

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.

Florida voters will decide future of casinos in state

Florida voters are going to have a say over the future of gambling in the state. State election officials on Wednesday certified that a proposed constitutional amendment dealing with casino gambling will go before voters in November of this year. Backers of the amendment had to gather nearly 800,000 signatures to qualify for the ballot.

Sixty percent of voters must vote yes in order for the amendment to pass.

The amendment makes it clear that only voters can approve casino gambling. State legislators have considered proposals the last several years to allow new casinos in south Florida.

On tourism day, House panel approves bill loathed by industry

Against the backdrop of a jam-packed tourism day at the Capitol on Wednesday, a state House panel approved legislation that the industry says would eventually cripple its funding.

The proposal would allow tourist development taxes, which are generated from hotel bed taxes and other sources, to be spent on infrastructure projects that affect tourist attractions. That includes such areas as roads or sewer projects that help boost facilities that bolster tourism numbers.

The tourism industry, which showed up in force to the House Ways and Means Committee, has consistently referred to an expansion of tourist tax money as a “slippery slope” that could lead to more being diverted from tourism efforts in the future.

The committee easily approved the bill, but several members warned the language was too broad, and that it could lead to tourist taxes being diverted from marketing, which is how most are currently spent.

School board term limits proposal advances in the House

A proposal to amend the state constitution to term-limit school board members moved forward in a 12-2 vote in the House Wednesday after several Republicans said they felt “conflicted” about the proposal. Critics have needled the proposal, House Joint Resolution 1031, for its retroactive effect.

The House Pre K-12 Quality Subcommittee amended the bill to limit the retroactivity. Under the changes made Wednesday, someone can only serve on a school board for eight consecutive years, and any service since 2013 counts toward the limit.

Despite the change, concerns about the retroactivity still linger. The bill will move to the Public Integrity & Ethics Committee to await its next hearing.

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ST. LUCIE COUNTY

Legislative UPDATE

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Senate adds Scott's \$50 million treatment request to opioid bill

The Senate added more than \$50 million for opioid treatment programs through a strike-all amendment before passing Gov. Rick Scott's legislation out of its first committee stop on Tuesday. The amendment matches Scott's dollar request for combating the statewide crisis. The governor had included the money to treat the epidemic in his 2018-19 budget proposal, but he didn't include it directly in the legislation sponsored in the House and Senate.

Specifically, it allocates \$42.5 million for residential treatment, outpatient care, after-care services and case management as well as medication-assisted treatment. The portion of that money going towards medication-assisted treatment, which provides addicts with drugs to help them wean off opioids, is being funded through a \$27 million federal grant. The bill also gives \$6 million in recurring money to drug treatment court to help addicts stay out of prison. In addition, it provides \$5 million in recurring funds to the state Department of Health so that it can purchase naloxone, another drug that helps revive addicts who overdose.

Senate Bill 8, sponsored by Senator Benaquisto, advanced favorably out of the Senate Health Policy Committee on Tuesday. Its next stop will be in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

Bill to prevent raid of housing trust fund passes committee

As the need for affordable housing grows in the wake of Hurricane Irma, especially in the devastated Florida Keys, some lawmakers want to see an end to the practice of "sweeping" housing trust funds to boost other areas of the budget.

Legislation filed in the state Senate, Senate Bill 874, would exempt state and local housing trust funds from being raided when lawmakers are building the state budget. Over the past five years, more than \$660 million has been swept from housing trust funds to help balance the state budget.

That bill, sponsored by state Sen. Kathleen Passidomo (R-Naples), unanimously was approved by the Senate Community Affairs Committee on Tuesday, with more than three dozen people speaking in favor of it. The House has yet to file a companion for the initiative.

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