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State Legislative Information

February 10, 2014

Interim Committee Week 7 – 2014 Session

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Airport Officials Attend Florida Airport Council Event

Doug Webster and Celina Saucedo of the Broward County Aviation Department attended the annual conference of the Florida Airports Council, the trade association for airports across Florida. In addition, the Broward County airport administrative team met with delegation members and ranking members of the Transportation and Economic Development Appropriations Committees of both the Senate and the House. Items discussed were the continuing expansion of the airport runway and plans for future economic growth.

Communication Service Tax Cut Moves in Senate

This week, the Senate Committee on Communication, Energy, and Public Utilities passed SB 266 Relating to Communication Services Tax (CST). The bill cuts the CST rate by 2%, reducing the general rate from 6.65 percent to 4.65 percent and the rate on the state direct-to-home satellite tax from 10.8 percent to 8.8 percent. The bill does not affect local CST rates, but still affects local governments through shared revenues. The bill has an estimated negative impact of \$20.3 million annually to all counties. If the bill becomes law, Broward County will lose approximately \$1.27 million annually.

The sponsor, Sen. Dorothy Hukill, stated that she would continue to work with stakeholders and find ways to mitigate the financial impacts as the bill moves through the process. A House companion bill has not been filed.

Medical Examiner Fee Preemption Passes First House Committee

Currently, medical examiners are required to autopsy bodies of those persons who die under unusual circumstances (e.g. suicide, during a crime, while in police custody). While some jurisdictions charge a fee for such service, funeral home operators argue that the law does not allow for the collection of such fee. HB 301 Relating to Medical Examiners would prevent local medical examiners from collecting a fee for cause of death determinations before cremation. The bill unanimously passed out of the Health Quality Subcommittee.

Parasailing Safety Bill Glides Through House Committee

HB 347 – Relating to Commercial Parasailing by Rep. Clarke-Reed passed unanimously through the House Business and Professional Regulation Subcommittee. The bill would impose minimum insurance coverage requirements, prevent parasailing activity during severe weather patterns, and require weather documentation before each sail. The Senate companion was scheduled for hearing this week, but was postponed due to travel delays experienced by Senator Maria Sachs.

Senate Gaming Committee Foreshadows Bill Release

On Monday, January 3rd, the Senate Gaming Committee heard testimony from Florida's horse industry. The industry indicated that the laws regulating pari-mutuels must be clarified. The issue revolves around "barrel racing" horse competitions at the Creek Entertainment Gretna track (Gretna) in North Florida. The industry contends that the Division of Pari-Mutuel Wagering improperly gave Gretna a pari-mutuel license based upon barrel racing, which is more akin to an obstacle course instead of a race track. Opponents see this loophole as a way to offer lucrative card room poker games and expanded gaming not intended by the legislature. This license has been the subject of administrative hearings and lawsuits.

While this is only one area targeted by a massive rewrite of Florida gaming law, committee Chair, Sen. Richter, stated that a bill will be unveiled in the next few weeks for public comment. He also stated that he envisions one or two new destination resort casinos in Miami-Dade and Broward.

Unfortunately, gaming legislation will likely stall in the House after Speaker Will Weatherford publicly stated that he would prefer a statewide constitutional amendment passed by voters before the Legislature makes changes to the law.

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