



WEEKLY BRIEF

From the Week of March 7 – 11, 2011

As the first week of Session 2011 comes to a close, AIF has advocated for a great deal of pro-business legislation moving through the House & Senate. With conservative leadership at the helm, it is likely that we will see many of these issues reach the Governor's desk in the coming weeks. Just a few of the major items that the Legislature has advanced in its first week include:

1. A measure that seeks to reform the Florida Retirement System (FRS) and move public sector employees into benefit plans that are more closely aligned with common practice in the private sector;
2. Unemployment Compensation tax legislation that relieves the burden of excessive costs to Florida businesses;
3. Comprehensive Property and Casualty reform legislation that is key to the restoration of the private residential insurance market; *and*
4. Legislation that will once and for all remove costly and burdensome security regulations for businesses in Florida's seaports.

Unemployment Compensation

On Thursday, March 10th the full House of Representatives considered and passed HB 7005 Relating to Unemployment Compensation by Representative Doug Holder (R-Sarasota). With the intent to reform Florida's Unemployment Compensation system, HB 7005 is a work product of the House Economic Development and Tourism Subcommittee chaired by Representative Holder, who presented the bill on the House floor.

On Wednesday of this week, the Senate Judiciary Committee brought up and considered the Senate's version of unemployment Compensation reform – SB 728 by Senator Nancy Detert (R-Venice). The most significant difference between the Senate and House bills is that the House measure contains direct tax calculation changes that will impact the unemployment tax rates that Florida employers must pay in 2011. Both bills provide some dramatic reform to the claims benefit procedures governing the system that will cut down on fraud and help sustain the unemployment compensation trust fund in the long run. These measures are also expected to save employers money as they are implemented into the system. To learn more about the different provisions found within the House & Senate measures, please refer to Thursday's edition of the daily brief.

AIF salutes Sen. Detert and Rep. Holder for their strong leadership to ensure that employers will see relief from unfair tax rate increases in the future and to guarantee that individuals who most deserve benefits will continue to receive them.

Immigration

On Thursday, March 10th the House Judiciary Committee voted to introduce **Proposed Committee Bill (PCB) JDC 1**. This legislation is an attempt at addressing the problem of illegal immigration in Florida. The bill, sponsored by Chairman Bill Snyder (R-Stuart), allows for law enforcement officers to ask about the citizenship status of individuals only under an ongoing criminal investigation. This differs from the controversial “Arizona-style” law which allows law enforcement officials to stop individuals at any time in order to determine their citizenship status. The most troubling provision in the bill for the business community is a mandate that would require all employers with 100 or more employees to use the federal E-Verify system by July 1st 2012 and those employers with 100 or less employees to use E-Verify by July 1st 2013. Businesses who do not comply or who are found knowingly to employ undocumented workers could lose their license to do business in Florida.

Members of the business community were united in opposition to the bill. **Brewster Bevis, AIF’s Vice President of External Affairs**, outlined a number of concerns with the E-Verify provisions of the bill. For starters, the bill does not provide a strong enough “safe harbor” for those employers who do their best to follow the law. Currently, employees who are terminated by mistake because of faulty E-Verify results could potentially sue their employers under this law. In addition, there are several unanswered questions regarding the contractor-subcontractor relationship and whether a business could be found liable because of the practices of a subcontractor they are doing business with. Bevis also called for changes in the bill which would require union hiring halls to also be required to use the E-Verify system. Multiple government studies have shown that E-Verify is a flawed system. While AIF believes that there should be some type of electronic employee verification system, we currently do not believe that E-Verify is the system that should be used.



The PCB will now be assigned an official bill number and re-referenced to additional House committees. In the Senate, the Judiciary Committee will be considering their version of immigration legislation – SB 7066 – next Monday, March 14th.

In its current form, AIF OPPOSES this legislation because of the unanswered questions and unintended consequences associated with mandating E-Verify on all Florida employers. Requiring employers (large and small) to operate this flawed system could lead to a disruption in our state’s economy and could lead to additional lawsuits by employers who are wrongfully terminated as a result of inaccurate E-Verify results. AIF looks forward to continuing to work with Chairman Snyder and his staff on finding ways to address the business community’s concerns.

Insurance

On Tuesday, March 8th the House Government Operations Appropriations Subcommittee approved HB 99 Relating to Commercial Insurance Rates by Representative Brad Drake (R-DeFuniak Springs). The measure will exempt the following insurance categories from the state’s rates prior approval process: nonresidential property, excess property, commercial motor vehicles, fiduciary and general liability.

