



House District 32 Legislative Report

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**Join me for one of
5 Post-Session Town
Hall Meetings in May**

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Dear Neighbor:

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to serve as your State Representative. It is an honor to represent the people of this district. We recently concluded the 2016 Regular Session in Tallahassee. In my view, this was a smooth and successful session in which much was accomplished on behalf of all Floridians. The Legislature passed over 275 bills this session, and some of the most significant bills are highlighted on pages 2 and 3 of this report. During the regular session, I also worked diligently on my sponsored legislation. Several of my bills were passed by both chambers, while others were passed by the House but died in the Senate. Please see the back page of this report for a summary.

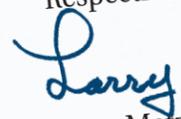
One of the most important things we must do each year is pass a balanced budget. This year's \$82.3 billion budget is fiscally responsible and prioritizes funding in the best interests of all Floridians. In addition, we maintained \$3 billion in reserves. In this budget, we continued to invest in our students' success by providing a historic level of education funding per student, exceeding the previous high in 2007-08. To help protect our precious natural resources, we included a reliable and dedicated funding source for restoring the Everglades that will exceed \$200 million this year. The bill also included \$5 million to continue restoration of Lake Apopka.

Several Lake County budget requests that I submitted and advocated for were funded, including \$2.8 million for construction of the Center for Advanced Manufacturing at Lake Technical College, \$450,000 for improvements to Citrus Grove Road, \$350,000 for a water project in Central Lake County, and \$500,000 for each of three water projects in South Lake County.

Additionally, I was pleased the Legislature passed over half-a-billion dollars in tax cuts this session. This year's tax cut package is aimed at helping grow Florida's economy. These tax cuts will benefit many Floridians, including homeowners, veterans, students and parents, and more. Some of the major components of the tax cut package include \$428 million in property tax relief for Florida's homeowners, a three-day Back-to-School sales tax holiday, and the elimination of sales tax on purchasing manufacturing equipment. I was proud to support these tax cuts because I firmly believe Floridians deserve to keep more of their hard-earned money.

I hope you find this legislative report to be a useful source of information. If you have any questions, or would like to discuss any issues, please call my office at 352-989-9134, or send me at email at Larry.Metz@myfloridahouse.gov. If we can be of any assistance to you, please let us know. Thank you again for entrusting me to represent you.

Respectfully,


Larry Metz
State Representative

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Representative Larry Metz
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Committees:
Justice Appropriations Subcommittee, Chair
Appropriations Committee
Choice & Innovation Subcommittee
Civil Justice Subcommittee
Joint Legislative Budget Commission
Judiciary Committee

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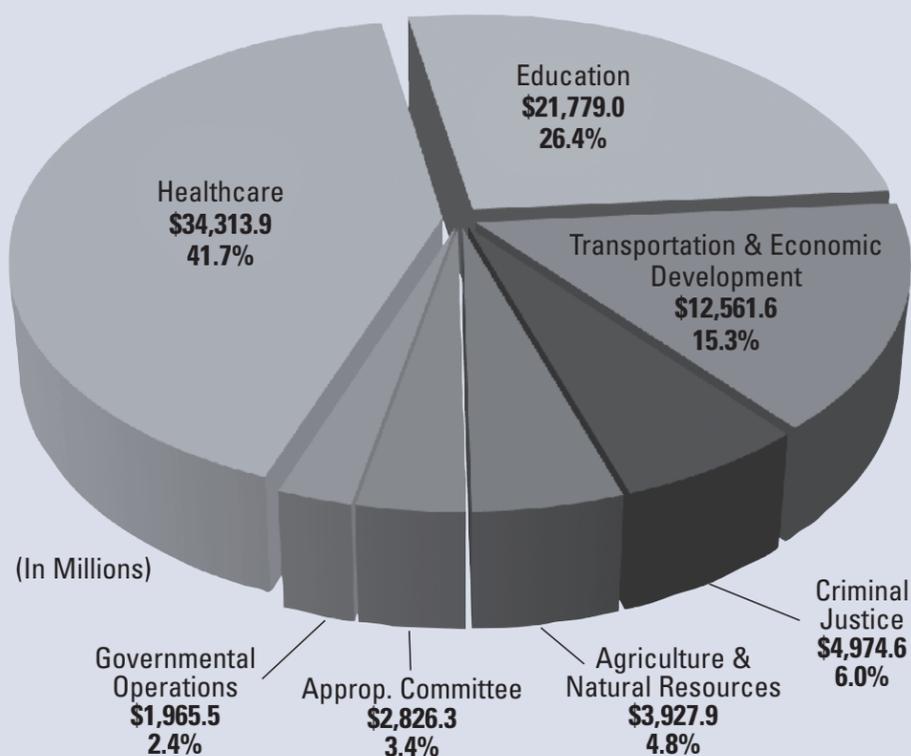
Legislature Provides Over Half-a-Billion Dollars in Tax Relief

