

*This month I would like to share with you the
2019 Final Legislative report written by Jean Gonzalez Wingo,
1st VP Florida Federation of Republican Women (FFRW).*



FFRW 2019 FINAL LEGISLATIVE REPORT

Thanks to the tremendous cooperation between Gov. Ron DeSantis, Senate President Galvano, and Speaker Oliva, 2019 was the most responsible and victorious Session we have seen!

In the 2nd week, the FFRW put forth 5 priority issues: (1) Human Trafficking requiring hotels and restaurants to train employees, (2) a large increase in Hurricane Relief for the panhandle, (3) the courageous Rule of Law bill by Gruters/Byrd known as Sanctuary Cities preventing cities from inhibiting law enforcement's cooperation with ICE, (4) implementation of amendment 4 by Grant requiring restitution to victims for felons to vote (the amendment said complete "all terms of their sentence" - that IS part of the sentence!) and (5) Red Tide mitigation.

Of the 3400 bills filed, 150 passed. Our five were among them as well as one we supported last year, distracted driving, which was bogged down by Parkland shooting legislation. That completed our list of top priority bills from last year also!

In the closing weeks, we asked that rainy day funds be used for Hurricane Michael as the Democrats in Congress refused to provide relief even as people continued to live in half destroyed trailers and tents and unprecedented amounts of trees lay on the ground inviting wildfires. We joined CFO Patronis, legislators, the cabinet, and victims in a press conference highlighting the concern. The Florida legislature added \$1 billion from reserves to the \$783 million from the state budget! This included money to rebuild destroyed schools and hospitals.

Additionally, our list encouraged more money be given to education and the environment due to Florida and Trump's strong economy. A large increase per pupil was funded for schools, 18,000 more scholarships were given to charter schools and numerous environmental issues were funded.

Other positive issues for women, the safety net hospitals got \$310 million, new safety standards were placed on plastic surgery centers, the business rent tax was cut again (we supported this 2 years ago), and an increased penalty for injuring police animals. An attempted run at allowing previously banned horrendous puppy mills was defeated which we also opposed.

It is impossible to imagine a more perfect Session for us! You made a tremendous difference by following legislative issues, making calls and emailing legislators. The liberal women's groups like NOW opposed many of these important issues and the women of Florida owe you a debt of gratitude! Please send a thank you to your legislators and then share with your members as you use the information to recruit new women who want to make a difference. Let them know what this great Republican legislature and Governor are accomplishing as we begin to re-elect Donald Trump!

Jean Gonzalez Wingo,
1st VP FFRW

Lee County School Board Update

Following a series of widely publicized blunders and investigations, Lee schools Superintendent Greg Adkins survived an effort by school Board Members and the community to fire him, with a 4-3 vote. The seven-member board completed the Superintendent's annual evaluation — and Board Member, Giovannelli, noted at the end of her evaluation that she planned to move to terminate Adkins during the meeting. The board evaluated Adkins in the four areas of educational leadership, professional leadership, community leadership, and executive leadership and rated

Adkins with a score between 1 and 4, in each category, to calculate an overall rating. Adkins has been the Superintendent since he was appointed, by the Board, as the interim Superintendent in 2015.

Giovanelli gave Adkins an overall rating of 1.42, Unsatisfactory, while Gittens and Vaughn rated Adkins as Needs Improvement. Patricca, Jordan and Morgan — rated Adkins with nearly perfect scores of 3.93, 3.82, and 3.82, Highly Effective. Fischer gave Adkins an Effective rating. The board members who gave Adkins poor evaluations questioned his leadership and mentioned district missteps in their evaluations, like the Bonita Springs High School construction controversy and a recent omission on a teacher scholarship form that could cost the district at least \$200,000. Giovanelli's evaluation, among other issues, criticized Adkins for not being transparent, not communicating effectively, and for the resignation of high-ranking leaders in the school district. Board Chairwoman, Gittens, included many areas of concern, including controversial raises given to executive leaders, unfilled positions, and the way Adkins has addressed her, 'in a very insubordinate way' at some meetings. Patricca called Giovanelli's plan to ask the board to fire Adkins "absurd" and a "political move to serve a special interest group." She questioned how the board could fire Adkins based on his accomplishments, including, what she referred to as his greatest accomplishment, the passage of the half-percent sales tax last year.

The School board also completed evaluations of their work as a board, and gave the board low-performance marks, grading its performance with three Unsatisfactory ratings, 3 D's, and one C. Unsatisfactory is the lowest possible grade on the board's evaluation system.

On May 8, 2019, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signed a bill that allows teachers in Florida public schools to be armed in classrooms - if the school district 'opt-in' to the Guardian program, which allows qualified teachers and other staff to volunteer to carry a gun on campus after they have received intensive mental health screening and intensive training by a sheriff's office. Lee County school board voted unanimously to only support the use of trained law enforcement officers to safeguard its schools and will not allow teachers to be armed in Lee County Schools.

Where are your tax dollars being spent?

Lee County School District is under investigation by the Florida Department of Education, following a December 2018 investigation by the Florida Auditor General, and the District may have to repay as much as \$3.9 million in funding after the state said that Lee County School District misspent millions in taxpayer money, the Board was informed this month. The deadline for the District to respond is May 31.

In April, the School District is purchasing 15 acres in Estero for over \$4M. The two pieces of land are near the end of Block Lane, northwest of Estero High School and west of River Ranch Road. According to the district, their immediate plan is to use the properties to build another K-8 school in Estero - the area with the lowest population of students in Lee County.

