may heal."

Challenge From Session

"The national attention brought to Florida a unique set of challenges for this past legislative session as we grappled with policies that will have an impact on people across the country, not just in Florida. We have seen other states quick to follow Florida with their own versions of Don't Say Gay and many will undoubtedly look at this latest session for inspiration again. That has a profound impact on how we go about our work in Tallahassee."

SENATOR SHEVRIN JONES

DISTRICT 34, MIAMI GARDENS



SENATOR ROSALIND OSGOOD

DISTRICT 32, TAMARAC

Highlight From Session

"This Session, I had the opportunity to co-introduce **SB 52, a bill regulating social media in Florida schools**, with the core aim of promoting responsible usage among students and addressing the issues of bullying, fighting, and social isolation.

By providing comprehensive instruction, limiting device usage, and restricting access to social media platforms, we aim to create safer environments where our young students can thrive, free from the dangers of exploitation. Witnessing the bill's progress, I was proud of the bipartisan cooperation and dedication to improving the well-being of Florida's school-aged children."



Highlight From Session

"Passing **SB 164** - reversing an outdated law that banned fentanyl test strips in Florida. By legalizing test strips in the state, more lives will be saved from tragic overdoses!"

Challenge From Session

"Fighting the barrage of **culture war bills** instead of fixing real problems."

SENATOR TINA POLSKY
DISTRICT 30, BOCA RATON



SENATOR BOBBY POWELL
DISTRICT 24, WEST PALM BEACH

Highlight From Session

"**SB 678**, that will broaden the opportunities for constructing **affordable housing**. Florida's Department of Transportation has a surplus of land that it does not use, but is well suited for building critically-needed affordable housing. All that was needed was the legal pathway to allow the land to be transferred to local government, at no cost, for that purpose, which my bill accomplishes. I'm also proud that we were able to secure \$2 million in funding for the Urban Leagues across the state."

Challenge From Session

"Spearheading **SB 430, Abandoned Cemeteries**, to passage in the Senate. I was aware that previous attempts had been unsuccessful, despite the House unanimously backing the bill last year. But I felt that this legislation was needed, especially since it not only creates a Task Force to identify forgotten and abandoned cemeteries, but has as its focus forgotten African American cemeteries – graves that in some cases even lay beneath buildings and roads throughout Florida. This bill gives us the opportunity to finally mark these resting spots and honor those who have come before us."



Democratic Fighters

SENATOR DARRYL ROUSON

DISTRICT 16, ST. PETERSBURG

Highlight From Session

"I'm proud to have included funding in the budget to award grants to community organizations that serve areas disproportionately impacted by violence to implement or expand violence reduction programs. Whether it's schools, hospitals, or the streets, this money will go to helping prevent violence before it happens. Even though it was vetoed by the Governor, I'm proud to have had bipartisan support for the program."

Challenge From Session

"For years, I've been trying to help the victims of the Dozier School for Boys in their mission to be acknowledged as victims by the State of Florida. Once again, the bill didn't make it to the finish line. I've sponsored this legislation for several years now - and I won't stop fighting for their justice."



SENATOR LINDA STEWART

DISTRICT 17, ORLANDO

Highlight From Session

"Passing **SB 1002** - eliminating the ability for solicitation of business and signing of an assignment of post-loss benefits for windshield replacement. By passing this legislation we will reduce the number of frivolous claims on automotive policies and update replacement practice requirements."

Challenge From Session

"Pushing for policies that are beneficial for all Floridians, and opposing legislation which divides, disparages, and marginalizes others."



Highlight From Session

"It is reassuring that the Florida Legislature prioritized safety on amusement rides today with a unanimous vote for the Tyre Sampson Act. We have communicated that we place value on human life and we want all individuals who choose to enjoy Florida's amusement rides to know that they are safe. Most importantly, we honored Tyre and his family with legislation that hopefully will prevent the tragic accident that took his life from happening to anyone else."

SENATOR GERALDINE THOMPSON

DISTRICT 15, ORLANDO



SENATOR VICTOR TORRES

DISTRICT 25, ORLANDO



Highlight From Session

"Passing two bills was the highlight of session, representing my commitment to those who have served our nation and our dedication to providing accessible pathways to education and employment. The first bill **prioritizes our veterans**, expediting their entry into the workforce, we are not only honoring their sacrifices but also harnessing their expertise to enhance healthcare services in our communities. The second bill focuses on **simplifying the process for taking the GED test** after passing the Pre-GED test, we are empowering students to pursue higher education and attain the skills needed for success."

