2015 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Friday marked the final day of the 2015 Legislative Session. However, the ongoing budget impasse between the Senate and House over Medicaid expansion has brought this year’s Regular Session to an unusual conclusion. As a result of the Legislature’s inability to reach an agreement, the chambers will be required to return for a Special Session to create and pass a balanced budget.

The disagreement about health care policy and spending reached a tipping point on Tuesday, April 28th when the Florida House unexpectedly adjourned Sine Die three days prior to the regularly scheduled close of Session. The House’s actions caused a number of significant policy initiatives to die, including certain tax cuts, statewide water policy, guns on campus, gambling expansion and medical marijuana.

The Senate continued to work after the House adjourned and returned on Wednesday to finish up a handful of bills and appointments that remained on its calendar. At the close of business on Wednesday, Senate President Andy Gardiner sent a letter to Speaker Crisafulli questioning the constitutionality of the House’s early adjournment and requesting the chamber to return to Tallahassee to complete their policy work. Speaker Crisafulli quickly responded and indicated that the House membership would not be returning until a Special Session was convened.

The conclusion of the Regular Session means that any bill that has not been passed by both chambers is officially dead. As stated previously, the House and Senate will now have to return for a Special Session on the budget at some point before the end of the fiscal year (June 30). During the Special Session (which are always limited in scope), Members will likely consider the General Appropriations Act, a Budget Implementing Bill and Budget Conforming Bills. The consideration of

GOING FORWARD

Now that the 2015 Regular Session has come to a close, the Office of Government Relations will be transitioning the Legislative Update from a weekly summary of our state’s legislative activities to a monthly update focused on the Special Session and the University’s community outreach efforts.

As in previous years, the Office of Government Relations will be composing a Legislative Session Final Report. The report will not be released until the Legislature completes its work on the budget and Governor Scott has taken final actions on the pieces of legislation that are currently awaiting his approval. Please contact our Office if there is a specific topic or piece of legislation that you would like to see addressed in the Final Report.

BILLS IN BRIEF

HB 35 / SB 7028 - Educational Opportunities for Veterans (Stark / PCB)
The measure expands in-state tuition rates to children and spouses of veterans and
Implementing and Education Conforming bills means that certain policy initiatives (ex. textbook sales tax, graduate school tuition cap, default rates, cap on state college bachelor degrees, etc.) may reemerge and be considered during the budget negotiations.

At the moment, it is unclear when the chambers will return to finish their work. President Gardiner recently sent Governor Scott and Speaker Steve Crisafulli an offer on the proclamation for a Special Session to begin June 1 and end June 20.

**Appropriations Update**

The leadership in both chambers remain unable to reach an agreement about how to address Florida’s health care funding system. As stated previously, the Senate has proposed a plan that includes $2.8 billion in federal funding to expand Medicaid health care coverage through the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare), a position the House adamantly opposes. The Senate is also including a $2.2 billion Low Income Pool (LIP) replacement program that helps hospitals treat uninsured, underinsured and Medicaid patients. Governor Scott and the Florida House believe that LIP and Medicaid expansion are two separate issues and should be addressed accordingly.

Initially, the federal government indicated that the issues are linked and would have to be resolved at the same time. However, this week, the federal government backtracked from that position after Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi filed suit on behalf of Governor Scott and his claim that the federal government is wrongfully trying to "coerce" Florida into Medicaid expansion by withholding LIP funds. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services have now denied the two are connected. These issues and their impact on the state budget will continue to be discussed as the Legislature prepares to return for the Special Session later this summer.

**FAU Board of Trustees Appointments**

On Wednesday, April 29th The Senate took up a series of SUS and College System appointments (see the full list here) for final confirmation. Trustees who received a vote in at least one committee were recommended for approval by Senate Ethics and Elections Chairman Garrett Richter. As a result, Chairman Anthony Barbar, Trustee Jeffrey Feingold and Trustee Robert Rubin were all confirmed by the full Senate. You can look up each Trustee and see their Senate confirmation on the following website - http://www.flsenate.gov/Session/ExecutiveAppointments.

**HB 63 / SB 824 – Public Private Partnerships (Steube / Evers)**

The measure formally extends the use of P3s to state universities and incorporates many of the recommendations contained in the task force report.

**Last Action:** HB 63 died in committee. SB 824 died on the Senate Calendar.

**HB 223 / SB 182 – Public Records for Postsecondary Education Executive Search (Combee / Hays)**

The measure would allow university searches for presidents and provosts to be closed until 30 days prior to a final vote or action being taken regarding the employment of an applicant.

**Last Action:** HB 223 died on the House Calendar. SB 182 died in committee.

**HB 925 / SB 1420 – Postsecondary Fees (Rehwinkel Vasilinda / Sachs)**

The measure requires SUS institutions to waive financial aid fees; technology fees; security, access, or identification card fees; and any fees or fines relating to the use, late return, and loss or damage of facilities and equipment for certain graduate students.

**Last Action:** Both bills died in committee.

**HB 4005 / SB 176 - Licenses to Carry Concealed Weapons or Firearms (Steube / Evers)**
The measure would allow an individual to carry a concealed weapon or firearm into a university or college facility.

**Last Action:** HB 4005 died on the House Calendar. SB 176 died in committee.

**HB 7125 / SB 938 – Postsecondary Access and Affordability (PCB / Flores)**
The measure addresses higher education access and affordability mechanisms by modifying requirements for instructional materials and tuition and fees. The bill also seeks to promote public awareness regarding higher education costs to assist students and their parents in making informed decisions.

**Last Action:** HB 7125 passed the House on 4/24/15 and died in the Senate. SB 938 died in committee.

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