

# PBC Legislative Update

DECEMBER 15, 2008

VOLUME 3 NUMBER 15

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### **Upcoming Event**

1. 2009 Proposed State Legislative Priorities to the BCC—Tuesday, December 16, 2008
2. Joint Meeting with the County Commission and Legislative Delegation – Friday, Jan. 9, 2009 @1:30 Norton Museum WPB

## **State Issues**

### **Committee Week – December 8-12**

The first Senate Committee meetings before the upcoming Legislative session were held on Tuesday and Wednesday of this week. On Wednesday, Senate President Jeff Atwater held a full Senate briefing on budget and revenue, and announced that budget committee meetings will begin next week in order to address the budget shortfall as soon as possible. The House committees will also begin meeting next week.

Amy Baker from Economic and Demographic Research office provided an overview on Florida's Budget and Revenue. Ms. Baker reported that there were changes in the revenue estimating conferences held in October and November 2008. The most significant reductions were shown in doc stamp tax collections, ad valorem, the State Transportation Trust Fund and lottery and slots. In October, Florida's unemployment rate was 7%, compared to the nation's overall unemployment rate of 6.5%. A projected 8.1% unemployment rate is projected for Florida by late summer 2009. The current projected deficit for 2008-09 is \$2.9 billion, which includes the Medicaid workload increase not included in previous forecasts. She projected that in April 2010, growth rates in Florida should begin to return to more typical levels.

### **Senate Committee on Florida's Economy Meets**

*By: County Staff*

**The Select Committee on Florida's Economy** formed by Senate President Atwater also held their first meeting. The Committee, chaired by Sen. Don Gaetz, was presented with a white paper outlining the Committee's tasks including at the top of the list: to develop and propose legislation that will create incentives and eliminate impediments to economic recovery and growth. The Committee will develop statutory legislation as well as constitutional amendments as necessary to accomplish these objectives. The Committee will hold workshops scheduled for the month of January around the state including 2 planned for southeast Florida. The committee will also include a strong research component headed by Dr. Rick Harper from the Haas Center for Business Research and Economic Development. The Committee is charged with having their first legislative proposals prepared by the first week of Session.

It is County staff's opinion that this committee will have an extremely important role in recommending suggestions for economic stimulus and development.

### **Summaries of other committee meetings:**

#### **Senate Committee on Community Affairs**

The Senate Committee on Community Affairs met on Tuesday and was given an overview of the Department of Community Affairs by Secretary Thomas Pelham. Secretary Pelham reviewed each of the Departments Divisions and Programs.

The Florida League of Cities and Florida Association of Counties each gave a presentation on their Legislative Agendas.

The League of Cities priorities included home rule, repeal of the cap on Sadowski Trust Funds, and support for the commuter rail in Central Florida including a dedicated funding source that could come from either a rental car surcharge or a vehicle miles travel fee. The League hopes that support for the Commuter Rail in central Florida will lay the foundation for a statewide commuter rail system. Other priorities included unfunded mandates and the identification and quantification of those mandates. Additionally, the League supports reclaimed water programs which prompted a discussion from the Committee regarding the governance structure of the Water Management Districts and whether members should be elected instead of appointed. Chairman Bennett suggested work-shopping the issue at a future meeting.

Senator Gardiner asked the League how many municipalities are now operating red light cameras, what the amount of the fine was and what the funds were being used for. The League responded that the amount and uses varied. Committee members commented that there needs to be consistency in the state regarding the program and would discuss it at a later date.

John Wayne Smith presented the Florida Association of Counties' priorities including infrastructure funding and transportation issues that included supporting an allocation of transportation trust funds for transit and highway improvements. Chairman Bennett talked about the need for mining aggregates to build and improve roads. John also talked about the Association's support for the cigarette tax and how it would in the long term decrease health care costs.

#### **Senate Committee on Commerce**

OTTED provided a review of OTTED's Oversight of the Innovation Incentive Grant Program (IIP). Their findings showed that based on quarterly reports, the IIP awardees appear to be meeting their job creation and other benchmarks, but because the program is only 3 years old, and their nature is scientific research, it is too soon to determine whether the \$450 million expenditure will bear fruit. Several options were also provided by OTTED including tasking the Scripps Funding Corp. with oversight of the IIP. Senator Crist inquired OTTED as to whether they have provided any cuts to the budget. OTTED responded that they have not received direction to cut back on any of the contracts.

#### **Senate Committee on Criminal Justice**

Secretary Walter McNeil provided the Committee with an update on the Department of Corrections. The Department of Corrections is currently the third largest agency in the State and houses 99,500 inmates. Secretary McNeil told the committee that if the jail population continues to grow at its current rate, that 19 prisons would need to be built in the next five years. He stressed that that money would be better spent on reducing the recidivism rate and while other states are reducing their recidivism rate, Florida's continues to grow. Of 40,000 inmates released, 3,000 will return within three years. One of the ways to reduce this number is to invest in re-entry programs.

