



WEEKLY LEGISLATIVE UPDATE FROM MARCH 14, 2008

The big issue for the business community this week was the re-emergence of the “guns in the workplace” bill. HB 503 Relating to the Preservation and Protection of the Right to Keep and Bear Arms in Motor Vehicles Act of 2008 by Representative Greg Evers (R-Milton) was passed on Wednesday, March 12th by the House Environment & Natural Resources Council. The bill is now ready to be considered on the floor of the House. HB 503 provides that no public or private entity may prohibit any customer, employee or invitee from possessing any legally owned firearm locked inside, or locked to, a private motor vehicle in a parking lot if the person is lawfully in such area. The bill treats employees differently than customers or other invitees. Employees are only permitted to bring properly secured firearms to the employer’s parking lot if they possess a valid permit to carry a concealed weapon issued by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

Associated Industries of Florida continues to oppose this legislation. Employers should be allowed to establish these types of policies and exert their rights as property owners. Maintaining a safe work environment is paramount for the longevity of any employer in Florida.

Other issues of critical importance to the business community that are covered in this week’s report include: energy legislation, space, and workforce issues. Next week will be a short week for the House and Senate since they will not be meeting on Friday in observance of the religious holidays.

Guns in the Workplace

On Wednesday, March 12th the House Environment and Natural Resources Council considered HB 503 relating to what has become known as "guns in the workplace". The bill sponsor, Representative Greg Evers (R-Milton) explained that the bill's goal is to allow individuals to "protect themselves while going to and from work." However, the bill has several provisions that are of concern to the business community. These include creating the possibility of a special protected class of workers who maintain concealed weapon permits, as well as awards of attorney fees.

Although the version of the bill that passed contains some efforts to make the bill more palatable, many concerns with the bill remain. Therefore, at this time AIF remains opposed to this bill. The bill undermines the doctrine of employment at will and threatens employers' ability to protect their property rights, employees and customers. AIF will continue to work on this bill with Representative Evers and other House leaders throughout the session and we will continue the fight to protect the rights of Florida’s business owners.

After passing its only committee of reference, HB 503 will now be considered on the floor of the House of Representatives.

AIF opposes legislation that prohibits businesses from enforcing or maintaining policies that ban guns in the workplace. Employers should be allowed to establish these types of policies and exert their rights as property owners. Maintaining a safe work environment is paramount for the longevity of any employer in Florida.

Insurance

On Thursday, March 13th HB 983 Relating to Windstorm Insurance Coverage by Representative Dennis Ross (R-Lakeland) was unanimously passed by the House Insurance Committee. The bill creates a new program for windstorm insurance coverage to provide windstorm coverage for non-commercial residential property. The creation of this program does not preclude private insurers from providing windstorm coverage for non-commercial residential property as they do under current law.

HB 983 will now be considered by the House Jobs & Entrepreneurship Council.

An analysis as to potential deficits and hurricane taxes to fund the deficits has not been performed. AIF will not take a position on the bill until further funding information is available.

On Friday, March 14th the House Insurance Committee held a workshop on Pre- and Post-Event Catastrophe Financing, Assessments and Deficit Funding by the Citizens Property Insurance Corporation, and the Florida Hurricane Catastrophe Fund. All presenters were put under oath in order to - as Chairman Don Brown (R-Defuniak Springs) stated - ensure that the evidence and statements offered were as factual as possible. The bulk of the meeting was devoted to hearing testimony from high-ranking executives from Citizens Property Insurance Corporation including their CFO, General Counsel, and top financial advisors.

Chairman Brown did a great job of presiding over a fair and balanced proceeding and the team from Citizens was commended by members of the Committee for the willingness to answer very tough questions in a fair and factual manner. Representatives from Citizens were asked about the need for adequate property insurance rates and several times the answer from Citizens was that; in fact, the current rates being charged to policyholders by Citizens are not what they should be. Committee members drove home the point that Florida would be facing an unprecedented level of assessments or hurricane taxes should the Cat Fund and Citizens run out of funds to pay for hurricane damages. Citizens' top financial advisor agreed with committee members that it would be very difficult, given the status of current financial markets, to sell the bonds necessary (upwards of \$28 billion dollars) to pay off losses from a major storm.

