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Florida Education Association

# *Frontline Report*

## *2021 Legislative Session*

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### *4th Interim Committee Week*

*Feb. 12, 2021*

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#### *Week Four*

Punxsutawney Phil may have seen his shadow last week, but your Public Policy and Communications teams feel more like Bill Murray in "Groundhog Day" with how much week four feels like we are on repeat.

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#### *Friends and Champions of Public Education*

Some days it may feel like everyone in the Florida Capitol is against us. But we have some pretty great friends and champions in the Capitol as well, and we want to make sure you know how much we appreciate them. For some of our longtime *Frontline* readers, it will come as no shock that Sen. Janet Cruz (D-Tampa) and Rep. Carlos Guillermo Smith (D-Orlando) were named during FEA's Delegate Assembly as Champions of Public Education. We honored several of our Friends of Education award recipients this week, including Reps. Tracie Davis (D-Jacksonville), Chris Latvala (R-Clearwater) and Matt Willhite (D-Wellington), and Champion Rep. Carlos Guillermo Smith received his award as well. We'll be awarding the rest of our Champions and Friends in the coming weeks, so look for their pictures too!



**Rep. Tracie Davis and President Spar**



**President Spar and Rep. Carlos Guillermo Smith**





**President Spar and Rep. Chris Latvala**



**Rep. Matt Willhite and President Spar**

Champions of Education are legislators who have shown an unwavering commitment to public education and educators in Florida and have previously been recognized as a Friend of Education. To be considered a Friend of Education, legislators must be willing to fight for public education and educators in Florida during the previous legislative session. Check back next week as we continue to honor our Friends and Champions of Education.

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### *More Union Battles*

Do you ever feel like Bill Murray in "Groundhog Day"? Well, that's what it felt like during the Senate [Judiciary Committee](#) meeting on Wednesday morning, when the committee once again took up [SB 78](#) by Sen. Ray Rodrigues (R-Fort Meyers). This legislation would put the employer between the employee and their union by mandating that the employer verify with the employee – all 150,000 of you – that you actually want to be a union member, and to re-sign a membership form every time a new contract is ratified.

In last week's *Frontline* we told you that our friends on the committee helped to run the clock out so the bill was not taken up for a vote. This week the chair allowed ample time for committee members to ask very pointed questions of the bill sponsor, take public testimony and debate the merits of the bill. Big thank you to all of our members who took time to call and email the committee members – as Sens. Jennifer Bradley (R-Orange Park), Audrey Gibson (D-Jacksonville), Tina Polksy (D-Boca Raton), Darryl Rouson (D-St. Petersburg), and Perry Thurston (D-Fort Lauderdale) raised serious questions and concerns with the bill. Only Sen.

Dennis Baxley (R-Lady Lake) debated in favor of the bill. Ultimately the bill passed on a [party line 6-4 vote](#). Sen. Bradley said she was only voting for it in committee so she could work with the sponsor on her concerns with the bill as it moves further. Sen. Jim Boyd (R-Bradenton) had an excused absence from the committee, so he wasn't present to vote.

Don't let up on your calls and emails to committee members! SB 78 will be heard in the Senate [Rules Committee](#) on Thursday, Feb. 18. We need you to keep up the pressure on why this bill is government overreach and completely unnecessary. Not one single employee or public sector employer has asked for this legislation.

While SB 78 attacks all public sector unions in Florida, [SB 1014](#) by Sen. Dennis Baxley and newly filed House companion [HB 835](#), by Rep. Cord Byrd (R-Jacksonville Beach), would expressly and only attack unions representing teachers and education staff professionals.

Remember that pesky little requirement that unions representing instructional personnel must be above 50 percent in order to maintain their roles as the collective bargaining agent? These companion measures would now require the 50 percent membership threshold to apply to unions representing education staff professionals as well. It goes a step further to:

- Make all education personnel unions join and re-sign with their union every two years.
- Require the re-signing of forms that tell every potential union member they don't actually have to join the union.
- Require the employer verify directly with the employee they want to be a union member before beginning dues deduction.
- Require our friends in the Florida Department of Education to make rules over unions in addition to the Public Employees Relations Committee (PERC).

HB 835 has yet to be referred. But SB 1014 has received its committee references, so it's only a matter of time before the Senate will start fast-tracking this bill too, we're sure. Be on the lookout for action alerts to contact committee members when these bills are placed on the agenda. We'll need your strong voices on these bills as you have responded on SB 78.

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### *Higher Ed Bills Moving*

It was the Rodrigues hour in the Senate [Appropriations Subcommittee on Education](#) this week when they considered just two bills, both by Sen. Ray Rodrigues (R-Fort Meyers). [SB 52](#), which would provide funding for tuition and materials to colleges and universities for dual enrollment students from private and home schools and add an additional bonus scheme that would require Board of Governors approval after the institutions' Board of Trustees negotiate the plan. Can you say "even bigger government?" Dr. Martin Balinsky (UFF Colleges Collective Bargaining VP and UFF-TCC VP) testified in opposition specifically to the section of

SB 52 that would allow the Board of Governors to enact parameters for university bonus programs outside the established and constitutionally protected right to collectively bargain terms and conditions of employment. Sens. Janet Cruz (D-Tampa) and Audrey Gibson (D-Jacksonville) expressed opposition to the bill's fiscal impact to implement the funding of dual enrollment for home school students and students in voucher programs provided by the state. The bill passed [6-3 on a party line vote](#).

Up second was [SB 264](#). If passed, the legislation would require each public college and university in Florida to conduct an annual assessment related to “intellectual freedom and viewpoint diversity” and allow students to video-record in classrooms without prior notice to the instructor that recordings were being made. Rodrigues offered amendments to clarify that classroom recordings would be for “personal use” but could be distributed if there was “wrongdoing” in the classroom, which is still a very slippery slope. The amendment passed.

Ultimately, the bill opens opportunities for political manipulation and will have a chilling effect on intellectual and academic freedom. Dr. Balinsky testified again as well as FEA lobbyist Cathy Boehme. Both of their messages were very clear: Non-consensual recordings in classrooms and playing political watchdog on our faculty and institutions is a dangerous precedent that brings with it unintended consequences and is a slippery slope towards McCarthyism. It was also pointed out that colleges and universities already distribute end-of-course surveys to every student, which are submitted anonymously, and therefore a second survey to measure “intellectual freedom and viewpoint diversity” is simply unnecessary. Sens. Cruz, Gibson, and Polsky each expressed concerns about stifling free speech, but no shock here, this bill also passed on a [party line 6-3 vote](#).

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