I believe the best way to keep Florida's economy growing is to put more money back into the pockets of hard-working Floridians. This Session, the Florida Legislature passed over half-a-billion dollars in tax cuts. Over the last two years, we have brought a total of \$1 billion in tax relief to Florida families and businesses. By providing meaningful tax relief, I believe we are not only making Florida a more affordable state to live, but also a better place to open and expand a business. Some of the major tax cuts passed this year include:

- \$428 million in property tax relief for Florida homeowners – \$54 per homeowner.
- Permanently removing the sales tax on purchasing manufacturing equipment.
- Continuing the Back-to-School sales tax holiday for purchases of clothes \$60 or less and supplies \$15 or less from August 5-7.
- Removing the sales tax on food and drinks sold to fellow members at veterans organizations.

I am proud to support this great tax cut package and also provide property tax relief for homeowners. I believe cutting taxes will provide needed relief for Florida's families and help our small businesses continue to invest and grow, keeping our state a national leader in job creation.

Total 2016-17 State Budget = \$82.3 Billion



Legislature Passes Balanced Budget

This Session, the Legislature passed an \$82 billion balanced budget that I believe addresses Florida's critical needs while being fiscally responsible with taxpayer dollars. In my opinion, this budget maintains our commitment to fiscal discipline and relies on the same common-sense approach we use every year – we identified necessities, prioritized spending, and focused spending on the core missions of state government. In this budget, we continued to invest in our students' success by providing a historic level of education funding per-student – \$7,178.49 – exceeding the previous highest level in 2007-08. To help protect our precious natural resources, we also included a reliable and dedicated funding source for restoring and protecting the Everglades, Florida springs, and Lake Apopka, totaling over \$258 million this year. In addition, we provided over half-a-billion in tax cuts for hard-working Floridians and small businesses and placed \$3 billion in reserves for any future economic uncertainty.

We can be proud that our state government has one of the most fiscally responsible budgets in the country and, compared to other states, provides services to our citizens at a much lower cost. In my view, by cutting taxes and passing a fiscally responsible, balanced budget that invests in key priorities and promotes economic opportunity, we are keeping Florida on the path to prosperity.

Protecting Florida's Environment

Florida is blessed with tremendous environmental resources, which include over 51,000 miles of rivers and streams, 7,700 lakes, and over 900 springs. In addition, Florida is home to the Everglades, one of the most unique and precious environmental systems in the world. To preserve and protect our environment, the Legislature passed a comprehensive water policy bill and a dedicated funding source for Everglades' restoration and preservation.



- **Senate Bill 552**, which received strong bipartisan support in both the House and Senate, addresses Florida's water quality and supply challenges in a comprehensive, statewide manner. This bill modernizes our existing water policies to reflect the progress we have made in protecting our water resources and focuses our efforts on the challenges we continue to face through the use of scientifically sound, responsible solutions. In conjunction with smart investments included in the state budget, this bill seeks to establish sound policy that will protect the health of our waterways and develop greater access to clean water for Floridians. This important piece of legislation was signed into law by Governor Rick Scott.
- **House Bill 989** creates the Legacy Florida initiative, which will provide a dedicated funding source for Everglades' restoration, springs restoration, protection and management, and Lake Apopka restoration. This bill passed both the House and Senate with strong bipartisan support and was signed into law by Governor Scott.

In my view, one of our most important jobs is to protect Florida's natural resources. I believe these bills are an important step in protecting and preserving Florida's lakes, rivers, springs, and River of Grass for future generations.

