

THIS WEEK IN THE FLORIDA SENATE MARCH 13 - 17, 2017

Senate Passes Legislation to Protect Right to Self-Defense

The Florida Senate passed Senate Bill 128, Self-defense Immunity. This legislation protects the right of self-defense for all Floridians by correcting a misinterpretation of the “Stand Your Ground” law in the 2015 *Bretherick vs. State* Florida Supreme Court decision. Senate Bill 128 clarifies that the government, not the accused, has the burden of proof in a “Stand Your Ground” immunity hearing. In a 5-2 decision, the Florida Supreme Court ruled otherwise.

Senate Bill 128 changes the burden of proof and who must bear it during pretrial hearings to evaluate a defendant’s claim of immunity based on a justifiable use of force. Current law provides a defendant a right of immunity from criminal prosecution and civil action if he or she is justified in using force. Although the procedures to claim immunity are not specified by statute, the Florida Supreme Court has determined that defendants must prove by a preponderance of the evidence the entitlement to the immunity at a pretrial hearing. The bill places the burden of proof on the state and requires the state to overcome the immunity claim by offering evidence meeting the standard of beyond a reasonable doubt.

Legislation to Keep BP Oil Funds in Northwest Florida Passes First Senate Committee

The Senate Committee on Commerce and Tourism passed Senate Bill 364, The Recovery Fund for the Deepwater Horizon Incident. The legislation will ensure that funds received in the settlement of the state’s economic damage claims caused by the 2010 Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill, remain in the eight disproportionately affected counties in Northwest Florida.

The eight Florida counties disproportionately affected by the Deepwater Horizon Spill include: Bay, Escambia, Franklin, Gulf, Okaloosa, Santa Rosa, Walton, and Wakulla.

Senate Bill 364 gives the initial settlement payment and future settlement payments directly to Triumph Gulf Coast, Inc. Triumph Gulf Coast, Inc. is tasked to work with local governments and make awards to programs and projects that meet the priorities for economic recovery, diversification, and enhancement of these disproportionately affected counties.

Senate Bill 364

The Recovery Fund for the Deepwater Horizon Incident

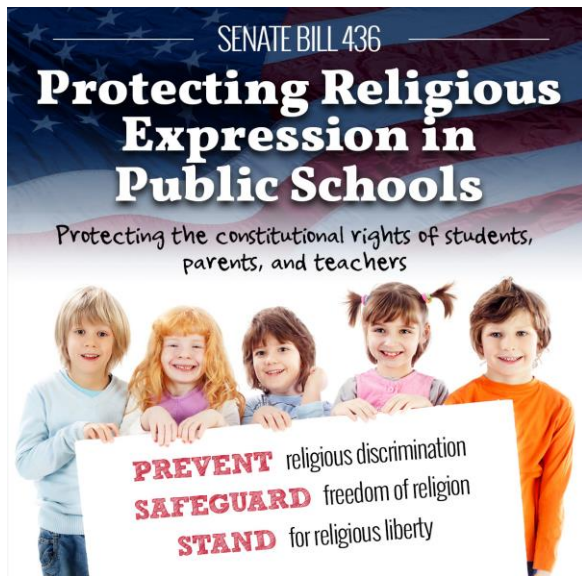
Keeps critical BP Settlement Funds in our
Northwest Florida communities



- Transparency
- Accountability
- Ongoing Economic Recovery

Religious Liberties Act Passes Final Senate Committee

The Florida Senate Committee on Judiciary passed Senate Bill 436, the “Florida Student and School Personnel Religious Liberties Act.” This bill ensures that a school district may not discriminate against a student, parent, or school personnel on the basis of a religious viewpoint or religious expression.



Students of any faith, or no faith, have a right to free speech. This legislation makes it clear that we support the constitutional rights of Freedom of Speech and Freedom of Religion for everyone associated with our public school system.

Senate Bill 436 authorizes students to express religious beliefs in written and oral assignments, free from discrimination. Students may also wear clothing, accessories, and jewelry that display a religious message or symbol, to the same extent secular types of clothing, accessories, and jewelry that display messages or symbols, are permitted in public school dress codes. Further, students may

pray, engage in, and organize religious activities before, during, and after the school day; to the same extent student engagement in secular activity or expression, and the organization of secular activities and groups is permitted.

College Competitiveness Act Passes Second Senate Committee

The Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Higher Education unanimously passed Senate Bill 374, the College Competitiveness Act of 2017, a component of the Florida Senate’s Excellence in Higher Education agenda.



This legislation will elevate the visibility of our nationally recognized Florida Community College System as an integral partner in Florida’s system of higher education and will promote a renewed commitment to access, dedication to the primary 2+2 mission, and on-time completion of vital associate degrees and workforce credentials.

Senate Bill 374 reinstates a statewide coordinating board for the Florida Community College System, tightens the community college bachelor degree approval process,

expands 2+2 college-to-university partnerships, and clarifies responsibilities within Florida’s taxpayer-funded K-20 education system to maximize programmatic offerings and resources already available at state universities, community colleges, and technical centers.

The Florida Senate Participates in Suits for Session

This week, the Senate Majority Office sponsored Volunteer Florida's Second Annual "Suits for Session" event at the Capitol. "Suits for Session" is a service project bringing together legislators, Capitol staff, the private sector, local nonprofits, state agencies, and others. New or gently used professional attire was collected and will be distributed to organizations across the state. The recipient organizations will connect individuals with the tools and professional attire necessary to make good first impressions on job interviews, as well as have the necessary professional attire required as they enter the workforce.