

Florida Education Association

Frontline Report

2025 Legislative Session

April 25, 2025

This week marked the eighth week of the session, and one week remains for the regularly scheduled 60-day session. The biggest question on everyone's mind is will we end on time? The only statutory obligation the legislature must complete is a balanced budget before they adjourn *Sine Die*. But according to the magic eight ball... outcome not likely.

Money, money, money... MONEY?

On Thursday, President Ben Albritton (R) made some unhappy but not unexpected comments regarding the budget. "We are all familiar with the timelines for getting the budget on the desks and concluding session on time. It's clear those timelines have come and gone," said President Albritton. He explained that they expected the House and Senate would finalize their budget allocations and would begin budget conference Friday and progress through the weekend. Instead, President Albritton sent everyone home for the weekend and session is not expected to end on time. The budget chairs will continue to negotiate toward a final budget number and the amounts per silo. Right now, the chambers are about \$4 billion apart. The House's proposed FY 25-26 budget totals \$112.95 billion while the Senate's proposal is \$117.36 billion.

Interested in how the budget proposals break down and their potential impacts? Visit [FEA's budget webpage](#).

Get Your Popcorn

We continue the saga of confirmation – or lack thereof – of Governor DeSantis' appointments for several State University Board of Trustees and other positions throughout Florida. We shared previously the University of West Florida appointments of Scott Yenor and Adam Kissel. Thankfully the writing was on the wall and Scott Yenor resigned. After supporting Scott Yenor, Gates Garcia, another UWF trustee, also resigned. As of today, Adam Kissel has not been

confirmed by the Senate Appropriations Committee on Higher Education, nor the full Senate Ethics & Elections Committee.

Normally Senate confirmations are rubber stamps, however this session that is [far from the case](#). The Senate Ethics & Elections Committee, which is responsible for screening appointees, has failed to consider roughly 150 of the more than 200 gubernatorial appointees. The latest controversies include former state representative Joel Rudman, who was appointed as a trustee to Pensacola State College (PSC), Shevaun Harris who was appointed as Secretary of the Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA), and Taylor Hatch who was appointed as Secretary of the Department of Children and Families (DCF). Joel Rudman accused legislators of consuming illegal substances, ultimately declined to show up for his confirmation hearing and [abruptly resigned](#) his position at PSC. Secretaries Harris and Hatch have been embroiled in the controversy surrounding \$10 million of a \$67 million Medicaid overpayment settlement being steered without any legislative knowledge to The Hope Florida Foundation – currently run by First Lady Casey DeSantis. Hope Florida then gave [\\$10 million](#) to political committees opposed to the marijuana and abortion ballot initiatives during the 2024 election cycle.

Any appointees who are not Senate confirmed will have to resign. However, the Governor can reappoint them to the same positions. If they fail to be confirmed a second time, they are ineligible for further appointment.

Charter School Chaos

For our long time *Frontline* readers, you are used to us sharing the Charter School legislation that comes every year. Normally those bills move fast and furiously to the finish line of session, but like so much of the weirdness of this session, these bills seem to be caught up in the chaos. There are 4 sets of charter school bills.

You've heard us talk about SB 140 by Senator Gaetz (R-Pensacola) and HB 123 by Rep. Andrade (R- that would take the teacher's vote out of the public school to charter school conversion process – known as "Parent Trigger". SB 140 passed the Senate on Thursday, in a [30-7 vote](#). While HB 123/SB 140 has yet to be calendared for a vote in the House this week, we know it will be up for a House vote next week for sure.

[Tell The House To Vote NO on HB 123/SB 140](#)

Other bills in 'Charterland' include the removal of land and school facilities from public schools and school districts and selling or giving them to charter schools. HB 443 by Rep. Snyder (R-Palm City) is one of those bills. HB 443 would give charter schools "right of first refusal" to any land owned by the school district before the school district may sell it to anyone else. The charter company would still have to offer a fair price for the land. Both HB 443 and its companion, SB 822 by Senator Rodriguez (R-Miami), also permit a charter school to provide virtual school attendance to students in ninth through twelfth grade, and those students would not count

towards the “facility capacity” of a charter school. HB 443 passed the House by [83-28 vote](#) and is now in the Senate. SB 822 is on the Senate special order calendar for Tuesday next week.

