

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.*

## Differences over Scott's \$85M infrastructure will be key budget fight

The House and Senate released transportation and economic development budgets plans on Wednesday roughly \$160 million apart, a small difference, but policy fights are likely embedded in the proposed spending plans.

Both chambers are giving Gov. Rick Scott his full funding request of \$85 million for an infrastructure and workforce development fund created last session during a last-minute budget deal. The Senate, though, ties that funding to the state receiving \$85 million in federal reimbursements the Federal Emergency Management Agency owes the state. If the feds don't pay the reimbursements, the Senate says it won't fund Scott's pot of infrastructure cash.

The fight over whether to tether the funding to federal disaster relief funding will likely play a large role in hashing out the 2018-19 economic development bill.

Overall, both spending plans are north of \$12 billion, a number that funds a wide-swath of state functions, including: the Florida Department of Transportation, the Department of Economic Opportunity, the Scott administration's top economic development agency, and low income housing, among others.

The biggest differences — nearly \$200 million — is in the proposed budget for the Department of Economic Opportunity. Among the differences is how low-income housing programs are funded. The Senate sets aside nearly \$210 million for traditional low-income housing programs used by the state. The House funds those same budget line-items at \$110 million, and earmarks the funding for areas of the state impacted by Hurricane Irma. The money will be allocated based on federal damage data.

## House gaming bill begins 'meaningful dialogue' with Senate

The House filed its own gaming proposal Friday night in the form of legislation seen as favorable for the Seminole Tribe of Florida by trading \$3 billion in revenue from its reservation casinos for tougher language that would solidify its exclusivity of casino-style games.

But unlike Senate Bill 840, the proposed committee bill assembled this week by the House is tough on pari-mutuel facilities looking to end racing but still keep open the more lucrative cardrooms. Those facilities would lose their licenses, along with other groups with licenses which have been dormant.

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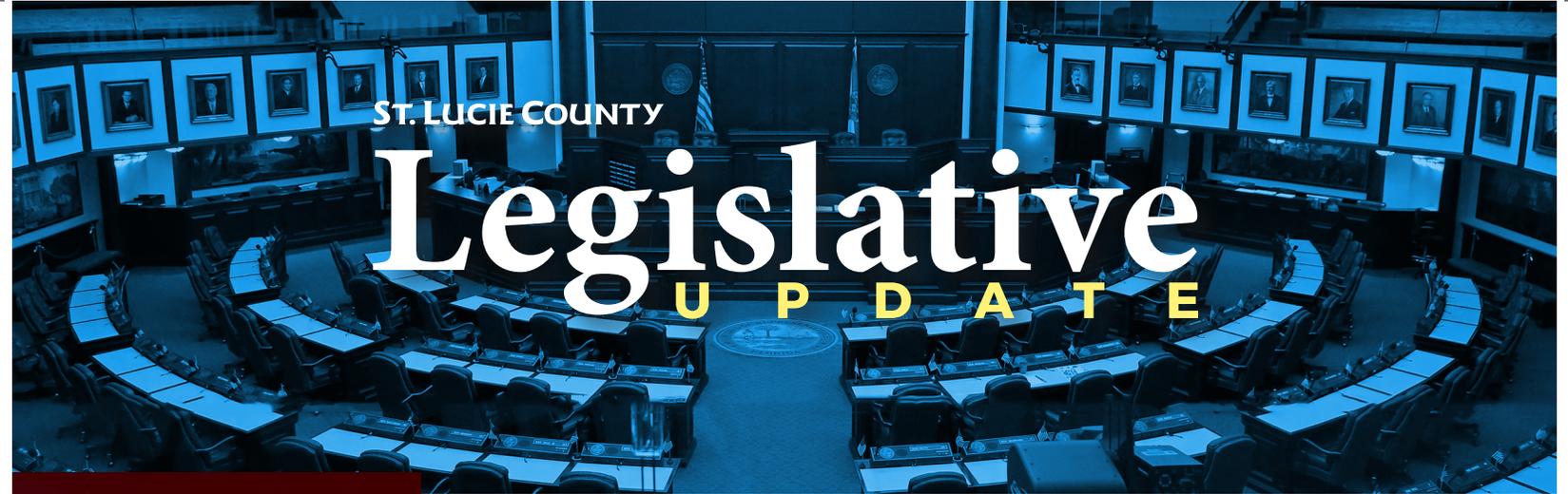
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## **House passes big piece of Corcoran's economic development agenda**

Legislation that state House Speaker Richard Corcoran has long touted as a top priority easily got the stamp of approval from the full House, but his real challenge begins as the focus now shifts to the Senate.

The legislation, House Bill 3, would add what Corcoran terms transparency and accountability measures to local economic development organizations that he has accused in the past of questionable spending. It passed on an 87-20 vote.

The organizations targeted use the bed tax — optional taxes levied on things like hotels or condo rentals — and use the money in large part for tourism and economic development marketing. Statewide, more than \$100 million is generated annually by local tourist development organizations.

Among other things, the bill, sponsored by state Rep. Michael Grant (R-Port Charlotte), would limit travel expenses, the amount of public dollars used for bonuses and compensation for top officials. It would also require contracts worth more than \$250,000 to get a 14-day review period prior to execution and make sure that certain agency records are not deemed confidential.

The legislation is similar to a Corcoran-pushed plan last year that put transparency measures over Visit Florida, the statewide tourism marketing agency. The Senate was originally skeptical of those plans, but agreed to many of them as part of a last-minute budget deal during June's special budget session.

The Senate version of the bill is scheduled to get its first hearing on Monday in the Senate Commerce and Tourism Committee.

## **House passes 'union-busting' bill amid labor furor**

A controversial measure that could have a broad impact on public-sector unions in Florida passed the state House of Representatives on a mostly party-line vote Thursday.

House Bill 25 — fast-tracked by House leadership — the legislation would decertify public unions in the workplace if voluntary dues-paying membership falls below fifty percent. The unions would have to report to the state annually how many employees are eligible for representation by the union and then how many of them do and don't pay annual dues.

The legislation would exempt unions that represent police officers, prison guards and firefighters.

A bill to encourage the implementation of prearrest diversion programs has passed its first committee.

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**ST. LUCIE  
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## **Diversion Program Bill passes first committee**

Senate Bill 1392 by Sen. Jeff Brandes (R-St. Petersburg), would direct all judicial circuits in the state to create and implement adult and juvenile civil citation programs.

The program would give an opportunity to offenders who commit minor crimes, such as petty theft or marijuana possession, to report to the program, which aims to give individuals who qualify community service hours instead of jail time. Senator Brandes says the move will “free up the court system to deal with more serious offenses” and will give individuals the chance to face “appropriate sanctions” for their crimes.

If a person does not complete the program, the bill states the case would go back to the law enforcement agency that made the arrest to determine if there is good cause to recommend charges for the misdemeanor offenses.

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