

ASSOCIATED INDUSTRIES OF FLORIDA
**LEGISLATIVE
DAILY BRIEF**



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**FROM SPECIAL SESSION 'D'
FOR APRIL 4, 2002**

CONFERENCE COMMITTEE CONTINUES TO MEET ON FLORIDA SCHOOL CODE

As this is being written, the education conference committee, assembled to hammer out the differences between the House and Senate on the Florida School Code rewrite, is sitting down to meet yet again.

Speaker-designate Johnnie Byrd (R-Plant City) suggested to the House members this afternoon that the House would probably reconvene tomorrow morning around 10:00 a.m. and hopefully by that hour a final conference committee "report" or bill would be available for a vote. If that is the case, then it is possible the House and Senate will adjourn sometime around Noon tomorrow.

Tragically, work on the school code rewrite this morning was delayed by the sudden loss of a Senate Education Appropriations Committee staff member. Deputy Staff Director Dale Hickam passed away last night, at home, due to unknown causes. This was a great personal loss to members of the Senate and fellow staffers and, of course, a loss in professional expertise. AIF extends its condolences to members of the Hickam family, his friends and associates in the Legislature, as well.

It has to be noted that the Legislative staff in both the House and Senate are highly regarded nationwide and are arguably the best staff, in terms of professional expertise and work ethic, in the country. Legislative staff are "at will" employees, they can be fired at any time and they serve at the pleasure of the House Speaker and Senate President. Little noted outside of Tallahassee, the Legislative staff have a marvelous "corporate culture" of excellence and a commitment to do things right, to complete the job, no matter how long it takes. Legislators come and go, but these staffers, many with advanced degrees and dozens of years in service, continue to maintain a fierce work ethic and attention to detail that is rarely found anywhere else. While the Legislators and lobbyists put in countless hours, the staffers put in even more hours, commonly working through the weekend for weeks at a time. In addition to enormous pride in doing things the right way, a majority of the Legislative staff truly perceive themselves as "public servants" and, with few exceptions, purposely do their work with little fanfare and without a personal agenda. The Education committee staffers, unlike the other staff which immediately were able to take time off following the conclusion of the Regular Session, have had to press on with demanding hours, due to this special session. With the loss of Mr. Hickam, it is timely to recognize the consistent, outstanding contributions the House and Senate staff make to the democratic process. Their value to the governance of Florida is often assumed and incalculable.

ANOTHER SPECIAL SESSION BECKONS

As the Legislature continues to work on the Florida School Code Rewrite, House Speaker Tom Feeney (R-Oviedo) announced on the floor today that a Special Session to resolve the 2002-03 fiscal year budget is likely to convene on April 25th. Speaker Tom Feeney suggested that members of the appropriations committees would need to come back to Tallahassee on April 22 in preparation for the Special Session. While Speaker Feeney did make these remarks today, Governor Bush has yet to release the formal “call” for this special session.

There is speculation that the Governor may wish to include in his agenda for the special session the issue of the Chief Financial Officer. As we have reported many times, the Legislature has not been able to agree on what, if any, regulatory authority over insurance, banking and financial services this new office should enjoy. The Office of CFO was created by an amendment to the Florida Constitution approved by the voters in 1998. The amendment collapsed the current Cabinet offices of State Treasurer and State Comptroller into one Office of the Chief Financial Officer. While the Constitutional amendment is very clear that this new office should execute the financial duties currently carried out by the Treasurer and Comptroller, the House and Senate have disagreed over the statutory, regulatory duties of this new office.

In addition to the CFO issue, there is talk that the many health care issues related to “prompt pay,” self-referral & kidney dialysis and flexible health plan for small business, may find their way onto the agenda. It is unlikely that the Governor would do this, but the Legislature does enjoy the prerogative to expand the call by a 3/5 vote of both chambers and there is some interest in these bills by the House and Senate members.

AIF has long held that the CFO should not enjoy direct regulatory authority over the insurance, banking and financial services industries in addition to the new office’s myriad fiscal responsibilities. This is simply too much political and governmental power to centralize in one office, an office that would arguably exceed the governing powers of the Governor.

Stay tuned to our daily brief and to our web site at www.fbnnet.com as the legislature makes some very important decisions on the state’s economy. These decisions will have a major impact on the business community and AIF will be reporting to you everything that happens.

This report was prepared by Curt Leonard, Manager – Governmental Affairs at Associated Industries of Florida (AIF). Please send your comments or suggestions to us at aif@aif.com or call the Governmental Affairs department at (850)224-7173.

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- Send us your E-mail address and we will begin to send this report to you automatically via E-mail.