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Federal Affairs Subcommittee

The newly created House Federal Affairs Subcommittee held its initial meeting on Wednesday. Chaired by Representative Plakon, the committee will address matters of state and federal relations, focusing on federal policy issues that: 1) potentially encroach on areas traditionally reserved to the states; 2) could negatively affect the state's economy or taxpayers; or 3) infringe on the personal freedoms of Floridians. The two presentations made during the meeting illustrated current examples of these concerns. Representatives from the Office of the Florida Attorney General updated the committee on the statuses of the Florida's lawsuits fighting implementation of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act as well as the EPA's adoption of numeric nutrient criteria for Florida waters. While very informative, a handful of members noted that the presentations failed to offer opposing positions on either of the matters. The Chairman reassured that Wednesday's introductory meeting was just the first of many, and that future meetings would feature speakers to offer alternative views on discussed issues.

Select Committee on Water Policy

The House Select Committee on Water Policy, chaired by Rep. Williams, also held its inaugural meeting on Thursday. At this largely introductory meeting, the committee was given a general overview of Florida's water policy as well as presentations on the roles of the Department of Environmental Protection, the Department of Agricultural and Consumer Services, and the five Water Management Districts in relation to water policy and governance structure. Committee members did not delve into specific issues or bills at the initial meeting; however, this will undoubtedly be an important committee to watch as the Florida lawsuit against the EPA's implementation of numeric nutrient criteria for state waters develops, and as the Legislature struggles with addressing growing water demands in all sectors of Florida's economy.

Florida's Prescription Drug Procurement and Management Plan

In Wednesday's Senate Budget Committee meeting, Jeffrey Lewis, President of Heinz Family Philanthropies/PS², presented *Florida Rx Blueprint: Achieving Greater Savings for Florida's Taxpayers*. The presentation detailed PS²'s analysis of the state's current prescription drug procurement and management plan, finding significant room for improvement and restructuring that could bring about upwards of \$230 million in

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savings to the state. Mr. Lewis's proposals included creating a single state agency to deal with procurement and contracting for pharmaceuticals in order to combine knowledge and expertise, and to ensure consistency throughout the state. Mr. Lewis also recommended immediate renegotiation of the state's current pharmaceutical purchasing contract, in force since 2003, as the existing agreement actually prohibits the contracted distributor from discussing pricing strategies with state employees or agencies. Among the other cost-saving strategies proposed by the study were: maximizing the use of generic drugs in state plans; reducing the retail and mail-order prescription fees currently paid by the state to market rates; and creating a coordinated state-wide drug formulary in place of the numerous agencies' individual plans. Overall, committee members seemed concerned about the apparently wasteful pharmaceutical plan the state has been involved in; however, many were eager to move forward with Mr. Lewis's recommendations and hope to make headway towards a more economical program in the coming weeks and months.

Florida AIDS Drug Assistance Program

The Florida AIDS Drug Assistance Program's (ADAP) precarious funding situation was discussed in both the Senate Budget and Health and Human Services Appropriations committees. The program, which helps approximately 10,000 Floridians with HIV/AIDS to obtain medications, needs \$14.5 million in funding to continue through April, when the next round of federal funds will be available. The \$100 million, largely federally-funded program may seem expensive; however, experts publicly testified that assisting individuals with HIV/AIDS in controlling their diseases actually saves the state money by reducing opportunistic infections, which could require emergency room treatment and use of other public medical resources. A local physician also testified that certain drugs provided through ADAP may make it more difficult for an infected individual to pass the disease on to others, potentially slowing the rate of new infections. Reducing new infections is an important objective for many in Florida, which currently has the highest rate of new infections in the country, with Broward County leading the state in the number of individuals currently using the ADAP program. The Senate Budget committee also explored using a public-private partnership to solve the budget gap problem, through a program whereby pharmaceutical companies would offer free medication to individuals on waiting lists for publicly-funded programs like ADAP.

Immigration

The Senate held the first of a series of meetings intended to educate members about immigration matters. Senate Judiciary Committee Chair, Senator Anitere Flores, is holding these meetings before the Senate begins hearing various immigration proposals that members have been filed. The Committee heard from Senate staff about the current number of undocumented persons residing in the United States and Florida, and FIU Law Professor Ediberto Roman provided an overview of federal power and the framework governing immigration. Senators also heard from representatives of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services who discussed immigration enforcement and federal programs such as E-Verify and SAVE (Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlement). The Committee received additional information concerning the impact of undocumented persons on hospitals, schools and prisons.