



# DAILY BRIEF

From December 6, 2005

## Special Session "B"

Members of the Senate Republican Caucus met this afternoon for the purpose of selecting Sen. Ken Pruitt (R-Port St. Lucie) as President-designate for the 2006-2008 term. Former Senate President Jim King (R-Jacksonville) gave the nomination speech and Sen. JD Alexander (R-Lake Wales) gave the seconding speech. During his acceptance speech, Sen. Pruitt, showed a video highlighting the achievements of individual members of the caucus.

AIF congratulates Sen. Pruitt on his designation as the next President of the Florida Senate.

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### Minimum Wage

HB 29B Relating the Florida Minimum Wage Act by Rep. David Simmons (R-Altamonte Springs) was unanimously passed with no amendments by the House Commerce Council. This is the implementing bill for the recently approved Constitutional amendment raising Florida's minimum wage to \$6.15.

Although no amendments were adopted, Rep. Ed Jennings (D-Gainesville) did announce to the committee that he hopes to add a provision to the bill which requires the production of a "state poster" displaying the minimum wage law. This "state poster" would be similar to the federal poster which employers are currently required to display in their place of business.

HB 29B has been placed on the House calendar and will be taken up next on the floor.

**AIF supports the implementation language of HB 29B. Although the jury is still out on the effects of raising Florida's minimum wage on the business environment of our state, it is important to implement certain safe guards like the 15 day right-to-cure provision for the protection of both employers and employees.**

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### Taxation

The House Finance and Tax Committee unanimously passed HB 15B Relating to Ad Valorem Property Tax by Rep. Adam Hasner (R-Delray Beach). Currently, property taxes on a person's home or business are due and payable in November and are delinquent on April 1 of the following year. Discounts are available to taxpayers for early payments. HB 15B by Rep. Hasner would allow a county, that was declared a major disaster area by a named storm in 2005, to extend the time in which property tax payment made by property owner qualifies for early-payment discount. The bill establishes the following discount provisions:

- Four percent for taxes paid by 1/31/06
- Three percent for taxes paid by 2/28/06
- Two percent for taxes paid by 3/31/06

Local governments and municipalities still have the final say on whether to enact this type of discount. Emergency ordinances would have to be voted on before this policy could take effect. Businesses in cities affected by the 2005 storms can benefit from this bill tremendously by paying less in property taxes.

HB 15B was placed on the calendar and will be heard next on the floor of the House.

**AIF supports giving businesses the opportunity to pay less in property taxes if they suffered through one of Florida's recent hurricanes. HB 15B provides some breathing room for businesses to get back on their feet.**

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### Workers' Compensation

The Senate General Government Appropriations Committee met today regarding the Legislative Budget Request for Office of Judge of Compensation Claims (OJCC). At the beginning of the meeting, Chairman Charlie Clary (R-Destin) observed that last year's budget contained \$1.6 million dollars and 20 positions for new judges and staff which were vetoed by the Governor because the agency had not requested additional judges or staff.

Robert Cohen, Chief Judge of the Division of Administrative Hearings presented the OJCC's budget request. Chief Judge Cohen began his remarks with stating that the due to the 2003 changes to the Workers Compensation Act; petitions for benefits were down significantly. Last year, 31 mediators handled 26,410 mediation conferences; of this number approximately half of the cases were settled at mediation. Additionally, Chief Judge Cohen observed that \$8.2 million dollars in child support arrearage has been paid by claimants, due to statutory changes enacted by the Legislature last session mandating collection of child support from workers compensation settlements.

The Division is requesting a total of \$27.2 million dollars and 265 full time employee positions. The OJCC is seeking approximately \$1.5 million dollars and 10 positions for four priority areas: 1.) security; 2.) additional staffing; 3.) salaries for judges and 4.) monies to reclassify career service secretaries to select exempted service.

The OJCC is requesting a 3% increase in judge's salaries in order to make the salaries comparable to that of county court judges. According to Chief Judge Cohen, the OJCC loses judges whenever a position becomes open in the county or circuit courts due to the more attractive salaries.

Chairman Clary asked Chief Judge Cohen to explain the factors that are driving the number increase in certain judge's caseloads. Chief Judge Cohen noted that although the number of simple cases has decreased, there have been an increased number of hearings being scheduled for more complex cases.

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## NASCAR

A bill that would create a specialty license plate benefiting the NASCAR Hall of Fame is making great progress through the legislative process. HB 31B by Rep. Pat Patterson (R-Deland) was passed by the House Finance and Tax Committee as well as the House Fiscal Council today. The bill establishes an annual use fee of \$25, to be paid by purchasers of the plate in addition to license taxes and fees. Annual use fees are distributed to the NASCAR Hall of Fame to be used exclusively for the construction and operation of the NASCAR Hall of Fame.

The authorization of the NASCAR license plate is contingent upon the City of Daytona Beach being designated by the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing, Inc., as the site for the official NASCAR Hall of Fame. Currently there are 4 other cities (Atlanta, Charlotte, Richmond, and Kansas City) being considered as sites for the NASCAR Hall of Fame. It is believed that NASCAR will announce its selection sometime in January of 2006 thus explaining the need for quick action by the legislature.

HB 31B was placed on the calendar and will be heard next on the floor of the House.