AIF believes this legislation will result in enhancing competition among insurance companies from which Florida businesses will benefit, particularly as it relates to affordability and availability of insurance. To attract and retain private capital to meet Florida’s insurance needs, rates must be “market based” and regulated by consumers in a competitive environment, not by government.

HB 99 has one remaining stop in the House Economic Affairs Committee and is expected to be ready for full consideration on the floor by the end of the month.

AIF SUPPORTS legislation aimed at de-regulating commercial insurance lines in Florida. Competition should be the primary determinant of insurance rates especially for commercial insurance, which is typically purchased by sophisticated business entities.

On Friday, March 11th the Senate Budget Subcommittee on General Government took up and passed SB 408 Relating to Property and Casualty Insurance by Senator Garrett Richter (R-Naples). Introduced as the Senate's comprehensive property insurance bill, this legislation is a top AIF priority for the restoration of the private residential insurance market, which is essential to reducing Citizens and its potential deficit taxes. Further, SB 408 includes provisions to eliminate fraud abuse in claims relating to mandatory sinkhole coverage.

SB 408 passed with unanimous consent and will now proceed to the full Budget Committee, the bill's final committee stop before being considered on the floor. The Senate Budget Committee is scheduled to hear SB 408 on Tuesday, March 15th .

AIF SUPPORTS legislation such as SB 408 by Sen. Garrett Richter (R-Naples) which makes sinkhole coverage optional to the insured; reduces the time frame to file hurricane claims from 5 years to 3 years after the hurricane; increases solvency requirements for insurance companies; eliminates public adjusters' abuses; and repeals the current requirement that property replacement costs be paid up front and replace with the payment of actual cash value with a holdback until repairs are actually completed.

Growth Management

On Tuesday, March 8th the House Community & Military Affairs Subcommittee considered and passed HB 639 Relating to Affordable Housing by Representative Gary Aubuchon (R-Cape Coral). Passing unanimously with no objection, HB 639 will remove the statutory limitations on the amount of documentary stamp revenue that goes into the State Housing Trust Fund and the Local Government Housing Trust Fund. The caps on the trust fund distributions are eliminated, so that 7.53 percent of net documentary stamp tax collections are split 50 percent to the State Housing Trust Fund and 50 percent to the Local Government Housing Trust Fund, and 8.66% of the net collections are split 12.5 percent to the State Housing Trust Fund and 87.5 percent to the Local Government Housing Trust Fund.

HB 639 has been a major priority for AIF and the Sadowski Housing Coalition and is expected to pass this legislative session.

HB 639 will now proceed to the Transportation & Economic Development Appropriations Subcommittee for consideration by its members. The Senate companion, SB 912 by Senator Mike Bennett (R-Bradenton), was passed by the Senate Community Affairs Committee on Monday of this week and awaits further deliberation in the Senate Committee on Children, Families, and Elder Affairs.

AIF SUPPORTS legislation that repeals the Housing Trust Fund cap and appropriates all doc stamp revenue toward affordable housing. AIF has worked closely with the Sadowski Coalition in effort to allocate these funds for which they were originally intended.

On Wednesday of this week, the Senate Judiciary committee took up and passed SB 410 Relating to Impact Fees by Senator Mike Bennett (R-Bradenton). This legislation would create the "preponderance

of the evidence” standard of review for the government in cases challenging the imposition or amount of an impact fee. At the present, a local government wins if their action was “fairly debatable”. Under SB 410, local governments must prove their case by the preponderance” of the evidence, which is the standard in civil cases today. Essentially, the bill will take away the “upper hand” that local governments have in defending their ordinances in court.

SB 410 is now headed to the Senate Rules Committee, its final committee of reference before heading to the floor. The House companion, HB 7021 by the House Community & Military Affairs Subcommittee, is waiting to be assigned to committees of reference.

AIF SUPPORTS a thorough review and, where appropriate, a limitation on the use of impact fee. Through all of the Legislature’s attempts to lower taxes, they have yet to place any mandates of fairness or limitation on the ever-growing local government funding source of “user fees”.

