

ASSOCIATED INDUSTRIES OF FLORIDA
**LEGISLATIVE
DAILY BRIEF**



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WORKERS' COMPENSATION

In an overabundance of fairness, Chairman *Jack Latvala (R-Palm Harbor)* allowed testimony Monday from a group of injured workers bused from around the state to delay work on the workers compensation reform bill, SB 1188. Under consideration was a Proposed Committee Substitute (PCS) to the bill, providing for a full and complete reform of the system. Despite regular pleas from Chairman Latvala that testimony be directed toward specific parts of the bill, the workers took more than an hour making general complaints about the present system. Sen. Latvala pointed out to several that the bill aims to correct some of their complaints, such as speeding the resolution of claims.

The unions and groups such as Florida Workers' Advocates do the injured workers a great disservice with performances like today's. Many, if not all, clearly had no idea what was in the PCS to SB 1188, what the committee was working on or what the larger problems were with the system. These injured workers who, with great discomfort and much personal anxiety, traveled to Tallahassee to testify, were fed half-truths and outright lies about the work of the committee. Their attorneys were getting kicked out of the system, their benefits were going to be slashed, they were told. It was sad to see these people being used for the political ends of their leadership. Chairman Latvala and the committee are to be commended for their patience and genuine concern with the personal status of many of these workers.

Chairman Latvala, who has worked diligently to develop a bill to resolve the two problems he cited: high premiums and low benefits, said the bill will be considered again before the committee next week. That meeting's focus will be testimony on the bill and amendments, and in the meantime, Sen. Latvala said, he will try to reduce 42 pending amendments to the PCS to four or five central issues, such as removal of exemptions for construction workers.

AIF is supporting reforms to the system that will provide expedited care for the injured employees and increase benefits to the injured employees. It's simple, eliminate the outrageous hourly fees attorneys are generating on their own behalf (and not the injured employee's) close the construction exemptions under current law that are a virtual welcome mat for fraud. AIF supports the PCS to SB 1188 and the work of Chairman Latvala.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

AIF supports efforts to keep the Florida Marlins baseball club in Florida. Currently there are two pieces of legislation to facilitate keeping the Marlins in Florida and the economic benefits that such a professional sports operation provides.

The first piece of legislation is an extension of the existing parking surcharges in the City of Miami. The second piece is a rebate of sales taxes generated by the operation of a new ballpark.

HB 1189 by *Rep. Mario Diaz – Balart (R-Miami)* and SB 2168 by *Sen. Alex Villalobos (R-Miami)* provide for a “brownfields” based rebate of sales taxes to contribute to the construction of the facility.

The rebate would be revenue neutral and would be based on rebating back all of the sales tax in excess of what the Marlins generated in the year 2000.

The rebate dollars would be used for the construction of the facility.

The rebate is based on sound public policy, promoting an economic engine that is a professional sports team, rehabilitating a “brownfield” (land of reduced value and usage because of environmental damage) and promoting the clean up of the Miami River (where the new ball park will be located). HB 1189 has been passed by the both the House Committee on Natural Resources and Environmental Protection and the Committee on Fiscal Policy and Resources. The Senate bill, SB 2168, has been approved by the Senate Committee on Comprehensive Planning, Local and Military Affairs.

The state of Florida has a long and established policy of providing sales tax rebates for the promotion and retention of professional sports franchises. The Florida Marlins should be no different. With the cooperation of the local government of Miami, it’s local legislative delegation and the support of Florida’s employers in the area, AIF supports legislation providing for an extension of the existing parking surcharges in the City of Miami and the sales tax rebate.

OTHER ISSUES

HB 159 by *Rep. Marco Rubio (R-Miami)*, which requires HMO treatment plans receive a final determination from a Florida-based doctor, is on the Special Order Calendar, but the House did not get to it today...the Senate companion, SB 1568 by *Sen. Jim Sebesta (R-St. Petersburg)* was amended in the Senate Banking & Insurance Committee today, but was not brought to a final vote by the committee...Speaker Feeney said the Senate has a lot of money “tucked away” in special projects for individual Senators, so he has not given hope for some tax relief this year...the Senate Appropriations Committee will be taking up CS SB 1202 by *Sen. Ginny Brown-Waite (R-Brooksville)* to reform Nursing Home Care on Wednesday...

This report was prepared by Curt Leonard, Manager – Governmental Affairs at Associated Industries of Florida (AIF) and Jere Moore, AIF Reporter. Please send your comments or suggestions to us at aif@aif.com or call the Governmental Affairs department at (850)224-7173.

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