



This newsletter contains important information about your 2012 Florida State Legislature, including new laws that may affect YOU!

2012 EDUCATION UPDATE

The big education issue of the session was the budget, including increases in funding for K-12 schools. The funds that have been added fall short of recovering the massive losses incurred over the past few years. For instance, last year's cuts caused a \$575-per-student reduction in school spending. As a result, this year's budget restores only about a quarter of that loss and still leaves per-pupil spending about \$930 less per student than in the 2007-08 school year.

I am concerned that the ongoing financial challenges of our public schools will result in layoffs of teachers and other school employees, cuts in arts and music programs, and will make it harder to develop a world-class education system for

the 21st Century.

I consider these changes a narrowing of opportunities for traditional public school students, which come as charter schools get more freedom with fewer regulations and voucher programs get more money and fewer requirements to prove their performance.

Perhaps the best thing for education happened when the Florida Senate killed a bill that created a parent petition process to convert low-performing traditional public schools into charter schools, which could have been managed by for-profit, out-of-state charter school companies. I think this legislation ignored the fact that opportunities already exist to implement turnaround plans to improve schools'



performance, and I am glad it was defeated.

Public universities also got hit with major cuts at the same time the Legislature approved tuition hikes and reductions in student financial aid.



District 93
State Representative **PERRY**
THURSTON

2012 UPDATE FROM THE FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Councils/Committee Membership:

Incoming Democratic Leader
Finance & Tax Committee
Rules & Calendar Committee
Council on the Social Status of
Black Men and Boys

Please E-mail my staff so we can provide additional Legislative updates throughout the year.

DEAR FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS,

The legislative session has ended and it is good to be home again in our community. Being able to work for our community on statewide issues is what you sent me to Tallahassee to do, and I hope this report gives insight into work that was done this session.

I am especially grateful to my colleagues for having allowed me to serve as the Democratic lead throughout the redistricting effort in the Florida House of Representatives. The redrawing of legislative and congressional boundaries takes place every 10 years, and it was a major focus of the 2012 session.

Besides redistricting, the Legislature addressed other major issues affecting the entire state, including destination gaming and the crafting of a new state budget. I am also proud that I have been designated by my colleagues to serve as the incoming leader of the House Democratic Caucus. I will be honored to lead what I consider to be the heart and soul of the Florida Legislature.

I will continue keeping you updated about the work of the Florida Legislature and the issues important to you. It remains my pleasure to represent you. Please feel welcome to contact my office if I can be of assistance.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve our community.

Sincerely,

Perry Thurston

Perry Thurston
State Representative, District 93

PUBLIC SAFETY: HUMAN TRAFFICKING TAKES CENTER STAGE

I BELIEVE PROTECTING THE SAFETY AND SECURITY OF THE PUBLIC IS A FUNDAMENTAL ROLE OF GOVERNMENT. FLORIDIANS DESERVE A JUSTICE SYSTEM THAT GUARANTEES DUE PROCESS, A CORRECTIONS SYSTEM THAT PROVIDES SECURE PRISONS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT THAT PROTECTS AND SERVES ALL FLORIDIANS.



This year, the Legislature tackled the devastating issue of human trafficking, a crime that robs individuals of their dignity and their right to contribute to our society. This serious of-

fense requires stricter penalties, especially in Florida, due to our geography, rapidly growing population and high number of visitors every year.

The human trafficking legislation passed this year stiffens the penalties for those involved in human trafficking in Florida. Additionally our efforts will grant jurisdiction on these multi-jurisdictional cases to the Statewide Prosecutor, giving local law enforcement officers the tools they need to protect victims and bring those engaged in human trafficking to justice.

A Democratic-sponsored bill passed that would ban the use of restraints on female prisoners during labor and to tighten guidelines on how pregnant prisoners may be restrained.

PIP INSURANCE

This session, the focus on insurance centered on changing Personal Injury Protection – a mandatory component of the auto insurance that motorists must carry in Florida – and efforts to transfer policies from state-backed Citizens Property Insurance Corp. to the private market.

The auto-insurance legislation sent to the governor limits certain attorney fees and limits access to medical professionals. It puts a time limit of 14 days in which an accident victim can make a medical claim. Within the two-week window, the amount of medical care can be limited to \$2,500 if determined to be for a non-emergency condition.

