

ASSOCIATED INDUSTRIES OF FLORIDA  
**LEGISLATIVE  
DAILY BRIEF**



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The House and Senate are finally getting into the groove of session and bills are beginning to move between each chamber. Even though we are only a week away from the end of session, the House still has found the time to spend hours debating some controversial bills dealing with prostitution and abortion.

The Senate spent much of the afternoon debating and amending one of AIF's top priorities for 2007 – the Cable Competition bill (SB 998). The issue is now ready to be voted on by the Senate as early as tomorrow. Several bills dealing with workforce development, another priority issue for AIF, were considered in both chambers and are also ready to be voted on.

No progress was made on property tax reform today, since the conference committee failed to meet. From all accounts, negotiations are at a stand still and both sides are regrouping before making any additional offers. No formal announcement has been made as to when the next meeting will be taking place.

### **Workforce Development**

Several workforce development bills saw action today on the floor of both chambers. SB 918 Relating to Student Financial Assistance/Need-based Students by Senator Steve Wise (R-Jacksonville) was heard and amended today on Second Reading. The bill expands the eligibility criteria for the Florida Work Experience Program (FWEP). FWEP is a work-study financial aid program that enables certain Florida postsecondary students to gain work experience in their field of study. Participating students work for an employer in their field of study and employers receive reimbursement from the student's postsecondary institution for wages paid to the student.

SB 918 is now ready for a final vote. Its House companion, HB 343 by Representative Aaron Bean (R-Fernandina Beach), is also ready for a final vote after being considered on the floor of the House today.

**Florida's workforce must meet the demands of our state's employers. Therefore, AIF supports legislation that would increase participation and funding for the Florida Work Experience Program. Allowing students to gain valuable, real-world experience in their field of study is sound public policy.**

In the House, HB 1161 Relating to High School to Business Career Enhancement Act by Representative Kevin Ambler (R-Tampa) was debated today. The bill requires each district school board to adopt policies and procedures for the High School to Business Career Enhancement Program through which student internships shall be offered in each school district. One amendment was adopted during debate that helped align the bill to its Senate companion, SB 2458 by Senator Victor Crist (R-Tampa).

**AIF supports legislation that encourages schools boards to establish partnerships with the private sector aimed at making easier for our students to gain valuable on-the-job experience. Better-prepared students equal a better trained workforce; one that will be able to meet the demands of the global economy.**

### **State-Issued Cable Franchises**

The Senate considered SB 998 Relating to Cable TV/Video Service Franchises by Senator Mike Bennett (R-Bradenton) today. This bill opens the door for consumers to have choice in the cable TV market by establishing a statewide franchise process to be administered by the Department of State (DOS). This is perhaps one of the most lobbied bills this session, with advocates representing the incumbent cable TV providers, the telecommunication companies that want to offer video service, and representatives from local government who are affected by many of the provisions in the bill. The full Senate had an opportunity to debate this bill for the first time this afternoon and to consider amendments. Over 28 amendments were filed on the bill in an effort for each of the interested parties to be heard. AIF has supported the concept of increasing competition in this market since the bill was first filed last year. Businesses and consumers across the state will benefit from reduced prices and more choice.

The bill's sponsor had to fight several unfriendly amendments that would have drastically reduced the bill's chances of passing. The first of these amendments was by Senator Bill Posey (R-Rockledge). Senator Posey's amendment would have required video service providers to offer consumers "a la carte" channel selection. In other words, consumers would have to be given the ability to select only the channels they wanted instead of the normal packages offered by cable providers. Senator Bennett urged his colleagues to defeat this amendment because it would hurt independent and smaller channels that offer ethnic programming who depend on the more popular channels for funding. Senator Posey's amendment was ultimately defeated. Another unfriendly amendment by Senator Nancy Argenziano (R-Crystal River) would have allowed municipalities to offer video service to their residents if no competition was established 3 years after passage of the bill. Senator Argenziano explained that she was offering the amendment because there was no guarantee that more rural areas of the state would experience any competition in cable providers as outlined in the bill. This amendment was also defeated.

One of the amendments that was adopted was offered by Senator Mike Fasano (R-New Port Richey). Senator Fasano's amendment strengthened the bill's anti-discrimination provisions by adding language establishing steep financial penalties for cable providers who are found to be willfully denying cable service because of race or income.