Education

Under the Chairmanship of Representative Marti Coley (R-Mariana), the House PreK-12 Appropriations Subcommittee met on Tuesday, March 8th and heard a workshop on proposed bill language to reduce class size in “core-curricula courses”. This provision defines core courses and clarifies that extracurricular courses are exempt from the class size requirements. Pre kindergarten through grade 3 “core-curricula courses” will continue to be capped at 18 students, grades 4 through 8 at 22 students, and grades 9 through 12 at 25 students, as required in the constitution. In addition, the bill language authorizes district school boards to make the determination they need to temporarily add students above their respective maximum if students arrive after the final count: up to 3 additional students may be assigned in kindergarten through grade 3, and up to 5 additional students for grades 4 through 12.

AIF has long supported flexibility in implementing the class size requirements in the Constitution in a way that balances the mandate with the need to preserve elective course offerings.

Thursday, March 10th marked the third and final reading of SB 736 Relating to Education Personnel by Senator Stephen Wise (R-Jacksonville), known widely as the Student Success Act. Senator Thad Altman (R-Melbourne) sponsored two late-filed amendments, which were both quickly voted down. Debate consisted of many of the same concerns expressed during the second reading, mostly regarding funding and how to appropriately assess teacher performance. Senator Nan Rich (D-Sunrise) went even as far as to claim that this bill is an unfunded mandate. Senators Evelyn Lynn (R-Daytona Beach) and Don Gaetz (R-Niceville) spoke very passionately about the bill, stating support for teachers’ professionalism and necessary reform. The final vote was 26-12 in favor of the bill’s passage, and was mostly divided along party lines; however, Senator Gary Siplin (D-Orlando) broke ranks with his party and voted in favor of the bill. In a similar fashion, Senator Paula Dockery (R-Lakeland) voted against the bill.

SB 736 was immediately certified and sent to House messages to be considered by its members.

SB 736’s House counterpart, HB 7019 by Representative Erik Fresen (R-Miami), made its last committee stop on Thursday morning in the House Education Committee. The bill was received well, although it drew sharp criticism from Representatives Gwen Clarke-Reed (D-Pompano Beach) and Betty Reed (D-Tampa). Representative Marti Coley (R-Mariana) was particularly pleased with HB 7019 for its efforts to increase accountability in the system, and excited that the profession will finally receive the respect and rewards it deserves. Ultimately, the bill was reported favorably by a vote of 12-6.

HB 7019 will likely be brought before the full House for a vote next week.

AIF SUPPORTS these bills because they provide a more business-like approach to the profession of teaching and will help keep our best teachers in the classroom. Senate Bill 736 and House Bill 7019 reforms teacher evaluation, teacher pay and professional service contracts in a manner that focuses on student learning as the most important factor in these decisions. Establishing these reforms will improve Florida's workforce, thereby making Florida more competitive in the global marketplace.

Environmental

HB 13 Relating to Onsite Sewage Treatment and Disposal Systems by Representative Marti Coley (R-Mariana) received a favorable vote from members of the House Health Care Appropriations Subcommittee Tuesday, March 8th. HB 13 repeals the onsite sewage and disposal system evaluation program that was scheduled to begin on July 1, 2011. During the 2010 regular session, the legislature passed SB 550 – an omnibus bill dealing with a variety of water issues including the septic tank inspection program. This issue was so controversial that the Florida Legislature passed a bill during the Special Session back in November 2010 to delay the implementation of the evaluation/inspection system.

HB 13 will now proceed to the House State Affairs Committee for further consideration by its members.

AIF SUPPORTS revising the legislation dealing with the septic tank inspection program passed last session (SB 550) by changing the statewide program to a pilot program in counties with a first magnitude spring or an impaired watershed basin.

Taxation

On Tuesday, March 8th the House Business and Consumer Affairs Subcommittee unanimously passed HB 311 Relating to Local Business Taxes by Representative Ken Roberson (R-Port Charlotte). This bill aims to reduce the tax burden Florida employers are currently facing as a result of local ordinances that require employees to pay local business taxes if their employer is already paying local businesses taxes to operate a business. The bill prohibits local governments from imposing a “local business tax” for professions regulated by the Department of Business and Professional Regulation (DBPR) without the local government verifying that the person has satisfied the DBPR qualification requirements. Furthermore, the bill clearly specifies that an individual who engages in or manages a business, profession, or occupation as an employee of another person is not required to pay a local business tax, obtain a local business tax receipt, or apply for an exemption from a local business tax.

HB 311 will now be considered by members of the House Finance and Tax Committee.

AIF SUPPORTS legislation that eliminates the requirement for certain employees to pay a “local business tax” if their employer is already paying a similar tax. This legislation will reduce the tax burden on employees across Florida and create a more business-friendly environment at a time when Florida's economy needs it the most.