It is AIF's understanding that these workshops will continue to take place and that representatives from the state's Office of Insurance Regulation will be the presenters at the next meeting.

On a separate note, this week the Co-Chairs of the Senate Select Committee on Property Insurance Accountability released this letter and memorandum regarding the outcome of the Committee's proceedings, which placed representatives from the private insurance carriers under oath as well. It is important to note that the findings of the Committee were never voted on, and as such are not considered an official report from the Committee.

Taxation

The House Economic Development Committee unanimously approved HB 111 Relating to Hurricane Preparedness by Representative Peter Nehr (R-Tarpon Springs) on Thursday, March 13th. The bill provides a sales tax holiday for items needed to prepare for hurricane season. The sales tax holiday will coincide with the opening day of hurricane season, June 1, 2008 and ends on June 12, 2008. There is a specific list of items that are eligible for the sales tax holiday. Some examples include batteries; self-powered light sources selling for \$20 or less; portable radios under \$75; tarpaulins or other flexible waterproof sheeting selling for \$50 or less; gas or diesel fuel tank selling for \$25 or less; and non-electric food storage coolers selling for \$30 or less.

HB 111 will now be considered by the House Economic Expansion and Infrastructure Council.

AIF supports the hurricane preparedness sales tax holiday. It is important for businesses and employees to be ready for hurricanes. Being prepared for these natural disasters will lower the amount of time a business may be closed or an employee to be away from work.

Education & Workforce Development

Four House Education committees met on Tuesday, March 11th, three of which considered legislation that aligns with AIF's session priorities for 2008.

The House Postsecondary Education Committee met and work-shopped two drafts of proposed council bills on remedial education reform and dual enrollment reform.

Representative Clay Ford (R-Pensacola) presented draft language creating the Remedial Reform Pilot program with the goal of reducing the need for and cost of remedial education for recent high school graduates. On the issue of remedial education reform the committee cited rising numbers of students requiring remedial education when entering college (55% of all students needed some remediation, mostly in math, but often in multiple areas). The pilot program will be administered by the Department of Education (DOE), who will select no more than four collaborative efforts between one or more school districts and community colleges by October, 2008.

AIF supports mechanisms to align the education delivered in K-12 with the preparation required for higher education. Florida's business community needs employees who can, at a minimum, do three things: write cogently, think critically, and speak articulately. Students must also be literate in technology and multiculturalism in order to compete in a global economy.

Citing the shortened time needed for a college degree and broadened scope of curriculum available to students through accelerated college credit programs such as Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and Dual Enrollment, the Postsecondary Education Committee also presented draft language for Dual enrollment reform on Tuesday, March 11th.

AIF supports increased educational opportunities for students that expand access to rigor in high school, which will prepare students for the workplace AND higher education.

The House K-12 Committee unanimously passed HB 207 Relating to Educator Certification by Representative Maria Sachs (D-Delray Beach) on Tuesday, March 11th, which aims to broaden the number of foreign languages available in Florida's schools by changing the way teachers can be certified to teach a foreign language. As originally drafted, the bill had a significant fiscal impact.

Additionally, the State Board of Education recently adopted a rule, which addressed this issue. For these reasons, the bill was amended to remove the fiscal impact and build on the recently passed State Board of Education rule.

HB 207 will now be considered by the House Schools & Learning Council.

AIF supports students having access to classes in modern languages that are used around the world for commerce. Access to these languages will give our students the foundation they need to compete in the global workforce, thus ensuring that Florida's businesses can compete with their counterparts across the world.

The House 21st Century Competitiveness Committee considered a proposed council bill relating to Class Size Reduction Implementation Flexibility on Tuesday, March 11th. The proposed bill amends 1003.03, Florida Statutes; the section of law that implements the constitutional amendment lowering class size. The bill preserves the integrity and purpose of the amendment, while providing a detailed mechanism for flexibility. The bill contains clauses restating the Florida Supreme Court's finding that the Constitution gives latitude to the Legislature to design ways to meet the class size goals, and finding that disruptions to learning in the middle of a school year are educationally unsound and distressing.

The bill also changes accountability and enforcement for class size compliance. AIF supports added flexibility in achieving the class size limits detailed in the Constitution.

