

# TALLAHASSEE WEEKLY REPORT

## July 6-10, 2009

Below please find a recap of events that took place around the state this past week.

### **OIA DEPARTMENTAL MEETINGS**

OIA began a series of summer-long visits and tours with various county departments. Our goal is to continue fostering our relationships with the various departments, while also attaining a better understanding of their daily functions. These visits also gave us the opportunity to discuss what took place during the previous legislative session, as well as have preliminary discussions with regard to the upcoming legislative session. A recap of the visits is as follows:

***Miami-Dade Police Department:*** OIA staff took a tour of the Miami-Dade Police Headquarters in Doral. We were given a tour of the crime lab, met with Communications and Community Services staff and spent time meeting with Glenn Theobald, Chief Counsel of the Miami-Dade Police Department.

***Elections:*** OIA staff received a tour of the Miami-Dade Elections Department, given by Christina White. We were briefed on the elections process, from when the ballots are printed to when they are tabulated on Election Day. We were given a tour of the warehouse where the voting machines and other supplies are stored and given background information on accuracy testing and auditing.

***Department of Emergency Management/Homeland Security:*** OIA staff received a tour of the Emergency Operations Center, given by David Perez. OIA was shown the Operations Center, as well as briefed on the process that is put into place when the EOC is activated, and spent some time speaking with Director Curt Sommerhoff.

OIA would like to thank our colleagues Glenn Theobald (MDPD), Christina White (Elections) and David Perez (DEM) for facilitating these visits and meeting with us this week.

### **High Speed Rail**

Florida Department of Transportation is currently working on an application for the cash to land federal stimulus money to help build a high speed rail from Tampa to Orlando and, eventually, Miami. FDOT plans on submitting the application this week.

The federal stimulus package currently includes \$8 Billion for passenger rail in the United States and Florida is considered a leading contender for some of that money due to its' work in developing such a system.

The state is seeking approximately \$2.5 billion for the Tampa to Orlando piece and has invested over \$1 billion in securing right-of-way for the line.

## **Growth Management**

A group of municipal governments have filed a lawsuit against Governor Charlie Crist and the Legislature this week accusing the state of violating its constitution in passing a growth-management law, which they claim is developer-friendly.

Senate Bill 360 was signed into law on June 1. It exempts builders from having to widen roads to accommodate traffic from new construction and eliminates the review process for some large developments. Local governments, as well as environmentalists, predict the new law will lead to sprawl and clogged roads.

While the lawsuit barely touches on the debate over sprawl and the economy, it focuses on two provisions of the Constitution that check the Legislature's lawmaking powers:

- The suit claims the bill broke the "single subject rule", whereby a piece of legislation cannot pass a single law referring to multiple unrelated subjects. This claim is based on language about security cameras at private businesses and affordable housing.
- Another provision in the suit claims the bill violates the "unfunded mandates" law by which the Legislature needs a 2/3 vote in each chamber if it passes laws that are imposed on local governments without any new source of money to pay for them. The Legislature did not pass this by 2/3, nor did it provide a funding source.

The municipalities involved in the suit are: Key Biscayne, Cutler Bay, Miami Gardens, Weston, Lee County, Deerfield Beach, Fruitland Park, and Parkland.

## **Citizens Approves 10 percent Increase in Premiums**

Citizens Property Insurance's board approved a 10 percent increase to their premiums beginning January 1, 2010, ending a three-year rate freeze. Citizens stated that the increase still will not come close to making it solvent.

Citizens' board also backed off a plan to reject rate cuts for customers in some parts of the state after contentious debate and input from the Office of Insurance Regulation. The board voted to cap any cut at 10%.

## **Appeals Court Upholds Save Our Homes Amendment**

The First District Court of Appeals ruled this week that the “Save Our Homes” amendment that caps tax assessments on homesteaded property is constitutional. It upheld a lower court ruling that rejected a challenge by an Alabama couple who own a second home in Florida and claimed the provision was discriminatory.

The court stated that the tax benefit is based on the way the property is used, not on the status of the landowner as a resident or nonresident.

## **Political**

- Former Tallahassee Mayor and one time Gubernatorial candidate Scott Maddox filed this week to run for Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services.