

ASSOCIATED INDUSTRIES OF FLORIDA  
**LEGISLATIVE  
INTERIM BRIEF**



P.O. BOX 784 • Tallahassee, FL 32302-0784 • Phone: (850) 224-7173 • Fax: (850) 224-6532 • Internet: <http://aif.com> • [fbnnet.com](http://fbnnet.com)

---

**WEEKLY INTERIM LEGISLATIVE BRIEF FROM OCTOBER 1, 2003**

The long journey to the 2004 Legislative Session began on Tuesday with a small step — in the form of House interim committee meetings. While little happened that was of interest to the business community on the first day of meetings, Wednesday brought a full schedule with a unifying theme: health care.

First on the agenda was the House Committee on Health Care's hearing on the implementation of the patient safety and physician-discipline provisions of the medical malpractice legislation adopted in August.

A lengthy portion of the meeting was spent on problems with the physician-profile Web site. Representative Susan Bucher (D-West Palm Beach) brought to light the profile of a particular physician who was listed as being in good standing although he had been convicted of a felony many months ago. Dr. Rafael Miguel, a practicing physician who chairs the credential committee of the Board of Medicine, echoed the committee members' dissatisfaction, noting that his own profile was out of date.

John Agwunobi, secretary of the Department of Health, and his staff reaffirmed their commitment to upgrading the Web site to make it easier to access, while improving the accuracy and the quality of the information it provides. The on-line practitioner profile directory holds great potential for facilitating intelligent decision-making by health-care consumers. Chairman Frank Farkas (R-St. Petersburg) promised that his committee will closely watch the development and improvement of the Web site.

The afternoon featured the inaugural meeting of the Select Committee on Affordable Health Care for Floridians, which began with a pep talk by House Speaker Johnnie Byrd (R-Plant City). Speaker Byrd urged the committee members to be good listeners because "the pinch of rising health costs is something we cannot ignore."

Greg Scandlen, the director of the Center for Consumer Driven Health Care, followed with an overview of 100 years of market distortions in health care that he believes have created the crisis conditions we now face. Scandlen prescribes giving consumers greater authority over how they spend their health-care dollars. He particularly criticized the third-party payer system that insulates patients from the cost of their health-care choices, comparing it to business travelers who never ask about the cost of the hotel room if their employer is paying for it.

In direct contrast to Scandlen the next speaker, Mila Koffman, an assistant research professor with Georgetown University's Health Policy Institute, advocated for small-business tax credits and more public funding. Koffman says she favors universal access, a goal that Representative Farkas believes Florida has achieved; our problem, he says, is a lack of universal payments to cover unreimbursed charity care provided in a number of settings, most frequently emergency rooms.

The third and final speaker was Cliff Thaell, a Leon County commissioner who also serves as president-elect of the Florida Association of Counties. Thaell asked for a bestowal of legislative authority for small and medium-sized counties to fund indigent care by enacting special taxes via an extraordinary vote of the county commission; a voter referendum is now required to enact such a tax.

From the reaction of the committee members, new taxes and more government spending are unlikely to engender much enthusiasm as the process continues. At the same time, it seems that there is no foregone conclusion that the select committee is expected to rubber stamp. Instead, these select committee meetings will give employers a meaningful opportunity to give their input on solutions that will help them.

In January the select committee will release its final report, along with recommended legislation. The final report of Governor's Task Force on Access to Affordable Health Insurance is due by February 15, 2004. While the two groups share some themes and issues, the select committee will focus on expanding the network of employer-provided insurance, while the governor's task force will delve into the broader problem of the uninsured and may address Medicaid or other programs for those who lack insurance regardless of whether or not they are employed.

Representative Farkas, who also serves as select committee chairman, urged the select committee members to attend their group's sessions as well as meetings of the governor's task force.

**Please send your comments or suggestions to us at [aif@aif.com](mailto: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.