

Broward SLI

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Governor and Legislative Leaders Change Position on ACA Implementation

Recent reports indicate an evolving acceptance to implementing the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) among the Governor and leaders in the Florida Legislature. In recent weeks, Gov. Scott was quoted saying “The election is over and President Obama won. If I can get to yes, I want to get to yes,” with respect to ACA implementation. The Governor has indicated a desire to meet with HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius to discuss not only creating the state’s health insurance exchange, but possibly expanding Medicaid as well. Gov. Scott would to implement a plan that reduces health costs, expands access and improves quality of care.

Similarly, incoming Senate President Don Gaetz made it clear while he opposed the passage of the new healthcare law he will work towards implementing the portions deemed constitutionally valid by the U.S. Supreme Court. The incoming House Speaker, Rep. Will Weatherford, echoed a similar sentiment, indicating that policy discussions in the House would focus on finding creative solutions to deal with the ACA.

Despite this evolving acceptance expressed by Florida’s political leadership, Sen. Gaetz and Rep. Weatherford notified U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kathleen Sebelius that Florida will not meet the November 16, 2012 deadline to inform HHS whether the state would operate its own insurance exchange. They are seeking answers to multiple questions and overall guidance for policy considerations during the 2013 Legislative Session.

Coincidentally, late Thursday, November 15, the federal government granted states a month extension to make the insurance exchange determination.

Leadership Teams Appointed in State Senate and House

On November 14, new leadership appointments in the Florida Legislature were made. In the Senate, Sen. Garrett Richter was designated President Pro Tempore. Sen. Richter serves the 23rd District which consists of parts of Lee and Collier counties. The President Pro Tempore serves a two year term assisting the Senate President in all proceedings before the Senate. In the House, Rep. Steve Precourt will serve as Majority Leader and Rep. Dana Young will serve as the Deputy Majority Leader and Majority Whip. They serve parts of Orange County and Hillsborough County, respectively. Incoming Speaker Will

Weatherford previously named Rep. Marti Coley to serve as the House Speaker Pro Tempore.

Sen. Chris Smith and Rep. Perry Thurston were both previously elected minority leader in their respective chambers. Both are members of the Broward Legislative Delegation.

Organizational Session to Convene November 20, 2012

In accordance with the Florida Constitution, the Legislature will convene on Tuesday, November 20 for Organizational Session. In November of each even-numbered year the Legislature convenes for the sole purpose of organizing each chamber. At this organization session, held fourteen days after the general election, members are sworn in, officers are elected, rules are adopted, and the committee appointment process is begun. All members of the Broward Legislative Delegation will be sworn in on Tuesday.

Incoming Speaker of the House Outlines Priority Policy Efforts for 2103 Legislative Session

On Tuesday, incoming Speaker of the House Rep. Weatherford shed some light on his legislative priorities heading into the 2013 Legislative Session. Near the top of the list is overhauling the Florida Retirement System (FRS). Rep. Weatherford labeled the current retirement system “old and archaic.” He favors requiring new state employees to enroll in 401(k) style plans, where employees contribute more and have more responsibility for their investment. For now, his stated plan provides for only new employees to enroll in the new system.

Rep. Weatherford also has plans to reform elections and campaign finance laws in Florida. He supports legislation that would eliminate Committees of Continual Existence (CCE). Disbanding CCE’s would increase transparency and marginalize third-party groups that circumvent the intent of traditional campaign finance laws. Weatherford would also like to see personal allowable contributions to be increased from the current \$500 maximum. Speaker Weatherford hopes to bring contributions from third-party donors and activists out from behind CCE’s and into official campaign accounts. He also indicated that election reform should include addressing the large lines and wait times at voting precincts across the state. If the 2011 law shortening early-voting was a contributing factor, Rep. Weatherford said it should be addressed.

The Speaker would also limit conforming bills over his two year term. The purpose of a conforming bill is to amend Florida Statutes in order to conform with elements of the appropriations bill. Weatherford told reporters that he specifically told Appropriations Committee Staff to limit conforming bills to strictly budget-related issues. In previous years, conforming bills have been used during the budget conference process to pass controversial policy items not directly tied to the appropriations process. One obvious consequence is to prohibit opponents of the policy issue a fair opportunity to make amendments to the policy since the budget conferences report to a conforming bill cannot be amended by either Chamber. For such cases, Senate and House members can only proceed with an up or down vote on the measure. This is led to calls for better transparency from the public and members of both chambers citing difficulty knowing exactly what they were voting for or against.

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Broward Delegation Elects New Officers

On Friday November 9, the Broward Legislative Delegation convened to elect a new delegation chair. Sen. Eleanor Sobel was nominated and unanimously elected Chair for a two year term. Rep. Jim Waldman was elected Vice-Chair. Following her election, Sen. Sobel spoke highlighting some issues the Delegation will need to work on in Tallahassee. Election reform to address the long lines at polling locations and fixing vote counting that takes several days are among Sen. Sobel's priorities. Sen. Sobel called for the Delegation to continue fighting for funding for the Broward's largest economic drivers: Port Everglades, Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport and the ever eroding beaches. The election, followed by a reception, was hosted at the Fort Lauderdale Museum of Science and Discovery in downtown Fort Lauderdale. The Broward Legislative Delegation welcomed a total of 19 new members to the delegation. Broward County will rely heavily on the Legislative Delegation to help implement many of the initiatives outlined in the 2013 State Legislative Program.

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