

May 12, 2009

## Post-Session Wrap-Up from the Office of *Representative Keith Fitzgerald*



Dear Friends,

The legislature finished up its work in an extended session last Friday, and I wanted to send my constituents a final update on what has happened in Tallahassee. Below you can read about next year's state budget and the final status of some of the bills I sponsored this year.

Also, I wanted to invite everyone to **join me for a town hall meeting on Monday, May 18 at 6:00 PM in the Sarasota County Commission Chambers** (1660 Ringling Blvd. in Sarasota). This will be your opportunity to hear an overview of the 2009 Legislative Session and to ask questions regarding legislative issues.

As always, please feel free to contact my office (941-955-8077) with any questions or concerns you may have.

Sincerely,  
Keith Fitzgerald  
State Representative, District 69

### **2009-2010 State Budget**

Last week, the state legislature convened in an extended session to debate and pass the state budget, which was not completed in time to be passed during the 60-day regular session. I voted against the budget because I did not think it took the right approach to getting our state through these tough economic times.

This budget imposes more than \$1 billion in new "fees" on the middle class, including hikes for driver's licenses and auto registration tags. The majority party leadership in the legislature also failed to utilize \$444 million in federal economic recovery dollars for Florida's unemployed, which not only would have helped workers facing long-term unemployment but also would have pumped additional dollars into Florida's economy.

Among its many other problems, this budget cuts funding for critical services such as home care and community care for the elderly and for the first time since 1990 fails to provide funding for the state's land preservation program, Florida Forever. For these and other reasons I voted against this budget.

### **Renewable Energy**

This year I sponsored a bill (HB 1317) to encourage renewable energy production in Florida by implementing a system known as "renewable energy dividends," which is based on the model used in Germany that dramatically increased the use of renewable energy in that country.



### **Need help dealing with a state agency?**

One of the things I can do as your state representative is help you resolve problems you are having with state agencies. Offices handling unemployment compensation and food stamp requests are overwhelmed during these difficult economic times, and our office can often help expedite your case if you are experiencing difficulties.

If you need help with these issues, please do not hesitate to contact my district office at 941-955-8077.

#### **District Office:**

1660 Ringling Blvd.  
Suite 310-311  
Sarasota, FL 34236  
Phone: 941-955-8077

#### **Capitol Office:**

316 The Capitol  
402 South Monroe St.  
Tallahassee, FL 32399  
Phone: 850-488-7754

Legislative Aide: Duncan Kirby

District Aide: Charolett Baker

**Committees:**

renewable energy in that country.

Under the legislation, power companies would have been required to contract with renewable energy producers to purchase the energy they produce at a rate that provides an incentive for investment by small businesses and homeowners.

While this legislation gained a broad base of bipartisan support during the legislative session, unfortunately it was not brought up for a hearing. I plan to continue to work on this proposal for the next legislative session.

#### **Committees:**

- Policy Council (Democratic Ranking Member)
- Finance & Tax Council
- Health Care & Family Services Policy Council
- Military & Local Affairs Policy Committee
- Select Policy Council on Strategic & Economic Planning

[Click here to read a February 2009 article from the Sarasota Herald-Tribune about my proposal.](#)

### **Affordable Housing**

I am happy to report that the language from my bill relating to affordable housing (HB 267) passed this year. This legislation helps to provide affordable housing by ensuring that property tax bills for residents of community land trust (CLT) homes reflect the restricted value of these homes. The bill was unanimously approved by all of its committees and the language was ultimately folded into a larger bill that passed on the final day of session.

In a CLT home, the homeowner owns the structure but not the land it sits on. The land is leased to the owner by the CLT nonprofit organization. This arrangement protects the public and nonprofit investment in affordable housing because the ground lease requires that the homeowner sell the home only to an income-eligible buyer at a restricted price.

Language from a bill I sponsored last year, which exempted from property taxes land under development for affordable housing by nonprofits such as Habitat for Humanity, was also included in the omnibus bill that passed at the end of session.

### **Mental Health & Substance Abuse Treatment Facilities**

On April 24, my bill relating to mental health and substance abuse services (HB 767) was passed unanimously by the Senate, after passing unanimously in the House the day before. The changes made by this legislation will help deliver mental health and substance abuse services more efficiently by allowing mental health facilities to be licensed to provide drug abuse treatment services in addition to mental health services.

More than half of all people seeking treatment in crisis stabilization unit facilities have both mental illness and addiction disorders, so allowing both types of services to be provided in one facility allows for more effective treatment as well as for more efficient use of mental health dollars.

Please note: Florida has a very broad public records law. Most written communications to or from state officials regarding state business are public records available to the public and media upon request. Your e-mail communications may therefore be subject to public disclosure.