

# Tallahassee Update

from State Representative

## SETH MCKEEL



On Tuesday, March 4<sup>th</sup> the 2008 Legislative Session officially opened. This marks the 110<sup>th</sup> Session of the Florida Legislature. This year, we are facing a number of challenges in State Government. The House of Representatives is continuing its efforts to improve every level of education. I am personally working with my colleagues to establish the USF Polytechnic Campus and protect the increases in K-12 funding that were appropriated last year. I will also be working on providing greater opportunities for government at all levels to implement energy conservation measures. I have also sponsored a piece of legislation that advocates for a study to be performed on the cost of alternative fuel opportunities for our state. However, all of this work is framed in the backdrop of a steep reduction in state and local revenue. This will mean that our government will have to take the lead of Floridians everywhere and become more fiscally responsible.

Despite these challenges, I shared a feeling of optimism with my fellow legislatures on opening day. The Florida Legislature has an opportunity to work on revitalizing the economy and provide better government at less expense to the tax payer. We are in a position to provide good public policy that stands up to the deepest scrutiny and I look forward to that challenge. In this update, I have provided you an outline of the House's budget reduction proposal and an update on the USF Polytechnic Campus project. I have also included a list of the bills that I will be sponsoring this legislative session. As I continue to serve you in Tallahassee, I encourage you to share your concerns with me. The opportunity to serve you is a blessing and I appreciate your confidence in me.

### USF Lakeland Polytechnic Campus

During this Legislative Session, your local delegation is continuing to work towards making the USF Lakeland Polytechnic Campus a reality. As many of you have heard me say, this is THE year to make this project happen. If we fail to acquire funding this year, USF Lakeland will lose its land donation. To continue our efforts to ensure that we acquire the greatest economic engine our community has ever had, Sen. J.D. Alexander and I have filed legislation on behalf of USF Lakeland this year.

In the House, I have sponsored HB 1143, a bill entitled University of South Florida Lakeland. This bill creates autonomy for USF Lakeland from its sister campus in Tampa, FL. This is on par with the USF regional campuses in both Sarasota and St. Petersburg. If it passes, USF Lakeland will have control over its daily affairs and be able to shape a unique vision for its own future. This legislation is critical to allowing USF Lakeland's day to day operations to flow smoothly. Consequently, I will be working hard in the Florida House of Representatives to see that this bill passes. In the coming weeks, your Legislative Delegation will be calling on you to also do your part to see that the USF Lakeland Polytechnic Campus is established. It is important that public leaders in our state know what impact that this project will have on our community and it is up to you to share your thoughts with them. Every Polk County resident must stand together behind one message, "Lakeland deserves a Polytechnic Campus!"

### Budget Outlook

As many of you are aware, this year has seen a slowdown in Florida's economy. The resulting budget shortfalls at the state and local level have brought with them the need to carefully review what areas of government are important. During that review process, I have continually emphasized an important point. In 1998-99 the State's budget totaled \$45.27 billion dollars. In 10 years, the size of our government has almost doubled. So, despite reducing our budget this year by approximately 2 billion dollars, at the end of the day, the State will be spending a whole lot of your money. Considering this, I think it is healthy to get our government as lean and efficient as possible and our current economic situation provides a framework for that to take place.

On Monday, March 3, the Policy & Budget Council considered a Proposed Committee Bill to revise the Florida budget for FY 2007-08. These revisions are designed to narrow the gap between recurring spending and declining revenue collections. It is also part of a larger strategy to balance the budget for FY 2008-09 and beyond. The following are some highpoints that outline the budget reductions by council.

#### The Big Picture

<b>2007 Session FY 2007-08 Budget:</b>	<b>\$71.9 billion</b>
<b>Special Session 2007C Reduction:</b>	<b>\$1.1 billion</b>
<b>Proposed 2008 Session FY 2007-08 Reduction:</b>	<b>\$0.5 billion</b>
	<b>\$70.3 billion</b>

#### Fiscal Year 2007-08

##### Key Points & Highlights of Proposed Reductions

Schools and Learning Council: \$357.2 million reduction.

