

ASSOCIATED INDUSTRIES OF FLORIDA
**LEGISLATIVE
DAILY BRIEF**



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FROM APRIL 8 2003

TRANSPORTATION

Today, the Senate Transportation Committee heard SB 2578, sponsored by Senator Jim Sebesta (R-St. Petersburg), which is known as the Secure Airports for Florida Act.

This bill creates the Secure Airports for Florida's Economy (SAFE) Council consisting of the directors, or their designees, of 19 commercial service airports; the secretaries, or their designees, of the departments of Community Affairs and Transportation; and the director of the Office of Tourism, Trade, and Economic Development.

The SAFE Council must develop a five-year SAFE master plan defining goals and objectives needed to develop airport facilities and an inter-modal transportation system. The bill requires the SAFE Council to promulgate rules for evaluating projects that may be funded under this act. The council must develop a list of projects with recommended funding levels for general aviation airports and council member airports.

This bill passed through the committee with a favorable vote.

Airports are economic engines for business growth in Florida. AIF supports this bill because it will lead to aviation facilities that are more efficient, comprehensive and safe.

HEALTH CARE

The Senate Health, Aging and Long-Term Care Committee heard SB 2020, by Senator Durell Peaden (R-Pensacola), regarding health-flex plans.

Last year the Florida Legislature created the Health Flex Plan pilot program. The goal of the program is to improve the affordability and availability of health-care coverage for Floridians who are unable to obtain health coverage. It does so by encouraging the development of these special plans that are cost-effective alternative approaches to traditional health insurance. Enrollment in a health-flex plan is limited to Florida residents who are under 65 years of age and have a family income equal to or less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

A health-flex plan may be developed and implemented by health insurers, HMOs, organizations sponsored by health-care providers, local governments, health-care districts, or other community-based organizations. Health-flex plans are freed of a number of the restrictions placed on regular health insurance policies; one may, for example, limit or exclude benefits that are otherwise required by law for insurers offering coverage in Florida but must still provide basic and preventative health-care services. All health-flex plans must have the approval of the Agency for Health Care Administration and Florida's Department of Insurance.

Under SB 2020, a health flex plan is made available to an enrollee “who purchases the coverage directly from the plan or through a small business purchasing arrangement sponsored by a local government.” The bill allows a limited term of coverage. Moreover, it requires that applicants must be uninsured for the previous 12 months and not eligible for coverage through a public health care program, such as Medicare, Medicaid, or KidCare. This bill will extend the health flex pilot program an additional four years, amending the termination date to July 1, 2008.

The committee unanimously passed the bill.

AIF supports legislation, such as SB 2020, that accords health insurers and managed care organizations an opportunity to provide low cost, flexible insurance plans to needy, uninsured Floridians.

TAXATION

Today, the House of Representatives passed HB 1793, sponsored by Representative Bruce Kyle (R-Ft. Myers) relating to excise taxes on documents.

This bill eliminates distributions to various trust funds of proceeds from the excise tax on documents and redirects proceeds to the general revenue fund. It revises the use of tax proceeds to support the Florida Affordable Housing Guarantee Program.

Concerns were voiced about the impact of this bill on the affordable housing program and the ability to continue funding this program from general revenue in years to come. The bill ultimately passed as a shift in these monies from trust funds to general revenue serves as an alternative to new taxes.

Trust funds are necessary for continuity and support of important state projects and programs, such as affordable housing. Failure to fully fund these projects and programs has a negative effect on Florida’s economy. A raid on trust funds constitutes a breach of trust and an implicit tax increase. When used for general revenue purposes, the burden of taxation falls unfairly on Florida’s business community. Therefore, AIF opposes bills like HB 1793 that redirect money from trust funds to general revenue.

GENERAL APPROPRIATIONS ACT

The House and Senate passed out their respective budgets for fiscal year 2003-2004, thereby setting the stage for appointment of a House-Senate conference committee that will negotiate the final budget deal. Reaching a comprehensive budget accord will require some time, because of significant differences in the two spending plans; enough time remains, however, to get the job done, if leadership squabbles do not unnecessarily complicate and delay the task at hand.

TOMORROW'S CALENDAR

Tomorrow is an important day for legislation affecting the business community. The Senate Judiciary Committee will take up seven different medical malpractice bills and a number of proposed committee substitutes.

Moreover, major workers' compensation bills will be heard in the House Insurance Committee and, for the first time, in the Senate Banking and Insurance Committee.

Please go to <http://www.aif.com/taxmedia.htm> to view a video clip regarding worker' compensation.

Please go to <http://fbnnet.com/2003-Articles/SpnoticeWC.htm> to view a special notice regarding: a workers' compensation vote in House Insurance Committee

Please go to <http://fbnnet.com/2003issues/wc/ASummaryReview.htm> to view the AIF Workers' Compensation Coalition summary.

AIF intends to testify at these critical committee meetings in support of meaningful reforms of the workers' compensation and medical malpractice systems. Watch for tomorrow's detailed report.

Please send your comments or suggestions to us at aif@aif.com or call the Governmental Affairs department at (850)224-7173.

- For more information on all of the important legislative information concerning the business community, go to our "members only" Florida Business Network web site at <http://fbnnet.com>
- Send us your E-mail address and we will begin to send this report to you automatically via E-mail.