On Wednesday, March 9th the House Finance and Tax committee met to examine the Corporate Income tax for possible modifications that would further employment possibilities for Floridians. Dr. Don Langston, the Committee's Staff Director, was introduced by Chairman Steve Precourt (R-Orlando) to give a presentation on the possible modifications.

Mr. Langston's presentation included the possibility of changing the state's corporate income tax apportionment formula to a single sales factor along with other credits, cutting the corporate income tax rate (which Governor Scott has recommended) and creating new credits or exemptions. **AIF lobbyist Frank Meiners** testified in support of an optional, not mandatory, move to the single sales factor apportionment factor.



Following the questions by members to better understand the presentation, Ben Phipps – a member of the AIF tax committee – testified that chapter 221 of Florida Statutes relating to emergency excise tax should be repealed to simplify the filing of corporate income tax in Florida.

AIF SUPPORTS the repeal of Chapter 221. While it currently adds little to state revenues, its repeal will do away with an unnecessary burden on Florida's corporate income taxpayers. Furthermore, AIF SUPPORTS legislation that would enact an optional Single Sales Factor formula for determining a company's corporate income taxes. This move would encourage companies to relocate or expand in Florida due to the advantages of determining income taxes solely on a company's sales, and not by the amount of property or payroll they may have.

On Friday, March 11th the Senate Budget Subcommittee on Finance and Tax considered Proposed Committee Bill (PCB) 7064 Relating to Corporate Income Tax. Chair Ellyn Bogdanoff (R-Fort Lauderdale) asked Mr. Robert Babin, the Committee's staff analyst, to explain the bill.

Mr. Babin explained that the state corporate income tax is a function of the taxpayer's federal income tax. Each year, Florida passes a corporate income tax "piggyback" bill to adopt the federal changes that were made.

In some cases, however, when the federal code changes allow for increased depreciation of certain assets that would cost the state revenue, the state does not always codify those particular changes. Mr. Babin went on to explain that in 2008 and 2009, the "piggyback" bill allowed taxpayers to spread the benefits received by the federal code changes over the span of 7 years.

PCB 7064 extends this process for the 2010 and 2011 federal changes, thus avoiding the \$500,000.000 estimated loss in corporate income tax.

AIF Lobbyist Frank Meiners testified that while AIF would have preferred a 5 year add back, AIF commends members of the committee for providing an add back method that prevents the taxpayers from having to keep two sets of books. In addition, passing PCB 7064 would help avoid taxpayers having to file amended quarterly returns.

Following testimony, the committee approved the introduction of PCB 7064 as a committee bill. The bill was subsequently filed as SB 1998 and awaits assignment to further committees of reference.

AIF SUPPORTS the adoption of a corporate income tax "piggyback" bill that codifies federal income tax code changes and ensures that businesses are not burdened with keeping two sets of books.

Legal & Judicial

On Wednesday, March 9th the Senate Judiciary Committee favorably passed an important piece of tort reform legislation relating to the admissibility of expert witness evidence in litigation. SB 822 by Senator Ellyn Bogdanoff (R-Ft. Lauderdale) will provide consistency for the criteria to be used in evaluating expert evidence between federal and Florida courts.

The admission of “junk science” has increased due to the tendency of trial judges to allow evidence in to court that is built on scientifically weak studies or dubious expert witnesses. In 1993, the United States Supreme Court established guidelines for federal judges for admitting scientific evidence and expert testimony. However, that standard is not binding on Florida state court judges, which has ultimately resulted in judges having total discretion to determine which opinions are admissible. This allows for different standards to be applied in different areas of the state.

In order to address this problem, many states are adopting legislation similar to Senator Bogdanoff’s bill, which use the standards for reliability and accuracy of scientific and technical evidence that the federal courts use. AIF strongly supports the passage of this legislation which ensures that trial judges are forced to conduct deliberative hearings in order to ascertain the qualification of a witness to testify as an expert. This bill will also require expert testimony relating to scientific evidence to be based on sufficient facts and be the product of reliable principles.

SB 822 passed on a party line vote of 5-2. The next scheduled committee of reference is the Senate Budget Committee.

AIF SUPPORTS legislation that will go a long way to help Florida correct a litigation crisis that increase costs to all American businesses and consumers. AIF applauds Senator Bogdanoff’s vision and leadership in sponsoring this critical legislation to make Florida a better place to conduct business.

