



St. Lucie County

Legislative Update

Inside this issue:

Special Session	1
Florida Audit	1
Open Carry	2
LIP	2
Property Taxes	2

St. Lucie County Board of County Commissioners

Paula A. Lewis, Chair
District 3

Kim Johnson, Vice-Chair
District 5

Chris Dzadovsky
District 1

Frannie Hutchinson
District 4

Tod Mowery
District 2

Howard Tipton
County Administrator

Click the links below



Our Mission....

To provide service, infrastructure and leadership necessary to advance a safe and sustainable community, maintain a high quality of life, and protect the natural environment for all our citizens.

THIRD SPECIAL SESSION CALLED

Senate President Andy Gardiner and House Speaker Steve Crisafulli formally called for members of the Legislature to return for a third special session in 2015 beginning Oct. 19 at noon.



The two chambers will meet for 19 days, ending 3 p.m. Nov. 6 for the purpose of redrawing the state Senate district map.

The dates and the purpose of the special session had previously been announced in a July letter from Gardiner and Crisafulli.

The formal proclamation, issued Oct. 5, provided specific start and end times and that remediation of the Senate districts is the "sole and exclusive purpose" of the session.

FEDERAL AUDIT SAYS FLORIDA MISMANAGED FUNDS

An audit from the Special Inspector General for the Troubled Asset Relief Program (SIGTARP) found that Florida has consistently ranked among the worst states when it comes to dispersing money from a \$1 billion fund for troubled homeowners.



The Hardest Hit Fund has been a target of criticism from SIGTARP before, with an audit conducted in January finding that the program had distributed only 51 percent of the money allocated to the state.

"After five years, Hardest Hit Fund Florida still has half of their HHF funds despite Florida homeowners experiencing critical need," according to SIGTARP.

The report found that Florida approved only 20 percent of applicants to receive funds, the lowest acceptance rate of any state, and estimated that only 39,000 people will receive assistance from the program by the time it ends.

Of the \$1 billion the federal government gave Florida, the state has tapped only \$520.6 million to help 22,400 Floridians. Most of that was spent in the last two years.

Originally, officials estimated the program would help 106,000 homeowners. The Treasury Department responded to the findings by noting that no one found any fraud, waste or abuse in terms of spending the money, and also pointed out that Florida had made progress with the program in recent years.

Watch Session Live:**Connect with
St. Lucie County!****Mark Satterlee**

Deputy County Administrator

Bob Adolphe

Deputy County Administrator

Nicole Fogarty

Legislative Affairs Manager

Mailing Address**2300 Virginia Avenue
Fort Pierce, FL 34982****PHONE****(772) 462-1100****TDD****(772) 462-1428****FAX****(772) 462-2131****e-mail****fogartyn@stlucieco.org****website****www.stlucieco.org****OPEN CARRY GUN BILL PASSES COMMITTEE**

House Bill 163 by Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fort Walton Beach, allowing individuals who currently hold a concealed carry permit to openly carry firearms in public, passed its first House panel in an 8-4 vote Oct. 6, 2015.

Gaetz said that HB 163 "restores and vindicates" Second Amendment rights and promotes public safety, but a number of citizens testified at the hearing of the Criminal Justice Subcommittee that seeing guns at coffee shops and restaurants made them feel unsafe.

Gaetz, though, argued that data from the U.S. Department of Justice shows that open carry laws reduced violent crime in states that passed them.

Gaetz's father, Sen. Don Gaetz, R-Niceville, has introduced a companion measure (SB 300) in the Senate.

The Florida's Sheriff Association has not yet taken a position on the bill, which is supported by the Florida Chamber of Commerce with the caveat that they would like to see more explicit protections for property owners who want to keep guns out of their homes or businesses.

The bill could also run into opposition from opponents of another set of bills that would allow students to carry guns on campus, since the two measures, in concert, would allow students to openly holster their guns on university grounds.

LAWMAKERS NOT READY TO DISCUSS LIP FUNDING

The pot of money set aside to fund health care for the poorest Floridians is expected to shrink dramatically next year but lawmakers taking up the issue Wednesday in advance of their annual session are showing no urgency to try to fill the gap, reports Michael Auslen of [The Tampa Bay Times](#).

Sen. Rene Garcia, R-Hialeah, the health care budget chairman, said Oct. 7 that he is aware the state has only been authorized for \$608 million in its so-called Low Income Pool (LIP) funds from the federal government to reimburse hospitals for unpaid care.

But he's not ready to suggest a backup plan to help hospitals, some of whom rely heavily on LIP funds.

That \$608 million pool -- which includes both federal and local tax dollars -- would be \$400 million smaller than the current year, and more than \$1 billion smaller than the pool from 2014.

The number is based on federal estimates of how much the hospitals would need to cover uncompensated procedures for those who would not be insured if the state expanded Medicaid.

FINANCE & TAX DISCUSSES FUTURE OF PROPERTY TAXES

A House committee is looking at ways to replace property taxes with a higher state sales tax.

The **House Finance & Tax Committee** Wednesday started to explore different scenarios that would shift the tax burden to shoppers by eliminating or reducing the number of Floridians paying property taxes.



According to the draft proposal, if the state eliminated all property taxes, committee records indicate the state's sales tax would have to go from 6 percent to 13.72 percent to cover existing expenses.