



This week was our final committee week before the regular legislative session begins on March 7, 2017. I had the opportunity to present some of my bills to committee, present budget requests on behalf of our district, and meet with constituents in regards to issues that are affecting their organizations, schools, and communities. I am enthusiastic about how productive this week has been and am looking forward to a successful session.

Sponsored Bills:

SB 176 – Sales and Use Tax Exemption for Feminine Hygiene Products

On Wednesday, I presented my “Hygiene Tax” bill to the Senate Finance and Tax appropriations committee. This bill serves to create a tax exemption on feminine hygiene products because these items are a necessity and access to these products is essential to women’s health. By removing the tax, we are making these products more accessible to all women in the state. Florida would be following 13 other states and Washington DC in removing this tax if the bill were to be passed. The bill was recommended favorably in the committee with a 5-0 vote, and will now be moving on to the Appropriations Committee.

SB 210 – Public Records/Public Guardians

On Tuesday morning, I presented my “public records” bill to the Senate Children and Families committee. This bill serves to protect current and former public guardians and their families and children, while also aiming to create an exemption from public records requests for certain identifying information of these individuals. This information includes the home addresses, telephone numbers, dates of birth, places of employment, and photographs of current or former public guardians along with their spouses and children. Although there are certain exemptions to this protection, the Legislature finds that the release of identifying and location information of current and former public guardians and their family members might place them in danger of physical and emotional harm from disgruntled individuals who act inappropriately or seek revenge due to actions taken by public guardians. Public guardianship is a noble and often complicated role. A citizen who takes on this responsibility should not have to worry about danger to themselves, their spouse, or children. The bill was voted favorably with a 4-0 vote.

SB 398 – Estoppel Certificates

On Wednesday afternoon, I presented my bill on Estoppel Certificates to the Regulated Industries committee. The bill revises requirements for estoppel certificates for condominium, cooperative, and homeowners' associations. When an ownership interest in a condominium unit, cooperative unit, or homeowners' parcel is transferred, the new owner is jointly and severally liable with the previous owner for unpaid assessments owed to a condominium, cooperative, or homeowners' association. Unpaid assessments may also become a lien on the property. Purchasers may request that the seller provide an estoppel certificate from the condominium, cooperative, or homeowners' association to protect against undisclosed financial obligations and to transfer title to the property free of any lien or encumbrance in favor of the association. An estoppel certificate certifies the amount of any total debt owed to the association for unpaid monetary obligations by a unit or parcel owner as of a specified date. The bill was voted favorably with a 7-1 vote.

My Committees:

Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Tourism, and Economic Development

This committee met on Wednesday morning last week and we spent our time listening to budget requests from around the state. I presented eight requests to benefit our district, which I have listed below:

- Collier County Accelerator

-Immokalee Culinary Technology Campus: \$3.25 million requested to match U.S. "Promise Zone" grant funds to build a 40,000 sq. ft. "high tech" food and beverage and processing plant in conjunction with IFAS in Immokalee.

-Naples Innovation Center: \$2.5 requested to expand the Naples Accelerator by 10,000 square feet to accommodate an additional 40 companies in the medical and technology fields. The Center also intends to collaborate with universities and nonprofits to provide internships and educational programs.

- Collier County Road and Bridge Projects

-Goodland Drive Rehabilitation: \$500,000 requested for the project to reconstruct and raise the elevation of the road and restore natural drainage to the mangrove forest on Goodland Drive which is also the sole access and hurricane evacuation route for the Goodland community.

-Gator Canal Bridge: Requested \$1 million to assist to replace an obsolete bridge that is a safety issue for school buses, emergency vehicles, and residents.

- City of Bonita Springs

-Bonita Beach Road/US 41 Congestion Reduction Project: Requested \$5.25 million for a road project to assist in relieving the significant congestion that occurs on US 41 and Bonita Beach Road, which is the only connection to the barrier islands. Relieving the congestion is a priority for maintaining a safe and functional transportation network.

- Hendry County

-Rehabilitation of the Ft. Denaud Bridge: Requested \$1 million for bridge repair. This bridge is one of only two crossings over the Caloosahatchee River in Hendry County and is a vital commuter route for the residents of Hendry and Glades Counties. When one bridge is down for repairs, which happens frequently, the other one is even more heavily used and delays are inevitable.

