



## **FYIFAS Week 1- March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

The 60 Day count down has begun as legislative session of 2021 started Tuesday.

On Tuesday, the Florida legislature gaveled in the 2021 legislative session which promises to be like no other in the state's history. The COVID virus has affected much of our lives and this session is not immune.

Typically, during a regular session, the Capitol building experience includes crowded hallways, packed committee rooms, special events bringing members of organizations up to advocate for their issues, and legislators having back-to-back meetings with constituents and lobbyists.

This year, the hallways are empty and eerily quiet. The committee rooms are empty except for legislators and those who are making presentations. Public comment is piped in virtually from the Tucker Civic Center, roughly four blocks away.

Lawmakers and members of the media must have weekly coronavirus tests to enter the building, wear masks at all times, and after each session, state workers in gloves and masks use misters and other cleaning devices to disinfect every inch of the chambers.

While changes provided challenges, we have been able to pivot and still meet with policy makers throughout legislative committee weeks and introduce UF/IFAS Vice President Dr. Scott Angle to the legislature. This session is sure to be the heaviest lift we have seen, and higher education is a targeted focused for budget cuts, but we are off to the races.

With a budget deficit looming, legislative leadership has been preparing to make tough decisions when crafting the state budget. The next revenue estimates will soon be released and there is optimism that the economic picture will be much improved.

In August, the economic downturn put the upcoming budget into a negative \$5.4 billion. But the January estimates reduced the hole in the budget to \$3.3 billion and the latest number is \$2.75 billion. So, that's bad, but not AS bad.

Our Legislative Priorities for the 2021 Session include:

- Maintain full funding IFAS Recurring Appropriations in Higher Education budget and the Agriculture and Natural Resource budget
  - o Animal Ag Industry Science & Technology
  - o Cervidae Research
  - o Forestry Education
  - o Florida Shellfish Aquaculture
  - o Statewide Water Budget Data Analytics
  - o Invasive Exotic Quarantine Facility
  - o Lakewatch
- We have also submitted a request for Workload at \$3,670,594 to be added to our base budget
- Supporting UF's AI initiative

Also, we are closely watching many policy bills related to higher education, Right to Farm, water, foreign influence, workforce, and resiliency.

Stay tuned for our weekly updates. It's certainly going to be interesting.



## **Week 2- Two down, 7 more weeks to go!**

March 12, 2021

This week, legislators focused on policy initiatives in committees posturing them for a floor vote in the coming weeks.

A few of the policy initiatives considered this week will have revenue impacts for the state budget. Senate President and House Speaker said this week they plan to use revenues from the online sale tax legislation to help rebuild the unemployment trust fund. Senate President Wilton Simpson would also like to use the most recent Federal COVID19 Relief Package to fill holes in the unemployment, water project, and local road construction- noting Federal dollars cannot be used for recurring expenses.

Legislators on some appropriations subcommittees will spend the weekend working on their budgets.

We expect the subcommittee Chairs to present their proposed budgets to their respective committees in the next two weeks. The Senate and House budget bills are based on the combination of the subcommittee chairs' budgets for each funding silo. It is also the first chance to see where our budget items stand. We continue to communicate with members about IFAS priorities and will keep you posted.

Members of the Florida Cattlemen's Associations leadership traveled to Tallahassee to advocate for their issues. We would like to thank them for including support for IFAS funding in their legislative priorities. We would also like to thank Florida Farm Bureau for including support of IFAS priorities including funding and fertilizer rates research.

We will be highlighting UF/IFAS Research and Education Centers across the state all throughout Session on social media! If you don't yet follow us on Twitter and Facebook, be sure to tune in to see all the great research being conducted.

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/IFASGovAffairs?s=20>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/UFIFASGovernmentalAffairs>



### **FYIFAS Week 3- March 18, 2021**

Anxiety is ramping up as we wait for the first roll out of the budget numbers that should be released any day now. Meanwhile, there are a lot of policy issues moving through the process.