On Thursday, March 10th the Senate Committee on Military Affairs, Space and Domestic Security unanimously passed SB 450 Relating to Emergency Management by Senator Mike Bennett (R-Sarasota). This legislation provides civil immunity to any person who gratuitously provides housing, shelter, food or certain other provisions in the wake of a declared disaster to first responders. SB 450 is important to community recovery and business continuity following catastrophic events. When communities are able to provide for their own first responder communities they are able to restore services and return to a state of normalcy much more quickly.

SB 450 is now slated to be heard in the Senate Judiciary Committee. The House proposal, sponsored by Representative Joe Abruzzo (D-Wellington), is awaiting consideration in the House Community & Military Affairs Subcommittee.

AIF SUPPORTS legislation that offers basic protection from unnecessary litigation to business owners who offer their services to first responders during natural disasters. Furthermore, AIF commends Senator Bennett for his vision and leadership in bringing forward this proposal.

Open-Carry of Firearms

On Wednesday, February 9th, the Senate Criminal Justice committee considered SB 234 Relating to Firearms by Senator Greg Evers (R-Crestview). This bill would expand Florida’s current concealed weapons law to allow for those license holders to carry their weapons in the open. As originally filed, SB 234 would also allow license holders to carry their firearms into career centers, nonpublic elementary and secondary school facilities, as well as colleges and universities.

Senator Evers offered an amendment to the bill which added a reference to an existing list of locations and businesses where guns are not allowed. This list of locations was originally included in the “Guns in the workplace” bill that passed two years ago and includes locations such as schools, correctional institutions, nuclear facilities, national defense, aerospace, or homeland security facilities, and businesses where the primary activity is the manufacture of combustible or explosive materials, etc.

Following the adoption of this amendment, Senator Paula Dockery (R-Lakeland) offered an additional amendment which deleted the language in the original bill which would have allowed persons with concealed weapons permits to enter school and college campuses. There was no vote on the bill because the Committee ran out of time. The bill is expected to be back on the agenda at the next meeting.

AIF OPPOSES legislation that would permit “open-carry” of firearms in Florida. The passage of this type of law could drastically expand liability concerns for business owners by creating a new duty of care related to having knowledge of a potential dangerous instrument on an employer’s premises.

Health Care

On Wednesday, March 9th the full Senate approved a bill filed by Senate President Mike Haridopolos (R-Melbourne). Senate Joint Resolution (SJR) 2 is a proposed constitutional amendment that would allow Floridians to opt-out of the individual healthcare mandate to purchase health insurance, which is currently contained in President Obama's Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act – more commonly known as “ObamaCare”. The federal law currently requires every American to obtain health insurance by 2014.

Following its passage by the full Senate, SJR 2 will now proceed to the House for consideration. The House companion, HJR 1 by Representative Scott Plakon (R-Longwood) has not yet been heard. If this measure passes the Legislature, Florida voters would be given the chance to vote on this issue on the 2012 ballot. At least 60 percent of the voters would have to approve of the language for it to be added to the Florida Constitution.

AIF SUPPORTS legislation that will protect Florida consumers from the radical proposals passed by Congress to overhaul our nation’s health care system. Furthermore, AIF commends President Haridopolos for the expeditious passage of this important legislation.

Pension Reform

The Senate Government Oversight and Accountability Committee, chaired by Senator Jeremy Ring (D-Margate), took up, amended, and passed SB 1130 on Thursday, March 10th -- one of two major pension reforms bills that have held the committee’s attention since mid-January.

Florida’s public employees are covered one of two ways in a pension system: plans administered at a state level, and local municipal plans administered by cities.

The remaining pension bill, SB 1128 by Chairman Ring, will stay in the committee for future action. This bill addresses pension reforms at the local municipal government level.

With a number of amendments added to the state level bill on Thursday, the Senate Government Oversight and Accountability Committee mitigated the reach of Gov. Rick Scott’s recommended plan. The Governor would close the FRS from all further entrants and instead require new hires to enroll and contribute five percent into a 401(k), or defined contribution retirement plan. In general, both the Governor and the Senate want to move public sector employees into benefit plans that are more closely aligned with common practice in the private sector, and although less stringent, the amended SB 1130 is

consistent with that direction. To learn more about the reforms found within SB 1130, check out Thursday's edition of the Daily Brief.

AIF SUPPORTS efforts to bring Florida's pension system more in line with that of the private sector. These important reforms will help balance the state's budget in future years and protect taxpayer dollars. AIF applauds Senator Ring for his deliberative approach to stabilizing the growing liability of these state and local government pension plans.