AIF looks forward to working with all the partners reviewing the issue of Class Size in order to find the most effective way to meet the intent of the amendment, address the escalating costs of compliance, and focus remaining capital outlay funds where they are most needed.

The Senate Education K-12 Committee considered two bills on Wednesday, March 12th that align with AIF's education priorities:

- SB 1906 Relating to Pre-K through 12 Education by Senator Don Gaetz (R-Niceville) would create a pilot program for high school students enrolled in rigorous career academies to earn alternative credit in specific math and science courses, such as Integrated Math 1 and 2, Algebra 1a and 1b, Algebra 1, Geometry, and Biology. SB 1906 was unanimously passed by the committee and will now be considered by the Senate Education Pre-K – 12 Appropriations Committee.
- SB 1908 Relating to Pre-K through 12 Education by Senator Don Gaetz (R-Niceville) provides criteria to be used for school grade calculation in addition to the FCAT. Beginning with the 2009-10 school year, half of the school grade will be based on the FCAT and the other half will be based on performance data in College Board Advanced Placement courses, International Baccalaureate courses, dual enrollment courses, post-secondary readiness as measured by the SAT, ACT or the common placement test, and achievement of industry certification in career courses. An amendment offered by Senator Ted Deutch (D-Delray) will also allow standardized statewide end-of-course exams to be counted toward high school grades. The bill was supported by Florida Education Commissioner Eric Smith and the Foundation for Florida's Future.

AIF supports legislation that will improve Florida's nationally recognized system of school accountability, expand access to rigorous courses, and strengthen the linkages between industry and career education. Businesses in Florida are counting on the public school system to produce graduates who can read, write, and communicate effectively and these two bills should assist in that endeavor.

The Senate Higher Education Appropriations Committee unanimously passed the proposed joint resolution SB 2308 Relating to State Cabinet/Education by Senator Lisa Carlton (R-Osprey) on Thursday, March 13th. The bill would amend the Constitution to restore education governance to an elected Commissioner of Education, an elected State Board of Education (made of up Florida's cabinet), and revises the authority of the Board of Governors to administer the State University System. This proposed Constitutional amendment would have to be approved by voters in the November election.

The committee adopted amendments that would require the elected commissioner of education to hold an earned bachelors degree. The bill will now head to the Senate floor for a vote.

AIF will continue to monitor this very important change in education policy. Education governance is an issue that has a direct impact on the quality of our students, their academic success, and the quality of our future workforce.

Infrastructure

The Senate Transportation Committee heard and passed the first transportation package of the Session on Tuesday, March 11th. SB 1978 Relating to Department of Transportation by Senator Carey Baker (R-Eustis) does a number of good things for both those who use the roads and those that work with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) on maintaining roads.

Most of the committee's attention focused on new options that would be developed for paying tolls, giving customers choices between SunPass and video billing, which is based on reading a license tag. A number of variations would be developed to make it more convenient for users. It also allows for variable toll rates that would encourage the development of managed lanes also known as HOT lanes. These lanes would be for high occupancy vehicles, and for a variable rate depending on the traffic load at a given time of day, would allow vehicles willing to pay more to move into the faster less congested lanes. For a service provider or in many other business applications, the extra charge could be well worth getting where you need to be on time.

SB 1978 will now be considered by the Senate Finance and Tax Committee.

AIF supports legislation that has the potential to alleviate the congestion in our state's highways. Innovative solutions such as HOT lanes that allow businesses to "pay to play" in order to save valuable time should be considered by the legislature.

The House Conservation & State Lands Committee held a workshop on Wednesday, March 12th to discuss proposed committee bill ENRC 09, the Florida Forever Successor Program. Florida Forever was created by the Florida Legislature in 2001 and is an acquisition program designed to purchase lands for the preservation of the state's natural resources. Florida Forever is scheduled to end in 2009; therefore, the Legislature will decide this year whether or not to continue the program as is or make changes.

Reenacting a successor program to Florida Forever is important to the business community because Florida's natural beauty is a strong selling point for businesses looking to relocate to our state. The millions of acres of public land represent an opportunity for growth in our economy through expanded recreational use and eco-tourism.

