

We're listening...

Contact Rep. Tony Sasso's Office

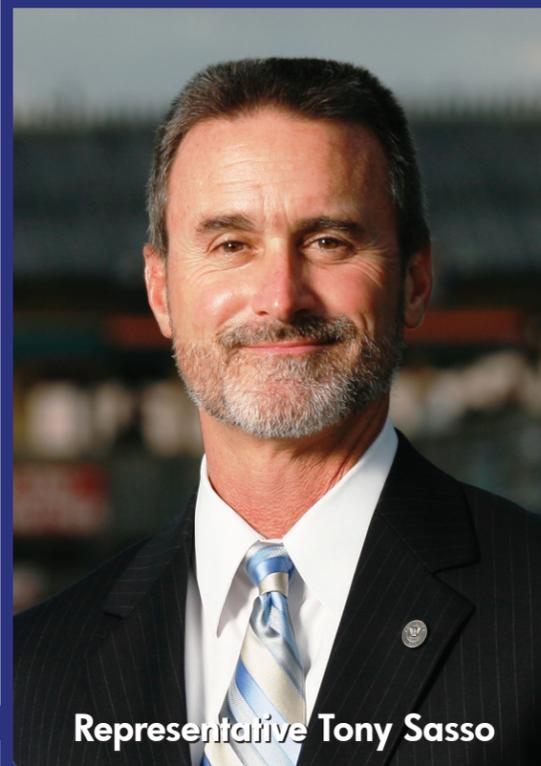
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District 32 Update

Representative Tony Sasso



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FLORIDA HOUSE
OF REPRESENTATIVES
Representative Tony Sasso
Florida's District 32



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Dear Friends,

On May 2, 2008, Florida's annual Legislative Session came to a close after 60 days of working on everything from tax and healthcare policy to veterans benefits and public transportation. It was a wonder working for you in Tallahassee but I'm very glad to be back in our community. As your State Representative for Florida House District 32, I would like to let you know what we worked on at the Capitol.

We began the session with a \$1 billion revenue shortfall for the current fiscal year. There were many options available but the legislature chose to reduce programs and services in education and healthcare, cuts that I did not support. Unfortunately, the bad news from our state economists did not stop there. In March, we got the devastating news that the state budget would need to be reduced by another \$4 billion. What once was a \$71.9 billion budget at the start of this fiscal year was reduced to a \$66.5 billion. Not surprising, assembling the annual budget consumed our time in Tallahassee and became the focus of this legislative session.

However, some good initiatives did pass both chambers and are before Gov. Crist for his consideration. Sensible and bipartisan public school reforms were passed that will minimize the reliance on the FCAT as the sole factor in grading schools. We also took initial steps to provide health insurance to the 3.8 million Floridians who are uninsured today. Finally, more smart energy and climate change programs made it out of this legislative session so we can focus our attention on renewable energy sources rather than depending on oil and other nonrenewable energy.

This year I focused on good legislation and worked hard to make sure this session was one in which bipartisan solutions prevailed. My goal in my committees and in sponsoring these bills was to ensure that the only solution we have to vote for is "The Right Solution," the one that will solve our State's problems in the most fiscally responsible and just way.

I hope you enjoy this legislative update. If you have any questions, comments, or issues, please call our office at (321) 449-5111.

Warmest Regards,

Tony Sasso

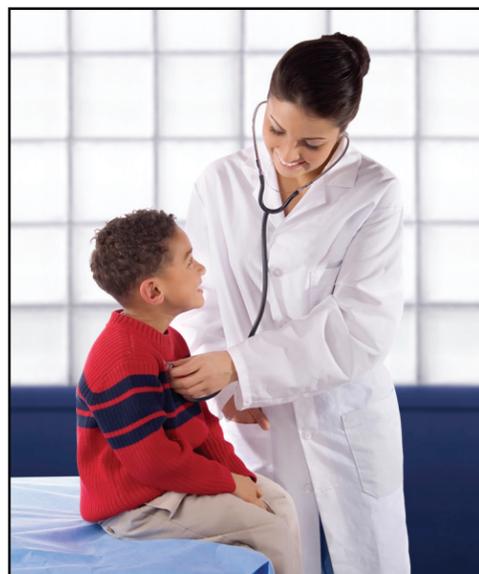
First Steps for Autism Spectrum Disorder Coverage

During the 2008 Legislative Session, the Florida Legislature made increasing access to coverage for children with autism a priority. The Speaker of the House created the Select Committee on Autism and Developmental Disorders to study and make legislative recommendation to the House's Healthcare Council, which resulted in the development of the House's Window of Opportunity Act.

