



# 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.*

## VISIT FLORIDA REQUESTS \$100 MILLION

Gov. Rick Scott's request for lawmakers to boost tourism marketing to \$100 million next year might be a tough sell in the House, reports Jim Turner of The News Service of Florida.

Members of the House Transportation & Tourism Appropriations Subcommittee said Wednesday that Visit Florida would have to justify the proposed increase by showing how many of the 112.3 million visitors last year, and 88.2 million so far this year, came to Florida because of the agency's marketing efforts.

"Throwing out \$75 million and 112 million visitors is just not compelling," Rep. Randy Fine, R-Palm Bay, said after the meeting. "If you can show the incrementality (of marketing to tourism growth), it's easier to justify the money."

Other members of the panel questioned if the state has the money available to spend. Lawmakers provided \$76 million to Visit Florida during the current fiscal year, and Scott has requested a \$24 million increase for the fiscal year that will start July 1.

Visit Florida put together \$5 million for a post-storm marketing campaign, which the agency has credited for helping the state draw a record 27.9 million tourists between July 1 through Sept. 30, even with Irma closing the Florida Keys for most of September.

## GUN LEGISLATION IN JEOPARDY

A push to expand gun rights is being blocked in the Florida Senate.

A Senate panel Tuesday voted down three separate gun bills (SB 274, SB 134 and SB 148), including a measure in SB 148 that would have lowered criminal penalties for concealed weapons permit holders who violate the ban on openly carrying guns, which died on a tie vote.

If passed, SB 274 would have allowed for a licensed person to carry their firearm in on a private school property where a religious institution is also located. SB 134 would have allowed individuals with a concealed carry permit to leave their firearm with security at a courthouse. Both died with six of the ten members of the Judiciary Committee voting against the legislation.

The votes means it is unlikely the Senate will consider any gun-related legislation in the annual session that starts in January.

Legislators have considered bills to expand gun rights the last several years but the measures have gotten bogged down due to opposition from Miami-Dade Republicans.

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

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**CITIZENS INSURANCE TO RAISE RATES**

Florida regulators are approving a rate increase for the state-created property insurance company that serves more than 450,000 commercial and residential customers.

The state Office of Insurance Regulation announced the Citizen Property Insurance Corporation's 2018 rates Wednesday after delaying a decision because of Hurricane Irma. Because of the delay the rates will not take effect until next May.

The rate increases are roughly the same as Citizens' requested before Irma slammed across the state in September.

The increases range from 0.9 percent to 10.1 percent, depending on the type of policy, though homeowners with multi-peril coverage will see a 6.6 percent average increase next year.

Commercial property multi-peril coverage will increase an average of 8.1 percent.

**NEW EVERGLADES RESERVIOR BEING PLANNED**

Water managers planning a massive Everglades reservoir to help end polluted releases from Lake Okeechobee that regularly foul both coasts unveiled early drafts of the project Tuesday, writes Jenny Staletovich of The Miami Herald.

By law, the South Florida Water Management District must stick to a strict timeline, which district officials dubbed the "beehive," forcing engineers to squeeze work that normally takes more than a year into six weeks.

The pace and complexity of the plan also has engineers struggling to design a project that meets multiple objectives on a limited footprint:

Earlier this year, lawmakers laid out the reservoir in a new law championed by Senate President Joe Negron, R-Stuart, to deal with rising complaints from residents. The law requires district engineers to design a reservoir capable of storing at least 240,000 acre-feet of water on land the state already owns.

Water managers also hope to dramatically increase water heading south -- where marshes have dried out and more than 40 square miles of Florida Bay seagrasses have died -- as part of ongoing Everglades restoration efforts.

Because the size is limited, the reservoir will likely need to be deep, increasing the need for treatment to meet water quality standards. And that's raised questions over how engineers will meet the challenge.

Polluted water is now treated in shallow basins south of the lake where underwater plants can grow and help scrub phosphorus, which is carried from farms and urban run-off into marshes that can tolerate very little. In recent years, the existing basin has successfully helped deliver cleaner water, a major success in drawn-out restoration work. Environmentalists now worry deepening that reservoir could hamper clean-up.

**TEXTING WHILE DRIVING LEGISLATION**

House Speaker Richard Corcoran praised legislation (HB 33) filed Wednesday by Rep. Jackie Toledo, R-Tampa, and prime cosponsor Rep. Emily Slosberg, D-Boca Raton, making texting and driving a primary offense while protecting civil liberties.

The bill strengthens the current ban on texting, emailing, and instant messaging while driving, by changing the current enforcement of the ban from secondary to primary. Any violation of the ban that causes a crash results in the addition of six points to the offender's driver license record.