

Tallahassee Weekly Report

June 29-July 3, 2009

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

New Laws in Effect

Several new laws went into effect on July 1 with an affect on Floridians statewide. Among them:

- The tax on packs of cigarettes increases by \$1/pack.
- Florida universities now have the ability to designate space on campus for storing ashes of deceased alumni.
- Families must pay full price for damaged or lost textbooks.
- Sex offenders and predators will have to provide home and cell phone numbers when they register with law enforcement.
- The Florida Energy and Climate Commission will start working on a rebate program for consumers who buy residential energy-efficient appliances.
- Vietnam War veterans who were honorably discharged and were drafted into service before graduation may now receive high-school diplomas.
- A court can now appoint a guardian at litem advocate to look after the interests of a child in a divorce case, even without an allegation of abuse.
- The cost of filing a civil suit in circuit court goes up from \$295 to \$395.
- Drivers can now be pulled over for not wearing a seat belt, regardless of whether there is another offense being committed.

South Florida Regional Transportation Authority

The South Regional Transportation Authority voted late last week to take money from Tri-Rail's capital funds and shift them to operations, in an effort to keep services running at current levels.

This move is in anticipation of a possible \$1.8 million shortfall in the budget that could take place when counties release their budgets for the upcoming fiscal year.

Broward and Palm Beach have already stated they will be cutting their contributions. Miami-Dade County, however, has yet to take a position.

Senator Bennett Drops Out of Senate Presidency Race

Senator Mike Bennett of Bradenton dropped out of the race to be the next President of the Florida Senate earlier this week. This move paves the way for Senator Mike Haridopolos to lead the chamber beginning in November 2010. Bennett was Haridopolos' strongest opponent in a race that also once included Senator Paula Dockery. Haridopolos and Bennett both issued statements announcing that Bennett will play a key role in the Senate leadership team.

Senators Charlie Dean, Dennis Jones, and Evelyn Lynn also announced this week that they would be supporting Haridopolos for President.

Meeting with Representative Bovo

OIA met with Representative Esteban Bovo in his district office this past week, the first of many such meetings scheduled with members of the Miami-Dade Legislative Delegation over the summer.

Representative Bovo discussed issues of importance to him, including the positive impact the new gambling legislation will have on Hialeah Park. Representative Bovo stated that he is willing to work with Miami-Dade County during the upcoming legislative cycle on issues of importance to the County.