



WEEKLY BRIEF

From the Week of March 9 – March 13, 2009

Week 2 of the 2009 session started with a bang, but ended rather quietly with both the House and Senate canceling any committee meetings on Friday. One group that did meet; however, was the state's Revenue Estimating Conference who was scheduled to release the March revenue estimates. As expected, Florida's revenue picture continues to worsen. The economists reduced the estimated revenue for the state of Florida by an additional \$3.4 billion (\$1.1 billion for this year and \$2.3 billion for next year). This on the heels of a budget special session which slashed the state's budget by \$2.8 billion.

In this edition of AIF's *Weekly Report* we will update you on all the AIF priority bills that saw action this week. Proposals dealing with Florida's workers' compensation system, economic stimulus, growth management, streamlining of regulation, commuter rail, class size, and space all saw action this week and are covered in this report.

Business Regulation

On Tuesday, March 10th the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Committee unanimously passed one of AIF's priority bills for the 2009 Legislative Session, HB 73 Relating to Expedited Permitting for Targeted Industries by Representative Robert Schenck (R-Springhill). This legislation is meant to help encourage business growth and expansion by stipulating that state required permits for storm water and environmental resource permits be approved or denied within 45 days, rather than the current policy of 90 days upon submission. HB 73 implements policies to expedite these permits for targeted industries as identified by local governments and seeks to reduce an often labor intensive and time consuming process that businesses are forced to deal with.

HB 73 will next be considered by the House General Government Policy Council.

At the end of the meeting, Chair Trudi Williams (R-Ft. Myers) requested that the committee members continue to work on their list of issues they would like to see included in a proposed committee bill on streamlined permitting. She asked that information be provided to staff by the end this week. Next week, they will workshop the proposed committee bill and vote on it during the fourth week of session.

Representative Mary Brandenburg (D-Lake Worth), the Ranking Democratic Member of the committee, had to leave the meeting early for another event. Therefore, Representative Mark Pafford (D-West Palm Beach) reported to the committee that the House Democrats are supportive of several issues being discussed. Those issues included many recommendations found in AIF's [2009 Session Priorities](#) and [ESP 2.0](#), such as extension of permits for 3 years, expediting permits, and the elimination of unnecessary duplications.

AIF SUPPORTS legislation aimed at improving the permitting process for existing businesses in Florida and for those companies looking to invest in our state.

On Wednesday, March 11th the House Government Affairs Policy Committee unanimously approved Proposed Committee Bill (PCB) GAP 09-04 Relating to Social Security Numbers. The PCB reenacts a public records exemption for agency employees and substantially amends the general public records exemption for access to social security numbers by the business community. Most specifically, the PCB amends the definition of "commercial purposes" to limit the ability for which a business may access social security numbers contained in a public record.

AIF is working on restoring language in current law that is stricken in the PCB that allows matching and retrieving records as a legitimate commercial purpose use. With that fix, we feel that the legislation will have little impact on the current uses of social security numbers by commercial entities.

Now that the PCB has been approved by the committee, it will be filed and referenced.

While we are pleased with the progress of this legislative proposal, AIF stands ready to oppose any effort to limit legitimate commercial access to personal information.

Education & Workforce

On Tuesday, March 10th the House PreK-12 Education Policy Committee passed (10-3) HB 919 Relating to Revision of the Class Size Requirements for Public Schools by Representative Will Weatherford (R-Wesley Chapel). Beginning with the 2010-2011 school year, the joint resolution changes the way that class size compliance is calculated by: (1) using the *average* number of students *at the school level*, rather than the maximum number of students at the classroom level; and (2) allowing the number of students that could be assigned to each teacher in prekindergarten through grade 3 and grades 4 through 8 to increase:

- For prekindergarten through grade 3, the maximum number of students that could be assigned to each teacher in an individual classroom is raised from 18 to 21, *but the school level average cannot exceed 18 students.*
- For grades 4 through 8, the maximum number of students that could be assigned to each teacher in an individual classroom is raised from 22 to 27, *but the school level average cannot exceed 22 students.*
- For grades 9 through 12, the calculation method is limited to the average number of students at the school level, which cannot exceed 25 students.