Legislation to Crack Down on Public Assistance Fraud

I believe it is important to ensure that tax dollars spent on various public assistance programs are closely monitored for fraud, waste, and abuse. The Florida House passed several bills this Session that I believe will crack down on public assistance fraud and protect your hard-earned tax dollars, including:

- **House Bill 1017**, which would have given the Department of Economic Opportunity the tools they need to curb fraud in unemployment benefits claims and protect consumer identities. Although this bill did not pass the Senate, I believe the House stood with taxpayers to keep fraud out of our public assistance programs.
- **Senate Bill 218**, which prohibits an individual from possessing two or more electronic benefit access cards issued to other persons and selling or attempting to sell them. I believe this is a blatant misuse of public assistance, and I am pleased this bill passed both the House and Senate and was signed into law by Governor Scott.

In my opinion, by passing these bills, the House took important steps to ensure that bad actors who take advantage of these assistance programs are held accountable under the law while still protecting those who truly need assistance.

Bill Strengthening Florida's Public Corruption Laws Passed

This Session, the Legislature unanimously passed **House Bill 7071**, which I co-sponsored. I believe this bill strengthens Florida's public corruption laws by adding public contractors to the list of those in statute who can be prosecuted for falsifying or concealing official records. It also adds officers and employees of government-created public organizations, such as Citizens Insurance and Enterprise Florida, to the list of those who can be prosecuted for bribery and influence peddling. The bill also changes the level of intent for corruption offenses to "knowingly and intentionally," so such cases can be more effectively prosecuted.

With this new language, I believe prosecutors will be better able to punish bad actors who abuse the public trust. I also believe this bill is a great step towards strengthening Florida's ethics laws and holding government, and those who contract with the government, accountable to taxpayers.

Free Market Health Reforms Remain a Priority

Health care reforms passed by the Florida Legislature and signed into law by Governor Scott include:

- **House Bill 1175**, which will increase transparency in the cost of care and drive down prices through competition. The bill will ensure there is clear, factual information about the cost and quality of health care for patients. This is essential for consumers to select value-driven health care options, and for consumers and providers to be involved in and accountable for decisions about health care.
- **House Bill 423** expands the scope of practice for advanced registered nurse practitioners and physician assistants, which will give patients greater access to care and more efficient health care delivery.
- **House Bill 1061** enacts the Nurse Licensure Compact (NLC) in Florida, which grants a multi-state license to nurses, allowing them to practice nursing in other compact member states without having to obtain additional licenses. Participation in the NLC will help ease our significant nursing workforce shortage, which is greater in Florida due to our aging population and seasonal tourism needs.
- **House Bill 7087** requires the Agency for Health Care Administration, with assistance from the Department of Health and the Office of Insurance Regulation, to survey health care practitioners, facilities, and insurers on telehealth utilization and coverage.

Protecting Vulnerable Floridians

This Session, the Legislature continued its important work to ensure our most vulnerable citizens are protected.

- **House Bill 545**, which I co-sponsored, is another critical step in Florida's fight against human trafficking. In 2014, the Legislature passed laws to remove offenses that penalize minors for participating in prostitution, recognizing that these children are victims, not criminals. Despite these efforts, 39 minors were arrested for prostitution in the past year. This bill officially prohibits all persons under the age of 18 from being prosecuted for prostitution. Under this legislation, these minors would be eligible for assistance from the Department of Children and Families as sexually exploited children.
- **Senate Bill 1294**, which also passed in the Legislature, increases the eligible age for the court to enter a protective order to allow a child victim or witness to testify by videotape or closed circuit television from under 16 to under 18 years of age. This bill also applies Florida's Rape Shield law to victims of human trafficking and minor victims of lewd or lascivious offenses. This will prevent a victim's prior sexual conduct from being admitted in court.

