

GRay Matters



It's not always black and white.



2020 Session: Week 4

2/10/20

The fourth week of the 2020 Legislative Session saw the House and Senate appropriations committees pass their budget bills, but it also featured plenty of controversy.

The House budget includes a provision that would withhold funding from the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services until all gas pump stickers featuring Agriculture Commissioner **Nikki Fried**'s face are replaced.

That and another House proposal that would place the Office of Energy under the Governor's control led to renewed protests from Fried, who claims she's the target of a Republican "power grab."

The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services was the only department to have a rough week. The House budget did not provide any funding for the embattled Visit Florida. While the Senate's proposal funded the marketing organization at \$50 million, the future of the state's tourism agency is uncertain.

The Florida House of Representatives



— A measure that would limit county school board members to eight years in office was approved by the House Education Committee and now heads to the chamber floor. If successful in the Legislature, the proposal would need to be approved by at least 60 percent of voters on the November ballot.

— A bill by Lighthouse Point Republican Representative **Chip LaMarca** that does away with size limits for wine containers passed the House with a 112-6 vote. Currently, state law prohibits selling more than a gallon of wine in a single container.

Florida Senate

— Senator **Rob Bradley**'s bill repealing the "Best and the Brightest" teacher bonus program was approved in its final committee stop, queuing it up for a vote on the Senate floor. The repeal is a prerequisite for the broader teacher pay packages being pushed by the Governor and both chambers of the Legislature.

— A controversial bill that would require parental consent before a minor could obtain an abortion passed the full Senate with a party line vote. It is expected to pass in the House, though it has not yet been scheduled for a floor vote.



Bill of the Week

Democratic Senator **Lauren Book** has introduced a bill that would make several updates to the state's foster care statutes.

Senate Bill 496 enumerates the rights of foster children, including the right to live in a safe environment; not endure physical, sexual or emotional abuse; receive proper medical care; manage their own money; and go to school.

For the most part, those provisions are already state law, but SB 496 compiles them into a "Foster Children's Bill of Rights" and directs the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to give every child in the foster system a copy and spend time explaining the document in age-appropriate language.

The measure also updates the responsibilities of foster parents to include a duty to inform children about their rights.

In addition, Book's bill would bolster the role of the Florida Children's Ombudsman. DCF created the position in 2016 and, as the name implies, the ombudsman is tasked with listening to complaints from foster children and assisting them in resolving problems.

The legislation adds the position to statute and lists out duties which include recording all complaints received and posting the data on DCF's website. DCF would also set up a hotline for foster children to call the ombudsman's office.

The measure was approved with a unanimous vote in the Senate Children, Families, and Elder Affairs Committee last year. It is awaiting a hearing in the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Health and Human Services.

Federal Spotlight

GrayRobinson's Washington, DC office releases a newsletter each week entitled **The Golden Apple**, reporting on the "latest discord on Capitol Hill." This week's newsletter discusses the House Financial Services Committee "rent-a-bank" hearing focuses on small-dollar lending.

The House Financial Services Committee held the [first of two scheduled hearings on "rent-a-bank" schemes](#) this week and heard testimony from the chair of the California State Assembly's Banking & Finance Committee about the state law enacted last October that would cap interest rates on loans between \$2,500 and \$10,000. Representative Gregory Meeks (D-NY), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Financial

Institutions, noted the need to make small-dollar loans more readily available to borrowers who need them, especially in “banking deserts” where physical branches have closed. Representative Patrick McHenry (R-NC), the Committee’s ranking member, said that bank partnerships with fintech companies to make more products available can benefit all consumers, and called for a remedy to the Second Circuit’s decision in *Madden v. Midland Funding*, which has left service gaps to be filled by predatory lenders. The Committee will hold a second hearing on the topic on February 26. Read **The Golden Apple** in its entirety [here](#).

Client Spotlight



Conservation Florida

Traci Deen, Executive Director and CEO

My role at Conservation Florida entails: I lead our nonprofit as Executive Director and CEO, overseeing our statewide land conservation efforts. My work includes fostering strategic partnerships, engaging the community and community leaders, and facilitating large-scale land transactions.

Conservation Florida can help you conserve land and protect wild, wonderful Florida. We focus on projects that provide habitat for the survival of Florida’s iconic species, recharge drinking water or benefit other hydrologic functions, offer outdoor recreation, and other community benefits. We also help landowners with working ranches, farms and timberlands to keep their land in production for generations to come. We work statewide!

Something you wish people knew about Conservation Florida that might not be obvious: Every conservation project is unique, and our role often varies and may include all or some of the following: developing conservation strategies, exploring funding sources, and purchasing or accepting donations of land and conservation easements. In short, we protect land by cooperating with landowners and other agencies to find the best, most cooperative protection strategy for each project.

What excites you about going to work each day: Our mission, period. I’m a 6th generation Floridian and having the chance to protect some of Florida’s most special — and timeless — places for generations to come is the honor of a lifetime.

Looking Ahead

On Monday, the Senate Education Committee will consider a bill (SB 646) that would allow college athletes to make money off their name, image or likeness. A similar proposal (HB 7051) was approved by the House Education Committee this week.

The House schedule kicks off with a meeting of the PreK-12 Appropriations Subcommittee, which will take up a bill (HB 737) that would require schools to offer non-denominational “moments of silence.” The bill cleared the PreK-12 Innovation Subcommittee with a unanimous vote this week.

Also meeting is the House Select Committee on the Integrity of Research Institutions, which was created to investigate foreign interference in United States publicly funded research, particularly by China.

Tuesday will see a bill that would require both public and private employers to implement the federal E-Verify get its first hearing in the Senate Judiciary Committee. Implementing the employment check system is a priority of Governor **Ron DeSantis**, though it is a wedge issue among Republican lawmakers.

The GrayRobinson Team

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