



Florida House of Representatives
Democratic Office

Franklin Sands
Democratic Leader

Geraldine F. Thompson
Democratic Leader Pro Tempore

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 22, 2009

CONTACT: Mark Hollis
(850) 488-9622

**HOUSE DEMOCRATS CALL FOR
GOOD GOVERNMENT REFORMS
TO RESTORE PUBLIC TRUST**

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. --- Florida House Democratic Leader Franklin Sands today praised House Democratic Caucus members' proposals to restore honesty, integrity and openness to state government.

"The people's trust has been violated through abuse and corruption by elected officials and other public servants," said Sands, D-Weston. "Florida House Democratic Caucus members seek changes to restore faith in the government. We urge Republican legislative leaders to join us in supporting good-government reforms, and to make these initiatives a high priority of the 2010 legislative session."

Florida House Democratic Caucus members have filed bills that would:

- Require state laws and budgets to be written in a truly transparent manner consistent with Florida's government-in-the-sunshine traditions;
- Encourage greater public participation in government and elections; and
- Lead toward an open and accountable state government that honors the public's right to know.

“Important bills filed by members of the House Democratic Caucus will help put an end to the culture of corruption that is pervasive in politics today,” said Sands. “These ideas are presented to help make certain that Florida’s leaders serve the people’s interests, not the special interests.”

Among the “good government” bills filed by Florida House Democrats are:

House Joint Resolution 241. Expanding The Public’s Access. Rep. Keith Fitzgerald, (D-Sarasota). HJR 241 is a proposed constitutional amendment that requires budget documents to be user friendly and easy to understand. The amendment would prevent last-minute backroom budget and legislative deals that avoid public input and scrutiny.

The resolution requires:

- Budget documents must be user friendly, easy to read and understandable;
- A three-fourths vote is necessary to allow an amendment on the House floor during the last week of session to reduce the back room last minute deals showing up for a vote without public scrutiny;
- Members of conference committees are prohibited from discussing legislative matters among themselves, except at noticed public meetings;
- A two-thirds vote of both chambers is required to enact public records or public meeting exemptions; and
- Citizens are allowed the right to challenge in court the rules governing public access to documents and meetings.

Several caucus members are sponsoring bills to clarify to public officials what they may not do with the power of the office the people entrust to them. Among the bills are:

House Bill 585. Rep. Ari Porth (D-Coral Springs) Standards of Conduct/Restoring Faith in Public Office Act: The bill bolsters the state’s Official Misconduct law by imposing tougher criminal penalties on a public servant who, with corrupt intent, willfully fails to disclose certain financial interests and other benefits.

House Bill 489. Rep. Adam Fetterman (D-Port St. Lucie) Public Corruption: The bill increases the penalties when a person uses their public authority to commit a crime.

House Bill 533. Rep. Mark Pafford (D-West Palm Beach) Testimony Before the Public Service Commission: The bill requires individuals who provide public comment at PSC hearings to disclose any financial relationship with a utility company. It helps to ensure that the commission makes an informed decision about how the relationship might affect their comments. The bill also requires the financial interest to be disclosed, including charitable contributions, gifts or any positions of governance that are held by an employee of a public utility within the organization represented.

House Bill 587. Rep. Adam Fetterman (D-Port St. Lucie) Voting Conflicts: The bill prohibits legislators from voting on bills that would result in their personal gain, their family's gain or any business/group they work with from gaining. It also requires disclosure of interests before legislation is considered, and requires written disclosure within a certain time period after a vote on legislation is taken.

House Bill 1153. Rep. Martin Kiar (D-Parkland) Bribery or Misuse of Public Office: The bill aims to make it easier for citizens and the attorney general to hold public officials accountable when they violate the public trust.

###