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Session 2023: A Failure for Floridians

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. – The **Florida House Democratic Caucus** ends the 2023 Legislative Session disappointed at the culture war distractions and missed opportunities that dominated the 60 days in Tallahassee instead of protecting Floridians’ freedom to be healthy, prosperous, and safe.

Floridians’ freedoms have been attacked and their problems ignored, and no sugar coating from the Governor and GOP leadership can lessen the harm done.

The Sunshine State’s families are still struggling with the highest property and automobile insurance rates in the nation, skyrocketing rent, unaffordable health care, and a widespread affordability crisis that makes Florida too expensive for too many Floridians.

“A lot was written and said about how this session was in service of **Governor Ron DeSantis** and his future political ambitions. As the hankies dropped today in the traditional Sine Die ceremony, all he has to show for it is a list of unpopular accomplishments. The people do not support his extremist agenda, including the abortion ban, book ban, permitless carry, [heavy-handed attacks on LGBTQ Floridians](#), and a big fight with Disney who is [now suing him](#) for ‘government retaliation.’ None of his divisive culture war fights have helped him win more GOP primary voters, as [his polling numbers](#) are worse now than when session started,” said **Leader Fentrice Driskell (D- Tampa)**.

“Instead of spending \$12 million to hunt down or profile immigrants legally admitted by federal immigration officials and fly them on a private jet to Martha’s Vineyard, we could expand Medicaid, which unlocks billions in federal dollars to help U.S. citizens in Florida,” said Leader Pro Tempore **Representative Dotie Joseph (D-Miami)**. “We could also use those millions to help Floridians with skyrocketing property insurance, rather than more billion-dollar bailouts to insurance companies – instead many Floridians will be kicked off their property insurance.”

“This has been the Session of protests. Over the past few months, the people of

Florida have traveled to Tallahassee and raised their voices in opposition to the extreme Republican agenda and in support of Democratic proposals. From abortion bans to bathroom monitors to criminalizing freedom of expression to denying health care to attacking Dreamers to undermining teachers and hurting public schools, Floridians showed up in force to reject the culture war distractions and demand legitimate public policy solutions to the challenges truly plaguing Florida's families. With that extraordinary level of engagement, we can expect these harmful laws to impact the next election cycle," said Policy Chair **Representative Kelly Skidmore (D-Boca Raton)**.

"While this session has seen many highs and lows, what strikes me the most is that we truly did not focus on the issues that my constituents seem to always ask about. We did not use our precious time to try to fix our property insurance epidemic nor solve our affordable housing crisis. Instead, we all too often engaged in policies that are aimed at disenfranchising specific groups of individuals or were designed to further political goals," said Floor Leader **Representative Mike Gottlieb (D-Davie)**. "I am hopeful that in the next session we can concentrate our energy towards goals that keep us healthy, prosperous and safe, and those include our housing priorities, rebuilding our workforce, establishing education goals that help our children succeed not disregard history and stop fighting social wars with our economic drivers."

"One of the most disappointing parts of this session was that while we were voting on issues that no one asked for, bills that were filed to address the concerns all our constituents face such as rising property insurance costs and rising auto insurance costs were never heard in committee," said Caucus Whip **Representative Christine Hunschofsky (D-Parkland)**.

CULTURE WAR: Bans college and university spending on diversity, equity, and inclusion programs and activities. Limits academic freedom in general education courses. Effects the way history is taught in Florida. This is hurting Florida's brand as a place to get a good high-quality college education. These extremist partisan assaults on higher education puts our college and universities at risk of going from world-class to class-clown.

MISSED OPPORTUNITY: And that's after two regular sessions and two special sessions specifically to deal with Florida's **property insurance crisis**, but nothing has been done to give Floridians immediate relief nor have aggressive reforms been implemented to help fix the market. Instead, a law was passed to make it harder to sue insurance companies when they don't do the right thing when a claim is filed. The House could have taken up [HB 1477- Insurance](#) by **Leader Driskell (D-Tampa)** which would require insurers to cap rates and lenders pay any interest they earn on insurance proceeds back to homeowners, providing the rate relief that Floridians deserve, and putting money back in consumers' pockets. This bill would also establish a Property Insurance Commission tasked with monitoring the market and reviewing reserve requirements for insurers. It never received a committee hearing.

CULTURE WAR: Women lost so much this year with the 6-week **abortion ban**, written to be as close to an all-out ban as they could get away with. Many women won't even know they're pregnant before their options are cut off by this extremist law. The [majority of Americans](#) support access to abortion health care services. This bill was so extreme that nine Republicans voted against it, a record for GOP "no" votes

on a priority bill this year.