AIF and the Florida Coalition for Responsible Preservation of Public Land support adding additional uses of public lands that would include alternative water supply programs, expands the use of mitigation programs for imperiled species, allows for utility infrastructure access to public lands, and emphasizes public access to water for outdoor recreational opportunities.

On Thursday, March 13th the Senate Community Affairs Committee work-shopped SB 482 Relating to Affordable Housing by Senator Rudy Garcia (R-Hialeah). With no money, the bill remains hamstrung to provide new programs; rather, the bill contains some clean-up language on the controversial issue of allowing mobile homes, not constructed to meet Florida's building code standards, to be able to access funds for the first time.

SB 482 will now be considered by the Senate Transportation and Economic Development Appropriations Committee and will likely emerge as the main affordable housing bill this session; it does not attempt to lift the cap on Sadowski Funds.

AIF supports full funding of the Sadowski Act by repealing the existing cap so that businesses can continue to attract a stable workforce capable of being housed in affordable dignity. In addition, AIF supports establishing incentives for local governments to establish truly “fast-track” permitting for workforce housing projects. AIF also supports the Department of Community Affairs’ efforts to streamline and fast-track local and state review of land use, subdivision, site plan and building permit applications for affordable housing projects, as well as the review of application denials by a state board where appropriate.

Secondary Metal Theft

On Wednesday, March 12th the House Safety and Security Council unanimously passed HB 799 Relating to the Theft of Copper or Other Nonferrous Metal by Representative Sandy Adams (R-Oviedo).

Representative Adams explained that the bill provides that a person who knowingly and intentionally takes copper or other nonferrous metals from a utility or communications service provider commits a first degree felony if the theft damages, interrupts, or interferes with the facilities or service of a utility or communications service provider. Representative Adams stated that the bill was very important because this theft could cause an outage of emergency 911 services.

HB 799 will now be considered by the House Policy and Budget Council.

AIF and Floridians for Cooper & Metal Crime Prevention support this bill because of its potential to curb the practice of secondary metal theft. Utility and communications interruptions lead to costly repairs, but more importantly they have the potential to call into question the public safety of Florida’s residents.

Space

The House Constitution and Civil Law Committee met on Wednesday, March 12 to hear HB 737 Relating to Informed Consent for Spaceflight, sponsored by Representative David Simmons (R-Altamont Springs).

HB 737 is a priority for Associated Industries of Florida because it provides a limitation on liability for commercial launch firms and their subcontractors, who provide human spaceflight services from Florida launch sites. Florida has nearly \$10 billion in invested infrastructure to support aerospace assets represented by over 1000 companies employing 30,000 people with an estimated financial impact of \$1.68 billion on Florida’s economy. This legislation will keep Florida’s competitive edge in the aerospace industry – allowing us to recruit and maintain new business to Florida.

The House Committee adopted a series of clarifying amendments before unanimously passing the bill. HB 737 will now be considered by the Safety and Security Council, while its companion bill, SB 2438 Relating to Spaceflight/Informed Consent by Senator Bill Posey (R-Rockledge), has yet to be heard by any committee in the Senate.

AIF supports full funding of pro-space legislation and other space related programs that will help Florida leverage its existing space-related infrastructure. This will ensure that Florida remains the frontrunner in the space industry for years to come.

On Thursday, March 13th the House Economic Development Committee passed HB 1055 Relating to Space Industry by Rep Thad Altman (R-Melbourne). HB 1055, better known as the Space Technology and Research Diversification Initiative (STRDI), is a priority for Associated Industries of Florida this session.

This legislation will create the STRDI in the Governor’s Office of Tourism, Trade and Economic Development to be a university-led program to develop high-impact space research, and applied technology programs that can best advance the state’s interest in a very competitive and diverse space industry.

HB 1055 will now be considered by the House Economic Expansion & Infrastructure Council.

AIF supports full funding of Space Florida and other space-related programs. Additionally, AIF supports proposals such as the Commercial Space Launch Act and the Space & Aerospace Development Infrastructure Enhancement (SADIE) Act. Investing in space leads to more jobs, a high-skilled workforce, and great economic activity.