Ethics and Elections

On Thursday, March 10th the House State Affairs Committee approved HB 1021 by Representative Chris Dorworth (R-Heathrow) by a vote that fell strictly along party lines. The bill prohibits state and local government from automatic payroll deductions for membership dues and Political Action Committee (PAC) contributions for members of public employee unions such as teachers, police, etc. The measure also allows a union member who has contributed to his or her union's PAC to request and receive a pro-rated refund of their contribution at any time during the year.

HB 1021 will now continue to the House Appropriations Committee, its final committee of reference before proceeding to the House floor. The Senate proposal, SB 830 by Senator John Thrasher (R-Jacksonville), is scheduled to be heard in the Senate Community Affairs Committee on Monday, March 14th at 10:15 am.

AIF SUPPORTS efforts to give union members more of a say on how their union dues are spent. At a time when dollars are scarce, union members should be allowed to keep their hard-earned money if they decide not to support their union's political activity.

Economic Development

On Friday, March 11th the Florida Senate Budget Subcommittee on Transportation, Tourism and Economic Development Appropriations, chaired by Senator Don Gaetz (R-Niceville), unveiled their first draft proposal to create a new economic development agency for the state of Florida. Titled "Jobs Florida", the current Agency for Workforce Innovation and several key divisions of the Department of Community Affairs would be rolled together along with the Governor's Office of Tourism, Trade and Economic Development to create a consolidated agency to focus on job creation.

The new agency, which is the top priority for new Governor Rick Scott, would house six divisions: Finance and Administration, Community Development, Business Development, Strategic Planning, Unemployment Compensation and Workforces Services. Chairman Gaetz commented that the new agency would be much more effective, targeted and responsive to companies needing incentives and permits from the state to expand.

The Committee also heard brief testimony from Mr. Gray Swoope, the new President of Enterprise Florida. As the former economic development director for the state of Mississippi, Mr. Swoope testified that his immediate goal will be to lead Enterprise Florida as the lead sales organization for the state, to create the right organizational structure, and to focus more on "speed" in decisions as one of the most vital requirements of his organization.

AIF SUPPORTS efforts to find a consolidated delivery system with goals and accountability measures in place to effectively promote economic policies that will recruit new industries from out of state and protect and assist existing businesses.

Space

On Thursday, March 10th the Senate Military Affairs, Space & Domestic Security Committee unanimously passed SB 652 Relating to Liability of Spaceflight Entities by Senator David Simmons (R-Maitland). Currently, spaceflight entities are not liable for the injury or death of a participant if the accident is due to the inherent risks involved in space flight. This protection, as it currently stands, is set to expire in 2018. SB 652 will eliminate this sunset provision, thereby keeping Florida competitive with other states as we compete globally for aerospace business. Aside from praise by Chair Thad Altman (R-Melbourne) for bringing this bill forward, the measure was passed with little discussion or debate.

SB 652 will now proceed to the Senate Judiciary Committee for consideration by its members. The House companion, HB 703 by Representative Tom Goodson (R-Titusville), awaits deliberation by members of the House Economic Development & Tourism Subcommittee.

AIF SUPPORTS this bill and the entire space agenda, and will work with Space Florida and other partners in the aerospace industry to make Florida a desirable location for aerospace commerce. SB 652 will continue to make Florida a desirable location for commercial spaceflight by extending liability protections for commercial space companies.

Seaport Security

The Senate Committee on Military Affairs, Space and Domestic Security unanimously passed SB 524 Relating to Seaport Security by Senator Jack Latvala (R-St. Petersburg) on Thursday, March 10th. Relating to improvements in security regulations at Florida's seaports, AIF has worked on this issue for the past several years, with some intermediate steps being taken in the past. This bill, however, completely and finally removes all duplicative, costly and burdensome security regulations that cause business in Florida's seaports to be much more expensive than in competing states. This legislation has bi-partisan support among legislators, as well as support of the business community, labor, and port authorities.

SB 524 will now proceed to the Senate Committee on Transportation. The House companion, HB 283 by Representative Dana Young (R-Tampa), awaits consideration in the House Transportation & Highway Safety Subcommittee.

AIF SUPPORTS legislation to reduce red tape and regulatory burdens, such as duplicative security credentialing, which encumber businesses in their daily work. AIF commends Senator Latvala for advancing this business-friendly proposal in the Legislature.