



Palm Beach County Legislative Update

Department of Legislative Affairs

Committee Week 3

October 16-20, 2023



Senate President-designate Ben Albritton at his designation ceremony.

On Tuesday, Florida Senate Republicans officially selected Majority Leader Ben Albritton (R-Wauchula) to be Senate President for the 2024-2026 term. He will succeed current Senate President Kathleen Passidomo (R-Naples) in November of next year. President-designate Albritton shared in his acceptance speech that agriculture will be a top priority during his tenure, along with water quality and Florida's foster care system. He also stated that affordable housing and property insurance were two issues that he believes the legislature still needs to continue working on in future sessions.

Numerous House and Senate committees met this week, though no legislation was considered. In the House, many appropriations subcommittees received presentations from agency heads and staff regarding their FY 2024-2025 Legislative Budget Requests while the lawmakers in the Senate heard updates on a variety of state programs. Included below are a few key highlights from these proceedings.

House Select Committee on Hurricane Resiliency & Recovery

The House Select Committee on Hurricane Resiliency & Recovery hosted the Florida Division of Emergency Management (FDEM) Director, Kevin Guthrie, who gave a briefing regarding the three recent hurricanes that have impacted Florida. Three days after Hurricane Idalia made landfall, 90 percent of the utility accounts impacted had power restored and \$202 million has already been obligated for recovery. Ongoing recovery and mitigation efforts are still underway in response to Hurricane Ian which hit the Southwestern portion of the state in late 2022. For the first time in history, FDEM was able to obligate \$1 billion in funds during the first 256 days post-landfall. The state anticipates receiving \$939 million in hazard mitigation funding to implement long-term mitigation measures in the communities that were impacted by Ian. Hurricane Nicole's storm surge exacerbated the coastal erosion already caused in some areas by Hurricane Ian and degraded many structures located near the water on the east coast of Florida. A total of \$11 million has been obligated thus far as a result of this storm and the state is estimated to receive \$47 million in hazard mitigation funding.

House Transportation & Modals Subcommittee

Advanced air mobility (AAM) was the topic of discussion in the House Transportation & Modals Subcommittee on Tuesday. Legislators received an overview of the industry from stakeholders as well as the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT). AAM is a rapidly emerging, new sector of the aerospace industry which aims to safely and efficiently integrate highly automated aircraft into the national airspace system. There is a collection of new technologies being applied to the aviation transportation system, particularly in new aircraft types. AAM use cases

include Urban Air Mobility (UAM), Regional Air Mobility (RAM), public services, large cargo delivery, and private or recreational vehicles. The AAM market is projected to reach \$1 trillion by 2040 though inflation and delays in federal regulations may slow down this growth. Florida is a target market for early-stage AAM and numerous original equipment manufacturers are ready for early operations in our state. FDOT shared the state's timeline for implementation of AAM with the third and final phase of fully integrating AAM into the state transportation system once these operations are ready sometime after the year 2025.

Senate Commerce & Tourism Committee

The Deputy Secretary of the Division of Community Development under Florida Commerce gave a presentation to the Senate Commerce and Tourism Committee regarding the Office of Broadband, updating lawmakers on the work they have been doing to increase access to high-speed internet across our state. The primary function of the office is to accurately map unserved and underserved areas, ensuring that grant funds are distributed efficiently and without duplication. To ensure a reliable connection within homes, a minimum of 100 Mbps per second both up and down is required which is the target the state is currently working towards.

Notable grant programs administered by the Office of Broadband include \$473 million in grants awarded by Florida Commerce for broadband across the state. These grants cover 151 projects in 60 out of Florida's 67 counties, aiming to provide high-speed internet access to more than 309,000 homes and businesses. Additionally, \$4 million in funding has been received for broadband infrastructure installation and employment, with an additional \$366 million in federal funding.

Looking ahead, there is \$1.1 billion in federal funding appropriated for the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program in 2024. This funding is allocated to Florida for broadband planning, deployment, and more. The state is currently working on an action plan and proposal for administering these dollars, as they will be used to fill any remaining gaps after the Broadband Opportunity and Capital Projects resources have been deployed.

Joint Proclamation Issued Convening a Special Session

Senate President Kathleen Passidomo and House Speaker Paul Renner issued a joint proclamation on Friday, October 20, convening a special session to last 4 days during the next scheduled committee week (November 6-9).

The scope of the Special Session is to:

- Provide tax relief and other financial assistance related to damages from Hurricane Idalia;
- Expand and fund recovery and resiliency efforts related to natural disasters, including but not limited to assisting agriculture and aquaculture producers as well as extending local government assistance;
- Provide a mechanism to increase the number of students served under the Family Empowerment Scholarship for students with disabilities;
- Express support for the State of Israel, condemn Hamas, and demand an end to financial support to the regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah, and others that support the violent attacks on Israel;
- Expand the designation criteria for scrutinized companies having business operations in the Islamic Republic of Iran and limit the circumstances under which the State Board of Administration may no longer list scrutinized companies with business operations in the Islamic Republic of Iran; and
- Provide financial assistance for security infrastructure to entities in the state that are at high risk for violent attacks or hate crimes.

The House and Senate will not meet again until the week of November 6. At the time this publication was released, 255 bills had been filed for consideration during the upcoming legislative session.