

TALLAHASSEE WEEKLY REPORT

May 16-20, 2011

Bill Update

Elections

This week, Governor Scott signed HB 1355, the controversial elections bill, into law. This bill reduces the number of days set aside for early voting, forces people changing their address on Election Day to use a provisional ballot, and creates a commission to pick the date for next year's presidential preference primary. The bill also imposes new restrictions on third-party groups that register new voters, such as a requirement that these groups turn in completed voter registration forms within 48 hours.

This bill was one of the more contentious pieces of legislation taken up this past session. Republicans claim the provisions were put in place to cut down on potential voter fraud and improve Florida's election system. Democrats felt the members of the Republican majority were trying to make it harder for supporters of President Obama, such as college students, to cast a ballot in 2012.

The bill goes into effect immediately, the effects of which are already being felt in Miami-Dade, as the final day of early voting in the Special Election had to be cancelled due to the new law.

Property Insurance

Governor Scott also signed into law SB 408, the controversial property insurance bill. The Governor called this bill "important" and stated that it would help stabilize a volatile property insurance market in a hurricane-prone state. SB 408 reduces the time homeowners have to file claims from hurricanes and sinkhole damage to two years and three years, respectively.

Budget

Also this week, Governor Scott was sent the General Appropriations Act, along with its implementing and conforming bills. The Governor has until June 1 to act on the budget, and has warned of "additional savings" once he is done, leading many to believe the Governor is ready to cut many items using his line-item veto power.

Many believe, after inquiries made by the Governor to the Division of Bond Finance, that he is ready to veto over \$200 million set aside in construction money that was put aside for schools, state universities and community colleges.

World Trade Week

This week, OIA, along with Commissioner Sosa and Port Director Bill Johnson, joined Governor Scott and Lieutenant Governor Carroll at the “Breaking Down Barriers to International Trade” forum held at the Miami Free Zone. The event signified the kickoff of World Trade Week 2011. Attached, please find the agenda for this event.

Online Travel Conference Call

OIA participated in a conference call with the Florida Association of Counties (FAC) earlier this week related to the online travel legislation. While HB 493 passed out of the House, the issue did not receive as much traction in the Senate, thus signaling that the bill will be brought up again in 2012. Concerns with the bill in the House center around the fact that one of its biggest supporters, Representative Chris Dorworth, is in the line of succession to be Speaker of the House.

FAC’s legislative team has also been monitoring a recent Georgia Supreme Court opinion to a suit brought by the City of Atlanta against Hotels.com and other online travel companies. The Court sided with the city in this case, stating that the online travel companies should rework their pricing formulas to pay the city more in occupancy taxes, but do not need to repay millions of dollars in back taxes.

OIA will be joining FAC, and other stakeholders, in monitoring this issue in preparation for its reappearance during the 2012 legislative session.

Attached, please find the Georgia Supreme Court opinion.

Constitutional Amendments

Attached, please find a document put out by the Florida House containing background and details on all the constitutional amendments the legislature passed this session that will appear on the 2012 ballot. These amendments passed as joint resolutions of the Legislature by a 3/5 votes of all members of the House and Senate. The proposed amendment must be approved by 60 percent of the voters in order for it to pass.

2011 Session Final Report

Over the next few weeks, OIA will be compiling information to be included in the final report of the 2011 legislative session. The report should be completed once the Governor has taken action on all bills that are sent to him. In the meantime, should there be any questions on a specific issue, please feel free to contact our office.

