



## St. Lucie County

# Legislative Update

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### 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.*

### COMMITTEE VOTES TO AXE ENTERPRISE FLORIDA AND VISIT FLORIDA

The House Careers and Competition Subcommittee Wednesday passed PCB CCS 17-01, a bill that would eliminate Enterprise Florida and Visit Florida. The bill passed on a 10-5 vote, but not before tourism promoters who packed the room with more than 150 speakers voiced their displeasure.

Bill sponsor Rep. Paul Renner, R-Palm Coast, said he wants to remove specialized subsidies for favored industries like tourism and focus on cutting taxes for all businesses.

Gov. Rick Scott, who has consistently named funding for Visit Florida and Enterprise Florida among his top goals each year and has openly clashed with House Speaker Richard Corcoran this week over the legislation, tweeted his frustration. "Politicians in (the Florida House) turned their back on jobs today by supporting job killing legislation," Scott posted on Twitter.

Meanwhile, the House Transportation & Tourism Appropriations Subcommittee Wednesday entertained a suggestion that Visit Florida operate on local tourism taxes, instead of state general revenues, according to Michael Moline of SaintPetersBlog.com.

Rep. Mike La Rosa, R-St. Cloud, who also sits on the careers and competition committee, came up with the idea as a way out of the contretemps between Scott and Corcoran over the wisdom of spending state tax dollars to promote economic and tourism development.

### SPEAKER THREATENS TO SUE VISIT TAMPA BAY

House Speaker Richard Corcoran Friday threatened to subpoena and even sue Hillsborough County's tourism marketing firm if the organization doesn't turn over detailed financial information related to its operations. Last month, Corcoran, R-Land O'Lakes, requested from 13 local tourist development councils their fiscal year 2016 revenue and expense reports. Of the 13 jurisdictions, Hillsborough County was the only one that did not fully comply with the request, Corcoran said.

Hillsborough County administrator Mike Merrill provided Corcoran some details. The county, however, contracts out its \$10.7 million tourism marketing budget to Visit Tampa Bay, a non-profit organization that considers much of that information private. So far, Visit Tampa Bay has said it doesn't have to share anything else. Santiago Corrada, president and CEO of Visit Tampa Bay, said the letter wasn't sent to his organization and he was not responsible for the response. But he said he saw the information Hillsborough County provided and thought it was "very detailed."

Hillsborough's response didn't satisfy Corcoran.

In a letter dated Thursday, the chairman of the House Tourism and Gaming Control Subcommittee, Rep. Mike La Rosa, R-St. Cloud, gave Corrada until Wednesday to comply.



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St. Lucie County!****Mark Satterlee**

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A bill that would give judges discretion to award attorney fees in public records lawsuits squeaked out of its first review panel Tuesday.

The Senate's Governmental Oversight and Accountability cleared the bill (SB 80) by a 4-3 vote. The measure changes the word "shall" to "may" regarding courts awarding legal fees when an "agency (has) unlawfully refused to permit a public record ... to be inspected or copied." It would also require a "complainant (to) provide written notice of the public records request to the agency's custodian of public records at least 5 business days before" suing. Records requests are not normally mandated to be in writing.

The idea is to cut down on the number of "frivolous" lawsuits at taxpayer expense by eliminating guaranteed attorney fees in cases where public officials made an honest mistake, say bill advocates, including the Florida League of Cities.

Open government watchdogs, such as the First Amendment Foundation, have countered that the bill would instead chill legitimate actions against local governments and state agencies that unreasonably refuse to respond to record requests.

Sen. Greg Steube, a Sarasota Republican and lawyer who is sponsoring the proposal, backed a version of the bill last session when he was a state representative. It passed the Senate unanimously but died in the House.

**SENATE COMMITTEE PASSES SB 10**

The Senate Environmental Preservation and Conservation Committee Tuesday unanimously passed a bill to buy farm land for water storage south of Lake Okeechobee.

SB 10 authorizes selling \$100 million in bonds annually for 20 years to acquire 60,000 acres of land and build a reservoir south of Lake Okeechobee in hopes of reducing harmful discharges to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries, the Florida Senate said.

The estimated cost of a reservoir providing 120 billion gallons of storage is roughly \$2.4 billion, with the federal government, subject to congressional approval, paying at least half of the cost.

Several members of the Environmental Preservation and Conservation Committee said to expect changes to bill before it reaches the full Florida Legislature.

**STATE COLLEGE CHANGES MOVE FORWARD**

A bill that would create a new governance board for state colleges and limit their ability to expand baccalaureate degrees cleared its first Senate committee Monday, although the measure drew plenty of questions.

The most controversial aspect is a provision that would set limits on the ability of the 28 state colleges to offer four-year or baccalaureate degrees. The bill (SB 374), which cleared the Senate Education Committee in a unanimous vote, would also create a new State Board of Community Colleges, which would oversee the 28-school system.

Sen. Tom Lee, a Thonotosassa Republican who voted for the bill, said he was sympathetic to the argument that many students would not be able to attend state universities and that the state colleges offered them a closer, more affordable alternative for getting baccalaureate degrees. Lee, who said he was supportive of the new governing board, said many of those questions surrounding the changes for the college baccalaureate degrees need to be resolved.