The Window of Opportunity Act was a bi-partisan comprehensive approach to treating autism and other developmental disabilities for children in Florida, that included provisions for increasing health insurance coverage for these children, as well as providing increased access for lower-income families and providing new educational and therapy opportuni-

ties through Florida's Voluntary Universal Pre-Kindergarten and McKay Scholarship Programs. Members of the Florida House overwhelmingly supported the Window of Opportunity Act, but it did not pass in the Florida Senate.

The legislation agreed to by both chambers will require large-group insurers to offer \$36,000 worth of annual medical coverage for autism to children 18 and under, with a lifetime cap of \$200,000 worth of benefits. This only covers children with autism, and does not include mandatory coverage for children with other developmental disabilities. Although this legislation is a more limited approach than the original House proposal, it is a crucial first step in providing help to families in Florida dealing with this health crisis.



Join Tony at one of these events to get involved and share your opinions:

- June 2 (7 p.m.) - North Merritt Island Homeowners' Association Meeting
- June 3 (7 p.m.) - Cape Canaveral City Council Meeting
- June 5 (7 p.m.) - Cocoa Beach City Council Meeting
- June 12 (6 p.m.) - ACORN Foreclosure Prevention Class
- June 18 (6:30 p.m.) - Rockledge City Council Meeting
- June 24 (6:30 p.m.) - Titusville City Council Meeting

Inside:

Page 2:

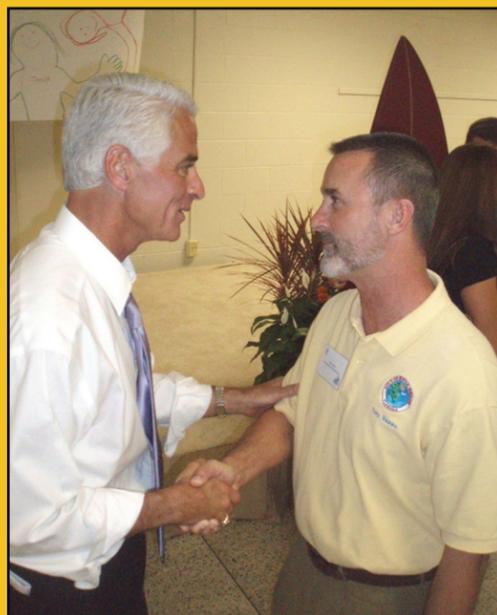
- A Better Budget Next Year?
- Working to Fix Florida's Homeowners' Insurance

Page 3:

- Strengthening Our Local Economy
- Protecting Our Oceans with the Clean Ocean Act
- Protecting Public Access to Our Beaches
- Enacting Tougher Penalties for Serving Alcohol to Minors

Page 4:

- First Steps for Autism Spectrum Disorder Coverage
- Public Meetings
- Contacting Tony Sasso



Representative Sasso with Governor Crist

The 2008 Budget

After spending nine weeks in Tallahassee for this year's Legislative Session, leaders in the House and Senate put together the spending plan for 2008-09. Florida's budget crisis dominated the 60 days as we tried to navigate what to do with a nearly \$6 Billion cut from last year. Unfortunately, the news is not good. Healthcare, education and public safety will see significant budget cuts. For instance, nursing homes took a \$163 Million cut, \$53 Million was reduced from the developmentally disabled, and each public school student in Florida will find their education cut by \$130 next year.

In practical terms, this means seniors will have to wait a little longer to get the care they need or to be turned in their beds, the developmentally disabled will lose critical services, and Florida's public schools will have to cut essential programs.

It is because of the spending priorities laid out in the budget and the major reductions made in healthcare, education and criminal justice that I voted against the budget this year. As a result of the budget that passed, our children in public schools will likely see critical programs eliminated, it will be harder for high school students to be admitted to colleges and universities as enrollments are cut and our seniors will have fewer services to meet their needs. I simply could not support a budget with so many unanswered questions and the potential for such a detrimental impact on so many of Florida's essential services. I hope that next year we can focus on restoring some of these cuts and expand funding in economic development and job growth to keep Florida's economy vibrant.



The Florida House Italian-American Caucus. Tony is third from the left.

Working to Fix Florida's Homeowners' Insurance

As a fellow District 32 homeowner, I understand the concerns and needs of the people of this area who struggle every day and every year, hoping against hope that a hurricane doesn't strike.