The joint resolution contains a ballot summary required to notify voters of the contents of the proposed amendment and must pass each side of the Legislature by a three-fifths vote.

Overall, HB 919 saw much less animosity than it has in prior years with only three no votes in its first committee stop. HB 919 will next be considered by the House Education Policy Council.

On Wednesday, March 11th the Senate Education PreK–12 Committee passed (6-1) HB 919's Senate companion, SB 1828 Relating to Revision of Class Size Requirements/Public Schools by Senator Stephen Wise (R-Jacksonville).

SB 1828 will next be considered by the Senate Education PreK-12 Appropriations Committee.

AIF supports increased flexibility in the implementation of the class size reduction requirement due to the positive fiscal impact that would be created as a result of changing the compliance requirements. This proposal is part of [AIF's Economic Stimulus Package 2.0](#) since greater flexibility will ensure money is spent where it is most needed at a time when school funding is facing drastic reductions as a result of the downturn in the economy.

Energy & Environment

On Tuesday, March 10th the Senate Environmental Preservation and Conservation Committee unanimously passed SB 114 Relating to Contaminated Property/Notification by Senator Charlie Justice (D-St. Petersburg). This bill was filed in response to a situation in the St. Petersburg area where a contamination plume spread outside the property owner's boundary and some residents did not feel as though they were properly notified.

The bill, as filed, would expand the list of those notified of a contaminated property to a radius of 1 mile. Senator Paula Dockery (R-Lakeland) offered a "strike-everything" amendment that was adopted, which lowered the radius of notification to 1,000 feet. This is still problematic to the business community. Currently, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is required to notify all recorded property owners which contamination had been discovered beyond property boundaries within 30 days. Expanding the notice requirement to such a large area, without any scientific bases, may cause property owners to be alarmed without cause.

Of course there are two sides to this issue. On one hand, a company would not want to buy property only to find out that there is a contamination problem in their neighborhood. However, too much notification may make owners of contaminated property a target for lawsuits simply due to increased public awareness of the presence of contamination.

At this time AIF opposes SB 114. We will continue work with Senator Justice and the DEP to see if there is a way to craft legislation to give adequate notice to property owners who may be affected by the spread of contamination.

Workers' Compensation

On Tuesday, March 10th the House Insurance, Business and Financial Affairs Policy Committee met this morning and considered HB 903 by Representative Anitere Flores (R-Miami) regarding attorney fees in workers' compensation. The bill passed the committee by a vote of 14-2. The only representatives voting against the bill were Representatives Priscilla Taylor (D- Riviera Beach) and Evan Jenne (D- Ft. Lauderdale).

However, the bill remained in a unique procedural posture in that it was retained by the committee. This means that at the next meeting of this committee it can be reconsidered. However, if no additional action is taken on it at the next committee meeting, it will move to the House Council on General Government Policy.

The bill as passed is a very narrow and strict fix to the Florida Supreme Court's recent decision in the *Murray v. Mariner Health* case which simply reinstates the statutory limitations on attorney fees and eliminates hourly rates. AIF fully supports this bill and applauds both Representative Flores and all the representatives who voted in favor of this legislation.

Representative Flores had prepared a strike all amendment that also sought to generate savings for Florida employers, while providing a different fee structure for those who represent injured workers. However, she withdrew the amendment and stated that it was not complete. She assured the committee that she would work closely with all interested parties to develop legislation that corrects the Murray decision and brings about stability and predictability to Florida workers' compensation system and the rates Florida employers must pay to obtain the coverage.

Following the committee's vote, Representative Waldman requested the committee retain that bill. That motion was concluded with no discussion. This was done to allow the committee to potentially reconsider the vote by which the bill passed. However, any additional action has to be taken on the matter at the next committee hearing.

