



FLORIDA AFL-CIO UNITED LABOR LOBBY



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

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Issue 3

The 2007 Legislative Conference : "Best One in Years"

The "best one in years!" That was the enthusiastic refrain from everyone we talked to during the final hours of this year's legislative conference. With well over 200 attendees and guests, it was certainly the best attended conference in years.

Reports from members indicate that this year's workshops held on Sunday, March 18th were some of the best we have had in a long time due to their timeliness and applicability to the specific issues of the 2007 Legislative Session. **Leon County Supervisor of Elections Ion Sancho**, a national hero in the fight for voting rights and voting systems reform, led a workshop on Florida's voting technologies, legislative attempts to suppress the vote and the need for system wide reform. **Jim Tait**, former legislative budget expert and current Executive Director of the new **Florida Center for Economic Policy**, gave a comprehensive review of tax policy and the potential dangers of some of the property tax reform plans currently in the mix. Another hit with the attendees was the workshop carefully dissecting House Speaker Marco Rubio's book and legislative plan "**100 Innovative Ideas for Florida's Future**" and what those ideas really mean for Florida's working families. The highlight was a special guest at our annual New Lobbyist Training. Republican **Representative Greg Evers** attended the workshop and participated in a role playing exercise to show new lobbyists what to expect on the hill. The twist was that Representative Evers attended pretending to be a union member who then pretended to be a Representative, which of course he really was! The General Session featured appearances by **Chief Financial Officer Alex Sink**, **AFL-CIO President John Sweeney** and minority leaders **Representative Dan Gelber** and **Senator Steve Geller**. **Senator Al Lawson** delivered remarks on behalf of Senate President Ken Pruitt.

This year's legislative dinner and dance was the best attended in recent memory, with over 500 in attendance including many of our newest and brightest legislators. Legislators in attendance included: **Representatives Susan Bucher, Dorothy Bendross-Mindingall, Audrey Gibson, Curtis Richardson, Luis Garcia, Perry Thurston, Joe Gibbons, Scott Randolph, Marin Kiar, Keith Fitzgerald, Betty Reed** and **Representative Greg Evers**. **Senator Ted Deutch** also attended as did **Florida Democratic Party Chair Karen Thurman**. Feedback from those who attended the conference indicates that our delegates see this as a vital exercise for those interested in helping their locals have a voice at the Capitol. If you were not able to attend, please be sure to do so next year. We promise you won't be disappointed!

The 2006 Legislators of the Year

Each year, the Florida AFL-CIO and ULL presents award for legislators who have shown a real commitment to Florida's working families and maintain that support regardless of the pressures they face in the Legislature. The 2006 awards were presented to:

Senator Arthenia Joyner (for her work as State Representative)
Senator Steve Geller

A very special award was given this year to a legislator who stood up for what was right during the 2006 session, regardless of the costs to him politically - a Senator who battled many in his own party to protect our schools and the right of all people to petition their government through the initiative process

Senator Alex Villalobos



Governor Charlie Crist's First State of the State Address: There's a New Sheriff in Town Part III



On March 6th, Governor Charlie Crist fulfilled his first obligation of the 2007 Legislative Session with his annual address about the state of Florida. As one Democratic legislator said in the press following the speech, said "That was one of the greatest speeches I've heard from a Democratic governor." This tongue planted firmly in cheek comment wasn't too far off the mark. Instead of the usual litany extolling the benefits of a far-right ideology, truth be damned, Governor Crist instead used this opportunity to highlight what he claims and we hope will be his approach to governing; an approach that acknowledges the real challenges facing our state and seeks to tackle them in a spirit of cooperation with all voices, regardless of their political or ideological affiliation. In the this final installment of our analysis of his speech, we look at Governor Crist's take on elections reform, bipartisanship and economic development.

"I hope you will also consider our initiative to build upon the progress already made to restore confidence in our voting process by funding voting machines that provide a tangible record of every vote cast—a paper trail. Let's end this controversy for once and for all."

