



# HOUSE MAJORITY OFFICE

FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



REPRESENTATIVE RAY RODRIGUES, MAJORITY LEADER

The Majority Office created the following articles as content for your newsletters.

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## **Florida House Conducts First Committee Meetings of the New Year!**

Florida House of Representatives committees met for the first time this year to begin preparing for the 2017 Legislative session, which begins on March 7. The committees met on a range of important issues, including ethics reform, economic development policy, medical marijuana, school choice, threats to agribusiness, and others.

In the weeks ahead, I look forward to working with Members on both sides of the aisle to ensure Florida continues to head in the right direction and remains the best state in the nation to live, work, and play.

## **Florida House Working to Protect the Free Market**

The Careers & Competition Subcommittee hit the ground running during the first committee week, discussing two important issues – Florida’s Economic Development Policy and Florida’s Economic Incentive Programs.

In my view, the meeting proved our current practice of providing incentives to businesses with the hope of advancing economic development in our state is broken: at least 10 of the state’s major economic development incentives have a negative return on investment for the state. I believe we must put an end to corporate welfare and stop government from trying to pick winners and losers within industries. By protecting the free market, I strongly believe we can move forward on a path toward sustained economic prosperity for which all Floridians can be proud.

## **House Reviews Red Light Camera Report**

This Wednesday the Transportation & Infrastructure Subcommittee reviewed the 2015-2016 Red Light Camera Summary Report. The report contains a summary of responses and a crash analysis based on statewide revenue data and a 29 question online survey. Information from the survey states that the number of active red light cameras decreased from 796 in 2015 to 688 in 2016, while at the same time the number of red light camera violations increased by 264,888. The analysis of crashes that occurred before and after the activation of red light cameras at intersections shows that total crashes increased by 10.14%, and crashes resulting in incapacitating injury increased by 26.8%. Similarly, rear-end crashes increased by 11.4%. In my opinion, the data shown in this report indicates that red light cameras do not



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improve safety, and the Florida Legislature should continue to investigate the overall effectiveness of the program.

## **Criminal Justice Subcommittee Discusses Florida's Death Penalty Sentencing Process**

This week the Criminal Justice Subcommittee met for the first time in preparation for the 2017 Legislative Session. On the agenda was a presentation regarding the effects of recent court decisions on the state's death penalty sentencing process that was revised by the Legislature in 2016. These decisions determined that the new process did not meet constitutional requirements, which has left part of our criminal justice system in a state of uncertainty. It is our duty now, as legislators, to resolve this uncertainty by reviewing and revising these laws.

I look forward to working with my colleagues in the Legislature to bring clarity to this solemn and important area of law.

## **Civil Justice and Claims Subcommittee Hears Presentation on Judicial Term Limits**

This week the Civil Justice and Claims Subcommittee met for the first time ahead of the 2017 Legislative Session. During the meeting, the subcommittee heard a presentation on judicial term limits. The presentation revealed two facts that I found interesting: the judicial branch is the only one of Florida's three co-equal branches of Florida government not subject to term limits, and no Florida Supreme Court justice or District Court of Appeal (DCA) judge has ever lost a merit retention election.

I believe that all three branches of Florida government should be held to the same standards of accountability. I also believe imposing term limits on Florida Supreme Court justices and DCA judges would reinforce the important principle that judicial service, like all public service, is about the citizenry, the institution, and rule of law, *not* about the individual. I will pay close attention to this important issue and keep you informed about any developments.

## **PreK-12 Innovation Subcommittee Starts with School Choice**

The PreK-12 Innovation subcommittee met on Wednesday for the first time this year to discuss School Choice Programs and their impact in Florida. The subcommittee heard from several experts on the issue from both inside and outside the state and touched on several types of school choice programs, including virtual education, charter schools, home school options, tax credit scholarships and others.

The robust conversation revealed many interesting facts including, for example, that Florida's tax credit scholarship for students in financial need is the biggest of its kind in the nation and currently serves 97,826 students in 1,712 schools, and the John M. McKay Scholarships Program serving students with disabilities is the largest in the nation and currently services 30,392 students in 1,432 schools. We also learned that research indicates school choice promotes positive impacts on student achievement for



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students choosing private school options as well as those remaining in the public schools. In my opinion, the meeting clearly showed that the more educational choices parents have for their children, the better. I will make sure to keep you informed of all developments on this important issue.

