

ASSOCIATED INDUSTRIES OF FLORIDA

LEGISLATIVE DAILY BRIEF



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The 2007 session began today with the traditional pomp and circumstance that has become the tradition over the years. Legislators' desks were brimming with flower arrangements and you could sense the excitement in both chambers. With a new Governor and Cabinet as well as 44 new legislators, there were several new faces around the capitol, all excited to get started on the 60-day session.

Governor Charlie Crist (R) delivered his first State of the State address highlighting many of the campaign promises that got him elected to office. The central theme, as expected, was property tax reform, an issue that has dominated the conversation both in Tallahassee and throughout Florida. Governor Crist called for a referendum this year on several property tax reform measures aimed at lowering or even doing away with property taxes. Crist's speech also called for or higher teacher salaries, a reduction in greenhouse gases and paper trails in elections, not your average conservative Republican issues. The Governor's populist ideals have made him extremely popular with Floridians. On the economic development front, we were happy to hear that Governor Crist has called for \$75 million in tax credits to enhance film making in Florida and for incentives for the private space industry to retain Florida's preeminence in this field.

Both the incoming House Speaker and Senate President also addressed their respective chambers. Speaker Marco Rubio (R-Miami) called for bold ideas and a fair exchange of ideas while Senate President Ken Pruitt (R-Port St. Lucie) surprised his colleagues including Speaker Rubio by unveiling a "Rubio in 2008" poster in reference to the upcoming Presidential election.

In addition, the newest member of the House of Representatives, Representative Clay Ford (R-Gulf Breeze) was sworn-in today. Representative Ford was victorious in the recent election to replace Representative Holly Benson.

Please go to http://www.flgov.com/2007_sos to read the Governor's State of the State Address

Legal Reform

The business community already finds itself gearing-up for a battle to defend the historic repeal of Joint and Several Liability, which was passed during the 2006 session. Representative Mitch Needelman (R-Melbourne) and Senator Jeremy Ring (D-Margate) have both filed bills (HB 733 and SB 1558) that would undo the repeal of this unfair legal doctrine. Known as the “Fabre Fix” the intent of this legislation is to limit the apportionment of fault to only the parties named in the civil proceeding. This is problematic because instead of naming all the parties involved in a case it would allow plaintiff attorneys to selectively chose which parties to go after – typically those with the deepest pockets. The House Constitution and Civil Law committee will hear HB 733 at 9:00 am on Wednesday, March 7th. Although, it is unlikely that HB 733 and SB 1558 will move through the legislative process AIF will continue to work towards defeating them.

AIF opposes HB 733 and its attempt to weaken or undo the repeal of Joint and Several Liability. We encourage all AIF members to oppose this bad bill and communicate with all legislators on the dangers of this legislation.

Workforce Development

The House 21st Century Competitiveness Committee heard testimony on career education issues today. The Manufactures Association of Florida gave a power point presentation outlining what Tropicana Workforce has done to show what competencies are expected for various levels of employment. What the manufacturing workforce needs was outlined for the members. They said that the Choice model for career academies from Okaloosa County has been extremely successful. The Department of Education gave a brief presentation on the Workforce Education System. Again the Choice Model from Okaloosa County received an excellent recommendation from the Department of Education (DOE). Other school districts are encouraged to model their workforce education after the Choice structure. Only two members had comments or questions. Chairman David Simmons (R-Altamonte Springs) asked Ms. Lucy Hadi from DOE if she believed the A++ law requires the districts to adopt the Choice Plan and Career Academies. Her answer was that it was only optional. Representative Stephen Precourt (R-Winter Garden) provided a strong endorsement of the Choice plan.

Also relating to Workforce Development was the passage of HB 343 Relating to the Florida Work Experience Program by Representative Aaron Bean (R-Fernandina Beach). The bill expands eligibility for the Florida Work Experience Program (FWEP) to include career-technical students attending community college or district operated career centers. Representative Bean presented the bill and informed the committee that last year’s budget included over \$12.5 million in needs based post secondary funding and none of those dollars was used towards career-technical/vocational students. The expansion of vocational students will add an additional \$11.9 million to the bill. HB 343 was unanimously passed and will be heard next by the House Schools and Learning Council.

Florida's workforce must meet the demands of our state's employers. Therefore, AIF supports legislation that would increase participation and funding for the Florida Work Experience Program. Allowing students to gain valuable, real-world experience in their field of study is sound public policy.

Energy

Both the Governor and Speaker of the House included statements on Florida's energy policy in their speeches today. The Governor in his State of the State Address proposed \$70 million dollars to foster the development of alternative energy fuels including bio-diesel and ethanol. He went on to state that there is no reason why Florida should not lead the nation in the production of alternative energy. Speaker Marco Rubio, similarly, called for Florida to become the "Silicon Valley" of alternative energy since recent scientific advances have begun to make this industry profitable.

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.