MISSED OPPORTUNITY: Florida now is [one of only 10 states](#) that still refuse to accept the federal dollars that come with **Medicaid Expansion**. With North Carolina's recent decision, forty other states will be getting federal money to help low income people, giving them better health care options, healthier outcomes, and reducing the costs that occur when people get sick and have to go to the ER but cannot afford to pay. Florida has some of the most restrictive access to Medicaid in the country. It's incredibly hard to get the help that some low-income families desperately need. The House could have taken up [HB 511- Medicaid Expansion](#) by **Representative Dotie Joseph (D-Miami)**. It never received a committee hearing.

CULTURE WAR: Despite **Permitless Carry** being [unpopular](#) across Florida, [especially Miami-Dade](#) where over 2/3 of voters oppose it, the GOP-controlled Legislature made good on a promise by **Governor DeSantis** to weaken common-sense gun laws by allowing people to carry a concealed weapon without a background check or training requirement. This is a soft-on-crime law that [makes our communities less safe](#).

MISSED OPPORTUNITY: Instead of this dangerous, unwanted, unnecessary law, the House could have taken up [HB 1513- Responsible Gun Ownership](#) by **Representative Christine Hunschofsky (D-Parkland)** and **Representative Dan Daley (D-Coral Springs)**. This bill would have required popular, common-sense gun law reforms such as universal background checks, safe storage laws. It never received a committee hearing.

CULTURE WAR: We've seen hundreds of books removed from Florida school libraries and classrooms, and the best defense the Governor's Office can muster is to argue over if it's technically a 'ban' or not. The books are pulled, unavailable to our students, and that's a **book ban**. We should have addressed last year's bill to clarify that parents and trained educators should be the only ones with the power to decide what the kids can or cannot read, not others with a culture war agenda. As currently written, almost [anyone can object to any book](#), pulling it off the shelves for a lengthy review process.

MISSED OPPORTUNITY: Instead of **fully funding public education** to provide a true world-class education for our kids and support our teachers, the legislature passed **HB 1**. Arizona [tried the same idea](#), and it ended up being a budget-busting handout to the wealthy. Worst of all, it did not fulfill the promise to help kids from low-income families. This is an expensive "free money to rich families for private school tuition" scheme that could cost Florida billions in the coming years.

We're witnessing an **unraveling of education** in Florida. Either of these alone would be a disaster, but they've done both at the same time.

An Incomplete List of the 2023 Bad Bills

[SB 300](#) – 6 Week Abortion Ban – Unpopular extremist law that bans abortion before many women even know they're pregnant.

[HB 543](#) – Permitless Carry – Unsafe, unnecessary, soft on crime.

[SB 1718](#) – Immigration – Florida’s economy – tourism, agriculture, construction – are built on immigrant labor.

[HB 831](#) – Tort Reform – Hurts Floridians’ ability to hold insurance companies accountable as we’re facing an insurance crisis.

[SB 7050](#) – Elections – Every year they make it harder to cast an easy ballot in a safe, secure election.

[HB 3](#) – ESG ban – Because the bankers had somehow become too ‘woke.’

[HB 1543](#) – Lower the Age to Purchase a Gun – The House GOP voted to undo good bipartisan work done after the Parkland shooting. Thankfully, the Senate didn’t agree and it won’t become law this year.

The anti-LGBTQ Agenda:

[HB 1521](#) – Anti-trans Bathroom – How is Florida planning to enforce this? Bathroom police?

[SB 1438](#) – Anti-Drag Shows – Florida law already prohibits exposing minors to explicit or harmful

[HB 1069](#) – Don’t Say Gay 2.0 – Bans the use of preferred pronouns in schools, takes away parental rights, expands Don’t Say Gay from K-3 to K-8, and makes Florida’s book ban problem worse.

[SB 254](#) – Anti-Trans Health Care – Big government attacking the rights of parents who support their trans kids. This is life saving health care, not a political talking point.

[SB 1403](#) – Medical Discrimination – The intersection of dual GOP attacking LGBTQ Floridians and preventing insurance companies from being held accountable.

Unraveling Public Education:

[SB 266](#) – Anti-DEI in higher ed – Bans college and university spending on diversity, equity, and inclusion programs and activities. Limits academic freedom in general education courses.

[HB 1](#) – Universal Vouchers – This is going to subsidize wealthy families’ private school tuition.

[SB 256](#) – Union Busting – Asking public sector unions to meet a 60% membership threshold is arbitrary, punitive, and unreasonable. We should leave them alone and let them do their jobs, like supporting Florida’s teachers.

Favors just for the Governor:

[HB 1305](#) – Disney Amendment – Bullying a leader of the tourism industry is unpopular and dangerous to Florida’s economy.

[SB 1616](#) – Pub Rec Exempt Gov Travel – If the Governor wants to have private travel he should become a private citizen. The people of Florida deserve to know where their

governor is going, when, and with who.

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