Challenge From Session

"A major challenge this session was watching **SB 1718**, the immigration bill, move through the process. Seeing families pleading for their loved ones, and knowing the damage it will cause to families, businesses, and even consumers in Florida. That was one of the most challenging moments of my legislative career."


Democrats Working For You

Relief for Your Pocketbooks



- Senators passed several tax exemptions to provide Floridians relief at the cash register – including a **Permanent Tax Exemption for Diapers and Incontinence Products**, a proposal sponsored by Leader Book to give families a break from basic necessities for babies and adults.
- There are several tax break holidays this fiscal year – from **back-to-school supplies** and **disaster preparedness** to **Florida fun**, including cultural, creative and outdoor entertainment!
- The tax bill also included a tax break for **Firearm Safety Devices** – which includes safes, lockboxes, trigger lock and cable locks – important gun safety incentives to help reduce accidental shootings.

Public Health

- 
- **KidCare Expansion** – Both chambers unanimously approved a measure to raise the income eligibility requirements for KidCare, effectively expanding the subsidized health coverage for kids.
 - To better help those with **sickle cell disease**, SB 1352, sponsored by Senator Rouson, will help to better track data and improve outcomes for those diagnosed with the disease. It requires the Agency for Health Care Administration to determine whether current covered medications, treatments, and services for sickle cell disease are adequate to meet the needs of Medicaid recipients.
 - HB 829, sponsored in the Senate by Senator Davis, modernizes and makes the Baker Act manual more accessible for those helping others with mental health issues.
 - In the fight against the fentanyl crisis, SB 164 sponsored by Senator Polsky **legalizes fentanyl test strips** in Florida.

Did You?
KNOW?

For years, Democrats have tried in various ways to expand Medicaid for Floridians. This year was no different - Senator Berman had a bill that was an incremental approach to explore expanding Medicaid to young Floridians. Unfortunately, the bill did not get heard.

Justice & Courts



- **HB 233**, brought by Senator Jones in the Senate, requires law enforcement investigating the murder of a young person to **provide family with status updates, contact information and a list of items found with the deceased loved one**. Named Curtis's Law in honor of Curtis Williamson, whose homicide death in 1997 was originally thought by police to be an accidental drowning.
- **SB 508**, sponsored by Senator Rouson, makes changes to **problem solving courts**, including expanding eligibility requirements to allow admission into a misdemeanor pretrial treatment-based drug court program.
- **SB 144**, filed by Senator Berman, is a compassionate alternative for working, breastfeeding mothers by **requiring, in most cases, that county courthouses provide a lactation space**.

Veterans



- **HB 139**, sponsored by Senator Torres in the Senate, focuses on helping veterans pursue their dream careers in medicine by **creating the Office of Veteran Licensure Services** in the Department of Health.

History



- Two bills sponsored in the Senate by Senator Powell focus on the history of African-Americans in Florida.
 - **HB 1441** creates a task force to make recommendations for the planning and construction of a **Florida Museum of Black History**.
 - **HB 49** creates the **Historic Cemeteries Program** within the Department of State, it creates an advisory council and it provides funding for research. In recent years, abandoned African-American cemeteries have been rediscovered, prompting a task force that recommended these policies to address the issue.

DEAR FLORIDA



TO THOSE WHO TOOK THE TIME TO RESPOND TO OUR 'DEAR FLORIDA' LETTER' - THANK YOU.

THE BUBBLE OF TALLAHASSEE OFTEN PUTS FLORIDIANS' PROBLEMS OUT OF SIGHT AND OUT OF MIND - AND INSTEAD PUTS POLITICS IN FRONT OF REAL ISSUES. BUT IN EACH AND EVERY CULTURE WAR SENATE DEMOCRATS FOUGHT, PROTECTING THE FREEDOM OF ALL FLORIDIANS WAS ALWAYS IN OUR THOUGHTS.

BELOW IS A GLIMPSE OF WHAT YOU SHARED WITH US.