On Thursday, March 12th the same committee met in Tallahassee. At the outset of the meeting, Representative Alan Hays (R-Umatilla), the committee's vice chair, moved to reconsider HB 903. The committee overwhelmingly voted against reconsideration. Accordingly, and under the House Rules the bill was released from the committee and will continue its progress towards passage by the full Florida House of Representatives.

The next committee the bill will be heard in is the House General Government Policy Council. That Council will meet next on Tuesday, March 17 at 8:00 a.m. in Tallahassee. Although the official agenda for that meeting has not been released, it is anticipated that HB 903 will be considered.

Please Contact the members of the House General Government Policy Council and urge them to also pass HB 903 when it is next considered!

AIF SUPPORTS efforts to pass workers' compensation legislation that clarifies the intent of the 2003 reforms and prevents Florida's workers' compensation system from deteriorating to pre-2003 status.

Taxation

On Tuesday, March 10th the Senate Communications, Energy and Public Utilities Committee unanimously approved SB 1590 Relating to Communications Services Taxes by Senator Thad Altman (R-Melbourne). The bill allows the dealers to allocate the bad debt tax credit to state and local jurisdictions on a proportionate basis, rather than maintain the voluminous amounts of data necessary to identify the actual jurisdiction from which it originated. The bill is remedial back to October of 2000. Senator Altman further explained that the industry, local governments and the Department of Revenue were all in agreement on the bill.

SB 1590 passed the committee with no questions or debate and will next be considered by the Senate Community Affairs Committee.

AIF SUPPORTS this bill because it makes administering the communications services tax more efficient for the providers and fairer to the taxing jurisdictions.

On Wednesday, March 11th the House Military and Local Affairs Policy Committee unanimously passed HB 701 Relating to Notices of Proposed Property Taxes by Representative Matt Hudson (R-Naples). The bill simply changes the current Truth in Millage notice (TRIM) to include the last year's millage rate; the current year's millage rate if a proposed budget change is made; and the current year's millage rate if no budget change is made.

HB 701 will next be considered by the House Economic Development & Community Affairs Policy Council.

AIF supports this bill because it informs taxpayers of what their elected officials are doing relative to the tax millage rates; which of course, are multiplied by the assessed value of your property to determine your total property tax bill.

On Wednesday, March 11th the House Military and Local Affairs Policy Committee also passed HB 521 Relating to Just Valuation of Property by Representative Carlos Lopez-Cantera (R-Miami). The bill provides that the property appraiser must show that he has arrived at an assessment being challenged by complying with s. 193.011, F.S. and professionally accepted appraisal practices. If the appraiser meets this burden, then the assessment is presumed correct. This places the burden of presumption of correctness in the hands of the appraiser.

The bill also changes the burden of proof that applies to assessment challenges after the assessment is revised and remanded to the property appraiser by the value adjustment board or court.

HB 521 will next be considered by the House Economic Development & Community Affairs Policy Council.

AIF supports legislation that addresses ad valorem assessment value challenges including revising the burden of proof and the presumption of correctness to level the playing field for tax payers.

Also passed by the House Military and Local Affairs Policy Committee on Wednesday, March 11th, was Proposed Committee Bill (PCB) MLA 09-02 Relating to Property Assessment Limitation. The bill adds changes to the state constitution that are very straight forward, changing 10 percent to 5 percent for the limitation on assessment increases applicable to non-homestead real property.

This proposed constitutional amendment will be submitted to the electors at the general election in November 2010.

AIF consultant, Frank Meiners, testified in support of the resolution but said that the 5 percent limit should apply to all non-homestead property, not just real property. The bill as is leaves out industrial property, machinery and equipment, and other tangible personal property such as agricultural equipment, electric power plants and telephone central offices. Representative Keith Fitzgerald (D-Sarasota) said he agreed with this and that tangible personal property was what created jobs and growth in the state.