Energy

On Wednesday, March 12th the House Energy Committee continued its workshop of proposed committee bill ENRC 01, which is the House's energy package for 2008. The Committee heard several presentations from staff, representatives from the Department of Environmental Protection, and the Florida Energy Office on a number of proposals that will eventually make up this omnibus bill. Some of the proposals include:

- **Legislation on Electric Power Plant and Transmission Power Plant Siting:** this proposal would allow utilities to pay the state a certain amount in order to be allowed to construct new transmission lines or improve existing lines.
- **New Energy Policy Governance Structure:** this legislation would create the "Florida Energy and Climate Commission," a new bureaucratic entity tasked with overseeing a number of energy related programs and with the power to direct Florida's energy and climate change policies. This new commission would have 7 members all appointed by the Governor.
- **Renewable Fuel Standard:** requires that after December 31, 2010 all gasoline sold or offered for sale in Florida must contain, at a minimum, 10 percent ethanol.
- **Appliance Standards:** this particular portion of the energy package would establish a schedule of increases in the energy performance of buildings subject to the Florida building code and establishes new standards for commercial and residential products (water heaters, pool pumps, and swimming pool heaters) sold in Florida, mainly mandating that these products use solar technology as an energy source.
- **Metropolitan Planning Organizations:** encourages MPOs to consider strategies that integrate transportation and land use planning to provide for sustainable development and reduce greenhouse gases.
- **Wind Energy and Wind Turbines Sales Tax Exemption:** exempts wind turbines from the state sales tax, up to \$1 million each fiscal year and provides a corporate income tax credit for 75 percent of all capital costs, operation and maintenance costs, and research and development costs, up to \$9 million per fiscal year, in connection with an investment in the production of wind energy.
- **Net Metering for Utilities:** directs public utilities, municipal utilities, and rural electric cooperatives to develop a standardized interconnection agreement and net metering (allows customers to be "paid back" for any amount of energy returned to the grid through the use of renewable energy sources) program.

It is expected that the House Energy Committee will be voting on this proposed committee bill next week.

The Senate Environmental Preservation & Conservation Committee again considered the Senate's omnibus energy package, SB 1544 by Senator Burt Saunders (R-Naples) on Thursday, March 13th. Last week, the Committee discussed the main provisions of the bill, which include a number of changes to the State's energy policy. SB 1544 encompasses broad changes that impact state government, businesses, and consumers. The bulk of the items presently in the bill originate from the executive orders unveiled by Governor Crist last year. Some of the more controversial items in the bill include the development of statewide greenhouse emission standards, vehicle idling rules, building efficiency standards, renewable fuels standards that call for increased usage of ethanol, and the establishment of a renewable portfolio standard that requires utilities to generate a specified percentage of their electric power from renewable energy resources. Another contentious issue included in this year's energy packager revolves around discussion regarding a new energy policy governance structure. Chairman Saunders informed committee members that he was not ready to have that debate just yet.

Representatives of the automobile industry objected to an amendment that could have the potential of delegating Florida's regulation of vehicle emission standards to a California emissions board. Under one of Governor Crist's executive orders, automobiles in Florida would have to be modified in such a way that their emissions would meet California standards. This would have the potential to drastically increase the cost of vehicles in Florida. The amendment was ultimately withdrawn.

Chairman Saunders expects to vote on SB 1544 next week in order to have the bill ready for the Senate floor during the fourth week of session.

AIF and its Florida Energy Council recognize the importance energy plays in keeping Florida's economy healthy and vibrant. Any recommendations considered in the formation of Florida's energy policy should allow for reasonable implementation, should support efficiencies and should ensure that undue mandates and costs are not placed on Florida's businesses and consumers, thereby creating a unilateral economic disparity. Florida should ensure that every effort is made to undertake a balanced approach that avoids unrealistic requirements on energy producers and suppliers. AIF is especially troubled and opposes any effort to restructure Florida's energy policy governance. In an era of shrinking state revenues, increasing the size and scope of government does not make sense.

Health Care

On Tuesday, March 11th the Senate Banking and Insurance Committee unanimously passed SB 1022 Relating to Health Flex Plans by Senator Durell Peaden (R-Crestview). The health flex program was established in 2002 by the Legislature to provide basic affordable health care to low-income, uninsured residents. The bill extends the population that is eligible to purchase Health Flex plans by raising the income limit from 200 to 300 percent of the federal poverty level. The bill will also extend the program until 2013. The bill was heard quickly due to a long committee agenda and was met with no questions or debate.

