

A Very Long Journey

Basically the Legislature has been in Tallahassee since the beginning of January. In January they had a week of committee meetings and two weeks of a Special Session to cut the current budget. In February they had three weeks of committee meetings in preparation for the Regular Session. They worked through Regular Session during March and April. And on the last day of Session, the House and Senate each passed a concurrent resolution to extend the Session for one week to conclude the work on the budget and revenue bills. Good Grief...they have worked hard and it's time for them to go home and get their lives back!

I will highlight several issues for you. However, a higher priority is to thank all of you who wrote, emailed, and called your legislators this Session requesting support for our issues. How do I know you did all these things?!? Because I saw the stacks of letters...because legislative aides told me they'd just written 50 responses to you...because legislators and staff wanted more information about your communications. Good Job! Well Done! And, I thank you.

Sales Tax Exemption:

Since 1972 your lot rents have been exempt from sales tax. As the Legislature struggled with the growing revenue shortfall, there was interest in removing some sales tax exemptions. Representative Ellyn Bogdanoff, (R-Ft. Lauderdale), Chair of House Finance and Tax Council, held several public hearings to consider exemptions that other House members wanted to remove. Unfortunately, the sales tax exemption on mobile home lot rents (212.03 (7)(c), Florida Statutes) was considered at that time. Fortunately, after my plea on your behalf, many questions from Council members, and a strong letter from FMO President Charlie Gallagher, the issue seemed to go into hold. Chair Bogdanoff had indicated from the beginning that she opposed increasing taxes, especially on essentials such as housing. Moving to the Senate with this issue, Senator Thad Altman, Chair of Senate Finance and Tax, indicated his personal opposition to such a tax, however, he cautioned me that I should remain vigilant inasmuch as the Legislature was continuing to search for new revenue.

Legislative aides began calling me as you turned to the phones and email, again! **I am so pleased to report that the sales tax exemption on your lot rents remains in full force and effect!** Imagine if your rent is \$400/month...times sales tax (6%+any local option)...times 12 months...that would have been no less than \$ 288.00/year out of your pocket!!! Big Victory here!

Tie-Down Program:

A BIG thanks to Senator Mike Fasano, Senate President Pro-Tempore, (R-New Port Richey). Once again he saved the day. The House part of the budget that funds this program transferred the funds away. This program has been working for you since 1999 and now over 20,000 homes have been strengthened and secured by replaced and improved tie-down systems. This became "all hands on deck"! Senator Fasano not only held strong to the Senate position that he spearheaded to keep the program fully funded,

he also was persuasive with House members and therefore, the new budget maintains the existing level of funding for this very important program. Another Big Victory here!

Homeowners' Offer to Purchase:

Oh my goodness! Even though the FMO concept of Homeowners' Offer to Purchase was too controversial to have a committee hearing in either the House or Senate Committee, it did see the light of day and had a great run. During the final Senate Judiciary Committee meeting of the Session, Senator Mike Fasano amended our Homeowners' Offer to Purchase language (which he sponsored in SB 1032) onto another bill (SB 880)!

During the last week of Session, when this bill got to the Senate floor, all manner of debate and confusion ensued. At that point Senator Fasano and Senator Nancy Detert, (R-Sarasota), streamlined the concept in an attempt to reduce confusion and replaced the Homeowners' Offer to Purchase with a new definition of "offer" relating to Sale of Mobile Home Parks. The language read ... "the term "offer" means any solicited or unsolicited offer to buy the park". They were even successful in putting this language on a different bill (SB 682) and passing it out of the Senate!

Both Senator Fasano and Senator Detert went onto the House floor on the last night of the Regular Session to talk to House members about the language. When SB 682 was taken up, Representative Evan Jenne, House Democratic Whip, (D-Ft. Lauderdale), and the sponsor of the FMO Homeowners' Offer to Purchase bill (HB 609), made an impassioned speech about the merits of accepting this new language. The language ultimately died on a voice vote when a procedural point was raised since the language had not been heard in a House committee. High drama! And a Big Thanks to Senator Fasano, Senator Detert, and Representative Jenne for all their hard work on your behalf. Do Not Be Discouraged! This issue will not go away.

And now, it's time for the Legislature to go home...when they're gone, I will get a little rest!