Lastly, HB 1267 by Rep. Busatta (R-Miami) (with no real Senate companion bill) and arguably the worst of the charter bills this session would allow so-called “Schools of Hope” charter schools to set up “schools within a school” aka a charter school on the same campus as a public school if the school has unused space and there is declining enrollment in the public school. Also included in this bill is the phased adjustment to our school grading system, previously found in HB 1483 by Rep. Valdes (R-Tampa) that would change the school grades to a 0-100 scale and result in a profound number of schools resulting in D or F grades. HB 1267 passed the full House by an [86-27 vote](#). It was sent to the Senate and referred to the Rules Committee, and we wait to see what happens with this bill next week.

Taxes

We’ve been closely monitoring the multiple tax reduction proposals coming from the Speaker of the House, Senate President and Governor. These proposals offer a reduction of the state sales tax, or a reduction or elimination of property taxes. While most of us ultimately cheer at the personal reduction of taxes owed, whether through property tax or sales tax, we must also worry about what that means for the services paid for through these taxes – namely the impact to our neighborhood public schools. Where and how the legislature lands on a tax reduction is in large part what is holding up the budget process – these proposals come with billions in price tags – from the conservative estimate of \$2.1 billion following the Senate’s proposal to \$5.5 billion following the House’s proposal.

The Speaker of the House unveiled a proposal to lower Florida’s sales tax by .75 (reducing sales tax from 6% to 5.25%), reducing the sales tax rate on various other items including electricity from 4.35% to 3.6%, and offering no sales tax holidays. The Governor responded with a one-time property tax reduction for 5 million homestead properties, to eliminate property taxes altogether through a statewide constitutional ballot initiative in 2026, phase out popular sales tax holidays over two years, and instead proposed backfilling tax revenues with higher bed taxes at hotels. The Senate President took a more conservative approach, citing his concern about lowering taxes now, only to raise them in two years when state revenues do not keep up with the costs of the state. He proposed studying the elimination of property taxes, while offering a permanent tax reduction on all clothing and shoes costing \$75 or less and maintained several sales tax holidays including the 10-day Back-to-School sales tax holiday.

Lost in the noise of the high-level discussion of tax reductions (though not to us of course) are bills to make it harder for school districts and ultimately the local unions who support passage of sales tax referenda. 31 counties in Florida have passed local sales tax referenda, whether a penny or half penny sales tax, to offset the loss in Public Education Capitol Outlay (PECO) funding that several years ago were sent exclusively to Charter Schools. These voter approved funds cover the cost of building construction and maintenance of public school buildings as well as provide funding for school safety hardening and school resource officers.

SB 1664 by Senator Trumbull (R-Panama City) proposes limiting referenda to 8 years and would require the reauthorization of 18 of the 31 county referenda to go back on the ballot to continue to receive funding. HB 1221 by Rep. Miller (R-Palm Bay), while amended in its final committee stop to remove this provision related to local school sales tax referenda, but made worse for other taxes, nearly failed by a [14-12 vote](#) in its last committee of reference, when 5 republicans joined all democrats in opposition. These bills are miles apart in policy. We'll see how and if they line up in the coming days. HB 1221 passed the House floor on Friday with a [62-45 vote](#), while SB 1664 has yet to be calendared for a floor vote in the Senate. We'll be watching to see whether they can come to an agreement and cross the finish line before the session ends.

Thanks!

We appreciate the members of the United School Employees of Pasco and the Florida International University chapter of the United Faculty of Florida who traveled to Tallahassee this week to meet with legislators and advocate for public education.

Questions? Call PPA at 850-224-2078.

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