AIF supports lowering the current cap on non-homestead properties to 5 percent from 10 percent. However, this cap should apply to all non-homestead property, not just real property. This provision will help AIF members control their costs of doing business and will allow them to be more competitive in the market place.

On Wednesday, March 11th the House Finance and Tax Committee continued their review of sales tax exemptions. While wrapping up the meeting, Chair Ellyn Bogdanoff (R-Ft. Lauderdale) talked about the council's next meeting. It will take place next Monday, March 16 from noon to 4:00 p.m. The council has been reviewing sales tax exemptions flagged by its members as ones that needed more discussion. Representative Bogdanoff told the council that every member will be receiving a list of all of the exemptions and they are to mark which ones they believe should be repealed. At the next meeting they will vote on any sales tax exemptions that have been suggested by a member of the council to be eliminated.

She also said that during next Monday's meeting she would like to hold a workshop on the streamlined sales tax issue since there is so much misinformation floating around about it.

On Thursday, March 12th the Senate Finance and Tax Committee heard presentations from a number of groups on Florida's tax structure and sales tax exemptions. Representatives from the Governor's office presented some of the "new" revenue recommendations the Governor has proposed for the 2009-10 fiscal year. Some of the proposals include:

- Increased State Park Fees
- Overweight Truck Fines – This increase would generate \$25 million. 50% of these additional funds would go towards funding the state's recycling goal included in last year's omnibus energy bill (HB 7135) and the other 50% would go to general revenue
- Graduated Court Filing Fees
- Motor Vehicles Licensing Fees. This increase would generate an additional \$77.9 million of which \$59.25 million would go towards general revenue
- Logo sign permit fees – estimated revenue of \$14.5 million for DOT funding.
- Overweight Truck Fines – These fines would be raised from \$0.05 to \$0.50 cents on a graduated scale. Estimated revenue of \$44.5 million for general revenue

The committee then heard a presentation from Dominic Calabro, President and CEO of Florida TaxWatch on the challenges and opportunities of Florida's tax structure. Calabro pointed out that the current downturn in the economy gives legislators a window to really take a close look at our state's tax system. Calabro then provided members of the Committee with a list of sales tax exemptions that could be ripe for repealing. Included where exemptions such as:

- Charter boat fishing
- Bottled water
- Sale of religious items
- Subsidies for the Professional Golf Hall of Fame and the International Game Fish Association,
- Skyboxes rented by high school and college sports teams
- Sales of U.S. and state flags

The total revenue included in the complete list of sales tax exemptions offered for repeal by TaxWatch was approximately \$224 million. Calabro also offered a list of services that legislators could consider taxing. This list included services such as:

- Barber shops and beauty salons,
- Dry cleaning and laundry,
- Valet parking,
- Photo finishing,
- Pet care,
- Fitness facilities,
- Pest control and lawn services and
- Sightseeing bus transportation

Altogether, taxing these services would bring in an additional \$335.8 million. Calabro did stress that TaxWatch was not advocating for the repeal of these exemptions. He clarified that the items included were those that didn't meet acceptable criteria and standards for tax fairness. Members of the Committee thanked Mr. Calabro for bringing forth such proposals, but were somewhat skeptical of their repeal.

AIF SUPPORTS a careful review of Florida's sales tax exemptions, but not an automatic sunset of these important tax policies. Legislators should proceed under the impression that each exemption is worthy and serves a public purpose. Exemptions should be repealed only when no evidence of public purpose is found.

Economic Development

On Tuesday, March 10th the Senate Commerce Committee considered a number of economic development bills designed to help stimulate Florida's economy and encourage businesses to either expand their existing operations or relocate to Florida.

SB 634 Relating to Commercialization Matching Grants by Senator Don Gaetz (R-Niceville) was unanimously passed by the committee. The bill creates the Florida Research Commercialization Matching Grant Program (program) to assist small or startup companies that take advantage of federal and state partnerships to accelerate their growth and market penetration. Program applicants must meet several criteria, such as having attracted funding from non-government sources.