Tuesday, the Florida Senate Committee on Education continued discussions on Bright Futures, passing SB 86 out of committee. This legislation would rewrite rules for Bright Futures college scholarship programs limiting scholarships to degrees that lead to potential success in the job market. However, Governor DeSantis has some concerns over the overhaul of student aid programs.

Several other bills focused on higher education were considered in both the House and Senate committees. A number of those bills propose restrictions and regulations on collaboration between universities and China and other communist regimes.

This week, Governor DeSantis unveiled his plan to spend the funding expected from the latest federal stimulus package. Florida could receive up to \$10 billion in federal stimulus money, but it may take up to a year to receive the full amount. Therefore, the Governor's recommendations for the use of one-time federal stimulus funds include \$4.1 billion, of which \$1.4 billion would be used for the current fiscal year.

DeSantis is recommending the Legislature leave a portion of the funds aside to use for targeted appropriations based on the recovery of Florida's economy throughout the year. He outlined a total of \$410.2 million for assistance to Floridan's; \$508.2 million for promoting economic development recovery; \$2.938 billion for investing in infrastructure, resiliency, and readiness; and \$195 million for workforce training and research.

The state is still waiting on more guidance as to how the stimulus funds can be spent. Meanwhile, the governor's recommendation has kicked off the debate over the plan that will dominate much of the legislative session.

We also want to express our appreciation to the Florida Agricultural Council who met with legislators this week to advocate for IFAS funding and industry issues.



#### **FYIFAS Week 4- March 25, 2022**

The budget process has begun...

After a couple of anxiety ridden weeks, the Senate and House Appropriations Subcommittees have released the first version of their budget proposals.

Yesterday, the Senate released their subcommittee budgets and fortunately, UF/IFAS did not receive any reductions to existing programs. In addition, the Senate included funding for UF/IFAS workload within the higher education budget and funding for fertilizer rate research in the agriculture budget.

Today, the House released their respective subcommittee budget proposals. Some of the highlights include an 11% reduction to higher education, which is \$570 million budget. This included a 10% reduction to IFAS, which reduces our budget by \$15 million.

We were not surprised to see significant budget cuts as we expected the proposals to be based on the December revenue projections that predicted a \$2.7 billion deficit. These proposals give us guidance as to what we need to focus on in the coming weeks while the appropriations bills are crafted.

We will spend the next few weeks working with legislators to improve our position in the House and maintain the Senate position. The subcommittee proposals will be combined into a House bill and a Senate bill and we expect they will be heard in their respective committees as early as next week,

However, a reset is anticipated after state economists provide an updated general revenue forecast which is expected to improve over the current projected revenues.

Florida could receive up to \$10 billion in one-time federal stimulus money, but it may take up to a year to receive the full amount. The state is still waiting on more guidance from the federal government on how the funds can be used. Senate President Wilt Simpson has warned against using the one-time federal dollars on recurring expenses.

We want to express our appreciation to the Florida Agricultural Council who has been meeting with legislators to advocate for IFAS funding and industry issues. In addition, Florida 4-H launched their virtual "Day at the Capitol" event with a combination of virtual and face to face meetings. 4-H youth met virtually with legislators in their counties. In addition, state officers traveled to Tallahassee to meet with a few legislators to highlight 4-H programming and express support for increasing internet accessibility in rural areas proposed in a few bills.



**FYIFAS Week 5- April 1, 2021**

**They gave us too much money!!!! April Fools!**

But this is going to get interesting... just not easy...

Wednesday marked the halfway point of this legislative session. With just four weeks left, the House and Senate passed their budget proposals out of the Appropriations committees. Both proposals feature deep cuts to key areas, including higher education.

The Senate budget totaled nearly \$95 billion overall, while the House budget was almost \$97.1 billion. They have significant differences in the different spending categories- including how federal stimulus funds will be used. These major differences guarantee an intense debate over the coming weeks.

