

# 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.*

## House, Senate pass \$87B budgets, setting stage for budget negotiations

The House and Senate both passed their proposed spending plans Thursday, setting the stage for final budget negotiations at the legislative session's midpoint.

The two budget plans are roughly \$100 million apart, a far smaller gap than in recent years. On the Senate side, the \$87.2 billion proposed spending plan was quickly given final passage with little debate, but Democrats in the House teed-off on a host of proposals buried in their \$87.1 billion proposed budget.

The most reoccurring complaint from the chamber's minority party was the sweeping of more than \$180 million in funding from the state's two housing trust funds.

The House's budget includes \$64 million to develop additional rental housing in hurricane-impacted areas, and \$45 million to produce all types of affordable housing in hurricane-impacted areas. The money will be distributed using a federal formula that measures the state's hardest hit areas.

The Senate does not sweep housing trust funds. Its budget includes \$104 million for homeowner assistance programs, \$104 million for local governments to finance affordable housing, and \$100 million specifically to help Hurricane Irma-impacted affordable housing.

There are a series of potentially high-profile budget differences that did not get much attention during the final budget debate.

The House is proposing \$76 million for Visit Florida, while the Senate wants \$50 million. Gov. Rick Scott wants \$100 million, which could complicate final budget negotiations because it's one of his top budget priorities.

The two sides also disagree on land conservation funding. The House budget sets aside \$8 million for the Florida Forever land-buying program, while the Senate's has \$150 million. The House does give \$25 million for conservation easements through the Department of Agriculture, an amount that is \$5 million in the Senate through Florida Forever, a funding formula for 10 land conservation programs at state agencies.

The Senate also boosts funding for state universities and colleges, a top priority for Senate President Joe Negron, by \$383 million, or 6.6 percent. The House has pitched an austere higher education funding plan, cutting colleges and universities by roughly \$280 million.

Both chambers passing their budgets on the same day is a good signal that they are on the same page and that remaining differences can be overcome. That coupled with the fact that the spending plan is so close in size means there is little of the budget angst that generally begins to fill the Capitol as session winds to an end.

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ST. LUCIE COUNTY

# Legislative UPDATE

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## House panel on board with public officer travel expense restrictions

House Bill 815, requiring oversight for municipal and county elected officers' travel expenses got the go ahead from the House Public Integrity & Ethics Committee on a 12-6 vote Thursday.

According to the bill, out-of-state travel would have to be approved in advance, though the committee substitute approved by the House panel would allow travel expenses to be approved after the fact if a "good cause" is presented.

Any out-of-state travel plans would have to be posted on the local government's website.

Additionally, the bill bans foreign travel for the public officers, though the outright ban raised concern among some committee members in last Wednesday's meeting.

The senate companion to the bill is scheduled to be heard this Wednesday in the Senate Ethic and Elections Committee.

## St. Lucie County alcohol licensing change ready for the floor

House Bill 891, sponsored by Representative Gayle Harrell (R-Stuart), is scheduled to be heard on the House floor this Wednesday afternoon.

Currently in St. Lucie County, SRX licenses may be issued to any bona fide restaurant with service for 200 or more patrons at tables and occupying more than 4,000 square feet of floor space. The bill will repeal this language and reference the requirements provided under general law, which will decrease requirements to service of 150 or more patrons and occupying more than 2,500 square feet.

## Short-term vacation rental bill heads to Senate appropriations

A bill that would create statewide regulations for the vacation rental industry and preempt many local ordinances passed its second Senate committee today amid heavy opposition from municipalities and hotels.

State Sen. Greg Steube Senate Bill 1400 would streamline the spectrum of ordinances passed by cities and counties since 2011 to shut down disruptive vacation rentals. Industry oversight and licensing would be handed to the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation.

The bill grandfathers in ordinances passed before 2011, the same year the Legislature passed a similar preempting bill. Lawmakers later ratcheted back that state policy in 2014.

The bill now awaits a hearing before the Senate Appropriations Committee before it can be considered for the floor. Companion House Bill 773 by Rep. Mike La Rosa (R-St. Cloud) has not yet been placed on a committee agenda.

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