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## Legislative roundup

### Florida lawmakers take action on jobs, debt collection, condo regulation

#### Florida legislators act on everything from economic development to condo-regulation reforms

Staff and wire reports

April 28, 2010

Florida lawmakers took action on a range of measures, aimed at everything from jobs and economic development to reforming condo regulations. Among the actions:

**Jobless benefits approved:** More than 107,000 unemployed Floridians could receive up to 20 weeks of additional unemployment benefits through a bill passed Wednesday by the House. The bill, which has passed in the Senate, now moves to the governor for signature before any benefits can be paid.

Florida residents whose state and federal emergency benefits expire on or by June 5 could qualify for the additional weeks of unemployment payments, according to the state work force agency. The legislation, which uses federal funds available to states with high unemployment, would be paid for the weeks ending March 6 through June 5.

Unemployed residents who received extended benefits from Jan. 2 through Feb. 27 and still have extended benefits available could receive the remaining weeks, up to 20 weeks total. Those who have exhausted all regular and federal emergency benefits or who will exhaust all benefits before June 5 could receive up to 14 weeks of benefits, depending on the date they exhaust emergency benefits, the agency said.

**Debt-collection bill advances:** A bill that would give the state more control over abusive debt collectors has been approved by the Florida Legislature and now heads to Gov. Charlie Crist for his signature.

The measure grants the state attorney general and the Office of Financial Regulation greater authority in punishing abusive debt collectors and bringing cases against them.

It received broad support from lawmakers and passed on a final vote of 114-0 on Wednesday.

**Economic-development bill clears House:** The Florida House has passed a wide-ranging economic development bill designed to stimulate the state's sagging economy. The bill (SB 1752) cuts a variety of taxes and offers myriad incentives for doing business in Florida. It was cleared by the House 117-0 Wednesday. It now goes back to the Senate to approve the tweaks made in the House.

The measure provides tax credits for companies hiring unemployed Floridians, creates tax incentives for filming movies and TV shows in the state, and provides around \$28 million to help workers affected by the retirement of the space shuttle program at Cape Canaveral.

The bill, which has been a priority for Republican legislators, is expected to cost about \$200 million over three years.

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**Condo relief measure heads to Crist:** The Florida House on Wednesday passed condominium relief legislation that requires lenders to pay more in past-due assessments on foreclosed properties. The bill, which passed the Senate earlier this month, now goes to Crist.

Currently, when a bank forecloses on a condo, the lender pays the association six months of overdue assessments or 1 percent of the original mortgage debt, whichever is less. This bill would require lenders to fork over 12 months of assessments or 1 percent of mortgage debt.

The bill also restricts common-area uses and suspends voting rights for condo owners who are 90 days delinquent. In addition, the bill would make it easier for condo associations to opt out of expensive fire sprinkler upgrades that must be completed by 2014.

With no line-item veto at his disposal, Crist rejected a similar bill last year. He sided with fire marshals and others, who cited the lack of sprinkler systems as a safety issue.

Staff writers Paul Owers and Marcia Heroux Pounds, the Orlando Sentinel and The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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