



March 5, 2010

Session Begins

The 2010 regular session of the state legislature began on Tuesday, March 2. During the opening ceremonies, Speaker of the House Larry Cretul and Senate President Jeff Atwater offered glimpses of their individual priorities for the session.

Speaker Cretul told the House that his focus will lie on creating jobs, streamlining government, and establishing a sound budget, including future reserves. President Atwater explained to the Senate that his emphasis would also center on job development, as well as on education reform and fraud prevention.

Later in the day, Gov. Charlie Crist spoke to both chambers for his last State of the State address. Naming jobs and the economy as his top agenda items, he also encouraged the legislature to prioritize education, environmental issues, and ethics as they go through the session.

Unemployment Compensation Tax Relief

Legislation offering relief from higher unemployment compensation taxes passed the House and Senate and was signed into law by the governor on Tuesday, March 2.

HB 7033 makes several important changes to current law that will help Florida's businesses:

- ◆ Reduces the taxable wage base from \$8,500 down to \$7,000 for the next two years. The rate will return to \$8,500 in 2012, and sunsets back to \$7,000 in 2015, unless there are outstanding federal loans.
- ◆ Provides that, regardless of the balance in the Unemployment Compensation Trust Fund, no rate increase will be triggered for the next two years. Rates will begin to rise again in 2012, but forecasts indicate our economy will be stronger. Employers will also have had time to plan for the higher costs.
- ◆ Grants employers the ability to make their 2010 and 2011 tax payments in quarterly installments without interest or penalties if the employers make the quarterly filings and payments on time.
- ◆ Provides that the payment of interest on federal advances will be made through an employer assessment.
- ◆ Provides an extension of the State Extended Benefits program which is 100% federally funded. This extension will cover up to eight additional weeks for claimants.

Without this legislation, which is effective immediately, the minimum unemployment tax rate on businesses would have increased from \$8, per employee, per year, to \$100.

Farm Bureau thanks Reps. Dave Murzin, R-Pensacola, and Jennifer Carroll, R-Jacksonville, and Sen. Rudy Garcia, R-Hialeah, for sponsoring this crucial legislation, as well as House Speaker Larry Cretul and Senate President Jeff Atwater for their leadership in ensuring its speedy passage.

HB 7033 passed unanimously in both chambers.

Legislative Priorities

Among many other bills, some of the legislation that Farm Bureau will be working on this session includes the following:

- ◆ **General agriculture bill, sponsored by House Ag and Natural Resources Committee and Sen. Durell Peadar (SB 2074):** Among other things, this bill prohibits local governments from enforcing duplicative regulations on ag lands. It also prohibits counties from imposing tax assessment or fees for storm water management on ag lands with a discharge permit or where BMPs are implemented. Additionally, among other provisions it exempts nonresidential farm buildings and fences from any type of permits or fees and exempts farmers and ranchers from a local business tax (formerly known as an occupational license).
- ◆ **Farm to Energy, sponsored by House General Government Policy Council and Sen. Thad Altman (SB 2346):** The 2010 Farm to Energy Act will allow agricultural producers the opportunity to produce and sell renewable electricity through the use of their Florida grown feedstocks and farm waste. Solar and wind is also included. This bill will create jobs and stimulate greater economic opportunity in the agricultural industry and create a new commodity that will further sustain one of Florida's largest industries.
- ◆ **Greenbelt, sponsored by Rep. Denise Grimsley (HB 981) and Sen. JD Alexander (SB 2182):** Provides that property classified as agricultural retains its classification if kept in agricultural production, even if the property is put up for sale.
- ◆ **Beekeepers, sponsored by Rep. Rich Glorioso (HB 1339) and Sen. Charlie Dean:** Authorizes the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS) to regulate certain apiary activities.

Farm Bureau Day at the Capitol

Farm Bureau Day activities in Tallahassee will be held on Monday and Tuesday, March 15 and 16. The festivities begin with a briefing dinner at the Tallahassee Antique Car Museum on Monday at 6:30 p.m. Cost is \$10 per person. Dress is casual. ***Reservations are required and must be made no later than Friday, March 12.***

Please make appointments with your legislators while you are here and encourage them to attend our reception. Because of the gift ban, legislators, staff, and other governmental employees have to pay to attend the reception. The cost is \$10 for those wanting a full buffet, \$5 for those opting for light fare. Those choosing not to partake at all are welcome to visit for free.

This year Farm Bureau will host a silent auction in conjunction with the state 4-H association at the reception. A wide variety of items will be available for bid.

Tickets are available at your local county Farm Bureau office. The cost is \$10 each.

For more information or to make reservations for the briefing dinner, contact Chris Scovotto at the state legislative office at (850) 222-2557.

FFBF STATE LEGISLATIVE OFFICE

Ben Parks, Director

Lee Ann Fisch, Assistant Director

Chris Scovotto, Legislative Assistant

Phone 850/222-2557 Fax 850/222-9927

E-mail BGParks@hotmail.com, LeeAnn.Fisch@ffbf.org, and Christine.Scovotto@ffbf.org