The school district bought the 5 acres from Park Place of Estero. The Lee County Property Appraiser's office listed the market value of this land as \$910,000. The district has not released its own appraisal of the land yet. The district bought the 10 acres from the Newquist Family. The county appraiser's office listed the market value of the land as \$371,698. The school board approved this 10-acre land purchase of \$2,670,933.00 at the April 9 meeting.

The district cites its growth in students as the reason it needs to build more schools and they state that their figures show there were 83,111 students enrolled in Lee County public schools, not including charter schools, last month compared to 81,579 in April 2018 - an increase of 1,532 students. The District lists eight schools on the sales tax project list, including five new schools, with the first new school being built with tax proceeds to be a high school in Gateway, scheduled to open in 2021. They plan to tear down and rebuild Franklin Park Elementary and Cypress Lake Middle schools and the state must approve those plans before the district can proceed. The district is also studying whether to build a new facility or renovate a building to meet the needs of Fort Myers Technical College.

In March, The school district considered paying \$625,000 for 20 acres in Fort Myers, along Michael G. Rippe Parkway, south of Briarwood Terrace for building a warehouse, bus depot, student enrollment office and administrative office. The Site Selection Committee voted in favor of this purchase, but the Superintendent decided against it, based on the advice of school district staff, according to the district spokeswoman.

May 21, 2019 The Board approved an estimated expenditure for branding, awarded to Priority Marketing of Fort Myers, in the amount of \$350,000.00, for the third year of the base contract period through June 2020. According to the Board agenda, 'Services include creating a District brand, communication of the District's brand, preparing District staff to deliver the District's message, leveraging technology to reach all stakeholders and recruitment advertising.'

Be prepared for the possibility of another school district tax referendum on your 2020 ballot asking for another increase in your tax dollars. A 2019 editorial posted on NBC2, titled, 'Chris Patricca explains how the district is funded, and how you can help get those funding decisions made locally', summarized the desire to have the school District able to exercise the same discretion with regard to setting millage rates that the county and municipalities have - and to raise the Required Local Effort (RLE), the expected property tax revenue for the district.' She expressed concern that the PUBLIC SCHOOL – BY STATE LAW millage rate decreased due to homestead exemption, 'and the amount you are paying is less than last year - even though your property is worth more.'

Isn't that the reason we support homestead exemption? The actual 2019 LCSO legislative priorities on this read: 'Update of the calculation for the Required Local Effort (RLE) millage rate to capture the increase in residential and commercial property values and revenue gained from new construction.'

An April 24th Wink News headline read, 'Property Tax Hike Proposed - Money would pay for teacher salary increases in Lee County.' This article stated that 'The Lee County Teachers Union is pushing to increase property taxes in hopes to get a more significant raise.' According to Reporter, Brendon Leslie, he spoke with several school board members and "the general consensus is they are open to the idea of a conversation around a property tax hike."



To: Lee Health Everyone

As the 2019 legislation session comes to a close, I wanted to update you on the request I made two weeks ago to contact your Florida Senator about two bills that will change the scope of the delivery of health care in our community.

Our local senators received hundreds of e-mails against these bills, and I thank you for taking the time to voice your opinion. The Florida Hospital Association worked tirelessly with lawmakers throughout session to come to reasonable compromises, but did not prevail. The repeal on CON will roll out in two phases, becoming effective for general acute care hospitals this year and specialty hospitals in 2021.

Most hospitals will now be free to enter our region without the following requirements: a 24/7 emergency room, a requirement to provide charity care and Medicaid services or a minimum bed requirement. While we feel this could have detrimental effects to the quality of care Southwest Florida patients receive, we must adapt to the new environment the legislature has created and continue to serve as the region's leader in high quality and safe health care. We are also still looking into how the bill might affect our CON hearing with AHCA for our planned hospital at Coconut Point.

In addition to CON repeal, ambulatory surgery centers will now be permitted to keep patients for up to 24 hours and perform more complicated procedures. This will be marketed as a cheaper option for patients, however ASCs are not subject to the same rigorous regulations as a traditional hospital and are often not equipped to provide critical care services should a complication arise.

These changes to Florida's health care landscape will significantly impact our health system, and we must take them seriously. New hospitals will be coming to Lee County, and it is imperative we continue to build on the successes of Exceptional Lee and Performance Excellence to provide high quality, safe and compassionate care to our patients.

This will help us build loyalty in our community, and we need to work together to ensure Southwest Floridians and visitors alike think of Lee Health as the best possible provider for their health care needs.

While these two bills did not go how we hoped, we were able to defeat several other bills that also would have had a negative impact on patient safety. These bills included measures that would have allowed the creation of recovery care centers, repealed personal injury protection insurance and allowed outpatient C-sections at advanced birthing centers.

In addition to defeating these bills, we fared extremely well in the legislature's budgeting process. We secured an appropriation for our Graduate Medical Education (GME) program, made significant gains in Medicaid rates and reimbursement structure and will receive a more equitable patient distribution for our Provider Service Network, Vivida Health.

Thank you again for your advocacy during the closing weeks of session. We are entering uncharted waters for the delivery of health care in our area. While it could take a few years to determine the full impact of CON repeal, we are already beginning to look at how we will need to adjust strategically. We are the largest and most trusted health care provider in Lee County, and now more than ever we must embrace our caring culture, compassionate delivery of care and exceptional safety standards to ensure the SWFL community knows that Lee Health is the health system where themselves and their loved ones receive the best possible care in the region.

Yours in Health,

Larry Antonucci, M.D., MBA
President & CEO, Lee Health