



**STATE SENATOR NAN RICH
LEGISLATIVE UPDATE
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Redistricting and Budget Will Dominate the 2012 Legislative Session

The 2012 Legislative Session will begin January 10th. This is two months earlier than the usual March-April Session, because the legislature needs additional time to complete the constitutionally-required redistricting process in time for the 2012 elections.

Along with the budget, redistricting will dominate the upcoming Session. Over the past few weeks, in preparation for next year's early session, the Legislature has been holding committee meetings in Tallahassee. During these meetings, we have seen some signs of what we can expect next month, and unfortunately, what we've seen is not promising.

Both the House and the Senate rolled out their proposed maps of Congressional Districts, as well as state legislative maps for their respective chambers. I voted against the proposed maps in committee because I believe they do not comply with the specific standards that are now in our constitution as a result of the vote by 63% of Florida's voters in support of Amendments 5 & 6. Florida voters sent us a clear message that they didn't like the way we created districts in the past because they were gerrymandered, they favored incumbents and political parties, and they didn't respect municipal and county lines. We were directed by them to allow voters to select their elected officials, not the other way around.

Unfortunately, the current proposals being considered bear an uncanny resemblance to the 2002 maps, which the chairman of the Senate Reapportionment committee said was one of the most gerrymandered redistricting proposals in state history.

The current proposed maps are tremendously familiar, because the Reapportionment Committee started with the 2002 maps. But by passing Amendments 5 & 6, the voters told us they wanted to start with a clean slate – not to simply make minor adjustments to the current maps. The only districts that look really different are the seats where there is no incumbent.

I believe the map aims to protect incumbents, and favors political parties, in violation of Amendments 5 & 6. We need to do better to earn the confidence of the voters, and we need to go back to work to do what the voters mandated we do – create fair legislative districts.

In addition to redistricting, we also saw the governor introduce his proposed 2012 budget last week. While he seems to have a new-found fervor for public education, the \$1 billion increase he proposes for public schools will amount to little more than \$100 per student. This amount doesn't keep up with inflation or undo the damage that the past few years of cuts have done.

The proposed funding will go primarily to replace cuts in the current fiscal year budget. Of the \$1 billion that the Governor touts as new state K-12 funding, \$643 million would simply replace funding cuts in the current budget year, fill a drop in property taxes, and would account for 30,567 estimated new students who will enroll in Florida schools next year. The other \$571 million would add new funding to the per-student formula, bringing the number to \$6,372 – still significantly less than the 2007 per-pupil funding.

The bottom line is that we would still be funding education at a level hundreds of millions of dollars less than we did in 2007, if the governor's proposal is passed. It won't make up for the \$1.35 billion that the legislature cut from K-12 education last session.

There's also bad news for hospitals, as the governor's plan slashes \$1.8 billion from Medicaid reimbursement to hospitals, which will devastate hospitals that treat Medicaid patients. Of this amount, \$1 billion would be federal funding that Florida would lose, meaning that Floridians would not receive their fair share of the tax dollars sent to Washington.

But these patients can't go untreated -- they will end up in our emergency rooms, and impact the cost of commercial insurance will be impacted. A cynical person might wonder whether this is all a plan by the governor to leave our safety net hospitals so crippled that the only solution is to allow private for-profit companies take them over.

These cuts could also wipe out 25,000 jobs around the state. Not only is this a devastating blow to health care – the one sector of the economy where we've seen growth throughout the recession – it would also lead to a diminished quality of care that patients receive.

The governor also proposes cutting \$1 billion from transportation projects and sweeping \$70 million from local government housing trust funds – which will also lead to a loss of jobs in our state.

While this is only a proposal by the Governor, slashing funding for areas of the budget that create jobs, and pitting two critical priorities against each other – education and health care – is not the solution Floridians expect, nor one we can accept. Hopefully, my colleagues in the legislature will recognize this is not the path we should be headed down, and take another tack on the budget.

As always, I appreciate the opportunity to serve as your State Senator. If you have any comments or questions on any issue related to Florida government, please feel free to contact my office at (954) 747-7933 or email at rich.nan.web@flsenate.gov.