

SENATE COMMITTEES COULD GEAR UP IN OCTOBER

After a relatively light schedule this week, the Florida Senate could hold committee meetings over four days when it returns to the Capitol in early October. The Senate and House this week held their initial round of committee meetings to prepare for the 2016 legislative session, which starts in January. They will return the week of Oct. 5 for another round. Many committees in both chambers did not meet this week, but a Senate schedule indicates the upcoming committee week could be busier. The schedule sets aside time for committees to start meeting late in the afternoon of Monday, Oct. 5, and continue into the afternoon of Thursday, Oct. 8. House committees likely will start the morning of Oct. 6 and continue into the morning of Oct. 8, according to a House schedule.

MILITARY MEMBERS GET FAST-TRACKED WEAPONS LICENSES

The state has fast-tracked 7,549 concealed-weapons licenses for active-duty members of the military and honorably discharged veterans since Agriculture Commissioner Adam Putnam announced July 27 that those people would be moved to the front of the line when seeking licenses. "If we get a complete application and a clean background, we're turning it over roughly in six days," Grea Bevis, director of the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Division of Licensing, told members of the House Military and Veteran Affairs Subcommittee this week. Another 900 applications are pending, Bevis said. The goal when the fast-track program started was to get the licenses application completed within 30 days, Bevis added. "So we've made great strides to meet that mark," he said. The fast-tracking was part of Florida's reaction to a shooting rampage at a military-recruiting center and a Navy Reserve facility in Chattanooga, Tenn., that left four Marines and a sailor dead in July. Gov. Rick Scott called for the state to expedite processing of new concealed-weapons licenses for members of the National Guard. Putnam expanded that to all active-duty military members and honorably discharged veterans.

The Vulnerable Road User Bills have been filed. We have the same sponsors as last year, but this time the original bills are stronger than last year.

The Senate version is SB 332 by Sen. Altman and the House version is HB 253 by Rep. Passidomo. Last year both bills passed all their committees and successfully passed both chambers. However, when the House decided to quit early due to a budget battle with the Senate, the bills died.

Taking what we learned from last year and teaming up with families that have lost loved ones, we will come out strong in support of these bills. We have worked hard to find families that are willing to share their story with the legislators and when combined with the hard work of all of you, we should really be able to make an impact.

At the State meeting in October I will be sharing some of the stories the families have shared with me. We also have a few other ideas to help get these bills through to the Governor. But as always it will take your help, I hope that you are ready to dig in for another legislative session because it is time to unleash the legislative warriors.

Whether you are Pro-firearms or Anti-firearms this coming session will be one to watch. There are

several firearms related Bills already filed and making their way thru the committees. Here is the latest on some of them.

SUPREME COURT TO WEIGH OPEN CARRYING OF GUNS

The Florida Supreme Court on Tuesday agreed to take up a case challenging a state law that bars people from openly carrying firearms. Justices issued a brief order accepting the case, which stems from the 2012 arrest in Fort Pierce of Dale Norman, who was openly carrying a gun in a holster. A jury found Norman guilty of a second-degree misdemeanor, leading to the constitutional challenge. The 4th District Court of Appeal in February upheld a state law that prevents people from openly carrying firearms, ruling that the restriction does not violate constitutional rights to bear arms. The Supreme Court decision Tuesday to accept the case came on the same day that a state House subcommittee approved a bill (HB 163) that would allow people with concealed-weapons licenses to openly carry firearms.

SURVEY: FLORIDIANS OPPOSE GUNS ON CAMPUS

In the months before gunfire erupted at an Oregon community college in a mass shooting that killed nine people and the gunman, Floridians were deeply skeptical of proposals that would allow students to carry concealed weapons on campus, according to a survey released this week by the University of South Florida. The USF-Nielsen Sunshine State Survey, taken over the summer, also shows that a majority of Florida adults favor legalizing medical marijuana, though perhaps not in strong enough numbers to adopt an amendment to the state Constitution to allow pharmacological pot. Almost three-quarters of Floridians --- 73 percent --- oppose allowing students with concealed-weapons permits to carry guns on campus, according to the survey. The poll was based on 1,251 interviews conducted from July 30 to Aug. 16 and has a margin of error of 2.77 percentage points. The results were weighted to account for characteristics like race and gender.

