

# Senate Majority Office

## This Week in the Senate

Majority Leader Lizbeth Benacquisto

December 3 - 6, 2012

### The Florida Senate holds First Committee Week

A stark contrast from the first Florida Senate, which convened for business with just seven of sixteen senators over 173 years ago on January 7, 1839, the Senate's Republican Caucus immediately got to work with committee meetings Monday through Thursday of the week.

### Sen. Negron Kicks Off the Senate Intensive Budget Review

Appropriations Chair Joe Negron, R-Stuart, announced Wednesday that the Senate would begin an intensive budget review. The review would examine the base budget and take a "deep dive" into dated and recurring projects. "Ask yourselves if this particular expenditure is as compelling as it was in 1998 when it was put into the budget," Chairman Negron advised the committee.

Chair Negron and President Gaetz, R-Destin, hope the process will shed light on state contracts and evaluate projects that still exist but no longer serve their intended purpose. As Florida's economy continues to improve, it is important that the State's budget does the same. By reducing waste and holding government accountable, taxpayers can be confident that our investments in local communities are getting a good return based on the realities of today's economy.

Breaking with previous practice, Senate President Don Gaetz, asked that every Senator serve on two appropriations subcommittees. "In the coming years, Florida will continue to face many tough decisions when balancing our state's budget," said President Gaetz, who believes the move will leave Senators "equipped with the information necessary to make decisions on what should be funded moving forward."

### Ethics & Elections will focus on Raising Standards and Begin to Look into Election Issues in Certain Florida Counties

Ethics & Elections Chairman Jack Latvala, R-Clearwater, opened the first meeting of the Ethics & Elections committee noting President Gaetz's charge to raise the standard of ethical conduct in Florida. The Senate seconded this sentiment last month with the unanimous adoption of expanded ethics rules. The rules require participation in Ethics training and increase transparency by strengthening conflict of interest disclosure and voting abstention requirements and requiring that documents associated with this rule be posted online.

During the meeting, Senators spent considerable time asking why some counties were unable to provide a satisfactory experience for voters. While a record number of voters cast ballots in 2012, many counties failed to make adjustments needed to accommodate the increased traffic. Secretary of State Ken Detzner spoke, acknowledging that some counties had "under-performed." As a result, he will be visiting the Supervisors of Elections of Lee, Broward, Miami-Dade, Palm Beach and St. Lucie counties. With many unanswered questions remaining, Chairman Latvala reminded the committee that "the eyes of the Nation are on us," emphasizing the importance of maintaining a thoughtful approach to solving voting issues.

### The Senate Holds First Committee Meeting on PPACA

The Select Committee on the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (commonly known as the Affordable Care Act or Obamacare) was held Monday. Chairman Joe Negron, R-Stuart, opened the meeting by explaining the committee's guiding principles: protecting individual choice, limiting the regulatory burdens on Florida's businesses, and promoting better value in health care purchasing.

The complexity of the healthcare law has left the State with many questions as to what actions, if any, Florida should take in regards to insurance exchanges and Medicaid expansion. Currently Medicaid is allocated \$21.2 billion, accounting for almost one-third of our state budget. Setting aside the federal health care law, Medicaid spending will grow to \$24.4 billion by SFY 2015-16, which is a 15% increase over the current-year appropriation. If Florida were to expand Medicaid, the costs estimated for Florida's first contribution year are a minimum of \$79 million and climb to approximately \$176 million the following year. Some have argued that the federal government will cover the additional costs associated with Medicaid expansion, but like many programs, funding promises seldom meet realities.

The Republican caucus is working hard to ensure that the interests of Floridians are protected as the Senators contemplate Florida's choices. To do this, it is critical to have a clear understating of our options as well as a seat at the table in discussions with the federal government.

### Committee Week 2 – January 14<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup>

The Senate will reconvene for its Second Committee week following the New Year. The Calendar will be available at <http://www.flSenate.gov/Session/Calendars>

*Have a Merry Christmas  
and a  
Happy Hanukkah*