



Legislative Report: 4.9.21

*Provided by Jim Spratt
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The halfway point of session came and went this week in Tallahassee, and most of the state breathed a collective sigh of relief. Seriously, outside of the budget, much of the news and action this week was focused on events outside of the capitol. Most notably from a political standpoint, the *60 Minutes* news story regarding Gov. DeSantis and COVID-19 vaccines has really taken on a life of its own. From the “cheap seats,” it would appear the story has backfired if the intent was to hurt Governor DeSantis or discourage his political ambitions; to the contrary, the Governor seems to be stronger than ever.

The other story which has really eaten up bandwidth is the failure of structures at the retired Piney Point phosphate mine. This incident has sparked legislators to offer a budget amendment for the clean-up and remediation of the facility, elicited an Emergency Order and evacuations by Governor DeSantis, and was the sole topic of a meeting of the House Pandemics and Emergency Response Committee late in the day of Wednesday, April 7th. There is a link to the committee meeting lower in this report.

BUDGET

The Senate and House passed their respective budgets, laying groundwork for the budget conference process. Not surprisingly, there are differences between the two chambers budgets, yet the wild card this year has to be the improved revenue estimates for the state. In fact, the latest numbers suggest our actual revenue collections are \$2 billion above the estimates. Given the two chambers based their original budgets on an expected \$2.75 billion shortfall, there is room for improvements even before the CARES Act money is factored into the final budget.

The Senate proposed \$75 million for springs funding while the House has \$50 million.

Both the Senate and the House proposed significant funding for Everglades Restoration.

The Senate budget also includes a \$3 million starting point for the clean-up of Piney Point and \$2.2 million for the UF/IFAS fertilizer rate study. **While there is no specific money for the Rural and Family Lands Program, the Senate parked \$50 million within the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to be used on agricultural conservation easements.**

Within the Florida Forest Service, the Senate has roughly **\$5.5 million for replacement of wildfire suppression equipment, while the House has proposed \$7.5 million. In addition, the House budget has \$5.5 million for an aircraft purchase.**

POLICY

As session has reach its halfway point, it seems appropriate to provide a list of bills which have been on FFA radar during this abnormal session. [Click here for the list.](#)

PINEY POINT

On Wednesday evening, the House Pandemic and Emergency Response Committee received an update from Florida Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Noah Valenstein regarding the Piney Point events. Please click on the following link to view the committee hearing:

<https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/VideoPlayer.aspx?eventID=7157>