

Pre-Session Update

It is almost time for the azaleas to bloom in Tallahassee, and that means spring is nearly here, and the Legislature is back in Session. On March 2, the 2004 Legislative Session will convene for its sixty-day regular session. Some important higher education issues before the Legislature this session include repealing or modifying the 18-credit graduation option, retirement related issues and funding for work-force education, community colleges and universities.

FEA/UFF Retirement Initiatives

FEA/UFF has initiated a number of retirement related bills that are being sponsored in the 2004 Legislative Session. While there are other retirement initiatives, two prime bills that FEA/UFF initiated are:

Health Insurance Subsidy Increase

SB 2204 by Senator Al Lawson HB 663 by Representative Suzanne Kosmas

The Health Insurance Subsidy is an allocation, above and beyond retirement pay, to each retiree's monthly check for the express purpose of assistance with medical costs. FRS employers are assessed an amount, currently 1.11% of salary, that is paid to FRS for this benefit. The bill will increase the maximum monthly health insurance subsidy from \$5 to \$7 per year service. The total maximum monthly payment would increase from \$150 to \$210 per month upon passage. An increase in the employer's contribution will pay for this benefit.

DROP and Reemployment Equity

SB 1556 by Senator Debbie Wasserman Schultz HB 885 by Representative Mike Davis

The 2003 Legislature passed more flexible rules for K-12 classroom teachers pertaining to DROP and reemployment after retirement. This bill would apply those same standards to K-12 ESP and instructional staff that are not classroom teachers and to higher education faculty. The bill would provide school boards, community colleges, universities & Florida School for Deaf & Blind the ability to reemploy a retired member after 30 days without that member forfeiting retirement pay. The bill also revises the election period in DROP for employees in grades K-20 & extends participation in DROP (up to 96 months) to personnel in grades K-20 who receive administrative authorization.

FAIR Amendment

UFF supports the FAIR Amendment being promoted by former Senate President John McKay. The amendment requires the Legislature to review every exemption and exclusion to the sales tax on or before July 1, 2007. In order to be retained, each exemption and exclusion must be contained in an individual bill and be voted favorably by a 3/5 vote of each chamber of the Florida Legislature. Exemptions that are retained are then reviewed on a ten-year cycle. Florida statutes currently exempt a potential of \$24 billion in revenues. Information about the petition drive and the petition itself can be found at <http://www.fairamendment.com>.

Thank you to Marshall Ogletree for preparing this update for our members. As always, please email UFF1@aol.com or call us at 850-224-8220 for more information and lobbying tips.