The Senate proposes nearly \$217 million reduction in spending for the state university system. The House proposes a \$593 million reduction to higher education, which is a 7% reduction from the current year.

Good news - according to the latest numbers released this week, Florida's general revenues are than the previous forecast by \$298.5 million. The current House and Senate budget proposals are based on a \$2.75 budget deficit. This suggests the final budget will look a lot different than the current spending plans.

We know the budget numbers are going to change. We just hope they change in our favor. Overall, House and Senate need to improve for IFAS's educational mission, although the Senate is good for both research and extension. The cuts to the classroom in both budgets are substantial.

The Appropriations bills are scheduled to be heard next week on the chamber floors. This is when legislators ask further questions on the floor of the appropriations sub-committee chairs, followed by lengthy debate of the budgets.

Once the proposed budget bills are passed, legislative leadership begin the process of appointing a conference committee to work through differences in the two budgets. It's almost like starting over...again.

Next Thursday, April 8, is #GatorDay! While it normally happens at the Capitol, it will be primarily media this year. With the Gator Nation, join us as we raise our collective voice about UF and IFAS's impact in Florida, nationally, and globally with #GatorDay. Be sure to follow and join it all at the accounts listed below. Don't forget to wear your Orange and Blue!

Twitter- @IFASgovaffairs @UF\_IFAS @gatoradvocates @uf

Facebook: [IFAS Governmental Affairs](#), [UF/IFAS](#) [GatorAdvocates](#), [University of Florida UF](#)



## **FYIFAS Week 6 - April 9**

*Let the negotiations begin...*

The Senate and House passed competing budgets today and have set the stage for a challenging budget negotiation process.

Neither of the two budget proposals have changed for higher education since the first numbers were released and they are very different from each other. The Senate proposes nearly \$217 million reduction in spending for the state university system. The House proposes a \$593 million reduction to higher education.

However, this week the revenue estimating conference released a forecast that is \$2 billion higher than a December forecast. The higher forecast can be attributed to sale tax collections for \$1.5 Billion more for this year and \$500.8 million the next. In December, the shortfall for the next two years was predicted to be \$3.3 billion.

The House appropriations chair said there is a lot of things that have the potential to change with the new forecast, but the increases are non-recurring revenue, and the state should not spend more than it takes in.

Now that the budgets have passed both chambers, legislators are preparing for the budget conference process. Just as they did before, building their respective budget proposals, now the House and Senate have to agree on how much money to allocate to each section or silo of the budget such as education, transportation, health care, etc.

Negotiations over the allocations could drag out over the next two weeks or be out as early as next week. Shortly before or after allocations are determined, the conference committee will be appointed, and our super bowl begins. Competition is tough this year, but we got our new helmets on.

Gator Day was celebrated in the capitol today. While it looked very different than we are used to, many stories and UF's impact was shared widely on social platforms. In the capitol the Gator Caucus shared their gator pride wearing orange and blue sporting their Gator masks on the House and Senate floors. #GatorDay was even trending nationally on Twitter. It was great to see the Gator Nation share their Gator Pride. If you haven't yet- it's not too late. We encourage you to engage with us on our accounts below.

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## FYIFAS Week 7- April 16, 2021

Conference is coming...

The House and the Senate stayed busy this week focusing on policy while we are in a waiting pattern on the budget. Session is scheduled to end in just two weeks so members are working to get their bills heard.

This week was dominated by really loooong committee meetings and sessions, some lasting all day. A lot of bills were heard in between extensive, and sometimes very intense debate on some of the more controversial bills.

Currently, leaders are negotiating "allocations," or the amount of money the final budget will include for specific policy silos, such as education, health care, infrastructure, child welfare, etc.

Florida Senate budget chief Kelli Stargel on Thursday said after appropriations committee meeting, "I think things are going well. I think you will be hearing some information on that pretty shortly."

