2021 DTU Legislative Update

Fourth Interim Committee Meeting
February 14, 2021
Week 4

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Friends and Champions of Public Education:

Public education has some pretty great friends and champions in Tallahassee and we want to make sure you know how much we appreciate them. For some of our longtime Update readers, it will come as no shock that Senator Janet Cruz (D-Tampa) and Representative Carlos Guillermo Smith (D-Orlando) were named during FEA's Delegate Assembly as Champions of Public Education. We honored several of our Friends of Education Award recipients this week. They included Representatives Tracie Davis (D-Jacksonville), Chris Latvala (R-Clearwater), Matt Willhite (D-Wellington), and Champion Rep Carlos Guillermo Smith. We'll be providing awards for the rest of our Champions and Friends in the coming weeks, so look for their pictures too!

Rep. Tracie Davis and President Spar

President Spar and Rep. Carlos Guillermo Smith

President Spar and Rep. Chris Latvala Rep. Matt Willhite and President Spar

Champions of Education are legislators who have shown an unwavering commitment to public education. To be considered a Friend of Education, legislators must be willing to fight for public education and educators in Florida during the previous legislative session. Check back next week as we continue to honor our Friends and Champions of Education.

Higher Ed Bills Moving:

The Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Education considered just two bills this week. Both bills were by Senator Ray Rodrigues (R-Fort Meyers). SB 52, provides for funding for tuition and materials to colleges and universities for dual enrollment students from private and home schools. It adds an additional bonus provision that would require the Board of Governors approval after the institutions' Board of Trustees negotiate the plan.

Dr. Martin Balinsky (UFF Colleges Collective Bargaining VP and UFF-TCC VP) testified in opposition specifically to the section of SB 52 that would allow the Board of Governors to enact parameters for university bonus programs outside the established and constitutionally protected right to collectively bargain terms and conditions of employment. Senators. Janet Cruz (D-Tampa) and Audrey Gibson (D-Jacksonville) expressed opposition to the bill's fiscal impact to implement the funding of dual

enrollment for home school students and students in voucher programs provided by the state. The bill passed 6-3 on a party line vote.

Up next was SB 264. If passed, the legislation would require each public college and university in Florida to conduct an annual assessment related to "intellectual freedom and viewpoint diversity". It would also allow students to video-record in classrooms without prior notice to the instructor that recordings were being made. Rodrigues offered amendments to clarify that classroom recordings would be for "personal use" but could be distributed if there was "wrongdoing" in the classroom. This would provide a very slippery slope. The amendment passed.

Ultimately, the bill opens opportunities for a chilling effect on intellectual and academic freedom. Dr. Balinsky and FEA lobbyist Cathy Boehme, both testified. Both of their messages were very clear: Non-consensual recordings in classrooms and institutions is a dangerous precedent that can bring unintended consequences. It was also pointed out that colleges and universities already distribute end-of-course surveys to every student. These surveys are submitted anonymously. A second survey is unnecessary. Senators Cruz, Gibson, and Polsky each expressed concerns about stifling free speech. This bill also passed on a party line 6-3 vote.

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