

# EMPLOYER ADVOCATE

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Volume 2 Number 2 June/July 1993

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## Changes In Attitudes

**O**n February 2, the rapping of a gavel opened the 1993 Legislative Session, and no one really knew what to expect.

During his State of the State Address on opening day, Gov. Lawton Chiles presented an ambitious program of initiatives in health care, workers' comp, criminal justice and campaign financing. Senate President Ander Crenshaw (R-Jacksonville) vowed to pursue an agenda of limited objectives: no new taxes and a timely end to the session. House Speaker Bo Johnson (D-Milton) wholeheartedly of-

fered his support to the latter objective while giving the first a lukewarm reception. All three declared their intent to

*"Maybe . . .  
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*Senate President  
Ander Crenshaw*

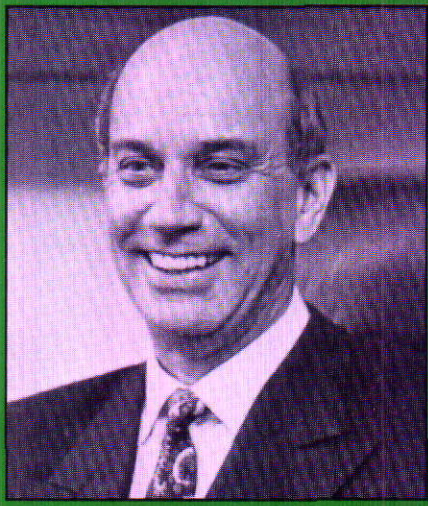
work in a spirit of friendship and cooperation, a welcome change from the bitter and divisive atmosphere that hovered over last year's meetings. Crenshaw summed up the reigning mood: "I noticed everybody has this willingness to get along and work hard. Maybe that's because all these new people don't know any better."

Passage of a budget is the only required item of business for the Legislature. Chiles made a request for \$630 million in new revenue, but separated it from his plan for tax reform. Taking a revenue-neutral approach, Chiles' plan closed a number of tax loopholes then used the money raised to reduce property taxes. Crenshaw responded to Chiles by insisting on allocating existing state resources in productive and cost-effective programs without raising taxes. He also asked for a constitutional amendment capping the growth of state revenues to bring an end to the ever-burgeoning level of government appropriations.

This year would pose the first test of the constitutional amendment requiring the budget to undergo a 72-hour waiting period before lawmakers put it to a final vote. That guideline, accepted by the vot-

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## President's Message



# Interest In Florida

by Jon L. Shebel, President and Chief Executive Officer, Associated Industries of Florida

**D**emocracy is rarely a tidy process. After all, the right to disagree and express opinions is a habit born of freedom.

That is the nature of politics: confrontation and compromise bring about common solutions. But when people work at cross purposes for short-term or narrow objectives, the result is bad news for this state.

While past sessions have been marked by intransigent disregard of some serious problems facing the state, this year witnessed a new willingness on the part of special interests to drop inflexible convictions in favor of negotiated solutions.

That spirit of collaboration smoothed the way for Florida's landmark response to the health care crisis. It also was responsible for the early coalition between business and labor that crafted the workers' compensation reform package. Those reforms fell under an onslaught of opposition by the legal community, but during the final days of the session, the trial lawyers joined AIF, the AFL-CIO and others to iron out their differences.

When the governor brings the Legislature back in special session, the consensus of the coalition should make it possible to alter the uncontrollable and expensive

workers' comp system and thereby bring some long-awaited relief to employers.

This trend to solve disagreements through face-to-face negotiation is the best hope for our state. Compromise, a dirty word for environmentalists in past years, made progress possible this year. Charles Lee, a lobbyist for the Audubon Society, withstood virulent condemnation from reporters and grass-roots organizations who accused him of selling out. Lee nevertheless acknowledged the wisdom of necessity by remarking, "The real world of the Legislature is one where all of our environmental ideas cannot always be completely accommodated."

Much attention was directed toward controlling the influence of special interest money on the legislative process. What often is ignored in the debate are the strong-arm tactics of some (not all) legislators who withhold support of bills until they receive campaign contributions from interested parties.

For years, certain legislators ignored an inherent conflict of interest when they opened campaign accounts during the legislative session and solicited donations from lobbyists. The practice reeks of influence-peddling, but attempts to outlaw it failed during the session. Some elected officials, such as Rep. Jack Ascherl (D-New Smyrna Beach), have voluntarily chosen to take the high road by waiting until after the session to open their campaign accounts. As Ascherl says, "It's not good public policy before we make laws."

Tom Slade, the new chairman of the Republican Party, has also taken the initiative to reform campaign financing. As I told you in the last President's Message, leadership funds established by both parties have led to abusive practices. While contributions to candidates are subject to limits, not so with donations made to the

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parties. Once the money is received, top lawmakers decide who gets the funds, a potent tool for those intent on holding their power.

Upon taking over the GOP, Slade instituted an investigation into the matter of his party's leadership fund. After completion of the investigation, Slade announced he would keep a close watch on the money as it came in and take control as it went out. His action should reduce the domina-

tion of party "consultants" (aka sleaze artists) who exert a negative influence over campaigns and candidates.

When asked if the Democrats would follow suit, party director Linda Russell responded, "We're not into chest-beating to the degree the Republicans are." Apparently Russell equates voluntary adherence to ethical standards with foolish idealism. Upon further questioning about Slade's desire to limit the amount of money that can be contributed to a political party, Russell goes on to display the depths of her cynicism: "When political parties can't even the odds, trial lawyers, doctors and business interests will replace them." Russell appears to believe that a violation of the

integrity of our election process is redeemed when the action is perpetrated by a political party. Perhaps some day she will realize that abuse by a political party is just as offensive as abuse by any other hand.

Arguments over ethics aside, the 1993 Session was a good one for business and the state as employers got some help from traditional foes. With the easy prosperity of the 1980s giving way to a slow-down in growth in the 1990s, this trend toward cooperation is partly attributable to economic necessity. Human nature causes most of us to take the good times for granted, but now that the bills are coming due, reality is forcing everyone to take a wider view of what is best for Florida. For those of us who take part in the process of making public policy, 1993 offered some positive omens for our state's future.