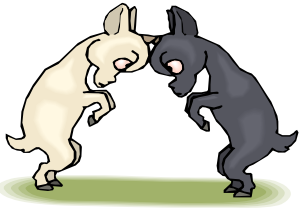
FINALLY! Former Governor Jeb Bush, his Secretaries of State and right-wing elements in the mainstream media have succeeded for years in making elections systems reform a partisan issue. Even a common sense measure like requiring a paper trail for touch screen voting machines was deemed a "liberal" measure. For years, the legislature has tweaked Florida's election laws in a ridiculous effort to somehow justify the notion that there does not need to be a tangible record of votes cast digitally. This was never a partisan issue...it was a good government issue. Unfortunately, a combination of arrogance and a desire to keep options open for electoral shenanigans kept Jeb Bush from realizing this. Crist's statement is a major development for Florida's democracy. The Governor's call alone is not enough to convince the Bush loyalists in the legislature to take action, but his defense of this measure takes away a great deal of the partisanship that has surrounded it for too long.

"I also ask for your support of my proposal to establish 20 million dollars to make Florida a national leader in the research of adult, amniotic, and umbilical cord stem cells. Stem cell research holds the promise of unlocking the secrets to cure diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's and many others, and Florida should champion this research."

Florida is home to one of the fastest growing populations of seniors in the country, a population who would benefit greatly from this type of research. Unfortunately, an extremely vocal minority has intentionally clouded the ethical questions surrounding stem cell research in order to create controversy out of something that should be non-controversial. Governor Crist's call for increased support and funding of this cutting edge research will accomplish two things. First, this research is expected to lead to cures for serious diseases, cures that will help millions of Floridians. Second, this is an incredible economic development tool. Jeb Bush has already committed billions of dollars to the new Scripps research facility in the hopes of creating a vibrant bio-tech center in Florida that attracts many new companies. Jeb's deal is a bit dubious, but it becomes ludicrous when considered against the backdrop of a state government that does not support the research these companies would want to engage in.

I ask that you give us the tools to spur economic development for the film and space industries. In my budget I have proposed 75 million dollars of tax credits to enhance Florida film making- a clean and vital industry which creates high paying jobs while spotlighting our beautiful state. Florida is the place where America literally reaches for the stars, so we must also continue to incentivize the private space industry to retain our preeminence in this field.

To date, many of Florida's programs to encourage economic development are incredibly flawed. Most center on handouts to retail giants with no mandates for good jobs creation. Fifty million dollars in tax handouts to Wal-Mart so it can create low wage jobs with no health benefits does not help our state, it only helps Wal-Mart increase its profits. The Florida AFL-CIO has argued repeatedly that NASA and the film industry are two economic sectors worthy of development aid because they have a proven track record of creating high wage jobs with benefits and more often than not, union representation. We could not have picked two better areas for the Governor to cite as needing state dollars for economic development and are working through the legislative process to support his initiatives.



Messages From the Front Lines

News from the Trenches of the Florida Legislature

Supporting Florida's Motion Picture Industry - SUPPORT

SB 96 by Saunders

HB1325 by D. Davis, Llorente, Murzin, Peterman, Porth, Robaina, Zapata

The Florida AFL-CIO has been skeptical of special tax subsidies in the past, but not all tax breaks are created equal. Some can actually help. Such is the case with the \$75 million subsidy for the motion picture and digital arts industries. The value of the global entertainment market is expected to grow to almost \$9 trillion by 2009. The motion picture, television and digital media production industries are one of the few sectors of the U.S. economy still expanding in the current global environment of increased outsourcing and exportation of American jobs. Jobs in this sector typically pay more and have better benefits than many others and many workers in the industry have the benefit of union representation. Florida has historically been the third largest film production center in the United States, but that rank is falling rapidly thanks to increasing competition from other countries and U.S. states that have implemented aggressive film production incentive programs. This legislation, which is supported by the Governor's office, creates strict qualification guidelines including benchmarks and standards for the creation of jobs and benefit to Florida. The original total amount for the subsidy was to be \$75 million each year for three years. That amount has been reduced to \$75 million total across the three year period. **HB 96 passed the Senate Committee on Commerce on March 20th and will next be heard in the Senate Committee on Finance and Tax. HB 1325 passed the House Economic Expansion & Infrastructure Council and is next scheduled for the House Budget and Policy Council.**

