

Florida Education Association

Frontline Report

2023 Legislative Session

April 14, 2023

A Brief Recap of the Week

There should be only three weeks left to go in session. Time will tell if the legislators are able to complete the budget in time — the one bill they are required to pass each regular session. Before their attention starts to shift toward the budget, both chambers are doing a final push to get their preferred policies passed.

- HB 1445 Advances to the House Floor
- Higher Education Remains Under Attack
- Legislation to Dehumanize LGBTQ+ People Sails Through Committee
- For-Profit Charter School Corporations Raid Public Coffers
- The Common Thread

Read below to find out more.

HB 1445 Advances to the House Floor

For more than two hours on Tuesday evening, educators, sanitation workers, nurses, 911 dispatchers, electrical workers and more [provided heartfelt testimony](#) (testimony begins at the 1:22:16 mark of the video) to the House State Affairs Committee asking them to oppose [HB 1445](#). In total 139 people spoke or waived their time in opposition to this bill. Nobody spoke in favor of the bill, but eight individuals did waive their time in support. Ultimately, HB 1445 – the bill that takes away your right to choose payroll deduction for your union dues — was passed on a [party-line vote](#). Because so much time was devoted to hearing public input, there was little time for debate. [It's worth watching the entirety of the debate.](#)

The eight individuals who supported HB 1445, of course, are not public workers and will not be impacted by the bill. Instead, they were in committee to represent out-of-state interest groups funded by billionaires like Betsy DeVos and the Koch family.

In this committee, the billionaires won, and it is likely the billionaires will win when the bill is up for a vote on the House floor. Their hope is that by making it harder for educators to be a member of their union and making it harder for unions to remain certified, we'll give up and pack our bags.

Those silly, silly billionaires. They have a lot more money than sense.

What they don't understand is that as educators we do hard work every day. Betsy DeVos wouldn't last a day in a classroom and wouldn't even make it an hour as a school bus driver. We don't back down, we don't surrender, and we sure as hell aren't going to let anyone shut us up or bust our unions.

There is hard work as we make the transition away from payroll deduction and switch to eDues, and ensure every local maintains at least 60 percent membership density. The good news is hard work is what educators do best!

Higher Education Attacks Continue

“We’re losing our teachers because we are holding them hostage. We’re losing our students because they can’t learn freely,” is how Sen. Tracie Davis (D-Jacksonville) summed up her opposition to [SB 266](#). This bill seeks to whitewash history, control higher education curriculum and insert politics into the classroom in ways that will cause Florida’s higher education institutions to lose accreditation.

The increased politicization of education by Gov. DeSantis and his cronies in the Florida Legislature is already hurting Florida’s colleges and universities. In debate, Sen. Shevrin Jones (D-Miami Gardens) referenced a human resources director at a state university who told him, “in the past month, we saw over 300 reconsiderations for our fall term for professors.” Matthew Lata, a professor at Florida State University, echoed those concerns in his testimony to the committee as he told them, “in the Florida State College of Arts and Sciences, the number of faculty members who have indicated they are leaving after 2023 is about double what it was in 2022.” During the recruiting process, he said, “more and more often, we’re hearing ‘I don’t think this is a good time to be an educator in Florida.’” Lata was one of 73 people who spoke or waived their time in opposition to the bill. Nobody spoke in favor of the bill.

Unsurprisingly, those concerns didn’t seem to move the sponsor of the bill, Sen. Erin Grall (R-Vero Beach) or her Republican colleagues; the bill passed the committee on a [party-line vote](#).

Legislation to Dehumanize LGBTQ+ People Sails Through Committee

If you are a regular reader of Frontline, you’ve read a lot this session about [SB 1320/HB 1069/HB 1223](#). These are the bills that expand Don’t Say Gay, target transgender students and educators, and make it much easier for anyone in Florida to ban a book in a Florida school library or classroom.

These bills that regulate public schools are just a small portion of the anti-transgender legislation moving through the legislature this session. For the first five weeks, the politicians who supported these bills chose their words carefully, misrepresented their intent and pretended these bills were designed to ensure safety and to protect children. In a rare moment of candor, Rep. Webster Barnaby (R-Deltona) ripped off the mask and made the intent of these bills clear when debating [HB 1521](#). Barnaby called trans people “demons and imps” and suggested trans people are like “mutants living among us on planet Earth.”

