



HOUSE MAJORITY OFFICE

FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



REPRESENTATIVE RAY RODRIGUES, MAJORITY LEADER

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House Leadership Rolls Out Transparency and Accountability Agenda

At a press conference this week, Speaker Corcoran announced that he has filed a lawsuit against the City of Tampa challenging their creation of an illegal tax. The city ignored the statutory criteria for a special district and imposed an additional \$1.50 per room per night charge on top of existing sales and bed taxes in certain hotels. I support any action that reigns in government bodies that exceed their constitutional authority.

In addition to announcing the lawsuit, House leadership unveiled three bills. The first bill, HB 3, will bring greater transparency to local tourism promotion agencies (TPA) and economic development agencies (EDA). A few of the much-needed accountability and transparency measures in the bill include: requiring all contracts valued over \$5,000 to be published on the TPA's or EDA's website; requiring all contracts valued over \$250,000 be submitted to the governing board of the county before execution and published on the county's website 14 days in advance; requiring more frequent audits of TPA's and EDA's; and making it a criminal offense to avoid the transparency and accountability requirements in the bill.

The other two bills, HB 459 and HB 461, will bring greater clarity to the trade secrets exemption of the public records law. Too often companies hide behind the guise of "trade secrets" to skirt proper transparency and disclosure. These bills will ensure that any contract made by a government agency is subject to public scrutiny and stops the practice of taxpayer-funded agencies hiding their spending behind trade secrets.

I support holding government agencies accountable because I believe any entity receiving public dollars should have complete transparency and always disclose how they are spending taxpayer dollars.

House Subcommittee Discusses School Discipline and School Climate

The PreK-12 Innovation subcommittee met this week with employees from the Department of Education and the Department of Health (DOH) to discuss school discipline and school climate.

The statistics presented about the number of school violence incidents was alarming. In a 2015 anonymous survey, 25% of male and 34% of female students reported that they had experienced bullying in high school. The numbers were even higher for middle school students, with 38% of males and 51% of females reporting they experienced bullying. Furthermore, 20% of students who were bullied on school property received mostly D's and F's on their report cards. I believe these statistics are appalling and that students who are bullied deserve to have a safe place in which to learn.



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In my opinion, this discussion reinforces the need for the Hope Scholarship program to get students away from an unhealthy situation and empower parents to choose a school where their child will thrive in an environment that is conducive to learning.

Civil Justice & Claims Subcommittee Approves Bill to Protect Children's Interests

This week, the Civil Justice and Claims Subcommittee advanced a bill that improves the courts' system for pro bono attorneys representing children with special needs.

Currently, an attorney who voluntarily represents a child with special needs must personally pay expert witness fees, deposition fees, and other litigation costs incurred during the representation. This creates a financial strain on an attorney who is providing a valuable service to the child and to our state, and thus may discourage other attorneys from volunteering their time for such an important purpose. House Bill 57 requires the Justice Administration Commission to pay litigation fees and costs to a volunteer attorney representing a child with special needs.

I support this bill and any legislation that protects the interests of children with special needs.

House Subcommittee passes Military Higher Education Bill

This week, the Post-Secondary Education subcommittee passed a bill that waives certain fees for active duty members of the U.S. Armed Forces at Florida College System (FCS) institutions.

Currently, active duty members are reimbursed for tuition through the Military Tuition Assistance program administered by the U.S. Department of Defense. The program is a great resource for military men and women seeking higher education, but it currently cannot be used for materials that are not directly related to course instruction, such as mandatory fees. These mandatory fees include student activity and service fees, capital improvement fees, financial aid fees, technology fees, and access fees. Because of this policy, active duty members incur out of pocket expenses for mandatory fees when enrolling in a FCS institution.

I believe this bill continues our commitment to our service men and women by authorizing FCS institutions to waive any portion of these fees not covered under the current reimbursement program.

I proudly support this bill and any effort to lighten the financial burden for our military members that bravely serve this county.

Florida House Committee Reviews Hurricane Preparedness

This week, the Select Committee on Hurricane Response and Preparedness reviewed the state's current capabilities for statewide emergencies.

The committee discussed the state's evacuations plans and options during a statewide emergency. The Florida Division of Emergency Management Interim Director explained their role in planning and modeling



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for future mandatory and voluntary evacuations. The Florida Department of Transportation Secretary also briefed the Committee on their role in creating evacuation, reentry, and implementation plans during a statewide emergency. Representatives from local government emergency management offices also briefed the committee on their role and perspective.

The Committee then received briefings on the state's petroleum supply and distribution systems. The briefings included a presentation from the Florida Division of Emergency Management on their role in coordinating petroleum distribution during a state of emergency, as well as presentations from several organizations and entities involved in the supply and distribution of petroleum. The Committee also heard several presentations addressing Florida's electric grid, including presentations from the Florida Public Service Commission, investor owned utilities, municipal utilities, and electric cooperatives.

I strongly support the efforts of our committee and welcome any ideas that improve the state's preparation and response to a statewide emergency. All of these presentations represent various sectors and when combined, create a comprehensive view of how we did as a state and how we can improve in the future.