



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.

SENATE BEGINS TO WEIGHING NEGRON'S WATER PLAN

Florida already has enough land for water storage south of Lake Okeechobee, the head of the **South Florida Water Management District** said Wednesday as lawmakers began to ponder a \$2.4 billion water redirection proposal intended to reduce toxic algae blooms on the east and west coasts, reports Jim Turner of [The News Service of Florida](#).

Pete Antonacci, executive director of the South Florida Water Management District, said the state needs to focus first on completing storage areas that will help raise the water level in the Kissimmee River valley, reducing the flow into the lake from the north, and could use farmland it already owns south of the lake for the additional storage.

"We don't need to buy any more land," Antonacci told reporters after addressing the **Senate Environment and Natural Resources Appropriations Subcommittee**. "We have land that could be purposed for that. That's my board's position right now. Policy could change. If policy changes, the board will salute the flag and move forward."

Antonacci's comments came after the first hearing on **Senate President Joe Negron's** proposal to buy 60,000 acres of farmland south of Lake Okeechobee as part of an effort to send more water south, reducing polluted lake discharges into waterways to the east and west.

SENATOR GALVANO FILES GAMBLING BILL

This year's first big gambling bill has something for everyone: Lottery ticket sales at gas pumps, fantasy sports, more slot machines, and a provision to finally OK the long-delayed gambling agreement with the Seminole Tribe of Florida.

As he promised, **Sen. Bill Galvano** filed this year's bill (**SB 8**) Thursday afternoon, coming in at 112 pages -- with a 16-page summary separately provided.

The Bradenton Republican, a lawyer expected to be Senate President in 2018-20, called it "an important step in the development of a comprehensive, statewide approach to reforming current gaming laws."

"This legislation in large part builds upon Senate work that has taken place over the last several years," he said in a statement. "My goal has been to address all aspects of gaming in a comprehensive manner that balances the interests of an industry that has contributed to Florida's economy for nearly a hundred years, our ongoing revenue-sharing agreement with the Seminole Tribe of Florida, and the authority of local voters, while maximizing revenues to the state."

To avoid complaints that the measure represents an expansion of gambling, Galvano included provisions to pare down the number of state gambling licenses, for instance.

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**MEDICAL MARIJUANA**

The **Florida Legislature** has not yet started to put voter passed medical marijuana into place, but the state **Department of Health** is about to launch its own rulemaking process.

Facing a "tight" timeline that requires rules be in place by July 3, **Christian Bax**, director of the **Office of Compassionate Use**, told lawmakers Wednesday that DOH is starting rulemaking workshops "in the coming days." And they'll take the meetings on the road to each of five regions throughout the state.

Amendment 2, passed by more than 70 percent of voters, gives the health department the job of writing rules for medical pot.

But it's clear the Legislature will weigh in too.

"We are not here to debate whether or not to have a medical cannabis program," **Rep. Cary Pigman**, R-Avon Park, the chairman of the **Florida House's Health Quality Subcommittee**, said Wednesday. "The voters have spoken convincingly that we will have one."

House Majority Leader Ray Rodrigues said the House does not plan to include a tax on medical marijuana in its proposal. The Estero Republican will be sponsoring the House bill during the 2017 Legislative Session. Rodrigues said he is in the early stages of crafting the legislation, but does not currently have legislation in bill drafting

CORCORAN TARGETS TOURISM

House Speaker Richard Corcoran has requested financial information from Florida's tourism councils, economic development boards and college and university foundations.

Dozens of groups are receiving letters on the official House letterhead that demand a wide array of information, in some cases under the threat of subpoena if they don't comply quickly.

"Recent spending abuses and unwarranted secrecy in the tourism and economic development arena in Florida raise legitimate concerns among both taxpayers and elected officials," Corcoran wrote to tourism leaders in Miami-Dade, Broward, Palm Beach, Pinellas, Hillsborough and other large metropolitan areas, referring to the once-secret Pitbull contract that cost **Visit Florida's Will Secombe** his job.

"Recent news media reports have only heightened that concern and reinforced my belief that it is time we take a close look at where development money is being spent, how it is being spent and whether these expenditures are returning value to the taxpayers."

Corcoran wants annual dollar amounts from tourism boards for tax revenues, grants, advertising, travel, lobbying, employee salaries, bonuses and reimbursements by Feb. 1. St. Lucie County has received the letter and have complied with the request.

Some of the information Corcoran is demanding is exempt from disclosure under Florida's public records laws, and colleges and universities are nervous about the potential impact on donors. But the Legislature has control over higher education spending, so they will comply by a Jan. 23 deadline.