Eligible businesses must be registered with the Department of State (DOS), have their primary office in Florida as well as the majority of its employees, and conduct its principal research in Florida. Senator Gaetz explained that this bill was a work product of the Senate Select Committee on Florida's Economy, which has been tasked by Senate President Jeff Atwater (R-North Palm Beach) to look at ways to stimulate Florida's economy.

SB 634 will now be considered by the Senate Transportation and Economic Development Appropriations Committee.

The Committee also unanimously passed SB 350 Relating to Entertainment Industry Economic Development by Senator Mike Haridopolos (R-Melbourne). This bill converts Florida's existing film and entertainment incentive from a cash reimbursement of qualified expenditures, to an uncapped, transferable credit against sales and corporate income taxes. For the last few years, Florida has had a film industry incentive program in place to try to lure production companies to film in Florida thus driving economic activity in our state.

SB 350 will now be considered by the Senate Finance and Tax Committee.

One of the bills considered by the Committee did run into some problems. SB 768 by Senator Steve Oelrich (R-Gainesville) was temporarily passed by the Committee due to the members having a number of questions on the specifics of the bill. SB 768 creates a research and development (R&D) tax credit against Florida corporate income taxes. The Florida tax credit is modeled after the federal research tax credit in Title 26 U.S. Code section 41 and incorporates some of its definitions. The tax credit is equal to 10 percent of the difference between a company's qualified R&D expenditures in the current taxable year and its average R&D expenditures over the previous 4 tax years. Senators Durrell Peaden (R-Crestview) and Dan Gelber (D-Miami Beach) both had questions about which kinds of R&D would be eligible for the incentives in this bill. The senators felt that given the economic difficulties being experienced by the state incentives should be given to very specific industries that the state has already invested in; instead of the broad group of businesses that would qualify under the original language in the bill.

AIF supports all three of these economic development bills. The incentives included in these bills allow Florida to compete with its sister states in the region and they provide the right kind of encouragement for companies to invest in Florida.

On Wednesday, March 11th the House Economic Development Policy Committee unanimously passed HB 485 Relating to Fast Track Economic Stimulus for Small Businesses by Representative Will Weatherford (R-Trinity). Both Republicans and Democrats alike lauded the measure in committee as Representative Weatherford explained what could be the session's most dynamic economic development bill.

HB 485 is an economic development tool that relies on a market based approach to expand credit, capital and financial services to our Low Income Communities across the state. By leveraging a \$26 billion federal program, the New Markets Tax Credit will provide a modest state-level tax credit to encourage capital investments to be made in

Florida's low income communities by utilizing federal oversight and allowing Florida to implement the program with minimal state resources. The program could have a total economic impact of \$6.3 billion over the next ten years, and is expected to immediately incite some \$250 million in private sector investment. It is also expected to create almost 4000 jobs in its first year.

Included in AIF's *Economic Stimulus Package 2.0*, this piece of legislation is a top priority for AIF and will continue to be for the duration of the session. The bill will next be considered by the House Economic Development and Community Affairs Policy Council.

AIF supports the New Markets Development Program. Florida must look for ways to stimulate business activity and we are happy that the Legislature is proposing ideas found within our economic stimulus package.

Card Check

On Wednesday, March 11th the House Governmental Affairs Policy Committee approved HJR 1013 Relating to Guaranteeing the Right to Vote by a Secret Ballot by House Majority Leader Adam Hasner (R-Delray Beach) on a strict party line vote of 8 to 4. HJR 1013 proposes the creation of Section 28 of Article I of the Florida Constitution to provide that voting by secret ballot is a fundamental right of all individuals. The amendment provides that the right of individuals to vote by secret ballot is guaranteed where local, state, or federal law requires elections for public office, requires public votes on initiatives or referenda, or requires designations or authorizations of employee representation.