SB 1022 will now be considered by the Senate Health and Human Services Appropriations Committee.

AIF supports the market-based solutions to the problem of Florida's uninsured found in the legislation. According to a study by the Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA), approximately 19 percent of all Floridians do not have health insurance. These individuals typically rely on emergency rooms for their primary care. Unfortunately, this kind of care is the most expensive option. Expanding access for low-income employees to health flex plans is sound public policy.

All four health care committees and the Health Care Council met together as a whole on Tuesday, March 11th to discuss a proposal that begins to address the issue of the uninsured in Florida. The model that is being proposed is a partnership of public and private marketplace solutions, which would help to create a new environment for buying and selling health benefits. Dubbed the "Farmer's Market" plan by Health Care Council Chairman Aaron Bean (R-Fernandina Beach), this proposal would be a voluntary marketplace that would appeal to small employers and sole proprietors and create a cafeteria plan for employers to be able to offer multiple choices to their employees. Through this marketplace, the consumers would be in charge of their health benefits, and would be able to choose benefits that best suit their needs under a "mandate-free zone," meaning that the individual would have the choice to pick and chose which mandates (requirements to cover specific conditions) they would want included in their plan.

The Governor's office is also working on a health insurance proposal that would provide affordable options for coverage for Floridians who are uninsured. Chairman Bean acknowledged that the two plans are somewhat different, but that he intends to work with the Governor's staff on consolidating the two.

AIF is pleased that the Legislature and Governor's office are working on plans to develop affordable health insurance coverage for those Floridians that need it the most. Businesses in Florida, especially those with 25 employees or less, would like to offer their employees some type of health insurance coverage, but because of the high cost of these plans it is simply impossible for them to do so. AIF and its *Health Care Task Force* look forward to working with policy makers on market-based options for health insurance coverage that begin to address the issue of the uninsured in Florida.

The Senate Commerce Committee unanimously approved SB 1012 Relating to Health Insurance Claims Payments by Senator Don Gaetz (R-Ft. Walton Beach) on Tuesday, March 11th despite the concerns raised by AIF. SB 1012 has three main provisions that concern AIF:

- Requiring insurers to accept mandatory assignment to out-of-network providers;
- prohibiting the use of "silent PPOs;" and
- shortening the look back period insurers use to recover employers' dollars which were previously incorrectly paid to physicians.

The bill will now move to the Senate Health Regulation Committee. The House companion is HB 405 by Representative Bill Galvano (R-Bradenton); it is currently in the House Policy & Budget Council.

AIF opposes legislation that prohibits silent PPOs. The search for ways to expand the availability of health care coverage to Floridians is an important endeavor. But almost as important is ensuring that Floridians who currently have health care coverage are not threatened by proposals that ultimately drive up the cost of coverage. Placing additional requirements on health insurers and HMOs, such as "Any Willing Provider", inhibit their ability to provide the most cost-efficient, quality care. As a result, insurance premiums will increase; thereby, affecting the number of Floridians who can continue to purchase coverage.

Business Regulation

The House Policy and Budget Council, unanimously passed HB 147 Relating to Expedited Permitting Process for Economic Development Projects by Representative Rob Schenck (R-Spring Hill) on Tuesday, March 11th. The bill requires the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and water management districts to create a 45-day expedited permitting process for businesses that have been identified as a target industry business by the state Office of Tourism, Trade and Economic Development. HB 147 was filed to help assist businesses through the often frustrating task of getting wetland or storm water permits.

The bill also requires a mandatory pre-application review process to reduce permitting conflicts by providing guidance to applicants regarding the permits needed from each agency and governmental entity, site planning and development, site suitability and limitations, facility design, and steps the applicant can take to ensure expeditious permit application review.

HB 147 is now ready to be considered on the floor of the House of Representatives.

AIF supports legislation aimed at improving the permitting process for existing businesses in Florida and for those companies looking to invest in our state. Any legislation that helps this process will have a dramatic effect on helping to stimulate our economy.

