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Sixty Days for 3.25.21 — A prime-time look at the 2021 Legislative Session

By Staff Reports | March 25, 2021

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Sixty Days — A prime-time look at the 2021 Legislative Session:

The Last 24

The Senate voted 39-1 for a bill ([SB 100](#)) repealing a massive toll road expansion that former Senate President **Bill Galvano** shepherded across the finish line [just two years ago](#). Bill sponsor Sen. **Gayle Harrell** said the plan, known as M-CORES, was a bold and forward-looking initiative but that lawmakers needed to reevaluate their policy goals. M-CORES would have created highways connecting Polk County to Collier County, extended Florida's Turnpike to the Suncoast Parkway and connected the Parkway north to the Georgia state line. If Harrell's bill clears the House and gets signed into law, it would shift the focus of the Department of Transportation to improving existing roadways to address congestion on Interstate 75. **Here's your nightly rundown.**

Shots, shots, shots. Floridians 40-and-up will be able to get COVID-19 vaccines on Monday and eligibility [will open to all adults](#) a week later.

Shields up. A Senate bill ([SB 72](#)) that would for businesses and health care providers from COVID-19 lawsuits [rolled to third reading](#) in the House.

Sadowski sweep. Lawmakers unveiled a bill ([PCB ANR 21-01](#)) detailing [legislative leaders' plans](#) to split affordable housing dollars into housing, combating rising sea levels and wastewater grants.

E-fairness. Senators voted 30-10 for a bill ([SB 50](#)) that would refill the unemployment trust fund by requiring retailers to [collect sales tax](#) on online purchases.

Property insurance. A major revamp ([SB 76](#)) of Florida's property insurance laws aimed at slowing skyrocketing premium increases is [headed to the Senate floor](#).

Code snitch. A bill ([SB 60](#)) to curtail nuisance code complaints by requiring people to say who they are when they say what is wrong [cleared the full Senate](#) with a 27-11 vote.

Adios, CRC? The Senate [voted to abolish](#) the controversial Constitution Revision Commission. If the House concurs, voters would decide the panel's fate in 2022.

Snip snip. The House's proposed [infrastructure and tourism budget](#) would trim a few percentage points off some state agency budgets and make significant cuts to affordable housing programs.

SALE: 7% OFF! The Senate Finance and Tax Committee is on board with a plan ([SB 302](#)) to make Small Business Saturday [a sales-tax holiday](#) for those patronizing small businesses.

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God & guns. The House is ready to vote on a bill ([HB 259](#)) that would allow gun owners to [pack heat in church](#), even if there's a school on site.

Suppression tactics. Agriculture Commissioner **Nikki Fried**, a coalition of Black pastors and voting groups [lambasted](#) proposed changes to election rules, calling them racist voter suppression attempts.

Coronavirus numbers

Positive cases:

- 1,989,922 FL residents (+5,648 since Wednesday)
- 37,507 Non-FL residents (+125 since Wednesday)

Origin:

- 15,806 Travel related
- 781,401 Contact with a confirmed case
- 21,561 Both
- 1,171,154 Under investigation

Hospitalizations:

- 84,203 in FL

Deaths:

- 33,589 in FL

Vaccinations:

- 8,071,096 Doses administered
- 5,346,471 Total people vaccinated
- 2,427,208 First dose
- 194,638 Completed one-dose series (+7,802 since Wednesday)
- 2,724,625 Completed two-dose series (+57,794 since Wednesday)

Quote of the Day

“We’re not sweeping. We’re redirecting for critical issues.” — Rep. **Josie Tomkow**, on the House plan to use affordable housing dollars for sea-level rise and wastewater grants.

3 Questions

A U.S. Supreme Court ruling in 2018 opened up sports wagering to states. In the two years since, 26 states have passed legislation to take advantage of tax revenues from the bets. Though talked about in Florida, no sports wagering bills have been successful, due in part to complications brought on by the Seminole Compact and a 2018 constitutional amendment that requires voter approval for any future gambling expansion. Most sports wagering legislation aims to allow sports betting in addition to working out a deal with the Seminole Tribe of Florida. But Rep. **Chip LaMarca** has legislation ([HB 1317](#)) he says side steps the Seminole Compact and Amendment 3.

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Florida Politics: No sports betting bills made it out of committee last year, what's different this year?

LaMarca: I know there's a larger conversation about the comprehensive gaming package and the Compact. The unique thing about this particular bill is, no one has run a bill that really pulls the issue outside of either of those issues. It wouldn't be affected by Amendment 3. It could be in or out of the Compact for the comprehensive package, but it also stands on its own. That's why we think it should get a hearing. It's a pretty unique language in the preamble how it was written, and we think it's a good legislation.

Florida Politics: What about the bill puts it outside of the issues of Amendment 3 and the Seminole Tribe of Florida?

LaMarca: We set forth examples and cases of why this is not an expansion of gaming. It's not accomplished with the Compact. It is a game of skill, not a given game of chance. We've given examples of why it could stand on its own and go through DBPR (Department of Business and Professional Regulation) and bring a lot of revenue back to Florida.

The sports wagering bills aren't moving on the House or Senate side, why is that?

LaMarca: I think there's probably a time. We'll continue to work with Chairs and Leadership to make our case as to why this is good policy. I am more than willing, as the bill's sponsor, to bring the Seminole or the other organizations into the process. The bill wouldn't conflict with it, but we welcome their participation.

Lobby Up

There are several preemption bills moving through the Legislature this year, taking aim at ordinances on everything from a home's exterior paint to where cruise ships can drop anchor.

One of the more surprising issues: Gas station bans.

