

Editorial: Kudos & Kicks for the 2018 Florida legislative session

Editorial Board, Naples Daily News Published 4:08 p.m. ET March 17, 2018 | Updated 4:22 p.m. ET March 17, 2018



(Photo: Andy Dean, Getty Images/iStockphoto)

The 2018 legislative session concluded a week ago. Here are some Kudos & Kicks for Florida lawmakers:

Kudos

» Lawmakers extended the session by two days as they focused on the well-reasoned approach of Gov. Rick Scott to address school violence through revised gun laws, campus safety and mental health initiatives, then adopted a budget. Following the Feb. 14 slaying of 17 students and faculty at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in South Florida, a legislative response was imperative. Kudos to Scott for leadership on this issue.

» In that legislation, lawmakers didn't enable teachers statewide to carry guns. In a news release explaining why he signed the bill, Scott emphasized "participation in this program is 100 percent voluntary and optional and does not allow classroom teachers to carry firearms." Instead, participation "must be agreed upon by the locally elected school board members and the local sheriff's office."

» The environment gained through \$100 million restored to Florida Forever land purchasing, \$50 million to expedite repairs to the Lake Okeechobee dike and appropriating money to continue creating an Everglades-protecting additional water storage area south of the lake.

» The state's escalating opioid crisis was addressed with a bill limiting prescriptions to three days for acute pain while allowing additional supply for more severely ill or terminal patients. Another \$53 million goes to treatment and prevention. More than 15 die in Florida daily from opioids, state figures show.

» Responding to Scott's executive order following Hurricane Irma and deaths in an east coast nursing home that had its air conditioning knocked out, nursing homes will be required to have backup power sources for several days. We suggest local emergency management offices that review nursing home response plans can help monitor compliance.

» Raises were OK'd for state law officers and firefighters, plus corrections and juvenile justice workers.

Kicks

» The Legislature went from an \$83 billion state budget this fiscal year to \$88.7 billion for 2018-19. Is it coincidence that it's an election year for House districts, half the Florida Senate, a new governor and

state Cabinet members? Despite that huge increase, other than those employees noted above there was no pay raise for other state workers.

» Legislators created new school safety measures, but some local leaders say the Legislature didn't fully pay for them. The Florida Sheriff's Association estimates it will cost \$360 million to comply with requirements for an enhanced law enforcement presence in schools, but the budget provides just \$162 million.

» Per student spending for K-12 rose to \$7,408, which is a \$101 increase, according to news reports. Factoring out the \$400 million in initiatives for safer schools, Florida district leaders say, this averages out to 47 cents more in the base student allocation. So the overall state budget goes up more than \$5 billion and districts get 47 cents more per student for teaching?

» *In a state trying to recover from Irma's widespread property damage and counter soaring real estate prices in counties like Collier, lawmakers massively raided the state's affordable housing trust funds while stockpiling a much bigger budget. Some \$322 million for affordable housing trust funds, collected through documentary stamp taxes on real estate transactions, was expected under a state formula. A Florida Housing Coalition report says the approved budget diverted \$182 million from affordable housing programs to other spending. Senate Bill 874 by state Sen. Kathleen Passidomo, R-Naples, to stop the trust fund raids didn't pass.*

» Lawmakers again didn't approve a bill to allow law officers to ticket drivers solely for texting behind the wheel.