House affordability or rent affordability.



I think working families need help with affordable housing and affordable insurance, both home and auto.

Under Republican rein the cost of living has skyrocketed. My neighborhood the cost of rent has gone up from 1,650.00 to 3,300.00 in just 4 years.

High Home Insurance Prices

The housing situation down here in Broward county is ridiculous!!



I would very much appreciate it if we could focus on insurance companies screwing hurricane victims over.

DEAR FLORIDA

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Insurance is almost unaffordable here in Southern Florida. Home insurance and auto. I have an apartment in an \$\$\$ area of Manhattan and pay 1/4 the home insurance. My FL home is only 1900 sq Ft. What the hell am I paying for?

Our homeowners insurance went from \$4000 a year to \$8000 a year. We are being priced out of our home.

Please work on home insurance costs and teacher shortage. It would be nice if our lawmakers treated teachers with respect instead of demonizing them. No new abortion laws and no anti lgbtq+ laws.

I know I sound like a broken record but those are my top three issues. I worry that my 5th grader with Down syndrome won't be able to access the supports he needs in public school once vouchers are siphoning off funds, I worry that my 9

Decline of public education - lack of resources, lack of teachers, quality of education failing.

To really answer your question, my concerns in our state are probably the same as everyone else. Back off the culture wars and do something to help Floridians. As a 12-year teacher with a Master's degree, I still am living paycheck to paycheck. While I consider myself more blessed than some, this should not be happening. Inflation, gas prices and property taxes/insurance are astronomical in our state.

The environment, including water quality (red tide, disappearing habitat for our wildlife, climate change and the resulting rising water levels and severe storms).

Trains, trams, street cars, etc. Make Florida a state where you can live and a car isn't necessary to get around. It will save on car costs (car payment, insurance, gas), ease traffic (I live in Tampa and it is awful), and shorten commute times.

BAN ASSAULT RIFLES IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA!

THE BOTTOM LINE IS: THE ISSUES IN FLORIDA REVOLVE AROUND HOW WE CAN LIVE A SAFER, MORE PROSPEROUS AND HAPPY LIFE - NOT IDEOLOGY FORCED ON US BY POLITICIANS.

THANK YOU FOR REACHING OUT TO US.

FLORIDA SENATE DEMOCRATS

Bridge Moments

Candid of Senators on the Knott Building Walkway

Clockwise, starting to the right: Senator Shevrin Jones and senior legislative aide Miles Davis, Senator Rosalind Osgood, Senators Tracie Davis and Lori Berman, and Senator Bobby Powell and legislative aide Malcolm Sommons.



Clockwise, starting to the right: Senator Linda Stewart, Senator Lori Berman and her legislative aide Daniel Delagran, Senate Democratic Leader Lauren Book, and Senator Geraldine Thompson waves at the camera.



Special Thanks

To Those Who Help Our Offices Run

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Senate Democratic Office Staff

Staff Director: Maggie Gerson

Legislative Analyst: Emily Bruno

Legislative Analyst: Dustin Paulson

Legislative Analyst: Margaret Thomas

Legislative Analyst: John Toman

Communications Director: Jossie Barroso

Administrative Assistant: Joyce Randall

Senate District Office Staff



Left to right, top row: Sean LeHockey, Sherese Gainous, Al Yorston, Nick Carper, Teri Cariota, Daniel Delagran, Devin Bleich, Miles Davis, John "J.J." Piskadlo, Jr.

Middle row: Malcolm Sommons, Kariana Ingram, Travis Flinn, Joe Oleksak, Mary Summers, St. George Pink, Michael Brien, Julie Fishman, Franceska Edouard, Nijah Smith, Lauren Ruiz, Julian Cintron

Front row: Abby Ross, Marina Braynon-Moore, Jacqueline Small, Alandra Martin, Farisha Hamid, Lauredan Official, Elvin Handy, Olivia Callari, Varun Bhupatiraju

Not pictured: Zoraida Druckman, Leisa Wiseman, Ella Coffee, Kayla Francis, Dana Rutledge, Gari Savage, Diane Andre, Michelle DeMarco, Beau Simon and other integral members of the district staff!



In Loving Memory

John "J.J." Piskadlo, Jr.

January 7, 1971 - June 17, 2023



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