

Dear Friend of USF,

The House and Senate convened on January 10, 2012 to open the 114th Regular Session of the Legislature since Florida's Statehood in 1845. If it seems to you that the Legislative Session came earlier than usual this year, you are right. That's because every ten years, following each U.S. Census, the Legislature is required to redraw the boundaries of each Florida House, Senate and Congressional district to reflect population shifts over the prior decade.

Redistricting and reapportionment can be contentious processes that require some court approval and often are contested in the legal system by parties who disagree with the eventual outcome. That may be even more true this time around due to the enactment of two new Constitutional Amendments in 2010 (<http://election.dos.state.fl.us/initiatives/initiativelist.asp?year=2010&initstatus=ALL&MadeBallot=Y&ElecType=GEN>) that were passed with the intent of limiting "gerrymandering" but which likely left open the door for additional legal and constitutional challenges regardless of the eventual shape and distribution of the new districts. Therefore, the Legislature opted to move the start date for their Regular Session up from a typical early March start date to January 10th to help ensure that the new district maps could be voted out of the Legislature and through the legal process in sufficient time for the 2012 electoral season. In addition to redrawing each of Florida's 40 Senate and 120 House Districts--the maximum number allowed by our state constitution (<http://www.flsenate.gov/Laws/Constitution#A3S16>)--the Legislature will be adding two new Congressional Districts to reflect national population shifts that increased Florida's population share of the U.S. between 2000 and 2010. Beginning in November 2012, Florida will have 27 U.S. House members (up from 25 currently) and 29 Electoral Votes in the Presidential Election.

The early business of the Legislature is sure to be dominated by the redistricting process. However, the Legislature will be taking up business that affects USF and the State University System concurrently with their work on redistricting. We will be sure to keep you updated regularly on the business that affects the USF System, and on occasion, may request your assistance in ensuring a positive outcome for your university.

For those of you who may be interested in following the Legislative Session more closely, Florida is blessed to have one of the most "online-friendly" legislatures in the world. The Florida House and Senate each have robust websites that post up-to-the-minute updates on nearly every piece of business they conduct, from bills, to agendas, to member contact info, to committee packets, to live video streaming of committee meetings and floor sessions. You may locate the House and Senate websites by clicking on the links below:

Florida House of Representatives: www.myfloridahouse.gov

Florida Senate: www.flsenate.gov

Your interest and advocacy for the USF System is greatly appreciated, and we encourage you to send us your feedback and ideas. I look forward to a continued dialogue with you as the now underway 2012 Legislative Session progresses.

Mark Walsh
Assistant VP for Government Relations for the USF System



CONTACT YOUR SENATOR OR REPRESENTATIVE

Click here (<http://capwiz.com/usfalumni/directory/statedir.tt?state=FL&lvl=state>) to locate contact information for your local Florida State Senator and Representative, using your home address.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

To send us your feedback or ideas, email: govrelations@usf.edu

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BILLS IN BRIEF

(SB = Senate Bill; HB = House Bill)

SB 94 BY SEN. FASANO AND HB 45 BY REP. SMITH

Summary: These bills require state universities and Florida Colleges that offer priority course registration for any segment of their student population to offer priority course registration for veterans or their dependents who are receiving education benefits under the GI Bill.

LATEST ACTION:

SENATE BILL--Passed by first two committees of reference. Awaiting a hearing in the Higher Education Appropriations Subcommittee.

HOUSE BILL--Passed by first committee of reference. Awaiting a hearing in the House Military Affairs Subcommittee.

SB 94 / HB 45 Link: <http://capwiz.com/usfalumni/issues/alert/?alertid=59651501>

SB 1156 BY SEN. FLORES

Summary: This bill allows the state universities' Capital Improvement Trust Fund (CITF) fee to be indexed to tuition instead of a dollar amount set in statute. The statutory cap for the fee has not been raised since the 1980s. It provides that an increase in the CITF fee must be approved by a committee consisting of at least 50% students appointed by the student body president. CITF fee revenue is used to construct non-instructional campus life facilities, such as student centers.

LATEST ACTION: Bill filed on December 6th.

SB 1156 Link: <http://capwiz.com/usfalumni/issues/alert/?alertid=59653501>

SB 1560 BY SEN. THRASHER

Summary: This bill would prohibit a sitting member of the Legislature from being employed by or having a contractual relationship with any state university or Florida College. It would also prohibit a former legislator from becoming employed by or entering into a contractual relationship with one of those institutions for at least two years after leaving the Legislature.

LATEST ACTION: Bill filed on January 6th.

SB 1560 Link: <http://capwiz.com/usfalumni/issues/alert/?alertid=59654501>