Measures to shrink Citizens, as well as a bill to reduce the coverage in the state's reinsurance fund – the Florida Hurricane Catastrophe Fund – were defeated, with concerns raised about raising rates. Proposed legislation dealing with Citizens would have allowed unregulated, out-of-state “surplus lines” carriers to absorb more of the coverage that Citizens provides.



TALKIN' BASEBALL!

State Representative Perry E. Thurston, Jr. held the fourth annual “Thurston AAA Invitational Baseball Tournament” for boys ages 9-10, 11-12 and 13-15. The Thurston AAA Baseball Tournament was held at Joseph Carter Park, starting with a Kick off Rally on Friday, April 13, 2012 continuing through Sunday, April 15, 2012.

Representative Thurston recognizes baseball as an important tradition in our community. He feels it is our responsibility to foster that tradition through grassroots efforts. Through a partnership with the City of Fort Lauderdale's Parks and Recreation we are able to provide a first class event for the city and surrounding areas.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

Putting Floridians Back to Work

DESPITE PROMISES OF FOCUSING ON JOB CREATION, I THINK THE LEGISLATURE FAILED TO ADDRESS THE PRIORITIES OF THE MIDDLE CLASS AND TO BOLSTER FLORIDA'S ECONOMIC REBOUND.

A Democratic-led initiative known as the Fair Economy Act that would close certain business tax loopholes to avoid spending cuts failed to become law. Instead, the Legislature approved a \$50,000 exemption to the state's 5.5 percent corporate income tax, doubling last year's cut and taking nearly 4,000 more businesses off the rolls. The tax-break package also includes breaks for manufacturing equipment, private planes, and eases tangible personal property taxes that businesses pay.

A bill dealing with Unemployment Compensation was passed that is designed to ease costs to Florida's businesses. But opponents are concerned that the changes may lead to increased taxes in future years because of the decreased ability to repay federal loans that have to be repaid with interest.

Meanwhile, an annual back-to-school sales tax holiday backed by Florida retailers was approved that involves a three-day tax break in August.

HEALTH CARE 2012

ONE OF THE MOST CHALLENGING DUTIES FACING THE LEGISLATURE INVOLVES DETERMINING HOW TO MEET CRITICAL NEEDS OF FLORIDA'S MOST VULNERABLE WHILE MANAGING LIMITED RESOURCES. I CAN ENSURE YOU THAT HEALTH CARE FOR FLORIDIANS IS AMONG MY MAJOR PRIORITIES.



I am pleased that additional funding has been provided to handle certain increased Medicaid caseloads, and that monies are provided for additional elder waiver slots in the nursing home diversion, PACE, the Aged and Disabled Waiver, and the Community Care for the Elderly Waiver programs.

I am also grateful that the Legislature recognized the importance of supporting advances in cancer research. This year, \$25 million was committed toward biomedical research

and services at cancer centers throughout the state.

However, I am concerned about cuts to medical providers who serve Florida's seniors and the neediest. The new health care budget includes reimbursement cuts to hospitals in the coming year and reductions to nursing homes. The annual number of covered emergency room visits is limited to six and the number of monthly primary care doctor visits is limited to two.



Redistricting:

As you may know, the Legislature has completed the once-a-decade task of redrawing House, Senate and Congressional district boundaries, though legal challenges and reviews of the maps are still underway.

The Florida Supreme Court rejected as unconstitutional the Legislature's first attempt at drawing proposed Senate district boundaries. The ruling, I believe, was an exciting victory for the people of Florida because the proposal, in my view, failed to meet the people's wishes to end extreme partisan gerrymandering.

When Florida voters overwhelmingly approved two state constitutional amendments dealing with how political boundaries should be drawn, they sent a clear message that they will no longer tolerate excessive partisan politics in the redistricting process.

Floridians want fair and competitive elections, and I believe the redistricting maps that have been crafted fail to meet the public's expectations and will suppress the voices of Florida's citizens.

To keep up to speed on any changes to your representation, I encourage you to follow news reports in our community and to reach out to your local Supervisor of Elections.