- City of Marco Island

-Marine Rescue Fire/Emergency Medical Services Facility: Requested \$750,000 to ensure immediate off shore medical and fire emergency responses by the Advanced Life Support/Fire EMS boat to the visitors and residents of the largest barrier island in the Ten Thousand Islands. Funds will be used to rebuild and outfit the 50-year-old fire station that houses this specially equipped vessel and the three-person crew.

- Good Wheels

-Scheduling Software for Good Wheels: Requested \$225,516 to purchase scheduling and routing software that will enable the organization to efficiently schedule over 10,000 trips per month for clients in Lee, Hendry, Collier, Glades and Orange Counties. The software program will reduce labor and fuel expenses as well as improve the “on-time” pickups and drop offs.

Appropriations Subcommittee on Health and Human Services

The HHS appropriations subcommittee met on Wednesday afternoon to complete discussions on local funding requests. The Committee also discussed a bill sponsored by Senator Garcia regarding mental health and substance abuse. Senator Garcia’s bill (SB 358) authorizes the Department of Children and Families to approve behavioral health care receiving systems, designate and monitor receiving and treatment facilities and suspend or withdraw such designation for non-compliance with the law or the department’s rules. This bill revises the reporting requirements of the managing entities for the Acute Care Services Utilization Database. The department is required to post certain data on its website on a monthly basis. The bill was recommended favorably with a 7-0 vote.

Commerce and Tourism

In our committee meeting on Commerce and Tourism on Tuesday morning, we discussed four different bills and then heard a presentation from the President and CEO of Visit Florida. In this meeting, I had the opportunity to present Senate Bill 252 for Senator Book. This bill calls for a tax exemption for Personal Hygiene products such as baby and adult diapers and incontinence pads. Senator Book and I feel that this bill is necessary because it will provide families with babies a break in the costs of the supplies that are necessary to the child's wellbeing as well as a break to those who are or care for someone in need of incontinence diapers and pads. The bill passed favorably in committee by a 7-0 vote.

The rest of our committee meeting was spent listening to a presentation by Ken Lawson, the President and CEO of Visit Florida. Mr. Lawson gave a detailed presentation on the effects of Visit Florida in the state and confirmed the recent announcement from Governor Scott's office that Florida once again set record high tourism in the state in 2016. In his announcement Governor Scott stated, "Florida has once again welcomed a record number of tourists with 112.8 million visitors to the state in 2016. Visitors spent \$109 billion and supported a record 1.4 million Florida jobs in 2016 – a testament to the vital importance of tourism to our growing economy." Tourism is a vital contributor to Florida's economy and Mr. Lawson argues that Visit Florida has a significant effect on the industry's success.

Health Policy

During Tuesday's Health Policy meeting, Senator Mayfield presented her bill (SB 182) to protect consumers against raises in costs of medications on their health insurance plans. Many people select their health plan because of the specific medications that are offered in the plan as well as the costs of that medication in the plan. Unfortunately, those medications may be removed from or replaced on the plan, or their costs unexpectedly raised because of the competitive nature of the pharmaceutical field. This bill will prevent insurance companies from changing the prices or selection of medications during a fiscal year of a plan except for in a few specific circumstances. This will provide citizens with the security that their selected health care plan will remain the same the entire year that they are covered under it. Our committee voted favorably on this bill with a 5-0 vote because we believe that it is important for Florida citizens to be able to secure dependable health plans every year.

Ethics and Elections

A good part of our committee meeting was spent reviewing and going through the confirmation process of the Governor's staff appointment recommendations. We confirmed all 39 of the Governors appointments. You can find the list of them along with their positions and terms by [clicking here](#).

Senator Hutson also presented his bill (SB 352) regarding Legislative Redistricting and Congressional Reapportionment. Reapportionment is a process that occurs every 10 years after the completion of the United States Census. During reapportionment, voting district lines are redrawn so that they most accurately represent the population of that area or state. State legislators are responsible for redrawing these lines in accordance with restrictions set by both the Federal and State constitutions. After the districts are redrawn for state legislative elections, the Florida Supreme Court must review them for constitutionality. These districts are not subject to the Governor's veto. District lines for the United States Congress however are subject to the Governor's veto and do not need to be reviewed by the Supreme Court of Florida.