Currently, the U.S. Congress is debating the Employer Free Choice Act or EFCA, which if signed into law by President Obama would virtually eliminate the secret-ballot election as the primary means to determine whether employees want to union representation. Under the EFCA, a union would be established for a work group without any election when it succeeded in securing a simple majority of employee signatures on authorization cards designating the union as the collective bargaining representative. This proposal is strongly opposed by all sectors of the business community.

Representative Hasner's bill would put before the voters of Florida a proposed constitutional amendment during the next general election in November of 2010, which would allow Floridians to vote in favor of adding a protection of the secret ballot process in our state's constitution. HJR 1013 would have to receive a 3/5th vote of each chamber before being placed on the ballot.

Debate on this proposal was spirited and passionate as members of the Democratic Party argued that this proposal was just a way to thwart the intentions of EFCA. A number of committee members shared their own personal experiences with the union process.

Members of the business community were on hand to lend support of this proposal. Jose Gonzalez, AIF's Vice President of Governmental Affairs, testified in support of HJR 1013 because of its ability to give the citizens of Florida an option for dealing with this federal issue. Up until this point, all businesses and citizens could do to influence this process was contact their congressman or woman. Under this proposal, the citizens of Florida can vote to protect their secret ballot.

HJR 1013 will now be considered by the House Policy Council.

AIF supports HJR 1013 and its efforts to protect the secret ballot process in Florida. Passage of this proposed constitutional amendment will allow voters in Florida to decide whether they want to enshrine the use of secret ballots in elections in our state's top document.

Seaport Security

On Wednesday, March 11th the Senate Military Affairs and Domestic Security Committee continued its consideration of a Proposed Committee Bill Relating to Seaport Security. As AIF previously reported, both the House and Senate are looking at the issue of Florida's duplicitous security credentialing at its 14 public ports. The workshop began with a presentation by AIF's General Counsel and Florida Maritime Council (FMC) lobbyist, Tammy Perdue, who described for the committee members the current landscape of overregulation in our state's ports. Following this description of the problem, Ms. Perdue presented a number of recommendations on how to eliminate the costly (almost \$800 dollars per year on security checks) system of background checks which threatens the ability for our ports to compete with ports in neighboring states.

Representatives from the trucking industry and longshoremen testified in support of eliminating the existing Florida security requirements in favor of moving to the federal Transportation Worker Identification Credential or TWIC.

Randy Ball, representing the Governor's Office, testified that Governor Crist would be in favor of adopting the TWIC card but keeping the existing requirements for additional state background checks. Unfortunately, this position does not advance efforts to bring Florida in line with the rest of the country and thus cannot be supported by AIF or its Maritime Council.

We anticipate that a bill will be ready to be considered at the next meeting of the committee.

AIF and its Florida Maritime Council support efforts to streamline security requirements and eliminate duplication of security credentialing at Florida's 14 deep water ports; thereby, reducing the expense and inconsistencies of Florida's seaport security regulations.

Growth Management

On Wednesday, March 11th the House Military & Local Affairs Policy Committee unanimously passed HB 441 Relating to Coastal Management by Representative Ron Reagan (R-Sarasota). This bill would help port-related or commercial projects, which are located within or within 3 miles of a port master plan area, proceed more rapidly and with less government oversight by exempting them from the developments-of-regional-impact (DRI) process.

AIF supports HB 441 and applauds Representative Reagan for pursuing this important issue. Ports and its related businesses are important to Florida's overall economy and anything government can do to help them expand will help us in these trying times.

On Wednesday, March 11th the House Military & Local Affairs Policy Committee also passed Proposed Committee Bill (PCB) MLA 09-01 Relating to Community Affairs. This is a growth management bill that transfers the functions of the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) to the Department of State (DOS) as well as the functions of the Department of Emergency Management (DEM) to the Governor's Office.

