

ASSOCIATED INDUSTRIES OF FLORIDA
**LEGISLATIVE
WEEKLY UPDATE**



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FROM THE WEEK OF MAY 12-16, 2003

It has been a busy week for the members of the Florida Legislature as they attempt to come to an agreement on the state budget, along with a number of other high-profile issues, including the following AIF bills of interest.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION

On Tuesday, the House introduced HB 25A, which is very similar to HB 1837, the workers' compensation bill that was supported by the business community and passed by the House during the regular session. This special session bill is sponsored by Representative Dudley Goodlette (R-Naples) and co-sponsored by Representatives Bob Allen (R-Merritt Island), Kim Berfield (R-Clearwater), Don Brown (R-DeFuniak Springs), Donna Clarke (R-Sarasota), Mike Davis (R-Naples), Dennis Ross (R-Lakeland), and Juan Zapata (R-Miami).

The Republican leadership, in particular, did a great job of ensuring that House members stayed the course on the important workers' compensation issue. On Thursday HB 25A was read a second time, several amendments were adopted, and the bill was ordered engrossed. Thereupon, Governor Jeb Bush expanded the special session agenda to include workers' compensation reform in the call, thereby allowing the take up the issue with procedural formality of a two-thirds vote.

HB 25A remains on third reading in the House.

Late on Friday, Senators Charlie Clary (R-Destin), JD Alexander (R-Winter Haven), and Jeff Atwater (R-Palm Beach Gardens) introduced SB 50A, which is identical to HB 25A as engrossed. This action suggests that Senate President Jim King (R-Jacksonville) is also on board with the House version of reform. Other senators, however, still want to muddy the water and cause the bills to fail. At this point in the special session, any new amendments would be devastating for the timely completion of workers' compensation reform.

AIF supports legislation that controls medical expenses, reduces litigation, and corrects inefficiencies in the workers' compensation system. Above all, AIF supports remedial legislation that will provide fairer benefits to injured workers and lower costs to employers.

*It is critical that AIF members contact your state senators to urge them to pass SB 50A, the Senate counterpart of HB 25A, **without any amendments**. HB 25A and SB 50A represents the last best chance to pass meaningful reform of the workers' compensation system during this special session.*

CIVIL RIGHTS

SB 46A by Senators Alex Villalobos (R-Miami), Lesley Miller Jr. (D-Tampa), Rod Smith (D-Gainesville), and Alex Diaz de la Portilla (R-Miami) grants authority to the attorney general to initiate, upon reasonable cause, a civil action for damages against any group or person that allegedly practices discrimination. In its present form the bill contains certain provisions that were requested by AIF and others in the business community in order to make the bill treat private citizens more fairly. It passed the Senate Judiciary Committee and was placed on the Senate second order calendar.

HB 143A, sponsored by Representatives Jeff Kottkamp (R-Cape Coral) and Juan Zapata (R-Miami), is the House companion measure to SB 46A. Today, on special reading, Representatives Anne Gannon (D-Delray Beach) and Nan Rich (D-Sunrise) attempted to expand the bill to also prohibit pregnancy discrimination. (Similar language was added to House and Senate versions of the civil rights bill in the regular session.) The Gannon-Rich amendment was defeated. After a series of questions and answers that clarified legislative intent, the House waived the rules and immediately passed the bill on third reading.

AIF has no present objection to the pending civil rights bills as written.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE: PERSONAL INJURY PROTECTION REFORM

Two bills addressing motor-vehicle insurance reform are presently under consideration in the special session: HB 27A, sponsored by Representatives Dudley Goodlette (R-Naples), Kim Berfield (R-Clearwater), Don Brown (R-DeFuniak Springs), Donna Clarke (R-Sarasota), and Mike Davis (R-Naples); and SB 32A, sponsored by Senator JD Alexander (R-Winter Haven).

SB 32A passed through the Senate Banking and Insurance Committee on Thursday. HB 27A was read a second time on the House floor, amendments were adopted, and the bill was ordered engrossed.

AIF supports reform of Florida's no-fault law to return stability to the automobile insurance market.

CHARTER SCHOOLS

HB 55A, sponsored by Representative Dennis Baxley (R-Ocala), and SB 38A, by Senator Daniel Webster (R-Winter Garden) have been introduced to address the establishment and operation of charter schools. As drafted, the House and Senate bills are identical.

Having passed the Senate Education Committee, SB 38A was placed on the Senate second reading calendar. The companion measure, HB 55A, awaits action on the House third reading calendar.

AIF supports the expansion and development of charter schools in Florida. Charter schools are a cost-efficient and educationally effective way to improve the quality of education in this state.

SMOKE-FREE WORKPLACE

Having failed to pass HB 1757 during regular session, Representative Manuel Prieguez (R-Miami), has re-introduced the Florida Clean Indoor Air Act as HB 63A. The purpose of this legislation is to implement the anti-smoking initiative contained in Article 10 of the State Constitution. The provisions in HB 63A are similar to ones that were found in HB 1757.

HB 63A has been placed on the House special order calendar where it awaits further action. The Senate counterpart, SB 44A by Senator Alex Diaz de la Portilla (R-Miami), has been referred to the Senate Regulated Industries Committee.

AIF supports legislation that clarifies the legal obligation of employers to comply with the “no smoking” amendment to the State Constitution.

- 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.