The Committee also discussed the problem regarding the mandate for prisoners to be HIV tested before being released. Although this is a State mandate, they are not physically forced to submit to the test. Senator King wanted the Committee to address that issue in future meetings.

#### **Senate Committee on Transportation**

In its first meeting Tuesday, the Senate Transportation Committee directed staff to begin drafting legislation that would dig the state out of the hole it is in when it comes to infrastructure in and around Florida's ports. The committee issued the directive after being told by staffers that container freight that travels by more than one transportation method increased nearly 8 percent annually between

1980 and 2004 and that none of the state's 14 water ports are wide enough to handle the largest freight ships currently being used. That is less of a problem now than it will be in a few years, though, because the Panama Canal is being widened to allow passage of the largest container ships, which can hold about 15,000 rail cars worth of material. That will drastically increase their use, and companies that use them could start skipping Florida's ports for deeper east coast docking stations like the one in Savannah, which the state of Georgia has heavily invested in over the past few years. The committee did not give much indication of what the planned legislation might include, but Sen. Paula Dockery, R-Lakeland, said it's important not just to widen the ports, but to develop transportation infrastructure around them, like roads and rails. "This doesn't occur in a vacuum," she said during Tuesday's meeting. "When ports make plans to take on these kinds of ships, they are going to have other transportation needs attached to them. It's incumbent upon us to know who's next in line so that we can start creating policies and attaching resources instead of finding out after the fact and then scrambling to get in position to take advantage of what that port is doing." Transportation committee staff identified Miami and Jacksonville as the most likely Florida ports to be deepened to handle larger freight liners.

## **Governor's Office Discusses Potential Budget Balancing Reductions**

*By: Orlando Sentinel Staff*

Governor Crist's budget writers are proposing hundreds of ways to cut spending. Here are examples of possible cuts being considered:

### **Education: Public schools, state universities**

\$185M: Cut money earmarked for class-size reduction

\$217M: Eliminate rewards for schools that perform well on the FCAT

\$145M: Suspend funding for school-bus replacement

\$5M-\$436M: Cut, suspend or alter eligibility for Bright Futures scholarships

\$53M: Cut 3% from basic university funding

\$9.7M-\$48.5M: Cut 10% to 50% from Resident Access Grants to Florida students in private in-state colleges

### **Criminal justice**

\$89M: Build modular structures instead of traditional prisons: 1,000 beds would cost \$11 million, compared with \$100 million for brick and mortar

\$30.5M: Reduce investigative-support and crime-lab services to local governments

\$10M: Transfer sex offenders in the Jimmy Ryce facility to county jails

\$15M: Eliminate 500 corrections-officer positions

\$1.08M: Allow felons to automatically regain their civil rights and eliminate state investigators

### **Economy: Transportation, environment**

\$17M-\$66.5M: Cut 25% or suspend entirely aid to local governments for

water and sewer projects

\$72M: Cut highway-maintenance spending by 25%

\$1.7M: Use county tax collectors to give out drivers licenses

\$246.7M: Cut new-highway construction by 25%

\$43.79M: Reduce or suspend infrastructure and economic-development grants

### **Government operation**

\$400M: Cut salaries of all state employees by 5%

\$300M: Furlough all nonessential employees for 2 weeks without pay

\$8.4M: Eliminate the Public Employee Relations Commission and Commission on Human Relations

\$1.7M: Suspend college-tuition assistance for National Guard members

\$3.7M: Suspend aquaculture-development activities

### **Health & human services**

\$3.97M: Merge the Agency for Health Care Administration's health-care regulation with the Department of Health's quality-assurance functions

\$24.6M: Cut payments to community-based child-welfare agencies by 10%

\$194M: Require higher county contributions to Medicaid nursing homes

### **Ethics and Elections Committee and Sec. of State Browning's Comments at DC Conference this Week**

Browning wants more early voting sites- some good news

Florida's elections chief plans to ask the state Legislature to expand the number of early voting sites before the next election, saying the law simply doesn't permit enough sites to handle demand. Secretary of State Kurt Browning also said local elections supervisors need more flexibility for when and where to offer early voting. Browning said he doesn't have a set number of early voting sites in mind, but envisions expanding the options to include convention centers, public meeting rooms and the like.

## **2009 Proposed State Legislative Priorities to the BCC– Tuesday, December 16, 2008**

The 2009 proposed State Legislative Priorities will be discussed at the Tuesday, December 16<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Board of County Commissioners. Some of the items that may be discussed include Economic Development Issues such as the Inland Port and Glades Utility Authority, Transportation issues such as the RTA, and Public Safety Priorities such as the Juvenile Assessment Center.

### **Palm Beach County**

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## **Joint Meeting with the County Commission and Legislative Delegation – Friday, Jan. 9, 2009 @1:30 Norton Museum WPB**

The Board of County Commissioners will meet with the Legislative Delegation to discuss joint legislative priorities on Friday January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2009 from 1:30pm-3:30pm at the Norton Museum of Art in West Palm Beach.

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