

# FEA Frontline Report

## 2017 Legislative Session

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Week 6 – Day 38

April 13, 2017

### *Quiet week on the home front*

It was a mostly quiet week in Tallahassee, as Legislators and staff marked the Passover and Easter holidays with a short work week. On Wednesday the Senate asked questions, debated and passed their budget. The House asked questions regarding the budget Wednesday, and is expected to debate and pass their budget today. We won't get another quiet week until the Legislature packs up and heads home after dropping the hankies, and the dust settles in Tallahassee letting us see the full extent of the damage they caused in Florida.

### *FEA President Joanne McCall calls on Legislature to do their job*

On Wednesday, FEA President Joanne McCall, along with Vice President Fedrick Ingram and Secretary/Treasurer Luke Flynt held a press conference to give the midway report on what we're seeing this session. Joanne called on the legislature to do their job and focus on the 5 things teachers need to improve public education, including adequate funding, letting teachers teach, reducing the time spent on testing, restoring class size limits and assuring a living wage for education staff professionals. Take a moment to view the [press conference](#) here.

### *Big budget breakdowns*

At more than \$4 billion (yes that's billion... with a "B") apart, the Senate and House have a long way to go to get to a single budget compromise before May 5. The legislature has a constitutionally mandated responsibility to pass a balanced budget prior to adjourning Sine Die each year (though not surprisingly, their version of "balanced" and our version of "balanced" never seem to agree... but I digress).

As the biggest portions of the state budget, the biggest areas where the House and Senate differ is how they allocate health care and education funding. Also making up sizable differences in the budget are member projects, with the Senate totaling \$700 million compared to the House's \$140 million. While the House budget fails to consider state employee raises for anyone but correctional officers, the Senate budget includes \$220 million for raises for all state employees who haven't seen a raise in 10 years. The House's \$81.2 billion budget slashes Enterprise Florida, the Governor's \$100 million slush fund for enticing companies to come work in Florida, as well as cuts the tourism advertising budget by two-thirds – from \$125 million to \$75 million; both are key projects for the Governor.

The key differences between the Senate and the House in the K-12 education budget are divisions over property taxes, teacher bonuses and the so-called "Schools of Hope" charter giveaway. The House slashes higher education funding while giving away \$200 million to charter schools. The Senate K-12 funding position increases the per-student spending by almost \$210 a student for a 2.91% increase over last year while the House proposal only raises per-student spending by a paltry \$19 per student for a 0.27% increase over last year. Lastly, the House grows the so-called "Best and Brightest" teacher bonus program by \$200 million while the Senate zeroes out the bonus programs.

It will be interesting to see how the Seminole gaming compact fight plays out as well, as this could greatly impact the budget. The House rolled out [HB 7037](#), which would freeze all new gaming in the state, would allow the Seminole Tribe to keep card games exclusively at their current gaming locations in the state and guarantees \$3 billion in revenue to fund specific portions of the education budget. The House relies on the Seminole compact to pay for the \$200 million in charter school giveaway (Seminole Compact results in up to \$1 billion in total going to charter schools over seven years), and to pay for the proposed increases in the so-called "Best and Brightest" teacher bonuses and the new proposal of bonuses for Best and Brightest Principals.

The Senate's version of the gaming compact, [SB 8](#), expands gaming to include slot machines in the eight counties that have approved it, would allow the pari-mutuel facilities, such as dog and horse racing tracks, to no longer run dog or

horse races but still operate cardrooms and slot machines, and allow those slot machine facilities and cardrooms to run 24 hours a day. Unlike the House bill, proceeds from gaming in the Senate bill would be transferred into the General Revenue Fund or the Educational Enhancement Trust Fund, similar to how the lottery funds supplement public education currently. Last week the senate passed their version off the Senate floor [32-6](#), while the House stripped the Senate's language and put their language onto SB 8, where it passed [73-40](#). This now sets up SB 8 to head to a gaming conference, similar to the budget conference process that we're about to enter.

### *House playing games as usual*

In addition to the budget bills being heard this week, two controversial bills also are expected to pass off the House floor today, including [HB 5105](#) and [HB 5007](#). HB 5105 is the charter school take over bill we've been telling you about, which would hand over public schools deemed failing to out-of-state, for-profit charter companies with a nice addition of \$200 million of your and my taxpayer dollars in their pockets. Democrats spent more than two hours questioning the sponsor, Rep. Chris Latvala (R-Clearwater) about the bill, as well as about a recent Politico article, which contacted the big charter corporations the House Speaker specifically had in mind for the takeover. According to the article, all charter schools contacted either had no plans to open in Florida or would not be using the model outlined in HB 5105 – as we already knew, those charter school companies aren't willing to come in and take over a failing school, because then they wouldn't be able to cherry pick the students to help pad their success rates. As he did during committee, Latvala continued to label schools that are deemed failing as "failure factories". Isn't it funny that the party calling schools with failing grades "failure factories" is the same party that set up the failed school grading system in the first place but continue to strip funding for public schools. HB 5105 passed the House down a party line [77-40](#) vote.

Also heard on the House floor was HB 5007, legislation that changes the default for employees that enroll in FRS on or after July 1, 2018, from the pension plan to the investment plan if they do not affirmatively choose a plan. The bill would also expand the survivor benefit for employees killed in the line of duty to all participants in the investment plan. That benefit currently applies only to members in the Special Risk Class. Finally, the bill would also authorize renewed membership in the investment plan for retirees or participants who take a distribution from their retirement account and then choose to return to an eligible employee position. Also included in the bill is the non-controversial retirement rate bill which is filed and passed annually. Thanks to Rep. Lorraine Ausley (D-Tallahassee) who filed an [amendment](#) to strip out the controversial default switch portion leaving just the rate bill, but not surprisingly, the amendment failed. On Thursday, the sponsor laid HB 5007 on the table and took up the Senate version, SB 7022, where he stripped the senate clean rate bill and placed the controversial language of HB 5007 onto the bill. SB 7022 passed the House [74-41](#) with two Republicans voting with the Democrats in opposition.

*Questions? Call PPA at 850-224-2078.*

*Thanks as always to Mark Pudlow and Sharon Nesvig for editing my proper usage of there, their and they're! And thanks to Kevin Watson for budget content.*