Upon conclusion of the amendatory process, the Senate took up the House version, HB 529 by Representative Trey Traviesa (R-Tampa), and substituted the Senate bill, as amended, for the House Bill.

HB 529 is now ready to be considered for final passage by the Senate. The final vote could come as early as Friday, April 27th.

**AIF supports legislation to allow for state-issued cable franchises because it opens up the cable market to the free market. Increased competition will only ensure better service, a better product, and more importantly, lower prices for the citizens and businesses of our state.**

### **Economic Development**

The House unanimously passed (116-0) HB 83 Relating to Florida Capital Formation Act by Representative Michael Grant (R-Punta Gorda). As amended the bill creates the Opportunity Fund Corporation, which will be housed under Enterprise Florida. This entity will be tasked with investing and leveraging approximately \$30 million dollars to attract additional venture capital investment in the state of Florida for companies and emerging businesses in the fields of IT, aviation, and manufacturing.

HB 83 will now be sent to the Senate for consideration.

**AIF supports legislation aimed at increasing the amount of venture capital investment in our state. Florida is significantly behind other growth states including Texas and California in the amount of money it spends on attracting venturing capital. This type of investment is essential for the growth of Florida's emerging businesses.**

### **Information Technology**

The Senate unanimously passed (39-0) SB 1974 Relating to State Information Technology by the Senate Governmental Operations Committee. This is AIF's Information Technology (IT) Council's must pass bill for the 2007 Session. The bill makes significant changes to the way enterprise information technology is governed by the state. The bill creates a new agency called the Agency on Enterprise Information Technology located in the Executive Office of the Governor, but headed by Governor and Cabinet.

SB 1974 will now be sent to the House for consideration.

**AIF supports this major overhaul of how IT systems are managed by the State. SB 1974 represents a real improvement in enterprise IT governance and a real improvement in agency chief information officer training and responsibilities.**

## Legal and Judicial

The Senate considered SB 320 Relating to Trespass/Posted Land/Railroads by Senator Jim King (R-Jacksonville) on Second Reading today. The bill simply provides reasonable limitations to signage requirements on Florida's 2,788 miles of railroad right of way. Existing law requires trespassing signage every 500 feet along that right of way. The bill would clarify the understanding that trespassing on railroad property exists regardless if the right of way is physically posted as a no trespassing area.

An unfriendly amendment by Senator Gary Siplin (D-Orlando) that would have prevented railroad companies from obstructing access to any private property surrounding railroad tracks was defeated.

SB 320 is now ready to be voted on for final passage in the Senate.

**AIF supports this bill because it removes onerous and over-burdensome regulations on Florida businesses. AIF supports legislation that helps keep our railroads safe from trespassing and eliminates the unrealistic requirement to post warnings every 500 feet. Florida has thousands of miles of railroad tracks, many of which go through very remote and inaccessible areas.**

## Jessica Lunsford Act

The Senate unanimously passed (39-0) SB 988 Relating to High-risk Offenders by Senator Nancy Argenziano (R-Crystal River). The bill makes significant changes to the Jessica Lunsford Act, which was enacted in 2005 to keep sexually predators away from school children. Unfortunately, the way the legislation was written, it made it very difficult for businesses to comply with its intent. Multiple background checks were being required for those businesses that had contracts with multiple districts. Definitions were also not clear of those who could not step on school grounds.

Under the bill, non-instructional personnel who are under direct supervision will not need the finger print background screening previously required and school districts will be able to share information with other school districts. Also, the amount a school district can charge for the background screening was capped.

Senator Argenziano explained that the bill was drafted in response to the inability of school boards to uniformly implement the original act. "We have fixed the problem by streamlining procedures and providing consistency across the state," stated Senator Argenziano.

SB 988 will now be sent to the House for consideration.

**AIF supports SB 988 since it will help companies who do business with school districts save time and money on the background screening for those employees who do not have direct contact with students, while upholding the integrity of the original law to protect our children from sexual predators.**

**Please send your comments or suggestions to us at [aif@aif.com](mailto:aif@aif.com) or call the Governmental Affairs department at (850)224-7173.**

- For more information on all of the important legislative information concerning the business community, go to our “members only” Florida Business Network web site at <http://fbnet.com>
- Send us your E-mail address and we will begin to send this report to you automatically via E-mail.