

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.

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DeSantis quietly signs repeal of smokable medical cannabis

Gov. Ron DeSantis has approved the repeal of the state's ban on smokable medical cannabis — the first bill of his first legislative session as the state's top executive.

DeSantis signed the bill with little fanfare. A motion to dismiss a challenge of the ban filed by Chief Deputy Solicitor General Edward Wenger stated that DeSantis had signed the bill.

The House sent the bill to DeSantis on Wednesday after it passed with a 111-11 vote. An identical version of the bill had also been approved by the Senate on March 7, with a 34-4 vote.

As Galvano and Oliva suffer setbacks, deal-cutting takes shape

Midway through the legislative session, roads, hospitals and gambling cash are emerging as fuel for the high-level deal-cutting that typically defines the end of session.

Tallahassee tradition dictates that one chamber's top priority be held hostage by the other as leverage — as bills flow through the legislative process in the hectic first weeks, measures that aren't moving can be just as significant.

Members are usually loathe to admit publicly that key legislative priorities are essentially linked, but clues to this year's horse trade began to surface this week. Legislation to repeal rules on hospital construction, a top priority of House Speaker Jose Oliva, stalled in the Senate Monday. And in the House, no one is carrying Senate President Bill Galvano's rural highway plan.

Galvano and Oliva dismissed speculation that a trade-off is in the works even as both scrambled this week to shore up their legislative priorities.

Senate proposes using petroleum cleanup fund for DeSantis water program

Industry groups are objecting to a Senate budget proposal to transfer \$40 million from a trust fund used for petroleum contamination cleanup to a water program requested by Gov. Ron DeSantis.

The Inland Protection Trust Fund was established by the Legislature in 1986 to pay for site cleanups and receives revenue through an excise tax on petroleum imports.

The Senate's fiscal 2019-20 state budget has proposed spending \$90 million on cleanups and transferring \$40 million from the trust fund to the Department of Environmental Protection for the DeSantis water grant program.

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Petroleum cleanup fund, continued)

The Inland Protection Trust Fund took in \$166.7 million in the past two fiscal years, about 75 percent of which was appropriated for the cleanup program, according to a House staff report. The Legislature appropriated \$110 million for cleanups in the current state budget. More than half of the 19,372 contamination sites in the state have been cleaned up while 8,907 are being scrubbed or awaiting action, according to DEP.

DeSantis requested \$40 million in general revenue, not Inland Protection Trust Fund dollars, for his alternative water supply grant program as part of a \$625 million package to address water quality and supply issues. The governor wants DEP to create the program to help communities plan for and implement vital conservation, reuse and other alternative water supply projects. The Senate proposed \$31 million more than the governor requested for water programs.

House advances bill to allow teachers to carry guns in schools

The House education committee on Thursday advanced an extensive school safety bill to implement recommendations from the commission investigating the Parkland shooting, including a controversial push to allow teachers to carry guns in schools.

The committee bill would eliminate limitations on Florida's Aaron Feis School Guardian Program, opening the door for schools to arm educators, something previous legislation had explicitly prohibited.

This provision fell flat with Democrats who otherwise endorsed different aspects of the sweeping legislation, which advanced in committee on a 11-5 vote along party lines.

In addition to expanding the guardian program, the bill would give the Department of Education authority to fine superintendents, school board members and personnel for failing to comply with safety rules.

It would require schools to share records, including mental and behavioral records, when students transfer campuses. The bill gives schools one day to transfer records within the school district and two days if outside.

Schools would have to consult more with law enforcement, screen students referred for mental assistance within 45 days, and verify that intervention services are offered to students when they transfer campuses.

Additionally, the legislation permits law enforcement academies and school districts to offer guardian training adopted by the Criminal Justice Standards Training Commission. Currently, only sheriffs are permitted to train guardians.

Senate proposes \$50 million for Visit Florida

The Senate has proposed a \$50 million budget for Visit Florida, but the cash comes with strings attached. The money can't be used to help local governments that ban certain sunscreens. Though the proposal doesn't mention a specific city, it's directed at Key West, which in February voted to ban sunscreens that contain a chemical scientist believe hurts coral reefs.

The committee budget sets aside \$1 million for a Visit Florida advertising campaign to address the "environmental impacts of polystyrene foam materials on Florida's beaches, wildlife, and water." It also includes \$25.7 million for Enterprise Florida, a taxpayer-funded economic development effort. Enterprise Florida and Visit Florida have long dominated the economic development budget and are poised to take center stage again. The House budget would eliminate funding for both programs.

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