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Florida Legislative Session Week 5 Update



Legislators were busy this week with the House's surprise bill to remodel the state's university system and the Senate's unanimous approval of the

budget. The House education legislation would combine New College of Florida with Florida State University and merge Florida Polytechnic University with the University of Florida in an effort to make the system more efficient, according to bill sponsor Representative Randy Fine. The Senate approval of the state budget for the 2020-2021 fiscal year will make key investments in teachers, state employees, vulnerable Floridians, and the environment and water quality. The Senate also tackled the high cost of prescription drugs, while both the House and the Senate moved closer to an agreement to revise gambling in the state.

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The Legislature continued its work in other policy issues, including:

[Cannabis](#)

Week five of this legislative session brought the revised budgets from both the House and the Senate. In the House, HB 1063 sponsored by Representative Drake, was heard and unanimously passed the Agriculture and Natural Resources Appropriations Subcommittee and has moved forward to its last committee stop. This State Hemp Program moves to amend certain requirements such as licensees only using certain hemp seeds and cultivators and also the distribution and retail sale of hemp

extract. Similar in its nature, SB 1876 sponsored by Senator Montford, has been placed on committee agenda for Innovation, Industry, and Technology on Monday, February 17.

Education

This past week a major proposal dropped that would merge Florida Polytechnic University into the University of Florida and merge New College into Florida State University. The proposal advanced through the House Education Subcommittee this week on a 12-6 vote (favorable). Also, this week the State Board of Education met and adopted the new Florida BEST standards, as well as the state's Perkins V plan.

Environment

Week five of the 2020 Session saw the House and the Senate finalize their respective Budget proposals, with the Senate at \$92.8B and the House at \$91.4B, while the DeSantis Administration made a federal funding request for the restoration of the Everglades (more on that to the right). As the committee process begins to wrap up, a number of bills continued their trek to the Floor. In the House, HB 1199, Environmental Protection Act, passed its final committee and has been placed on the Calendar.

Meanwhile, HB 1091, which increases civil penalties for environmental violations, cleared its second committee of reference. Over in the Senate, SB 1360, the Florida Endangered and Threatened Species Act, which focuses on revising policy and definitions concerning 'endangered' and 'threatened' species, cleared its first committee. Also advancing was a

Senate Resolution, SB 1572, expressing the Legislature's support of policies that will help the state of Florida prepare for the environmental and economic impacts of climate change and sea-level rise. Finally, SB 1706, Water Testing for Pollution, passed its first committee, and allows for requests to be made to the Department of Health to test the water quality of private and public water systems.

Financial Services

Governor DeSantis was in Jacksonville to announce grant awards totaling \$3.6 million for Fin Tech training through the Northeast Florida FinTech Initiative. Financial bills making headway this week include HB 115, the Keep Our Graduates Working Act, where it was read for the third time in the Senate and passed, and has now become an enrolled bill and will make its way to the Governor's desk. Two of the three bills relating to the creation of Financial Technology sandbox, HB 1395 and HB 1391, passed their second committee stops and are both onto the third and final committees. SB 1672, Protection of Vulnerable investors also moved this week, passing its second committee and now moving to its third and final stop before heading to the floor.

Health Care

One controversial piece of legislation making its way to the finish line relates to eliminating the practice of balance billing patients when they are transported by an out-of-network air ambulance. The bill is now ready for a House floor vote and its final committee hearing in the Senate. A

compromise bill related to requiring hospitals to perform biennial patient safety culture surveys has picked up steam in both chambers this week thanks to amendments scaling the language back, as has legislation authorizing certified nursing assistants and home health aides to perform certain tasks delegated by registered nurses. Meanwhile, the House dove this week into an investigation of ties between China and researchers at Moffitt Cancer Center and the University of Florida.

Technology

Multiple technology bills sped through the committee process this week, generating Member feedback and media coverage. Efforts to strengthen the state's Broadband framework continue to progress in addition to electric vehicle legislation and measures to tighten cell phone security. Detailed reporting on individual committee proceedings can be found in the Committee Reports section on page three. Looking ahead, the annual Tech Day at the Capitol, hosted by the Florida Technology Council, will take place on Wednesday, February 19th. This year's Tech Day focuses on technology in transportation and will feature presentations from Porsche, the Florida Department of Transportation, the University of Florida, as well as Representatives Jeff Brandes and James Grant. For more information about Tech Day at the Capitol, contact your Southern Group lobbyist.

Transportation

Week five of this legislative session had the Florida House of Representatives and the Florida Senate passed their respective budgets.

There is about a \$1.4 billion difference between the two spending proposals, and conference is expected to begin toward the end of this month. The Express Lanes Bill (SB 1090) was heard and passed unanimously out of its second committee of reference this week. The bill, which eliminates Express Lanes, is sponsored by Senators Diaz and Taddeo in the Senate. Its House companion bill (HB 829) has yet to get its first hearing. Also this week, the Department's bill (SB 7054) passed out of its first committee this week. The bill removes the Florida Rail Enterprise, reallocates the office's \$60 million budget to rail projects and rail safety improvements and increases the Department's cap on debt service for right-of-way bonds.



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