We're keeping our cell phones close as the new budget allocations could be announced at any time. Once allocations are announced, the presiding officers will appoint the conference committee members, and conference begins.

Last night, both House Speaker Chris Sprowls and Senate President Wilton Simpson told members to stay in town this weekend, as budget conferences could take place as early as this weekend.

The budget process is never a smooth ride, but this year has been a rollercoaster – kind of like Space Mountain. When session started lawmakers faced \$2.7 billion gap. But federal funds for pandemic relief brought an influx of cash (\$10 Billion of one-time money) to the state. Then last week, state revenue estimates came in \$2 billion higher than previous forecasts.

Lawmakers will begin to close the gaps of the two budgets, cautiously filling the deep cuts made through conference. But we've got the safety bar down, we're strapped in tight and we're ready!





## **FYIFAS Week 8-April 22, 2021**

Days are getting long but tempers are getting short....

Last week, general agreement between the House and Senate was reached on the modified spending levels for the different areas funded by the state budget. This set the stage for the next level of negotiations which officially began on Friday. Budget conferees worked through the weekend and are expected to finish up on... well, umm nobody really knows.

Fortunately, allocations for higher education significantly increased from the original proposals. The Senate met the House's proposed reductions related to distance learning, Bright Futures Scholarships, and a few other issues. They also held their position to fund Workload at the requested \$3.6M. Unfortunately, the House did not match the Senate, maintaining their position for Workload at \$0. But the issue is still in play.

Good news! - Monday, the House offered a proposal that maintains the 5 IFAS recurring base funding programs and removed the originally proposed \$15M budget reduction.

The higher education budget promises to be a lengthy and complicated negotiation over the roughly \$223 million in cuts to state universities in the latest public documents and how to allocate one-time federal funds provided to deal with impacts of COVID. With no resolution, the conference committee agreed to bump the entire higher education budget to the Appropriations Chairs to work out.

Saturday afternoon was our first chance to see the details of the agriculture budget. The initial offer from the Senate did not affect our programs funded in the agriculture budget. They also maintained their proposal of \$2.2 M for the fertilizer rate study. The House released their proposal on Sunday, that included a lesser amount of \$1.6 M for the study and agreed to maintain our recurring programs. The Senate later accepted that offer.

The two Chambers' spending plans include vast differences on other budget items with large price tags. So, there is still a lot of work to be done.

The clock is ticking as there is little more than a week left in the legislative session, which is scheduled to end on April 30. In order for legislative session to end on time, negotiations must be completed, and the budget bill must "hit the desk" by Tuesday to allow for the legally required 72 hours for members to review the bill before a final vote. Eight more days to go and yes, we are counting.





## **FYIFAS Week 9- BUDGET UPDATE April 28, 2022**

It's on the desk as of 12:06 pm yesterday... not that we have been laser focused or anything  
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Monday night, the Budget Conference Chairs held their last meeting ironing out the budget details and accepted compromises on spending for education and other large ticket items.

The version of the bill that will be voted on has little resemblance to the original. The state budget totals \$101.5 billion, which includes \$6.7 billion of federal coronavirus recovery funds.

The Higher Education budget totals \$5.3 billion, which is an increase of 2.8% over the recurring base budget. This also significantly exceeds the original Senate and House Conference offers which proposed reducing the SUS budget by 3.7% and 1.2% respectively.

The good news for IFAS continues as the budget includes full Workload funding (\$4M) and nearly \$1.7 M for a Fertilizer Rate Study and full funding for our recurring base programs in the education and agriculture budgets.

Some other UF highlights include, \$20 million for operational support for the university's AI initiative, \$16.5M in construction funding for an important expansion project at the Whitney Laboratory for Marine Bioscience and \$4M for the Lastinger Center.

