



WEEK SIX

APRIL 6-10, 2015

The fifth week of the 2015 Legislative Session began with the Governor turning his back once again on 800,000 Floridians who would qualify for health care coverage under President Obama's health care reform law, at no cost to state taxpayers. It marked his latest flip flop on the issue. In 2012, Governor Scott was against Medicaid expansion. In 2013, campaigning for re-election, he said he supported the measure, but did nothing to help it. Now he's returned to his original position, opposing expanding health care at a time where our state budget is at risk of losing \$1.3 billion in federal funding to pay hospitals for the care of Floridians in the Low Income Pool program. That's on top of the billions of Florida's tax dollars left on the table if the House and governor continue to oppose the Senate's Medicaid expansion plan.



(L-R) Senator Joyner and Congresswoman Frederica Wilson

Earlier this month, both the Senate and House passed their respective budget plans for the upcoming fiscal year. The remaining task is to negotiate the \$4 billion difference between the two, especially in the health-care area, where the Senate includes spending for Medicaid expansion and the House does not. The negotiations to settle the differences and arrive at a single balanced state budget are expected to begin although no conference plans have as yet been announced. There are only three weeks remaining in the 2015 legislative session.

2015 LEGISLATIVE SESSION MAJOR ISSUES

Session convened on Wednesday, April 8 with Travis Hutson, a former member of the Florida House of Representatives, sworn in as a newly elected member of the Senate. He replaces John Thrasher, now president of Florida State University. In addition, the Senate took up several measures relating to traffic enforcement agencies and traffic

citations and adoption. Senate Bill 264 would prohibit traffic enforcement agencies from establishing traffic citation quotas.

Senate Bill 320 Adoption and Foster Care by Senator Gaetz would establish a program where state employees, teachers and other government employees would receive incentives to adopt foster children. They would get \$5,000 to adopt a foster child, with the incentive growing to \$10,000 when the adoptions involve children with special needs. A so-called "conscience provision" amendment which would allow some adoption agencies to discriminate against gay parents on religious grounds was soundly rejected in a bi-partisan vote.

MEDICAL MARIJUANA

During the 2014 Legislative Session, the Governor signed into law Senate Bill 1030 Low-THC Marijuana and Cannabis, which allows for a very low-THC content of medical marijuana. In November of 2014, 58 percent of Floridians voted for the constitutional amendment on the ballot to legalize medical marijuana but that was short of the 60 percent needed to pass. Today, patients remain frustrated with the inability to obtain this drug mainly because the state cannot decide who should be given authority to grow and dispense the medical cannabis.

Senate Bill 7066 Low-THC Cannabis is intended to end the backlog by slightly increasing the number of state-approved businesses that could participate. But, it still contains onerous restrictions such as a requirement that nursery operators have 30-years of operation history and an annual production of 400,000 plants in order to qualify. This hit black farmers particularly hard, excluding them from any participation in this promising new industry. The bill also continues to limit the THC content, which does nothing to help cancer patients who currently are forced to turn to highly addictive pain medication for relief. In committee this week, Democrats attempted to amend the legislation and remove these restrictions. While the amendments were not successful, we are refiling them in time for the bill's hearing on the Senate floor.

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 464 Controlled Substances allows a court, upon a motion of the defendant, to depart from the 3-year mandatory minimum term and fine applicable to trafficking of certain drugs. My bill passed the Appropriations Subcommittee on Criminal and Civil Justice unanimously and has two more stop before it heads to the floor for a full vote.

Heading to the Governor's Desk: Senate Bill 94 Expanding the "Closing the Gap" grant program to include sickle cell disease. My bill unanimously passed its final stop in the House on Thursday.

VISITORS TO THE CAPITOL



(L-R) Senator Joyner and Congressman Patrick Murphy



Members of AMI Kids Tampa (L-R) Angel Amore, Senator Joyner and James Smith

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