Sunset Review

On Monday, March 10th the Joint Legislative Sunset Committee met to continue its review process of state agencies. The main topic of the day pertained to Florida's water management districts and a revision of their policies and procedures.

The first proposal considered by the committee was to amend the fiscal calendar year for the water management districts. Currently, their fiscal year is different from all other state agencies. The Sunset Committee debated a proposal, which would have aligned the water management districts fiscal year with all other agencies. After much debate, the proposal failed. Representatives from the water management districts were able to persuade committee members that they would not have enough time or information to put together their budgets under the typical fiscal year.

The committee then considered the issue of having either elected or appointed water management districts board members. Currently, board members in the five water management districts are appointed by the Governor and then confirmed by the Senate.

Senator Rhonda Storms (R-Brandon) proposed that all water management board members be elected rather than appointed. She cited that this should be the duty of an elected official to serve, rather than that of one appointed. Ultimately, Senator Storms' proposal was not adopted.

Representative Kevin Ambler (R-Tampa), Co-Chair of the Joint Legislative Sunset Committee, then introduced a hybrid proposal of both appointed and elected board members. Representative Ambler's proposal was temporarily passed, as the Committee was running out of time.

The Committee will revisit Representative Ambler proposal next week when its members convene again for its final scheduled meeting.

AIF opposes the concept of electing water management district board members because of the level of expertise that comes with appointed members. This expertise puts our water resources in the hands of qualified individuals, who will make the best decisions for citizens and businesses in Florida.

Environment

HB 547 Relating to Water Pollution Control by Representative Paige Kreegel (R-Punta Gorda) was unanimously approved on Tuesday, March 11th by the House Policy and Budget Council. The bill is now ready to be considered by the full House. This legislation will set up a trial water quality credit trading program for the Lower St. Johns River Basin.

According to the staff analysis "*Water quality credit trading is a voluntary, market-based approach to promote protection and restoration of Florida's rivers, lakes, streams and estuaries that enhance other voluntary, regulatory and financial assistance programs already in place.*"

HB 547 is now ready to be considered on the floor of the House of Representatives.

AIF supports this legislation because trading could lead to reduce the costs of pollutant reduction activities to businesses, industries, agriculture, and all taxpayers.

The House Utilities and Telecommunications Committee heard presentations by water utilities on long term water supply issues on Thursday, March 13th. Chairman Dave Murzin (R-Pensacola) has made water a priority issue for this committee. Because of the importance of this issue, Chairman Murzin has reached out to the House Democrats and asked for them to designate one of their members as lead on water issues. He announced today that Representative Bill Heller (D-St. Petersburg) will be that person.

AIF thanks Chairman Murzin for bringing this important issue before his committee. Water is important to the businesses and residents who are here today. Water is also important for our future growth and AIF believes in responsible growth. You can not build roads, schools, hospitals without water; so we need to plan today (through alternative water supply programs and other conservation measures) so that we have dependable access to potable water for years to come.

Transportation

SB 816 Relating to Uniform Traffic Control, by Mike Bennett (R-Bradenton), was passed on a 6-2 vote by the Senate Transportation Committee on Thursday, March 13th. Last year the committee killed the same measure, but this year's version of the red-light camera bill continues to successfully move through the legislative process.

Special congratulations go out to our partners at the Manatee Chamber of Commerce, especially their Vice President of Public Affairs, Neil Spirtas, who has invested a great deal of time and made numerous trips to Tallahassee in support of the legislation. Members from the Orlando Regional Chamber were also in town on their annual visit to the state Capitol and attended the Senate meeting in support of the bill.

The only disappointment in the victory was that fines that would support the purchase and installation of camera equipment were cut in half. Even though a ticket for running a red light issued by a police officer remains a \$125 infraction, tickets issued by the results of the camera use were reduced to \$60. Senate Transportation Committee Chairman Carey Baker (R-Eustis) had concerns that the bill should focus on traffic safety and not a vendor driven profit opportunity. Senator Bennett left the door open for trying to amend the \$60 fine because a portion of the money goes to local governments that would install the cameras. They have expressed doubts about the affordability of the program at the lower rate.

SB 816 will now be considered by the Senate Criminal Justice Committee.

AIF supports legislation that allows for the installation of automated enforcement systems, such as red light cameras, at busy intersections.