Other Legislative News:

Autism Training:

Senator Thurston has proposed SB 154, which requires the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) to establish continued employment training relating to autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Instruction must include, but is not limited to, instruction on the recognition of the symptoms and idiosyncrasies of an individual on the autism disorder spectrum and appropriate responses to a person exhibiting such symptoms and idiosyncrasies. An understanding of disorders such as ASD is important for law enforcement officers to have, because citizens with ASD who encounter police officers often need to be communicated with and treated differently.

School Recess:

Senator Flores has proposed SB 78, which adds an unstructured free-play recess requirement to district school boards' responsibilities regarding physical education. Specifically, the bill requires each district school board to provide at least 100 minutes of supervised, safe, and unstructured free-play recess each week for students in Kindergarten through 5th Grade. The bill went through its first committee review with the Education Committee this week and was voted favorably with a 7-0 vote.

Excellence in Higher Education Legislation Passes Final Senate Committee

Senate Bill 2, the Excellence in Higher Education Act, and Senate Bill 4, Faculty Recruitment, were merged this week and passed the Senate Committee on Appropriations as a package. Senate Bill 2 is available for consideration on the Senate floor during the first week of the 2017 Legislative Session, which begins on March 7. The Florida Excellence in Higher Education Act (SB 2), promotes on-time graduation by expanding student financial assistance and support, establishing tuition and fee incentives, streamlining 2+2 articulation, and strengthening mechanisms that keep colleges and universities accountable to Florida taxpayers. It also expands policy and funding tools universities can leverage to recruit and retain

the very best faculty, enhance professional and graduate schools, and improve aging infrastructure and research laboratories.

Comprehensive Gaming Legislation Passes Final Senate Committee

Senate Bill 8, Gaming, passed this week in the Senate Committee on Appropriations, the final Senate committee stop for this legislation. This legislation presents a comprehensive approach to regulating a voter-approved industry that has contributed billions of dollars to our economy, while providing thousands of jobs to Floridians over the course of nearly 100 years. On a statewide basis and locally, voters have communicated that they support gaming in our state. The people of Florida have even authorized gaming in our state constitution. This bill ensures over \$215 million will be accessible in this year's budget for important state priorities like education, infrastructure, and health care. Additionally, this legislation will stop future increases in gaming permits and will remove unused existing permits. It will enhance protection for animals by raising anti-doping standards for racehorses and will ensure any increase in gaming opportunities would only come after the voters of that locality have spoken.

2017 Legislative Session Right Around the Corner

The Senate will convene in Regular Session on Tuesday, March 7, 2017, at 9:30 a.m. Session begins on the first Tuesday, after the first Monday in the month of March, of each odd-numbered year. For even-numbered years, Session begins on the first Tuesday, after the first Monday in the month of March; or on another date as may be fixed by law. Regular Session may not exceed a period of 60 consecutive days. Senate committee meetings and floor sittings are streamed live on the Senate's website. The daily video broadcast schedule is available here:
<http://www.flsenate.gov/Media/VideoSchedule>.

Constituent Corner:

Physical Therapists from South West Florida

On Tuesday morning, I had the opportunity to meet with physical therapists, physical therapy assistants, and PT students from South West Florida for the Florida Physical Therapy Association's State Advocacy Day to discuss some of their statewide initiatives.

Hillsborough County High School Seniors

On Tuesday evening, I sat down with some seniors from Hillsborough County High School to discuss our "pink tax" bill. As part of their school's "It Ought to be a Bill" program, the seniors helped bring the issue of taxation on feminine hygiene products to my attention. As the bill is now on its way to its third committee review after having been voted favorably in its first two, I was glad to catch up with the seniors about our success on the legislation thus far.

Consumer Information

Poison Help:

On Thursday morning, I had the opportunity to meet with representatives from Poison Help. They are the people to call if you have experienced a poisoning or have a question about a possible poisoning. Poisonings are among the leading causes of injury death in Florida and this incredible service provides free lifesaving help at your fingertips. Call 800-222-1222 and you will have free and confidential access to specialists in poison information, who are nationally certified doctors, nurses, and pharmacists. You can call 24/7 and will immediately speak with an expert!