



LEGISLATIVE SESSION WEEK 6

Dear Friends & Neighbors,

Please enjoy an update of week six of the Florida Legislative Session. This week was marked by several items concerning public health and safety.

Solar Schools Amendment

On Monday, a portion of my solar bill (SB 1290) was amended onto SB 1498 in the Education Committee. SB 1290 would have removed many of the barriers school districts face when trying to invest in solar energy systems on their educational facilities.

Currently, state statute inadvertently hinders school districts from investing in solar energy systems on their educational facilities. Solar energy investments have been counting towards the cost per student station limitations in new construction projects. Things like architect and engineer fees, legal costs, furniture and equipment all count towards the cap.

While these limitations were created to prevent wasteful spending, they're actually preventing schools from saving money in electricity expenses. From 2017-2018, the Department of Education estimated Florida's public schools spent over \$500 million on energy expenses.

If we can offset this cost by exempting solar energy system investments from the cost per student station limitations, the average Florida public school could save up to \$16,000 per year on their electric bills. And if all public schools utilized solar energy systems, the state could collectively save over \$70 million dollars, and that is money we could put back into our children's education.

We have made exceptions to the cost per student station limitations in the past. By adding solar energy systems to the list of exemptions, we can lead new generations of young Floridians into a brighter, cleaner future.



Bill Action Update

In the Senate Education Committee on Monday, we heard SB 1634, Parental "Bill of Rights," a bill that concerns me greatly. This legislation was heard last year, and I raised many of the same issues. Contained in SB 1634 is language that schools must share "important information" with parents. We all know that there are many unsafe home environments, with some children being subjected to abuse. Students sometimes confide in teachers, school guidance counselors, and other administrative personnel over their sexuality or problems at home. Disclosing these confidential conversations to abusive parents might leave these students vulnerable to backlash or more punitive abuse.

SB 1634 also gives broad authority to parents to "direct their child's education," even at a public school. The issue with this is that a parent would be able to selectively circumvent certain lessons or curriculum. They could remove their child from important lessons about the Holocaust, the history of slavery in our country, or age-appropriate sex education.

Our society has made great strides in developing a comprehensive, free, and secular public education that includes painful lessons that must be learned, lest we repeat the mistakes of the past. If parents wish to remove their children from what we've all considered to be an appropriate and necessary education, there are charter or private school options they should consider.

I feel this legislation is too broad and overreaching and is a solution in search of a problem that simply doesn't exist. Simply put, it is unnecessary.



Equal Pay for Equal Work Press Conference

For many years in the Florida House of Representatives, I filed legislation to support women earning equal pay as their male counterparts. In Florida, women earn 87 cents to the dollar that men earn. Wage discrimination is unfair and we need to continue to send that message to our legislators. Proudly, I stood with Senator Linda Stewart of Orlando and Representative Geraldine Thompson, of Windermere, to support SB 90/HB 739.



Coronavirus Update

During the Health Policy committee, acting Surgeon General, Dr. Scott Rivkees, presented an update on the outbreak of coronavirus both globally and in the United States. I inquired why the public has been kept in the dark about the investigative cases of coronavirus in Florida. Although there are no confirmed cases, we should know where testing is occurring -- it's a matter of great public concern. Dr. Rivkees cited Florida Statutes as the reason why the Department of Health cannot reveal the location of these investigative cases, but I feel the statute could be interpreted differently. Disclosure of the testing locations would not compromise patient confidentiality. During the height of Zika, there was continuous coverage and reporting of testing.

Check out the video clip below to listen to a few questions I asked during committee.



Inquiring about the coronavirus in Florida with acting Surgeon General, Dr. Scott Rivkees

District Events

This weekend showcases one of District 31's biggest annual events - the Lake Worth Street Painting Festival. More than 600 artists will converge to design masterpieces across the pavement of the streets of downtown Lake Worth Beach. As a fun, family FREE event, the festival is sure to please everyone with music, food, art and culture. Park and ride options are available from Palm Beach State College's Lake Worth campus as well as free street parking downtown.



As always, if you have any questions, concerns, or ideas on how to help move our state forward, please contact our office. With only three weeks left of our legislative session, this is the time that is notorious for bills to be picked up and moved. My advice to is to pay attention and ask questions!

All the best,

Lori Berman, State Senator District 31

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