OPEN-CARRY GUN BILL BANGS INTO BUSINESS CONCERNS

Floridians permitted to carry concealed handguns would be able to display firearms on the outside of their clothes, under a measure that cleared its first House committee Tuesday. However, several lawmakers in both parties and an influential business group expressed concerns about the potential impact of the proposal on private property rights. The House Criminal Justice Subcommittee voted 8-4 to support the measure (HB 163), filed by Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fort Walton Beach, for the 2016 legislative session. It would allow people with concealed-weapons licenses to openly carry firearms, something the state has banned since establishing conceal-carry rules in 1987. Gaetz described his proposal, one of a number of firearm-related bills before the Legislature, as allowing citizens to be "armed with their own liberty." The Northwest Florida lawmaker pointed to certain crime rates that are lower in other states that allow some form of open-carry. But he wouldn't go so far as to say his measure --- his father, Sen. Don Gaetz, R-Niceville, is sponsoring the Senate version (SB 300) --- will make Florida safer. "I can say that the statements from some of the shrillest voices that oppose the Second Amendment that this will lead to the wild, wild west are unfounded based on any review of the crime data and statistics maintained by the (U.S.) Department of Justice," Matt Gaetz said. Still, the

measure, backed by gun-rights groups, may need to be changed or face opposition in future committees.

BACKYARD GUN RANGE BILL GETS GO-AHEAD

Trying to address issues such as backyard gun ranges, a Senate panel Tuesday approved a bill (SB 130) that would put restrictions on people who recreationally fire weapons in residential areas. The Senate Community Affairs Committee unanimously approved the measure, which Sen. Garrett Richter, R-Naples, filed for the 2016 legislative session. A staff analysis pointed to reports about people constructing gun ranges in their backyards, with neighbors being concerned for safety. The bill would prevent people from recreationally firing guns in areas with residential densities of one or more dwelling unit per acre. It would include some exemptions, including an exemption added Tuesday to make clear people would not be prosecuted for accidentally firing weapons. The bill also was unanimously approved last month by the Senate Criminal Justice Committee. A similar House bill (HB 41), sponsored by Rep. Neal Combee, R-Polk City, and Rep. Darryl Rouson, D-St. Petersburg, is scheduled to go before the House Local and Federal Affairs Committee on Wednesday.

HB 253 Criminal Justice Subcommittee

Hey Everyone,

HB 253 begins its committee process with the House Criminal Justice Subcommittee. I will let you know as soon as they put HB 253 on the agenda, but we can start calling and emailing the subcommittee members now to ask for their support of HB 253.

More importantly, we need to contact the Chairman of the House Criminal Justice Subcommittee and ask for his support and ask him to place HB 253 on the agenda for the House Criminal Justice Subcommittee at his earliest opportunity.

Rep. Carlos Trujillo (Chairman) 850-717-
5105 carlos.trujillo@myfloridahouse.com

Rep. Charles Van Zant (Vice Chair) 850-717-
5019 charles.vanzant@myfloridahouse.com

Rep. Randolph Bracy 850-717-
5045 randolph.bracy@myfloridahouse.com

Rep. Dennis Baxley 850-717-
5023 dennis.baxley@myfloridahouse.com

Rep. Jay Fant 850-717-
5015 jay.fant@myfloridahouse.com

Rep. Gayle Harrell 850-717-

This is the first Senate committee that the Vulnerable Road Users (VRU) Bill will have to pass. Last year the VRU passed this committee with some changes being made to the Bill and with quite a bit of discussion back and forth about the need for the VRU Bill. We do have a HUGE supporter of motorcyclists and the VRU Bill, Senator Greg Evers has in the past sponsored the VRU and he fights very hard with us to pass this Bill. If you can please call his office and thank him for his current and past support he has given us.

Please call all the Senators on this committee to voice your support for SB 332 when it comes before the Transportation Committee. Below is an example of what you can say:

“Hello, my name is _____, I am calling to ask for Senator _____ support of SB 332 when it comes before his/her Transportation Committee. *** Here you can give a brief version of the loss of your loved one and what the vehicle driver was only charged with. Let them know how this has impacted your life*** Thank you for time and please vote in support of SB 332.”

When you call their office, 99.9% of the time you will get their legislative aide. We LOVE the legislative aides, they control the information given to the Senator and can REALLY help us. I know that they will be moved by your story and will want to help you. The aide will usually ask your name, where you live, and a contact number. Sometimes they will have some follow up questions.

You can ask to speak to the Senator, but don't count on that to happen. If you make a good connection with the aide they will personally pass your request to the Senator. Just remember that they get hundreds of calls each day during session, so the sooner you can call them the better chance you have to get in touch personally with them.

Here are the members of the Senate Transportation Committee:

Sen. Jeff Brandes (Chairman)	850-487-
5022 brandes.jeff@flsenate.gov	
Sen. Dwight Bullard (Vice Chair)	850-487-
5039 bullard.dwight@flsenate.gov	
Sen. Oscar Braynon	850-487-
5036 braynon.oscar@flsenate.gov	
Sen. Greg Evers	850-487-

5002 evers.greg@flsenate.gov
Sen. Denise Grimsley 850-487-
5021 grimsley.denise@flsenate.gov
Sen. Wilton Simpson 850-487-
5018 simpson.denise@flsenate.gov
Sen. Geraldine “Geri” Thompson 850-487-
5012 thompson.geraldine@flsenate.gov

This is the first committee for SB 332, so I encourage you to call and email the members right away.

Thank you for your help!