

2025 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

SESSION WEEK 2: WEEK OF MARCH 10

FLORIDA NOW

The second week of the 2025 Florida Legislative Session has officially concluded. During this week, several bills dealing with agriculture, business regulation, local government, law enforcement, and education were deliberated in both the House and Senate. Of which, a significant number received unanimous bipartisan support. Since the chaos earlier this session, many legislators have voiced their support in trying to aim their focus on prevalent issues affecting Floridians; not the social ones that cause divide. On the fiscal front, budget chairs received their allocations Thursday night, with presentations likely to begin as early as next week, though they are more anticipated week four. The actual budget conference typically takes place in weeks eight or nine, where the final differences will attempt to be ironed out. There has been ongoing speculation in Tallahassee about potential cuts to nonrecurring general revenue through member projects, and it will be interesting to see how much of this materializes. This and more below.

FLORIDA'S FUTURE

Policy aside, and politics front and center – Minority Senate Leader Jason Pizzo continues to tease his run to be the next governor of Florida. Pizzo has emphasized that his focus will be on economic issues affecting Floridians statewide, including property and auto insurance, as well as the goal to improve Florida's education especially as SAT scores continue to decline. Like his committee and floor speeches, Pizzo believes that voters care more about the economy and education in Florida than that of social issues. He believes he can be the moderate candidate that tries to silence the loudness found in both political parties.

On the Republican side, Congressman Byron Donalds continues to receive major endorsements including from President Trump, Donald Trump, Jr., Charlie Kirk, among many other influential individuals and groups. Prior to these endorsements, Casey DeSantis – who has made no definitive comment about running – appeared to have a noticeable lead in polls amongst the gubernatorial candidates; however, that has now flipped.

GOVERNMENT & ELECTIONS

RURAL RENAISSANCE

A priority of President Albritton, and sponsored by Senator Simon, the Rural Renaissance bill looks to enhance and revitalize Florida's rural communities. This legislation seeks to increase the economic development of many sectors including but not limited to health care, education, and infrastructure. Of importance, this revitalization is advised to be done without causing harm to the rural areas' commercial and cultural integrity. Senator Simon amended his bill to include a provision requiring VISIT FLORIDA to assist in the promotion of agritourism businesses and expand eligibility for rural infrastructure grants in unincorporated areas affected by disasters. Receiving ample support from numerous stakeholders including but not limited to community leaders, businesses, and citizens, this legislative package will have a vast impact on services provided by law enforcement, schools, and hospitals. The bill passed the full Senate on Thursday with the addition of \$6.5 million more in funding for health care expansion in rural areas. Republican Representatives Griffiths and Abbott have the bill in the House.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING TO CHANGE THE CONSTITUTION

Stemming from the last election, where the DeSantis administration spent money to oppose constitutional amendments, Republican Senator Jennifer Bradley filed a spending restriction provision to SB 7016. This would prohibit state government spending to support or oppose changes to the state constitution and would specifically block state funds from being utilized for public services messages, regardless of whether they are informational, or advocacy related. Senator Bradley believes this is the next best step to address the process related to constitutional amendments ending up on the ballot. The bill passed on a 6-3 vote and will now be considered on the Senate floor.

AI IN CAMPAIGNS

Sponsored by Republican Senator Danny Burgess, SB 702 aims to increase the transparency in digital content and the usage of artificial intelligence, particularly in political campaigns. If enacted, the bill would require digital content featuring electoral candidates generated by artificial intelligence to include provenance data. Moreover, it mandates that providers of generative artificial intelligence tools apply provenance data to synthetic content and offer tools for public verification. Social media platforms would be required to retain and publicly share this provenance data alongside the synthetic content. The bill has thus far received bipartisan support in the Senate; Republican Rep. Fiona McFarland is carrying a similar measure (HB 369) in the House.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

FLORIDA SHERIFFS AND ICE

Each county sheriff in the State of Florida has agreed to work with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to combat illegal immigration. As of now, Florida is the only state where all the 67 county sheriffs agreed to do so. Many of the sheriffs took to their social media pages to ensure publicly their cooperation with state and federal government on these initiatives. These immigration enforcement efforts are expected to expand to over 400 police departments as well. To further strengthen the efforts, Senate Minority Leader Jason Pizzo filed SB 782, an initiative that would require all employers, including those with fewer than 25 employees, to use E-Verify to confirm the legal work status of employees. Leader Pizzo believes the Legislature is not doing enough to target employers, which he claims to be the true root of the problem. Republican Representative Berny Jacques is carrying in the bill in the House. Governor DeSantis has already shown his support of this bill and would like to sign it as soon as possible.

BUSINESS

TIPPING CULTURE

A new amendment on House Bill 535 would no longer allow restaurants to include automatic service charges on bills for parties of five or less people. Moreover, for parties comprised of six or more, people could now refuse to pay if they did not want to. Republican Representative Demi Busatta convinced the House Industries and Professional Activities Subcommittee to add the amendment to House Bill 535, which is sponsored by Republican Representative Chad Johnson. This bill originally focused on allowing easier eviction of long-term guests who do not pay bills at hotels and motels. The bill was already being scrutinized due to concerns over people who would otherwise be homeless without the shelter in hotels and motels, but now it will be under even closer observation due to the new amendment. House Bill 535 was passed favorably with a 14-3 vote.

PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM HEMP

New state regulations went into effect on Wednesday that aim to prevent children from having access to hemp and to restrict marketing that is geared towards children. The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' new regulations include rules on how hemp can be marketed, labeled, and advertised throughout Florida. The provisions also require hemp products to have child-resistant packaging to keep the products inaccessible to minors. Paula Savchenko, a founding partner at Cannacore Group and PS Law Group, reportedly said "the new regulations taking hold Wednesday should be welcomed by the industry in Florida." Savchenko noted that there has been a lot of ambiguity in Florida regarding the packaging of hemp products despite hemp being legal in the state since 2017. Additionally, the bill's provisions include label requirements for consumable hemp products in order to align with federal law. It also requires said products to have a scannable QR barcode that links to the manufacturer's website that works for 90 days or more after the product's expiration date.

MINIMUM WAGE IN FLORIDA

On Monday, the Senate Commerce and Tourism Committee passed Senate Bill 676, sponsored by Republican Senator Jonathon Martin. Senate Bill 676 amends wage requirements by allowing certain employees to exempt themselves from state minimum wage in specific scenarios. These scenarios include when employees are in a "structured" work-study, pre-apprenticeship, apprenticeship, or internship, which exempts employers from their minimum wage obligations for employees. For employees under 18 years of age, parents or guardians of the employee are required to sign the waiver for them. Critics have expressed concern over the potential for exploitation of employees by corporations and the constitutionality of creating an exemption to the voter-approved minimum wage. Some of the concerns have come from Democratic lawmakers, including the three in the Senate Commerce and Tourism Committee who voted against the bill (Senators Arrington, Davis, and Guillermo Smith). This committee was the bill's first stop; it will be heard next in the Senate Governmental Oversight and Accountability Committee. The House companion bill (HB 541) has been filed by Republican Representative Ryan Chamberlin.

EDUCATION

CELL PHONES IN SCHOOL

The House Education Administration Committee passed House Bill 949, sponsored by Republican Representative Demi Busatta. This bill addresses the use of wireless communication devices on school grounds, prohibiting students from using them throughout the school day rather than only during instructional periods. It mandates that local district school boards establish designated areas within school grounds where students, with authorization from a school administrator, can use these devices during the school day. Additionally, the bill outlines disciplinary measures or penalties if these devices are used in criminal activities. Representative Busatta showed committee members that schools with policies similar to the provisions in the bill have less bullying, fewer distractions, and better academic outcomes for the students. There was concern over medical needs and phone use during emergency situations, but Representative Busatta reassured committee members with the fact that school districts will have leeway in their specific implementation of said provisions. Ultimately, the bill's intent was widely supported, leading to its approval with a 17-0 vote. The bill will be heard next in the House Education & Employment Committee.

CHANGES TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Senate Bill 1624, sponsored by Republican Senator Alexis Calatayud, enhances a variety of Florida's educational system through numerous provisions. This expansive bill covers an array of topics including revoking eligibility for in-state tuition rates for students with a Florida grandparent, renaming Hillsborough Community College to Hillsborough State College, and changing the college reach-out program to include all educationally disadvantaged and low-income students, regardless of their minority status. HB 1307 and HB 355, sponsored by Republican Representative John Temple and Democratic Representative Jose Alvarez, tackle similar issues.

CRIMES COMMITTED BY TEACHERS

Republican Senator Clay Yarborough is sponsoring a bill that seeks to give harsher punishments to educators when they are accused of serious crimes. Specifically, the provision, SB 1374, would enforce a self-reporting obligation on teachers and administrators within 48 hours of an arrest, along with any/all rulings and convictions within 48 hours as well. The bill targets a large range of crimes like grooming activities and requires school principals/designees to notify the parents or guardians of students who had direct contact with the arrested educator within 24 hours of the school being informed of the arrest. Senator Yarborough was spurred into action on this topic after a series of incidents led to the arrest of a teacher at Douglas Anderson School of the Arts in Jacksonville. It is important to note that this obligation does not apply for minor traffic violations, nor does it imply guilt or legal evidence against the educator. The bill has a companion bill in the house, HB 1287, by Republican Representative Will Robinson.

2025 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

SCHEDULE

The 2025 regular session dates can be found [here](#) and the annual calendar of major events can be found [here](#).

SESSION

Week 3

- House Authorized Schedule for March 17-21, 2025, can be found [here](#).
- Senate Weekly Schedule for March 17-21, 2025, can be found [here](#).

Week 4

- House Authorized Schedule for March 24-28, 2025, can be found [here](#).
- Senate Weekly Schedule for March 24-28, 2025, can be found [here](#).

REGULAR SESSION BILL STATISTICS

- *HOUSE*: 830 general bills filed; 94 have received a favorite committee report.
- *SENATE*: 892 general bills filed; 106 have received a favorable committee report.