Legislature Continues Tradition of Bold Education Reforms

This Session, the Legislature enacted numerous reforms at the K-12 level to expand educational choice options and protect taxpayer dollars. We revised controlled open enrollment to allow students to apply and transfer to public schools on a statewide basis beginning in 2017-2018, without affecting eligibility for extracurricular activities, and expanded Personal Learning Scholarship Accounts to help parents of students with disabilities provide a more customized education for their children. We created an incentive program for districts to adopt school uniform programs to increase focus and safety in school. We also created pilot programs that allow students to learn at their own pace and give principals more autonomy to fix failing schools. We took important steps to strengthen charter school accountability by increasing application requirements and financial oversight, clarifying funding processes, implementing automatic termination of low-performing charter schools, and establishing prioritization of charter capital outlay for schools that serve specific student populations. We also passed legislation to increase accountability for the costs of new K-12 construction and to establish penalties for recruiting student athletes and to bring more fairness and accountability to high school athletics.



Protecting Your Second Amendment Rights

I believe protecting our Second Amendment rights is a critical part of ensuring public safety. This Session, the Florida House passed several bills intended to strengthen the fundamental Second Amendment rights of Floridians, including legislation that would have allowed law-abiding citizens with a concealed carry permit to openly carry their firearm in a holster, case, or bag, and legislation that would have allowed those with a valid concealed firearms license to carry concealed firearms on college and university campuses. I believe that these measures would have helped deter criminal activity in our state and improve the safety of our college campuses. Unfortunately, these bills did not pass the Senate.

The Legislature passed **Senate Bill 130** to address the recreational discharge of firearms in dense residential areas. For safety reasons, I believe responsible gun owners should not participate in reckless target or celebratory shooting in densely populated neighborhoods. However, I believe a citizen's right to self-defense must always be protected, and this bill provides an important exception when lawfully defending life or property to ensure our right to self-defense is not abridged. This legislation has been signed into law by Governor Rick Scott.

By passing these important bills, I believe the Florida House has once again signaled we stand firmly beside Floridians exercising their Second Amendment right to defend themselves, their families, and their property from harm.

Protecting Religious Liberty

The protection of religious liberty is one of the most important rights enshrined in the United States Constitution. This Session, the Florida Legislature passed what I believe is a vital piece of legislation aimed at protecting our right to religious freedom. **House Bill 43**, which I co-sponsored, protects churches, clergy, and religious organizations from being required to participate in a marriage ceremony that violates their sincerely held religious beliefs. In my opinion, this bill does not create a new right for churches, religious organizations, and their employees. I believe it simply provides an extra layer of protection for religious organizations by codifying an existing right guaranteed by the United States Constitution, the Florida Constitution, and the Florida Religious Freedom Restoration Act (FRFRA) – the right to be free from the government compelling them to engage in conduct their religion forbids.

Making Florida the Most Veteran-Friendly State in America

The Florida House continued supporting the brave men and women who have served our nation by passing several bills that provide support for our veterans. We worked to increase educational opportunities, reduce fees, help veterans find a job, and make voting easier for our veterans. We aimed to make Florida more affordable for veterans by passing **Senate Bill 222**,



Senate Bill 1202, and **House Bill 799** to reduce fees for veterans on a variety of things, including higher education tuition, professional licensure applications, airport parking, and park entrances. We also passed **House Bill 7023** to expand eligibility for property tax exemptions for veterans who served overseas. We made voting easier for veterans by passing **Senate Bill 666**, which allows them to use a Veteran Health Identification Card as an acceptable ID card to vote. Finally, we passed **House Bill 1157** to expand options for veterans to earn college credit for their military training. Our veterans have made many sacrifices to protect our freedoms, and I believe these bills are another important step in showing our appreciation and making Florida the most veteran-friendly state in America.

Rep. Metz's Sponsored Legislation Highlights

HM 417 – Article V Convention for Congressional Term Limits

- This memorial is a formal application to the United States Congress under Article V of the U.S. Constitution to call a Convention of the States with the sole agenda of proposing an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that limits the number of terms that a person may be elected to the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate.
- Passed the House and Senate and will be sent to Congress.

CS/ HB 479 – Special Districts

- Revises certain statutes governing special districts, to build on the comprehensive special districts reform bill (CS/CS/CS/SB 1632), the House companion of which Rep. Metz sponsored in the 2014 session, which provided greater transparency, oversight, and accountability for the 1600+ special districts in the State of Florida.
- Passed the House and Senate unanimously and was signed by Governor Scott.

