

Tallahassee Weekly Report

February 9-13, 2009

Recap of Interim Committee Meetings

The Florida Legislature held interim committee meetings this past week in Tallahassee. The only committees to meet were appropriations committees, there were no policy committee meetings. OIA was present at these meetings.

The Senate and House appropriations committees held budget workshops to review agency budgets. The committees heard presentations from the Secretaries of various state agencies, as well as public testimony, where relevant.

The Senate Finance and Tax Committee listened to presentations on the impact of Amendment 1, the effect of millage limitations for 2008-2009 local government property tax levies, property tax related constitutional amendments adopted in November 2008, and several other property tax issues. The following link contains the committee packet for this meeting, which includes the presentations that were made.

http://www.flsenate.gov/data/committees/Senate/meeting_packets/FT.pdf

The House Finance and Tax Council held a workshop on the various sales tax exemptions that exist in Florida. At the previous meeting of the council, Representative Dean Cannon, who chaired the council at the time, gave each member a homework assignment of analyzing and presenting before the council a handful of the exemptions. The following link contains the meeting packet, which outlines every exemption and contains a comprehensive chart delineating the cost to the state of each exemption.

http://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Documents/loaddoc.aspx?PublicationType=Committees&CommitteeId=2460&Session=2009&DocumentType=MeetingPackets&FileName=F and T_02_11_09online.pdf

At the Senate Ways and Means Committee meeting, Chairman JD Alexander informed his committee that Florida will not receive enough federal stimulus money to avoid more budget cuts, due to a continuing decline in tax revenues. Chairman Alexander stated that this year's budget may face an additional \$300 million shortfall, while next year's budget will contain a \$5 billion gap. Jerry McDaniel, Governor Crist's budget director, informed the committee that Florida could lose up to \$4.5 billion in anticipated stimulus money earmarked for education due to a maintenance of effort clause in the federal legislation. Florida may not qualify for this money because it is currently spending fewer state dollars on public schools than it did in 2006.

Perhaps the most discussed committee in Tallahassee this past week was the Senate Transportation and Economic Development Appropriations Committee. The committee members took VisitFlorida, a tax supported agency that promotes the state around the world, to task for its spending. Senators questioned \$1.3 million for travel, \$500,00 to entertain travel writers, and \$85,000 for four director's meeting. Senator Alex Diaz de la Portilla said he dialed the agency's call center five times, and kept getting incorrect answers about Tallahassee, including being told once that Tallahassee had a beach and being told four times that Tallahassee was not the state capital.

While in Tallahassee, OIA was able to meet with staff for incoming Speaker Larry Cretul. As reported last week, Cretul was voted "Republican Leader" by the House Republican Caucus, paving the way for him to be elected Speaker of the House by a full vote of the chamber on the Opening Day of Session. OIA also met with incoming Speaker Pro Tempore Ron Reagan. Like Cretul, he will officially be voted in by the full House on the Opening Day of Session. OIA staff has close relationships with these two offices and will maintain continued dialogue throughout the legislative session in an effort to further the county's agenda.

The legislature will hold its final interim committee meetings next week. The agendas that have been released as of this report show that meetings will go beyond budget hearings and bills will be heard. OIA will be present in Tallahassee to cover these meetings and will report next week as to what takes place.

Federal Stimulus Package

President Barack Obama made his first trip to the state of Florida since being sworn in on January 20 when he visited Fort Myers this past week to promote the stimulus plan. The President was introduced by Governor Charlie Crist at the town hall-style meeting. Governor Crist is a supporter of passage of a stimulus package, noting its importance in light of the bleak budget situation our state finds itself in.

The following day, Congress reached a compromise on the stimulus plan. Governor Crist stated he was still pleased with a stimulus plan, even though Florida will likely receive less money than anticipated.

While all the details aren't available yet, Senator Bill Nelson's office says the plan will save or create 206,000 jobs statewide over the next two years, and provide tax credits to 6.9 million Florida workers and their families – up to \$400 for individuals and \$800 for families.

Other numbers that are being mentioned include: 195,000 Florida families eligible for college tax credits of \$2,500 and additional \$100 per month in unemployment benefits to 761,000 Florida workers.

Update on OIA's Preparation for the 2009 Legislative Session

The 2009 Legislative Session begins on Tuesday, March 3. OIA has held several meetings with our lobby team in preparation for the start of session. We have secured bill sponsors for all relevant legislation, we have begun to identify vehicles for possible amendments and have held several meetings with legislators, including those in leadership, with regard to the county's agenda.

The budget situation has placed a cloud over the legislative process. The numbers of bills that have been heard in committee to this point pales in comparison to similar points on the calendar in previous years. Our office understands the importance of focusing on both policy issues, as well as fighting to maintain current levels of funding for projects and programs in Miami-Dade County.

OIA will continue to report weekly with updates on the county's agenda, as well as news and items of interest.

Update on Legislation

SB 360 by Senator Bennett, the Senate's omnibus Growth Management bill, will be heard Tuesday in the Senate Community Affairs Committee and Thursday in the Senate Transportation Committee. As reported last week, this bill is being fast-tracked, and will only have one committee stop left after this week before reaching the Senate floor. The language related to the impact fee moratorium has been removed from the current version of the bill. The attachment contains the Florida Association of Counties' letter to Senator Bennett with their comments on the bill.

SB 630 by Senator Bennet related to Impact Fees provides for a three year moratorium on the imposition or collection of impact fees by a county or municipality. This bill has been referred to committee, but has not been scheduled for a hearing as of yet. Should this legislation pass, it would have a \$117.6 million fiscal impact on Miami-Dade County over the next three years. OIA has informed our entire lobby team that we need an entire team effort to insure defeating this legislation.

SB 1408 by Senator Storms related Taxpayer Rights/Supporting Documentation was filed this week. This legislation provides a taxpayer the right to be provided all supporting documentation used in a property appraiser's assessment, without requesting such documentation, 14 days before the value adjustment board's

hearing date. This bill has not been referred to committee, nor does it have a House companion.

SB 1570 by Senator Garcia related to Household Moving Services was filed this week. This issue has been filed the past few years and preempts the county from regulating movers. OIA has worked to defeat this legislation over the past few years, and will do so again this year. There is no House companion as of yet, nor has it been referred to committee.

HB 859 by Representative Gibson related to Community Redevelopment was filed this week, and is the companion to SB 110 by Senator Bullard which expands the definition of the term "blighted area" to include land previously used as a military facility. The House version has no committee assignments yet, but the Senate bill has been assigned to Community Affairs, Military Affairs and Domestic Security, Finance and Tax, and Transportation and Economic Development Appropriations.

SB 1522 by Senator Storms and HB 849 by Representative Burgin related to Property Appraisal were both filed this week. These bills delete requirements that a property appraiser consider the property's highest and best use when determining the just value of the property. Neither version has been referred to committee yet.