

AG WATCH

A weekly update on legislative issues affecting Florida's farmers

March 11, 2011

Session Begins

The 2011 state legislative session opened on Tuesday, March 8, with the traditional fanfare of opening day speeches in the House and Senate chambers. This year, however, a new element was added as competing rallies were held outside the Old Capitol.

Tea Partiers from across the state rallied on one side of Monroe Street in support of Gov. Rick Scott. Protesters gathered on the other, waving signs against the governor's proposed education cuts and other policies.

Although the two groups had widely divergent views, it was a peaceable assembly. It was also a fairly symbolic start to the session, an indication that this year will not be business as usual.

Like other sessions, there is the customary business that will take center stage: a budget that has to be passed and other issues that need to be addressed. Outside of that traditional arena, however, there are other elements vying for attention, which will directly and indirectly affect the session's final outcome in both big ways and small.

First, there is the budget deficit, a projected shortfall of \$3.5 billion. Sen. Budget Chair J.D. Alexander, R-Lake Wales, has said that the state can cover \$2 billion of that. The question remains how the other \$1.5 billion will be handled: which state agencies and programs will bear the brunt of the budget cuts?

One idea that Gov. Scott favors is merging the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) with the Department of Environmental Protection, reducing the DCA staff from more than 300 to less than

50. This proposal has received cheers from the business community and outrage from environmental activists and "no-growthers." The governor has also proposed significant cuts to the education system and a considerable reduction of the state workforce in general.

Second, there is the redistricting process. Every ten years the state legislature is mandated to redraw district lines for state House and Senate seats as well as congressional seats, based on population. This process begins in earnest in January of 2012 (sessions begin earlier in redistricting years) but preliminary work is already underway.

The creation of new political boundaries, with their potential to shift voter bases and therefore election outcomes, is a political process in itself. Those drawing the lines have the power to influence the make-up of the legislature as a whole as well as the outcome of individual seats.

As such, this year the redistricting process is an underlying current that could flow through any issue. Redistricting might not have anything to do with a bill itself, but as long as it affects the person voting on the bill, it affects the bill.

Redistricting issues have historically been known to bring all other legislative business to a standstill.

There are other underlying issues that will come into play over the next two years. Senate President Mike Haridopolis, R-Melbourne, is making a bid for the US Senate in 2012. House Speaker Dean Cannon, R-Winter Park, has expressed a strong desire to institute major judicial reforms.

Gov. Scott wants to run state government like

a business. The interplay between the various leadership agendas will definitely create powerful ripple effects.

Ag Issues

Below are some of the issues that have been heard in committee recently:

General Ag HB 707 by Rep. Steve Crisafulli; SB 858 by Sen. Alan Hays

- Prohibits duplication of regulation.
- Exempts nonresidential farm buildings and fences from permits or fees.
- Requires that anyone moving to land bordering a farm to acknowledge that it is an ongoing operation.
- Exempts farms which are incorporated from paying a local business tax.

SB 858 passed out of the Senate Ag Committee this week on a unanimous vote. FFBF supports.

Fertilizer HB 457 by Rep. Clay Ingram; SB 606 by Sen. Greg Evers

- Preempts local governments from restricting or banning the retail sale of fertilizer or its application by licensed professionals.
- HB 457 has passed House Ag and Natural Resources and now goes to Community and Military Affairs. FFBF supports.

Wetlands Ag Exemption HB 421 by Rep. Leonard Bemby; SB 1174 by Sen. Gary Siplin

- Clarifies exemption that certain agricultural related activities are allowed in wetland areas.

HB 421 has passed out of House Ag and Natural Resources and is now in House Rulemaking and Regulations. FFBF supports.

Septic Tanks HB 13 by Rep. Marti Coley; SB 168 by Sen. Greg Evers

- Eliminates statewide septic tank evaluation programs and fees.

HB 13 has passed favorably out of two committees and is now at its final stop before being heard on the House Floor. SB 168 has passed favorably out of the Senate Health Regulation Committee. FFBF supports.

Immigration PCB JDC 01 by House Judiciary; SB 1896 by Sen. Greg Evers

- Mandates use of federal E-Verify system for purposes of employment of authorized workers.

PCB JDC 01 passed the House Judiciary Committee Thursday afternoon. FFBF opposes this legislation in the belief that immigration reform is a federal issue and is best addressed at the federal level.

We will continue to work to make sure that Florida agriculturists are not unduly burdened by expensive mandates that place the responsibility of determining workers' legal status on them.

The sense that we have right now is that the leadership in both the House and the Senate strongly want an immigration bill, including an E-Verify component. Our goal is to present them with more workable alternatives.

Farm Bureau Day at the Capitol

Monday, March 21 – Briefing Dinner @ Antique Car Museum. \$10. Reservation required.

Tuesday, March 22 – Legislative Reception @ Civic Center. \$10.

Call Chris Scovotto (850/222-2557) for reservations and information.

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