## **PreK-12 Quality Subcommittee Focuses on Effective Teachers**

The PreK-12 Quality subcommittee met this week to discuss effective teachers. A presentation provided by Bellwether Education Partners showed that in the 2014-2015 school year, 98.4% of Florida's classroom teachers were rated as highly effective or effective. However, the study also showed that students in low income areas are less likely to have access to effective teachers.

The Department of Education gave a presentation on teacher certification and provided recommendations regarding methods that can be used to recruit, retain, and assign effective educators. Strategies that were discussed by a panel comprised of a school district representative and highly-effective educators included recruiting earlier, using incentives to attract and retain highly-effective teachers, and providing targeted professional development. Assigning principals with strong leadership skills and the ability to create a positive school climate is an important element of recruiting and retaining highly-effective teachers. I believe all students across Florida should have the opportunity to receive an education from high quality teachers, and I intend to do my best to make sure that happens.

## **Florida House Begins Preparing for Implementation of Amendment 2**

On Tuesday, November 8, 2016, Florida voters passed an amendment to the Florida Constitution—Amendment 2—to legalize the use of marijuana for certain debilitating medical conditions. The amendment went into effect on January 3, 2017, and requires the Florida Department of Health (DOH) to adopt regulations related to patient and caregiver identification cards, caregiver qualifications, medical marijuana treatment centers (MMTCs) and patient supply limits by July 3, 2017. DOH must begin registering MMTCs and issuing identification cards by October 3, 2017. Any Florida citizen has a private cause of action to compel DOH rule-making, MMTC registration or issuance of identification cards, if DOH fails to meet either of these deadlines.

The Florida Legislature must decide whether to enact implementing laws, which must be consistent with the terms of the amendment. On Wednesday, the Health Quality Subcommittee received presentations from medical experts and the director of DOH's Office of Compassionate Use about Amendment 2 and potential challenges it may pose. The meeting was a crucial first step toward determining the safest and most responsible plan of action. I look forward to working with Members from both sides of the aisle to reach a consensus on medical marijuana's role in our community. As your state representative, I will always do my best to make sure that your safety and health come first.

## **Health Innovation Subcommittee Hosts Discussion on Certificate of Need**



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In preparation for the 2017 Legislative session, the Health Innovation Subcommittee met this week with a panel of experts to review Florida's "Certificate of Need" (CON) program. The CON program, administered by the Agency for Health Care Administration, requires certain health care providers to obtain state approval before entering the market or offering certain new or expanded services. The CON program currently regulates hospices, skilled nursing facilities, intermediate care facilities for the developmentally disabled, new hospitals and certain specialized hospital services. It does not regulate outpatient services, home health services, purchases of major medical equipment or assisted living facilities.

I believe that this program negatively affects competition in the health care market, causing unnecessary and unfair cost increases for consumers. I find it imperative to evaluate the CON program and, if necessary, end the program altogether to increase access to care and reduce health care costs for Floridians. I will continue to keep you up-to-date on this and other evolving health care issues that affect our community and your family.

## **Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill Funds Update**

The Deepwater Horizon oil spill was a tragic event that caused significant impacts to Florida's natural resources and economy and affected the lives of so many people in the Panhandle. As part of an overall resolution of federal, state and local government claims against BP, Florida will receive \$2 billion between 2016 and 2033 to resolve the state's economic loss claims. Recently, Speaker Richard Corcoran created the Select Committee on Triumph Gulf Coast and charged it with making recommendations to the full House to ensure the appropriate and transparent appropriation of public funds recovered by the Attorney General and to ensure that 75 percent of the recovered funds are dedicated to the eight disproportionately affected counties.

The Select Committee met for the first time this week and members received an overview of current Florida law governing money the State of Florida receives for economic damages resulting from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, the flow of Deepwater Horizon Funds into Florida, and the Gulf Consortium. I believe this meeting was a productive first step.

## **House Conducts Workshop on Ethics Reforms**

On Thursday, the House Public Integrity and Ethics Committee met to discuss bold ethics reforms. Some of the reforms the committee discussed included the following: extending the current ban on legislators' and certain other officials' post-service lobbying from two years to six years; creating new ethics requirements for local governments, including requiring a person who wishes to lobby certain local governmental entities to register as a lobbyist with that entity prior to lobbying; and expanding the Commission on Ethics' duty to render advisory opinions.



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In the coming weeks the committee will determine which reforms should be included in legislation. In my opinion, it is essential for the Legislature to continue to ensure that government is accountable to the people.