SB 856 by Sen. **Travis Hutson** and HB 839 by Rep. **Tom Fabricio** come after Petaluma, Calif., passed a local ban on new gas stations — the first such ban in the nation.

So, far no Florida cities pushed an outright ban, though a handful of local governments have flirted with the idea. A resolution briefly considered by the Tampa City Council, for instance, would have banned new gas stations from being built after 2030.

Proponents see the bans as a way to accelerate the switch to electric cars. Oil companies, and many who rely on combustion engines, want to pump the brakes.

The opposition isn't outright opposed to electric vehicles, but they contend a patchwork of local bans would lead to quite a few cars sputtering out on the side of the road.

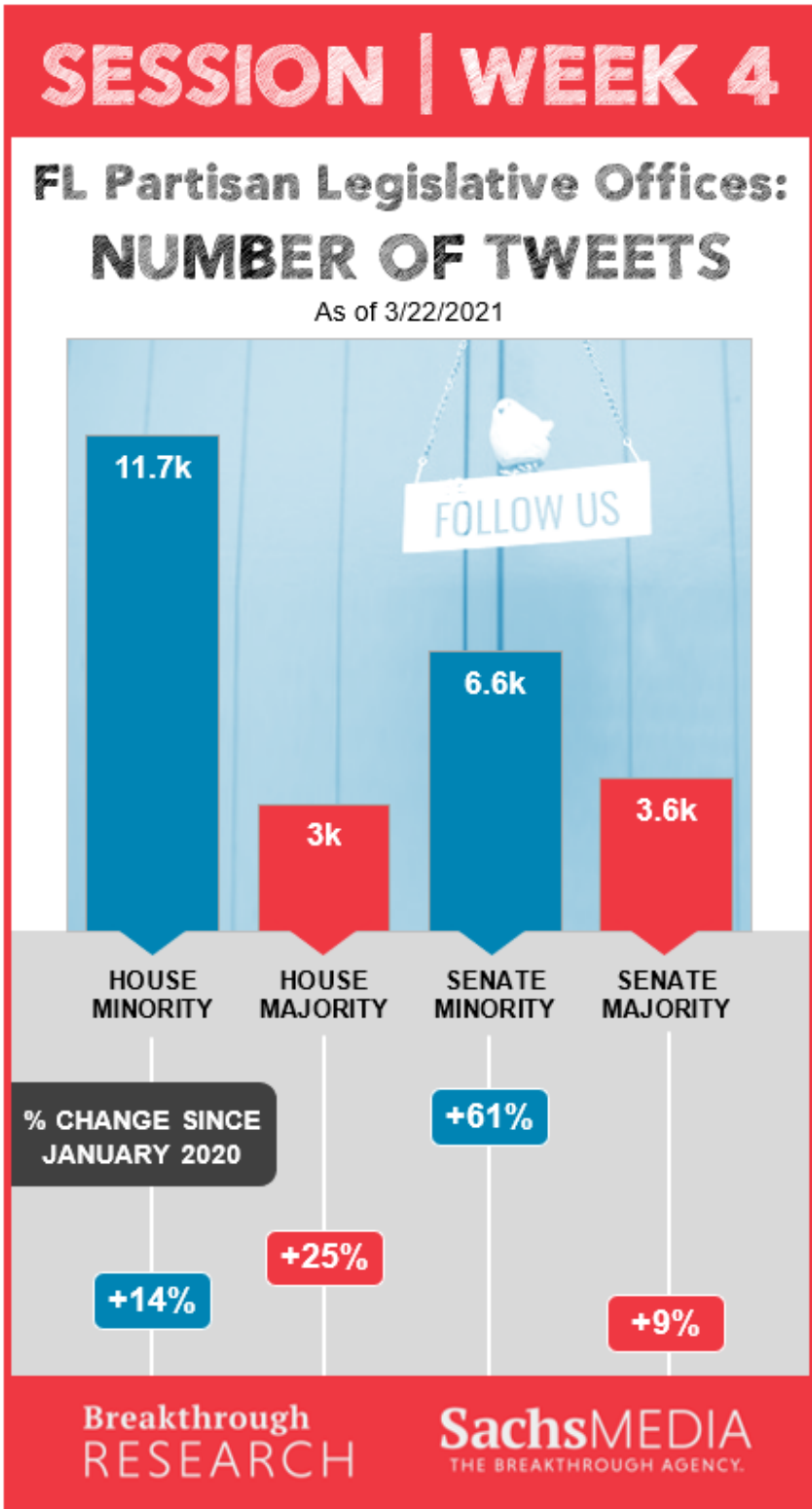
One company pushing for the preemption bills is RaceTrac Petroleum. The Atlanta-based company operates 670 gas stations nationwide, and nearly 250 of them are in the Sunshine State.

The company has hired **Lori Killinger**, Chair of Lewis Longman & Walker's lobbying practice, to help ensure the bill crosses the finish line. LLW lobbyists **Kasey Lewis** and **Martin Lyon** are also on the job.

The bills are in good shape midway through the Legislative Session. Hutson's measure has already made it through two of its three committee stops and the House companion passed its first earlier this month.

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Breakthrough Insights



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The Next 24

The Revenue Estimating Conference will discuss fiscally constrained counties and analyze the fiscal impacts of proposed legislation. They will meet at 8:30 a.m. in Room 117 of the Knott Building. REC will also meet at 2 p.m. to discuss the state's unemployment trust fund.

The House will hold a floor Session at 9:15 a.m.

The Department of Economic Opportunity is scheduled to release February unemployment numbers at 10 a.m.

Full committee agendas, including bills to be considered, are available on the [House](#) and [Senate](#) websites.

Article last accessed [here](#) on March 29, 2021.