Teachers Lead Program - SUPPORT

SB 450 by Rich, Bullard, Gaetz

HB 355 by Vana, Chestnut, Heller, Kriseman

Many people don't realize that teachers often have huge out of pocket expenses to get the classroom supplies they need to effectively do their jobs. Most would be shocked to see just how much this amount can be per month, sometimes running into hundreds of dollars. This legislation expands state sponsored stipends to ensure that our classroom teachers have the supplies they need without resorting to using their own money. These bills also expand the eligibility for the program to include public pre-K teachers, who had previously been excluded. This is a common sense, good education initiative that we hope everyone will support. **HB 355 passed the House 5-12 Committee on March 13th. SB 450 passed the Senate Pre K – 12 Committee back in February. Based on the support that has been shown for this bill, Representative Vana is currently working to expand the program beyond what was in the original bill, making a good idea even better.**

Special Risk Retirement / Ocean Water Rescue - SUPPORT

SB 646 by Fasano

HB 205 by Jenne, Davis, Gibbons, Porth, Skidmore

The Special Risk Category of the FRS was designed to provide additional retirement assistance to those workers who serve the public in jobs that pose unique and serious hazards. The fact that the **lifeguards** who keep our beaches safe (many of whom are union members) are not currently afforded special risk status, is unconscionable. These bills will correct that injustice. **HB 205 passed the House State Affairs Committee on March 21st. SB 646 has yet to be heard.**

Improving the Jessica Lunsford Act - SUPPORT

SB 988 by Argenziano

There have been numerous unintended consequences with the Jessica Lunsford Act, which was designed to restrict people's access to schools and other places children congregate to protect them from predators. The broad nature of the original language and the way it was implemented have created many problems for law abiding building trades and other workers who do their jobs on school grounds. This bill is designed to fix those problems while continuing to keep our kids safe. **SB 988 passed the Senate Pre-K -12 Committee on March 21st. The bill's next stop is the Senate Governmental Operations Committee.**

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I believe we will work together with a sense of urgency and purpose, as we did on insurance reform. We will work together not as Republicans or Democrats, but as Floridians to make our neighborhoods more safe, improve our children's education, and protect the beauty that is Florida. I am fond of a quote from Robert Kennedy that he gave in his run for the Presidency. We can tailor his words and think of them as this: "Some people see things as they are and say, Why? I dream of a better Florida and say, Why not?"

Governor Crist is correct. The insurance reform session was an exercise in bi-partisanship. While the final product was far from perfect, it was a necessary first step. A step that was taken in the spirit of cooperation without the naked partisanship that characterized the past eight years. We are hopeful that, under his leadership, this will continue. The fact that he chose this quote from Robert F. Kennedy, a hero to many in democratic circles, adds to his credibility on this issue.

As we have shown in this three part analysis of the Governor's speech, there is a lot to be hopeful about in Tallahassee. We are hopeful but not blind. We understand that the Governor will face incredible pressure from many in his party's base to reverse course and return to the attitudes of his immediate predecessor. We won't know until the completion of this session whether or not he will bow to those pressures, but for now we accept the olive branch he offered with this speech at face value. Our game plan will not change. Our job is to represent you and all of Florida's working families to the best of our ability. We will continue to fight for what is right. The question as to whether or not we have an ally in the Governor's office remains to be seen. One thing we do know is that now, for the first time in eight years, the door to compromise appears to be open.

Employee **FREE CHOICE** ACT

Senator Nelson supports us...Senator Martinez doesn't. Contact Senator Martinez today and tell him to support the Employee Free Choice Act! Contact Senator Martinez at (202) 224-3041.

To find out more online:
<http://www.aflcio.org>

**NOTHING
IS
TOO
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FOR OUR
TROOPS!**



Literally.

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