



DAILY BRIEF

From March 18, 2013

The beginning of Week 3 of the 2013 Legislative Session was dominated by health care discussion and environmental issues. Legislators were busy discussing the implementation and impact of the Patient Protections and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) as well as water quality credit trading and agricultural land legislation. In addition, the Senate Education Committee work shopped multiple charter school bills in an effort to create two comprehensive bills. Associated Industries of Florida (AIF) was present in multiple committee meetings to stand on behalf of Florida's employers.

Also of note, Governor Rick Scott released a statement on the unemployment rate. Florida's unemployment rate has fallen below the national average & more than 282,000 private-sector jobs have been created since December 2010.

Health Care

The Senate Select Committee on PPACA held its final meeting this morning and officially completed its mission. The committee acted on two remaining issues – how to address the state and federal insurance regulatory issues that are in conflict and whether or not to provide insurance to the state's part-time or "OPS" employees.

Chair Joe Negron (R-Stuart) recommended that the Office of Insurance Regulation (OIR) continue to review health insurance policies submitted by health insurers to ensure they comply with various state regulations such as consumer protection provisions. The recommendation also called for the OIR to suspend determining if rates proposed by health insurers are fair and reasonable. The committee voted to leave that responsibility to the federal government. However, Chair Negron left the door open for OIR to resume reviewing rates once the federal government completes the rules associated with the PPACA.

The second recommendation was to offer health insurance coverage to almost 10,000 temporary state employees who work an average of 30 hours a week or more. If the state had chosen not to provide coverage for these employees, a penalty in the amount of \$318 million would be levied by the federal government. The cost of providing coverage to these employees will cost Florida \$137 million. The Senate Banking and Insurance Committee will pick up where the Select Committee has left off on the insurance regulatory matters and we expect to see specific legislative proposals in the coming weeks.

The House Select Committee is scheduled to meet on Thursday morning and will most likely make recommendations on the two issues discussed by the Senate today. Both committees already voted against expanding eligibility in the state's Medicaid Program. The Senate plans to put forth an alternative plan that may provide funding for low income Floridians to purchase health insurance in the private market. The Senate Health Policy Committee, Chaired by Senator Aaron Bean (R-Jacksonville) will take the lead on that proposal.

AIF encourages legislators to best leverage available federal funding to ensure Floridians have coverage in a manner that protects the state's financial health and helps employers avoid a possible \$1.3 billion hidden tax for uncompensated care for thousands of Floridians not qualifying for private health care or Medicaid.

Environment & Agriculture

In the Senate Agriculture Committee meeting this afternoon, AIF stood in support of SB 1700, *Relating to Agricultural Lands*, by Senator Jack Latvala (R-Clearwater). The bill repeals provisions requiring the Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) to map and monitor the state's agricultural land base as neither DEO nor the previous agency responsible for this function, ever implemented the program and it is not considered essential. It is not considered necessary because the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS) currently has several mapping programs providing this information.

The bill reported favorably out of committee by a vote of 6-0 and now goes to the Senate Commerce and Tourism Committee.

AIF supports legislation that eliminates duplicative duties by other governmental agencies as it eliminates an unnecessary tax burden on Florida's employers.

In the same committee, AIF was present to stand in support of SB 948, *Relating to Water Supply*, by Senator Denise Grimsley (R-Sebring). However, SB 948 was temporarily postponed because the Senator opposing the bill is away on family business. SB 948 requires the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS) to establish a water supply planning program in order to develop data on potential agricultural water supply demand. The water management districts (WMDs) are required to consider the data supplied by DACS in order to properly prepare for future agricultural water supply demands.

AIF will be present in Committee when SB 948 is voted on in order to express our support on behalf of Florida's businesses.

AIF supports efforts by DACS to secure funding for a new agricultural water planning program.

The House Agriculture and Natural Resources Subcommittee met later in the day to review CS/HB 659, *Relating to Fossil Fuel Combustion Products*, by Representative Tom Goodson (R-Titusville). The bill addresses the continued use of coal ash in many products and creates a regulatory program under the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) for the beneficial use of Fossil Fuel Combustion Products. This bill would let the EPA know that Florida wants to continue to use coal ash in various types of products. It also saves energy while producing revenue by using coal ash in products rather than incurring the cost of disposal.

AIF stood in support and the committee passed the bill, which will next be heard in the House State Affairs Committee.

AIF supports any legislation promoting the beneficial use of Fossil Fuel Combustion Products in order to save Florida's businesses from the costly disposal of such resources.

The committee also heard CS/HB 713, *Relating to Water Quality Credit Trading*, by Representative Cary Pigman (R-Sebring). This bill expands a pilot program to a statewide water quality credit trading program. Participation in this program is completely voluntary. The program is market-based and allows businesses to buy trading credits (pollutants reductions) from others which saves them money rather than implementing a more expensive cleanup project.

AIF stood in support and the bill passed. The bill now goes to the House Committee on State Affairs.

AIF supports this legislation because establishing a water quality credit trading program could reduce the costs of pollutant reduction activities to businesses.

Education

The Senate Education Committee held a workshop on twelve separate charter school bills and announced that parts and provisions of all of these bills will be rolled into two separate proposed committee bills (PCBs). The first PCB deals with charter school accountability and will be sponsored by Senator Kelli Stargel (R-Lakeland). The other PCB will focus on district charter innovations and be sponsored by Senator Bill Montford (D-Tallahassee). The chairman of the Committee, Senator John Legg (R-Lutz), made it clear that some of the provisions in the bills were in direct opposition to each other and should be prepared to file amendments. He indicated the bills would be on the Committee agenda the week of April 1st.

AIF supports equitable funding for public charter schools as well as removing artificial enrollment caps preventing public charter schools from meeting the demand of students on waiting lists.