Even better with a cherry on top, the House and Senate agreed to release the 6% of the universities operating budget "hold back". This means that we will receive the full amounts originally appropriated during the current fiscal year. A portion of those funds were withheld in case the loss of revenues due to COVID 19 caused a shortfall in the current budget.

The bill also includes \$350 million for deferred maintenance for state agencies, colleges, and universities to address needed repairs and renovations to existing facilities.

The required 72-hour cooling-off period has started during which the Legislature reviews the 400 plus page document before they can vote on it and Sine Die or adjourn by this Friday. Dare we say it, they will end on time. The next step is the Governor's desk for signature and vetoes.

There is no way to thank all of you who supported us this year. It has taken several years to reach this goal and we could not have made it without you. I will not begin to name names as there are too many and I would risk leaving someone out but you know who you are...a thousand thank yous!



**FYIFAS Week 9, April 30<sup>th</sup>**  
*Sine Die.... It's happening!*

So really, what is Sine Die? It means final adjournment and for us that means the end of the 2021 legislative session.

This session will be described in the history books as unique. The empty hallways in the Capitol, the COVID protocols requiring masks, regular COVID tests, and citizens and lobbyists commenting on bills virtually from a building blocks away from the Capitol.

Based on revenue estimates from this summer, legislators began preparing for a \$4 billion budget deficit. By early April, increased revenues enabled the legislature to pass a state budget that was slightly larger than last year. Best news ever – IFAS did extremely well!

On behalf of Dr. Scott Angle, Vice President of UF/IFAS, we cannot express how much we appreciate your support and advocacy. Grassroots works!

This year, 3,140 bills were filed, and over 250 bills passed. The Governor has already signed 7 of these bills into law. But there is still some business to be done. The Governor will now begin to review policy and budget for potential veto or approval. In addition, the legislature will reconvene for a special session in mid-May to ratify a compact just signed by the Governor and the Seminole Tribe of Florida governing gaming. They'll also consider three bills that deal with other gaming laws. The agreement will generate the state a minimum of \$2.5 billion in new revenue over the next five years and an estimated \$6 billion through 2030.

**Interesting facts about Florida's legislative session:**

In Florida, 160 state legislators are called to set state policy on a wide array of issues, making decisions every day that affect their constituents' lives. In addition, the governor, three cabinet members, 14 cabinet functions and entities, 19 state agencies, seven water management districts, the Supreme Court, five district courts of appeal, 20 circuit courts and 67 county courts, 67 county governments and school districts, and 412 municipalities make up Florida's Electorate. Combine that with 1,800 registered lobbyists and in a normal year typically 5,000 capitol visitors, and this is where policy is made.

**Fun but not necessarily accurate facts:**

- Average weight gained by legislators, staff, and lobbyists during a legislative session is 7.3 lbs.
- Local liquor sales increase by 37% - it would have been higher if Tallahassee wasn't a college town.
- The amount of French fries and chocolate consumed increased by 16%.
- Number of subscribers to FYIFAS is 967 and we are hoping there are a few people out there who actually read it.

## Ceremonial close of session

Each year at the close of Florida's 60-day legislative session, the sergeants of each chamber go the Rotunda (between the House and Senate chambers) to drop a handkerchief signaling the end of the session. It doesn't always work out. There have been times when one chamber has left early, sometimes in a huff, which makes a mess of the hanky drop.

The ceremony was started for practical reasons. In the historic capitol, the House and Senate chambers did not face each other. Therefore, the Senate President and House Speaker had no other way to signal the end of the session. Then of course, with the advent of phones the whole ceremony became symbolic.

Sometimes it looks like waving a white flag for surrender because at the end of the 60-day session, legislators just want to go home.

Today, it was a welcome ceremony!



*Sine Die April 30, 2021, Photo by Colin Hackey*

Mary Ann Hooks  
Director of Governmental Affairs  
UF/IFAS

Victoria Price  
Assistant Director of Governmental Affairs  
UF/IFAS