The growth portion of the bill picks up a number of issues in the Senate companion, SB 360 Relating to Growth Management by Senator Mike Bennett (R-Bradenton), including authority to create Transportation Concurrency Exception Areas in defined "dense urban areas", extends certain state and local permits for 3 years, and provides for a streamlined review process for certain comprehensive plan amendments. The measures included in this proposal would undo the practice of requiring developers to pay for the existing infrastructure backlog, rather than their own projects. Such charges can and have made projects financially unfeasible.

Now that the PCB has been approved by the committee, it will be filed and referenced.

AIF supports SB 360 and its House companion as a way to stimulate Florida's economy through low cost regulatory measures that seek to reduce unnecessary government oversight.

Health Care

On Wednesday, March 11th the Senate Children, Families, and Elder Affairs Committee unanimously passed SB 242 Relating to Autism Spectrum Disorder Screening/Minors by Senator Jeremy Ring (D-Margate). The legislation requires that a physician refer a minor to an appropriate specialist when screening for autism spectrum disorder under certain circumstances.

The main concern with the bill is that it is yet another health insurance mandate. The bill also contains some problematic definitions and does not provide for a specified time frame for this newly mandated coverage.

SB 242 will next be considered by the Senate Health Regulation Committee.

AIF OPPOSES any health insurance mandate that makes coverage less affordable and accessible without greatly contributing to the increased well-being of all Floridians.

On Thursday, March 12th the House Health Care Appropriations Committee heard a presentation regarding the Low Income Pool (LIP) Council, which is in jeopardy this session due to bills that seek to restructure it. Paul Belcher gave a presentation to the members trying to explain LIP, an extremely confusing structure to explain, and the 18 different models that the Legislature can choose to have the money allocated.

AIF SUPPORTS legislation that eliminates the Low Income Pool (LIP) Council and places responsibility for recommendation and distribution of these funds in the hands of the Legislature and experts at the Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA).

Space

On Wednesday, March 11th the House Economic Development Policy Committee unanimously passed HB 69 Relating to Space Industry by Representative Dorothy Hukill (R-Port Orange). A priority for AIF, the bill creates a multi-university Space Technology and Research Development Institute (STRDI) within the Governor's Office of Tourism, Trade and Economic Development and is supported by Space Florida. The STRDI will be a university-based program, led by Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, to provide research and development and policy analysis to improve the competitiveness of the space transportation industry in Florida. Research to be supported by the institute includes, but is not limited to:

- Range and airspace management systems;
- Spaceflight human factors;
- Launch vehicle safety;
- Materials science; and
- Spaceport instrumentation, technologies, and processes.

HB 69 will next be considered by the House Economic Development & Community Affairs Policy Council.

As mentioned in ESP 2.0, AIF fully supports diversification of the space industry through university-based and applied technology programs across the state.

Transportation

On Wednesday, March 11th the Senate Judiciary Committee passed (6-3) SB 1212 Relating to Public Transit by Senator Lee Constantine (R-Altamonte Springs). Passage of this bill is essential for the enactment of the Central Florida Commuter Rail Project or "SunRail" as it is more commonly known. The bill provides the Florida Department of Transportation with the authority to contractually indemnify freight rail operators when using a rail corridor with commuter rail operations.

State approval of the "SunRail" project is top priority for Associated Industries of Florida. This project will bring immediate economic activity and jobs to the Central Florida region and other parts of the state at a time when our state's economy is reeling from the effects of the current national recession. In fact, approval of Central Florida Commuter Rail project is one of the recommendations found in AIF's [Economic Stimulus Package 2.0](#).

SB 1212 will next be considered by the Senate Transportation and Economic Development Appropriations Committee.

AIF SUPPORTS efforts to approve the Central Florida Commuter Rail Project. This project will not only create jobs in the Orlando area, but throughout the state of Florida while injecting over \$1.2 billion into the economy over the next 18-24 months. This project will lay the foundation for improved passenger transportation and freight distribution in Florida, thus ensuring our state's ability to remain competitive and meet the challenges of expanded global trade.