While debating SB 1320, Sen. Shevrin Jones (D-Miami Gardens) alluded to Barnaby’s comments when his colleagues, “I want to remind us, we’re not talking about mutants, we’re not talking about demons, we’re not talking about imps...We’re talking about human beings.” Jones continued to try to put a human face on those who will be impacted by SB 1320 as he concluded his debate, “Fighting Disney, and fighting big corporations—that’s punching up. They can handle themselves. But what we’re doing (with SB 1320) is punching down. We’re punching down on individuals who can’t fend and fight for themselves.”

Not surprisingly, SB 1320 passed along [party lines](#). Having passed its last committee, it is now ready for the Senate floor. The House companion, HB 1069, [passed the House two weeks ago](#).

For-Profit Charter School Corporations Raid Public Coffers

Our neighborhood public schools truly belong to the public. As Hurricane Ian was barreling toward the coast at the start of the school year, public schools provided shelter for thousands. Investing in public school infrastructure is investing in communities.

Charter schools buildings and the land they sit on, on the contrary, often belong to for-profit development corporations. Much has been [written over the years](#) about the lucrative business of [charter school real estate](#). Certain legislators are looking to sweeten the pot even more for their corporate donors who run Academica, Charter Schools USA and other charter school management companies whose primary concern is not educating students but maximizing profits.

[HB 1259](#) would force school districts to give a portion of their capital outlay funding (the money that can be used for school building maintenance and repair) to charter schools. The [bill analysis](#) shows that in the first year alone “school districts would be required to distribute \$279.5 million (of public funds) to eligible charter schools.” With the ability to get that kind of money to enhance their real estate schemes, it is no wonder [Academica has five highly paid lobbyists working to make sure this bill passes](#).

Their work paid off this week in the House Education and Employment Committee, where HB 1259 passed on a vote of [16-4](#). Both HB 1259 and its Senate companion, SB 1328, have one committee stop left before they are ready to be heard on the floor of their respective chambers.

The Common Thread

For those who don't know the history of the labor movement and its role in the civil rights movement, the attack on labor unions in HB 1445, the attack on people of color in SB 266, the attack on LGBTQ+ individuals in SB 1320 and the defunding of public schools in favor of charter schools in HB 1259 might seem unrelated. But labor unions have long been attacked in the South explicitly because of our involvement with civil rights organizations and our commitment to creating a better life for everyone regardless of race, religion, gender or sexual orientation.

Speaking to delegates at the 1961 AFL-CIO Convention, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. put it this way, “the labor-hater and labor-baiter is virtually always a twin-headed creature spewing anti-Negro epithets from one mouth and anti-labor propagand from the other mouth.” [You can also hear Rep. Michelle Rayner-Goolsby \(D-St. Petersburg\) make that connection during her debate on HB 1445](#).

To put it simply: certain legislators are attacking our public schools because they remain one of the only places in America where people of all races, income levels, religions, genders and sexual orientations spend time together, learn together and grow together. When these politicians bristle at the words diversity, equity and inclusion, it is because they fear losing the power and privilege that comes when they pass laws to mandate conformity, unjustness and exclusion. For these politicians, dividing communities is an essential part of their plan to maintain power. They count on voters attacking and blaming each other instead of pinning the problem on the politicians who are stoking the division.

Knowing this means these attacks on our freedoms cannot be stopped by defeating individual bills. Systemic issues are never solved with individual solutions. Instead, what is needed is for parents, educators and students to be united with each other and the communities in which we live, learn and work. Only when we join together across our differences and demand lawmakers focus on liberty and justice for all will we truly live in the free state of Florida.

Thanks!

Thanks to the following locals for sending members up this week to lobby: Association of Bay County Educators, Alachua County EA, Broward TU, Charlotte FEA, Citrus County EA, Collier County EA, DeSoto County EA, Escambia EA, FEA-Retired, Gadsden County CEA, Hillsborough CTA, Hernando CTA, Lake EA, Leon ESPA, Levy County EA, Marion EA, Marion ESPA, Nassau ESPA, Nassau TA, Okaloosa CEA, Okaloosa, ESPA, Okeechobee County EA, Orange CTA, Orange ESPA, Palm Beach CTA, Putnam Federation of Teachers/United, Polk EA, United Faculty of Florida, United Teachers of Dade and Walton County EA.

How You Can Take Action Today

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