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**Committee Weeks
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Contents

- Arrestee Medical Expenses
- Florida Water Alliance
- Budget Forecast

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Arrestee Medical Expenses (SB 218)

On Tuesday in Senate Community Affairs, SB 218, related to Arrestee Medical Expenses was scheduled to be heard. The bill caps medical expenses of arrestees "injured during or at the time of arrest", for which counties (often the sheriff) are ultimately responsible as payers of last resort. At Broward's urging, this bill became a Florida Association of Counties (FAC) priority for the 2010 Session. FAC and Broward staff met with legislators in advance of the bill's hearing and met with general acceptance of the bill's concept, especially in light of the Legislature's willingness to offer a similar cap to the Department of Corrections in the 2009 Session.

Upon the urging of Senator Thrasher, the bill was temporarily postponed. At issue: what cost cap would be appropriate? Representatives of hospital, physician and medical associations argued that the bill limited flexibility and violated free market provisions of the Constitution. The FL Medical Association requested that the cap be at 110% of the Medicare rate, which covers costs, rather than the Medicaid rate, which they testified would cover 56% of actual costs. The Physicians' Association asked that emergency room doctors' charges be treated differently from facility (hospital) charges. In meetings afterwards, the sheriff's association, a proponent of the bill, indicated interest in meeting with Broward to discuss including our amendment to preclude pre-existing conditions from coverage. The bill's sponsor, Senator Jones, asked that counties and sheriffs offices provide detailed responses to questions that were posed by opponents to the legislation, which Broward has done. We expect SB 218 to be heard the first week of February.

Florida Water Alliance

Also on Tuesday, the Florida Water Alliance met to discuss a strategy for the diverse group in the upcoming Session. Normally focusing solely on water supply issues, the Alliance considered expanding its scope to include water conservation, the Chapter 373 rewrite, job creation and "water" as an economic engine of the state. More proactive engagement of House and Senate leadership was suggested and agreed-upon by the members in attendance. Several members mentioned the potential for an Omnibus Water Bill that would include a variety of issues from previous sessions.

Budget Forecast

Economic indicators around the state seem to be improving slightly. Specifically, sales tax revenues are up more than 5% over forecasted levels, leaving the state with a \$1.7 billion recurring revenue deficit. However, Senator JD Alexander has been painting a far gloomier outlook on the budget gap - using a deficit figure nearer to \$4 billion. The Governor's Office will have its budget completed and rolled-out publicly by next Friday and by all accounts, it will include an expected continuation of the FMAP increase (Medicaid match from the federal government) which was included in the ARRA (stimulus) bill last February. Florida derives an approximately \$1.5 billion benefit from the federal Medicaid match increase. The next phase of the FMAP was originally only contained in the federal Health Care Reform legislation; however, when it became clear that Reform may meet stronger opposition than initially anticipated, the FMAP increase was placed in the Jobs Bill, as well.

On Wednesday, the Senate Policy and Steering Committee on Ways and Means did several presentations related to the State budget. Senate President Atwater addressed a large crowd of colleagues and spectators as he rolled-out the State's new **Transparency Website**, which went live January 20, 2010. The site provides highly detailed information about the Florida Budget process and contents of agency budget requests and final appropriations numbers.

Two nationally renowned economists made presentations about Florida's short- and long-term unemployment and housing forecasts. Both agreed that unemployment numbers will actually get worse in 2011 before slowly improving. Apparently, it looks like the jobless rate will hit 11-12% later this year and then adjust to 8% by 2014. Many in audience seemed shocked to see that only four years ago, the unemployment rate in Florida was below 4% and it is not expected to return to that level until far into this decade.

Last on the agenda was the cost of **Health Care Reform**, if passed. Side-by-side comparisons of the House and Senate bills were presented and Senators asked a number of questions, displaying their concerns over the additional \$100M it is expected to cost the state to implement health care reform over the next four years.

Homeless Hate Crime Legislation

Legislation sponsored by Rep. Porth (HB 11) and Sen. Ring (SB 506) that aims to include homeless status into Florida's hate crimes statute passed committees during the last two weeks. More specifically, HB 11 was considered in the House Public Safety & Domestic Security Committee on January 12th and the House Policy Council on January 21st, passing each by a 13-0 and 14-1 vote, respectively. In the Senate, the Criminal Justice Committee also unanimously passed SB 506 on January 13th.

If enacted into law, both bills would reclassify upwards the penalties for the commission of certain criminal offenses, if the offense was committed against a person because of the individual's "homeless status." The term "homeless" is defined as an individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, or has a primary nighttime residence that is:

- A supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations; or
- A public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

Senate Bill 506 next moves to the Senate Judiciary Committee. House Bill 11 now resides in the Criminal and Civil Justice Policy Council, its last committee of reference before heading to the House Floor.

Seminole Gaming Compact Rejected

It took about 8 minutes for the House Select Committee on Seminole Indian Compact Review to vote down the second gaming compact Governor Crist negotiated with the Seminole Tribe of Florida. The January 14th meeting began with the Committee taking up PCB (proposed committee bill) SICR 10-01, which Rep. Galvano, the Committee's Chairman, explained as containing all the relevant provisions of the negotiated compact. He then requested that committee members vote against the bill. Members did so, unanimously. In his remarks, Rep. Galvano stated the House was not drawing a line in the sand, but that the compact the Governor negotiated was not right for the state.

The Select Committee then took up and unanimously passed a second PCB (SCIR 10-02) which makes effective on July 1 2010 the pari-mutuel industry changes the Legislature enacted during the 2009 Regular Session, including the tax rate for Florida's 28 pari-mutuel facilities. The Legislature had tied the effective date of these pari-mutuel changes to the ratification of a new gaming compact. The Select Committee's action puts the effective date of the changes on its own track.

Florida Jobs Summit

Spearheaded by Senate President-designate, Senator Mike Haridopolos, and House Speaker-designate, Rep. Dean Cannon, a Florida Jobs Summit was held in Orlando on January 15th. The summit, which brought together representatives of government, business, industry, environment, labor, and other interested organizations, sought to develop ideas the Legislature could pursue to stimulate job creation in Florida. With Florida's jobless rate at 11.8% as of December, about 350 attendees participated in breakout sessions which included:

- Promoting Job Creation: Eliminating Barriers and Building Incentives;
- Leveraging Existing Resources to Create Sustainable Jobs
- Immediate Opportunities to Grow New Sectors
- Strengthening Florida's Traditional Economic Pillars
- Smart Growth: Balancing Florida's Interests; and
- Getting the Workforce Ready to Work.

Among the many ideas discussed by participants, some included:

- Leveraging state investment with private investments to fund and build Florida's needed infrastructure;
- Increasing Florida's competitiveness for federal dollars;
- Growing the increasing logistics (distribution) industry;

- Expanding agricultural production and distribution;
- Increasing the movement of cargo through Florida's ports;
- Incentivizing commercial development and other construction;
- Assisting small businesses with lending needs to make capital available;
- Addressing barriers to creating jobs, including ensuring that government regulations are reasonable and not duplicative;
- Revising Florida's corporate tax, and the state's unemployment tax;
- Employing economic development and comprehensive planning strategies that are balanced and sustainable for creating jobs, preserving the environment, and preserving Florida's cultural heritage and uniqueness;
- Diversifying Florida's industries and creating more opportunities for business to business collaboration (with an aim at less dependence on government in hard economic times); and
- Pursuing revenue potential from energy exploration off Florida's Gulf Coast.

It is expected some of these ideas may be turned into legislation during the 2010 Regular Session.