Maintains an increase of 4.53% in per-student K-12 funding over the prior fiscal year. The revised budget reduces Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) per student funding by \$237.2 million (1.18%), but this still represents a 4.53% increase FY 2006-07, which itself was a record funding year.

Healthcare Council: \$36.9 million reduction.

Safety and Security Council: \$66.2 million reduction.

- No prisoners will be released early.
- Department of Corrections Substance Abuse Program not reduced.
- Even with a \$17 million reduction for state court funding (to a total of \$466.8 million), state courts have received a net increase of approximately 8.6% over the last two years.

Economic Expansion and Infrastructure Council: \$50.5 million reduction.

- No state trooper positions eliminated.
- No reduction in per-student funding for Voluntary Pre-kindergarten

Environment and Natural Resources Council: \$6.4 million reduction.

Government Efficiency and Accountability Council: \$11.5 million reduction.

Jobs and Entrepreneurship Council: \$2.7 million reduction.

### Rep. McKeel's Bills In Committee

#### HB 37 Contracting for Efficiency or Conservation Measures by State Agencies

Includes water & wastewater efficiency & conservation in measures encouraged by Legislature; provides for inclusion of water & wastewater efficiency & conservation measures in guaranteed performance savings contracts entered into by state agencies, municipalities, or political subdivisions.

#### HB 51 Partial Payment of Property Taxes

Requires tax collectors to accept payments of portions of amounts billed in tax notices; subjects unpaid amounts to penalties, interest, & other processes of law.

#### HB 827 Motor Vehicle Dealers

Removes exception to certain registration requirements for certain motor vehicles manufactured on truck chassis; removes requirement that transfer of motor vehicle by dealer not meeting specified qualifications must be titled as used vehicle; provides for denial, suspension, or revocation of license for operation of unlawful additional motor vehicle dealership location or unlawful supply of motor vehicles; provides for cause of action & remedies.

#### HB 905 Disposition of Public Property for Affordable Housing

Allocates qualified unused land held by County School Boards to be allocated for affordable housing. Provides for county & municipality ineligibility to receive state funding for affordable housing for failing to complete & update inventory list of surplus real property; increases frequency required of managers of state lands under management or use plans to evaluate & indicate to BTII Trust Fund which lands are not being used for specified purposes; requires Division of State Lands to annually submit to Legislature state inventory of specified lands; requires district school boards to prepare inventory list of surplus district real property; requires boards to review list & determine appropriateness of properties for affordable housing; requires boards to state public purpose for use of specified properties; authorizes boards to dispose of specified properties for affordable housing purposes; provides for ineligibility of boards to receive Merit Award Program funding for failing to complete & update inventory list of specified real property.

#### HB 1143 University of South Florida Lakeland

Establishes & designates University of South Florida Lakeland campus; requires Board of Trustees to appoint Campus Board; provides that university is administered by Campus Executive Officer; provides that students enrolled at branch campus of university have same rights as other students; requires university to provide for a system of student registration that meets certain conditions.

#### HB 1165 Renewable Energy

Creates Task Force on Oil & Natural Gas Inventory; revises provisions relating to renewable energy source exemption; provides tax exemption for sale or use of renewable fuel; provides for transfer of renewable energy technologies investment tax credit; repeals implementing bill reversion provision relating to Renewable Energy Technologies Grants program; revises provisions relating to solar energy system incentives; extends Farm-to-Fuel Grants Program; requires DOR & DEP to adopt rules.

250 East Highland Drive  
Lakeland, FL 33813  
(863) 647-4896

Hillsborough Toll Free (866) 731-3032  
Seth.McKeel@MyFloridaHouse.gov

Callie Neslund, District Assistant  
Ryan Sandy, Legislative Assistant