



**WEEK 5**

**MARCH 30-APRIL 3, 2015**

The fifth week of the 2015 Legislative Session marked a tumultuous midpoint segment as both chambers passed proposed budgets differing by approximately \$4 billion. The Senate unanimously approved an \$80.4 billion spending plan for the upcoming fiscal year. The appropriations bill includes a \$725 million increase for K-12 schools and does not propose tuition hikes for state colleges and universities, a priority of the Senate Democratic Caucus. The Senate's proposal also includes a Medicaid expansion and an alternative Low Income Pool program within Medicaid to draw down almost \$5 billion from the federal government. The House includes neither, setting up a showdown between the two chambers as negotiations begin to reach an agreement on a balanced budget before session's end.



**(L-R) Senator Joyner and U.S. Senator Bill Nelson**

Differences between the Senate and House are also found in the amounts budgeted for Amendment 1. The constitutional amendment was approved by 75 percent of the voters and requires 33 percent of documentary stamp revenue be set aside for land and water projects. Much to the dismay of Senate Democrats, neither budget includes the full amount originally expected to be set aside for conservation purposes. The Senate's plan includes \$82 million for Everglades restoration and \$50 million for springs restoration, as well as \$35 million for buying conservation land.

**2015 LEGISLATIVE SESSION MAJOR ISSUES**



**Members of the Democratic Women's Club of Florida and Senator Joyner**

With four weeks now left to go, a number of controversial issues are still moving for final passage. The Senate Health Policy Committee voted 5-3 in favor of yet another abortion bill (SB 724), this one requiring a waiting period before undergoing the procedure. At the same time, legislation (HB 19) allowing certain employees to carry guns in schools appears to be in trouble in the Senate, but guns allowing students to carry concealed weapons on college campuses (HB 4005) is still alive in both chambers.

Senate Bill 616 Education Accountability would delay the use of student test results for school grades, teacher evaluations and student promotion to fourth grade until the new Florida Standards Assessments can be independently validated. In addition, the bill would take away a law requiring school districts to come up with end-of-course tests in classes where the state does not administer such exams, limit the time students spends on testing at 5 percent and reduce teacher's evaluation tied to student performance from 50 percent to a third. The legislation has already passed the full House as HB 7069 and awaits a final, full vote from the Senate.

### Committee Assignments

Appropriations Subcommittee on Criminal and Civil Justice, Vice Chair;  
Appropriations; Health Policy; Higher Education; Judiciary; Rules;  
Joint Legislative Budget Commission

### MY BILLS

Senate Bill 646 Controlled Substances allows a court, upon a motion of the defendant, to depart from the 3-year mandatory minimum term and fine applicable to certain drugs like cocaine, hydrocodone, oxycodone, opiates or opioids, phencyclidine, amphetamine, methamphetamine, flunitrazepam, phenethylamines, or lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) if the court finds certain criteria are met.

Under current law, possession of 28 grams or more but less than 200 grams of cocaine requires a 3-year mandatory minimum term. In my bill, possession cannot involve more than 34 grams.

### VISITORS TO THE CAPITOL



My 2015 Legislative Intern Maria Nieto and I at the Florida Legislative Black Caucus Gala



**Students from SEC Mentoring Program (L-R) Torrean Miles, Denton Thompson, Senator Joyner, Jeremy Linnen, and Frank Peterman III**



**Senator Joyner and U.S. Congressman John Lewis at the 59th Anniversary of Bloody Sunday in Selma, Alabama**



**(L-R) Senator Joyner and U.S. Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz  
Debbie Wasserman-Schultz**

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**Your Senator,**

*Arthenia*

**District 19**