CS/CS HB 593 – Government Accountability

- Increases reporting requirements for lobbying firms before the executive and legislative branches and strengthens ethics standards for public servants. Defines fraud, waste, and abuse; creates a statutory duty on state agencies and certain local governmental entities to establish and maintain internal controls designed to prevent and detect fraud, waste, and abuse; and provides numerous other reforms designed to promote greater transparency, oversight, and accountability in state agencies and certain local governmental entities.
- Passed the House but died in the Senate.

CS/CS HB 675 - Federal Immigration Enforcement

- Prohibits state agencies and local governments from adopting sanctuary policies that thwart the enforcement of existing federal immigration law, requires cooperation by state and local government entities with federal immigration enforcement efforts,

and provides consequences for failure to comply.

- Passed the House but died in the Senate.

CS/CS HB 889 - Contraband Forfeiture

- Seizure of private property may only occur if the owner of the property is arrested for a crime that renders the property contraband, or one of the specified exceptions to the arrest requirement applies. Increases the standard of proof to probable cause for seizures, and beyond a reasonable doubt for forfeitures, and requires annual reporting requirements.
- The Senate companion bill, CS/CS SB 1044, passed the House and Senate unanimously and was signed by Governor Scott.

CS/ HJR 1009 – Tax Exemption for Totally & Permanently Disabled First Responders

- Proposes an amendment to the Florida Constitution to authorize a first responder, who is totally and permanently disabled as a result of an injury sustained in the line of duty, to receive relief from *ad valorem* taxes assessed on homestead property.
- Passed both the House and Senate unanimously and will be on the ballot this November.

HM 1225 – Preventing Voting by Non-Citizens

- Urges Congress to amend federal statutory law to empower states to require proof of U.S. citizenship when registering voters and to give states access to federal databases that would assist them in preventing voting by noncitizens.
- Passed all House committees but was not heard on the House floor.

HB 4047 - District Cost Differential

- Eliminates the District Cost Differential (DCD) from the state formula for K-12 education. Repealing the DCD would assist smaller rural counties, including Lake County, whose state funding is reduced by use of the DCD.
- Died in the Education Appropriations Subcommittee.

Rep. Metz's Co-Sponsored Legislation Highlights

CS/CS HB 179 - Evidence Collected in Sexual Offense Investigations

- Requires that sexual offense evidence kits or other DNA evidence be submitted to a statewide criminal analysis laboratory system and that FDLE adopt guidelines for collection, submission, and testing of DNA evidence.
- Senate Companion (CS/CS/ SB 636) passed the House and Senate and was signed into law by Governor Scott.

CS/HJR 197 - Term Limits for Appellate Courts

- Proposes an amendment to the Florida Constitution imposing term limits on future Supreme Court justices and District Courts of Appeal judges.
- Passed the House but died in the Senate.

HB 7005 - Environmental Resources

- In addition to modernizing Florida's statewide water policies, this bill codifies and strengthens the Central Florida Water Initiative to improve regional coordination of efforts to address water supply and quality.
- The Senate companion bill, CS/CS SB 552, passed the House and Senate and was signed into law by Governor Scott.

CS/HB 1219 - Veterans' Employment

- Revises the section of Florida law governing veterans' preference in appointment and retention to require agencies to include a veteran recruitment plan and to track data related to the current veterans' preference requirements.
- Passed the House and Senate and was signed by Governor Scott.

For more information on these bills and other legislation, visit www.MyFloridaHouse.gov/sections/bills/bills.aspx

State Rep. Larry Metz invites you to attend one of his POST-SESSION TOWN HALL MEETINGS

Tues., May 10, 2016 – 6:00 - 7:00 pm

Town of Howey-in-the-Hills Council Chambers
101 North Palm Avenue
Howey-in-the-Hills, FL 34737

Thurs., May 12, 2016 – 6:00 - 7:00 pm

Clermont Community Center
620 W. Montrose Street
Clermont, FL 34711

Tues., May 17, 2016 – 6:00 - 7:00 pm

Leesburg Community Center
109 East Dixie Avenue
Leesburg, FL 34748

Wed., May 18, 2016 – 5:30 - 6:30 pm

Cagan Crossing Library
16729 Cagan Oaks
Clermont, FL 34714

Tues., May 24, 2016 – 6:00 - 7:00 pm

Astatula Elementary School - Cafeteria
13925 Florida Avenue
Astatula, FL 34705