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Florida Education Association *Frontline Report*

2021 Legislative Session

2nd Interim Committee Week

Jan. 29, 2021

Another Week, Another Set of Bad Ideas

Today completes the second week of the 2021 interim committee weeks and the Senate is moving fast! Wonder if they want to get out of Tallahassee early this year? While the House still chugs along with their committee presentations the Senate is moving at the speed of light to pass their bad policy ideas.

Governor Announces his \$96.6 Billion Budget

Pandemic? Proposed revenue shortfall of \$3-5 billion? Doesn't seem to be a factor for this governor. It was business as usual for the announcing of the governor's proposed budget early Thursday a.m. as he announced a near-record budget amount and outlined his recommendations for the education budget as it relates to us, specifically.

Now remember, the governor proposes and the Legislature implements the budget. So, the numbers below are just really placeholders and don't mean all that much in the grand scheme of things. But it does give us a starting point to work with legislators and budget appropriators moving forward.

The governor's budget did not get the hatchet the way some were predicting – instead he proposed cutting the budget a little over \$1 billion in the next two years. Again, not taking

into account the long-range fiscal impact of Covid-19 and the pandemic on revenue for the state – which makes up large parts of the budget. We have been hearing and expecting a \$3-5 billion shortfall which would be reflected in the budget – and legislators will have to take that into account when they start building the budget in the coming weeks.

Budget Highlights:

- \$50 million increase to the Teacher Salary Increase Allocation Categorical – for a total of \$550 million (dedicated funding source for teacher and staff raises)
- \$132 per-student increase of the Base Student Allocation (unincumbered funds districts use for raises and benefits primarily)
- \$10 million increase for mental health initiatives – for a total of \$110 million
- \$43.5 million to establish a Title I School Recognition Program (likely bonuses for Title I schools based on student performance. Watch for this policy initiative to be rolled out this session.)
- \$318.5 million for public education capital outlay (building and maintenance funds that have been totally syphoned off for charter schools)
- First time in years maintains the Required Local Effort (RLE) rather than roll it back – which is a revenue generator for local school districts

So, what's next you ask? Well, that's a great question! Now legislators will begin meeting in their appropriations committees and will present a proposed budget for their respective area of the budget. The appropriations chairs of the House and Senate will then compile their chamber's budget proposal where legislators will vote. Once a final budget has been voted on by both chambers, the real fun begins – backroom deals and horse-trading leads to one final budget product that both chambers will either pass or reject. And voila! The FY 2021-2022 budget is sent to the governor for his final approval, or veto, or what usually happens – line item vetoes and then approval.

Why do they pick on the unions?

If you are a *Frontline* regular, then you will remember us spending quite a bit of time last session on HB 1 – legislation that would have inserted the employer between the employee and their union. Requiring the employer to verify that a union member does, in fact, want to be a union member, and requiring that union members reauthorize their union membership every year or up to every three years depending on the contract. We were successful in killing this bill last session thanks to help from the Senate who kept this locked in a drawer, so it never advanced out of committee. And while the bill did pass in the House last year, it received bipartisan opposition on the House floor.

As we explained in the last *Frontline*, this year, the Senate is first out the gate with legislation and is moving it with lightning quickness. [SB 78](#), filed by Senator Ray Rodrigues

(R-Fort Meyers) was heard and passed in the [Governmental Oversight and Accountability Committee](#) on Wednesday by a [4-2 vote](#). We thank Sens. Linda Stewart (D-Orlando) and Victor Torres (D-Kissimmee) for debating and voting against the bill.

FEA Lobbyist, Stephanie Kunkel, was there to testify in opposition to the bill, and was joined in expressing opposition to the bill by FEA higher ed unions, graduate student unions, AFL-CIO, Police and Firefighter unions alike.

This bill will next be heard Monday, Feb. 1 in the Senate [Judiciary Committee](#). We will once again be there to testify in opposition and are working hard to meet with every senator on the committee before Monday. If you haven't yet contacted your senator or the members of the Judiciary committee. [Click here](#) to take action.

Senate Education

Not to be outdone, our higher ed folks had quite the week in the Senate as well! The Senate [Education Committee](#) heard [SB 264](#), requiring an intellectual freedom survey on campuses, and [SB 52](#) which takes university presidential searches out of the sunshine. These bad bills are identical retreads that we helped kill last year - the only differences are the bill sponsors.

These ALEC funded initiatives lack any merit, especially in Florida. For instance, SB 264 came to fruition after individuals, particularly those in the "alt right" like American neo-Nazi Richard Spencer, were denied the opportunity to speak on college and university campuses, including at the University of Florida in 2016. The bill sponsor, Ray Rodrigues (yup, that guy again!), admitted in committee that the catalyst for this legislation was due to national reports. There hasn't been a single issue in this state that relates to this bill. No university or college student has complained. Unfortunately, the bill [passed by party-line vote](#).

SB 52, by Sen. Jeff Brandes (R-St. Petersburg), would take the current very open university presidential search process and restrict it so that the public would only know about the final three candidates chosen. This allows for the search to be manipulated and removes public buy-in to the process which is critical to a healthy university system. The justification that we have to take this process out of the sunshine in order to get better candidates into our presidential searches lacks merit, and the ends do not justify the means. Until just recently, across the country, ALL presidential searches were open. To state that secret searches yield better presidents is to imply that all previous presidents were not as good because it was a transparent process. I guess all our previous university presidents were chopped liver because they didn't have their search done in secrecy. This bill passed with a [7-3 vote](#). We are disappointed that one of the "yes" votes came from Sen. Shevrin Jones (D-West Park).

Capitol Protocols

Last Frontline we informed you of the current Capitol protocols for the interim committee weeks – Senate President Wilton Simpson (R-Spring Hill) has limited any public

appearances in the Senate – and is not permitting legislators to meet with lobbyists or the general public in the Capitol. We have now learned that President Simpson is keeping this protocol for session as well. He joked to press that senators should appreciate not having 15 lobbyists lined up outside their doors.

We also informed you that House Speaker Chris Sprowls (R-Clearwater) had taken a more lax approach, limiting individuals in the building. He is still permitting meetings with legislators, by appointment only, and you must be escorted to and from the Capitol rotunda by the staff or legislator you are meeting. The speaker has not announced session protocols yet, but we would assume this would continue to be the case.

As you can imagine, this makes lobbying in Tallahassee nearly impossible, unless you have already built a working relationship with legislators. It is also why we are suspending any lobbying corps program for this year, and instead encouraging all our member activists to be meeting with legislators at home before they come to Tallahassee.

Questions? Call PPA at 850-224-2078.

Big thanks to Yale Olenick for the Higher Education content this week and of course our comms team who keeps our spelling and punctuation perfect!

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