



DAILY BRIEF

From March 11, 2013

The beginning of the second week of the 2013 Legislative Session saw little committee action. Still, health care and Medicaid dominated the majority of headlines, while agriculture issues also came up. Associated Industries of Florida (AIF) was present at both major committee meetings this afternoon to stand on behalf of Florida's employers.

Health Care

This afternoon, the Senate Committee on Patient Protection and Affordable Health Care (PPACA) voted along party lines *not* to expand eligibility in the state's Medicaid Program. However, following the vote, Chair Joe Negron (R-Stuart) outlined his plan for an alternative plan that would allow low income Floridians to purchase health insurance coverage with premium assistance. Sen. Negron said he hopes to move the plan this session. The components of the program include:

- *Defining a benchmark health insurance plan in which everyone must pay an amount for services.* Sen. Negron noted that the payments, such as copayments and deductibles by low income persons would be based on a sliding scale.
- *Using the Healthy Kids Program as the framework through which persons in this new plan would purchase coverage.* Healthy Kids currently provides health insurance plans to children of low income families. Negron told members that the program saves an average of 4.5% over cost and has worked within an 85% MLR (plans providing services must spend at least 85% on health care services, rather than on administrative services).
- *Requiring the health insurance plan to have a Health Reimbursement Account (HRA) component in which participants can be rewarded for healthy behavior.* Patients can build up the funds and use them for co pays or for uncovered services.

Sen. Negron told committee members that, although more research was needed, there may be a way to advance this plan without being required to receive a waiver from the federal government, which was required for the 2011 Medicaid reform plan. Sen. Negron went on to say that he would like to see Florida's use of the traditional Medicaid system replaced by a premium assistance program.

Moving forward, the Select Committee will meet to discuss in more detail the components of this alternative plans. The committee is scheduled to meet next on Monday, March 18th. The House Select Committee is scheduled to meet on Friday March 15th.

Recently, Governor Rick Scott noted he would support expansion of the Medicaid program called, with a few caveats. Last week, Speaker Will Weatherford (R-Wesley Chapel) noted he did not support expansion in his speech on the opening day of session.

Associated Industries of Florida (AIF) encourages legislators to best leverage available federal funding to ensure Floridians have coverage in a manner protects the state's financial health.

Environment and Agriculture

Today in the Senate Committee on Agriculture, AIF demonstrated its support for Senator Alan Hays' (R-Umatilla) SB 1106, *Relating to Agritourism*. Agritourism refers to the practice of attracting tourists to agricultural areas, usually for recreational or educational purposes. Agritourism provides Florida farmers with an alternative and innovative way to expand their incomes either through activities on the farm or employment activities off of the farm.

Under current Florida law, also known as the *Greenbelt Law*, agricultural operative properties are taxed according to the "use" value of these operations rather than the developmental value. SB 1106 prohibits a local government from adopting ordinances or policies designed to prohibit or limit agritourism activity on land deemed "agricultural" by the county property appraiser. The bill also clarifies the definition of "agritourism activity," and establishes a limit on the liability for the landowner and the employees if a notice of risk is posted on the land. The bill passed unanimously and now heads to the Senate Committee on Community Affairs, scheduled to meet Thursday, March 14th.

AIF supports any legislation that allows Florida farmers to safely expand their incomes through the use of Agritourism.