Last year the Legislature took positive steps to address a market that has witnessed unprecedented rate increases. The steps taken in Special Legislative Session last January were aimed at stabilizing the crisis so Floridians could catch their breath. The hope was that after the 2007 Special Legislative Session, long-term results would follow as the legislature continued seeking meaningful reforms to achieve a healthy insurance market. Unfortunately, only baby steps have been taken to achieve rate relief

and the reforms needed to have a stable insurance market.

This year, SB 2860 passed the legislature unanimously because of the good consumer protections in the bill. For example, the bill prohibits, for a year, the practice of insurance companies increasing rates prior to obtaining approval by the Office of Insurance Regulation (OIR). The bill also requires insurance companies to notify OIR 90 days before non-renewing more than 10,000 policies in one year. More importantly is the requirement that insurance companies cannot drop a customer without a 6-month notification. Finally, SB 2860 extends the Citizens' rate freeze until January 1, 2010. I intend to work with the legislature to remedy some of the problems in this bill by introducing even more consumer-friendly provisions that will protect all of us.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT Strengthening Our Local Economy

(HB 1055 & HB 1355)

As NASA transitions from the Shuttle program to the Constellation program, we must ensure there are continued opportunities for space workers and that our private-sector space industry expands to support our local economy. High-paying space exploration and research and development jobs will continue to be my top priority in the legislature to ensure the Space Coast remains on the cutting edge in Florida's future.

This year, I co-sponsored two incredibly important bills that pave the way for District 32 to remain a strong economic force in the State of Florida. These two bills enable our universities and community colleges to establish a Space Life Sciences Laboratory, which will focus on continuing space research, sustaining human space flight, providing commercial space transportation programs, and recruiting the best and brightest space researchers to Florida. This new institute will help our area attract more commercial space industry and create jobs for our citizens. In addition, we were able to secure an additional \$15 Million dollars in economic development funding to aid in the transition from the Shuttle program.



Protecting Our Oceans with the Clean Ocean Act

One of the biggest successes for the Space Coast delegation this year was the passage of HB 897, the Clean Ocean Act, legislation I have championed as a lawmaker and as a citizen activist. I was excited to work with Senator Mike Haridopolis and Representative Stan Mayfield to help pass this bill, which prevents gambling ships from dumping untreated sewage into the waters off our coast.. After years of hard work it feels great to pass legislation that protects our beaches and our environment from harmful pollutants and waste.



Representative Sasso after being sworn into the State Legislature

Working Hard in Tallahassee Legislation to protect and strengthen Florida

Arriving in Tallahassee after a Special Election in February, a week before Legislative Session, I had just ten days to file bills, with the condition that they had to be companion versions of bills already filed in the Senate. After looking over dozens of bills, I chose six bills that will benefit not only the residents of District 32, but all of Florida.

Some of these bills include tax breaks for fleet purchasers of hybrid vehicles (and require our state agencies, universities and some local governments to buy hybrid, flex-fuel and bio-diesel vehicles); protect voters' rights by mandating audits of voting machines during close elections; require that public beaches stay open to the public, so we can all enjoy them with our families; protect our kids from alcohol abuse by increasing penalties for adults who buy alcohol for children; and simplify the name of what is now known as "The Memory Disorder Clinic, Inc." in Brevard County. Finally, I submitted legislation designating "Space Mile Marker One" with an 18-inch-square marker near the Space Florida headquarters.

Protecting Public Access to Our Beaches

(HB 1523)

As Floridians, we all know and understand the importance of our beaches – to our tourism industry, our environment, and most importantly, to our quality of life. This year, I sponsored a bill that guarantees our beaches remain publicly accessible and prevents anyone from restricting access to the Atlantic Ocean, the Gulf of Mexico, or other bays and waterways. This bill still protects private property rights, but it sets out clear guidelines for what part of the beach is public and how our access to the water will be protected.

Enacting Tougher Penalties for Serving Alcohol to Minors

(HB 1527)

Each year, over 5,000 are people killed in this country as a result of underage drinking. It is a growing problem, in our area and across the state, often with tragic consequences for our young people and their families. Unfortunately, the penalty for serving, giving, or selling alcohol to minors is even less than the penalty for selling tobacco products to minors.

That's why I sponsored House Bill 1527, a bill that increases the penalty for serving, giving or selling alcohol to minors to match the penalties for similar tobacco offenses, including up to 60 days in jail and a \$500 fine. This bill raises the penalty for second and subsequent offenses of providing alcohol to a minor to up to 12 months in jail and a \$1,000 fine.



Rep. Sasso with Minority Leader Dan Gelber