



Working to make a difference. Every day.

Michelle Rehwinkel Vasilinda

State Representative, District 9

SUMMER 2010

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2010 BILLS INTRODUCED

• **HB1267/1269**
Public Benefit Fund

• **HB 167**
Streamlined Sales & Use Tax Agreement

• **HB 675**
Millionaire's Tax

• **HB 931**
Aviation Fuel Tax

• **HB 167**
Exemptions on bottled water

PASSED:
• **HB 7243**
Environmental Control (Recycling bill)

Co-sponsored:

- * **HB 1: Statutes of Limitations – "Jeffrey Klee Memorial Act"**
- * **HB 105: Civics Education – "Sandra Day O'Connor Act"**
- * **HB 697/SB 1752- Jobs bill for film industry**
- * **HM 191: Ecumenical Patriarchate**
- * **HB 523: Florida Civil Rights Hall of Fame**
- * **HB 723: Postsecondary Education**
- * **HB 709 /SB 318 the "Snake" bill**
- * **HB 3: repeals adoption provision**
- * **HB 391: prohibits workplace discrimination**
- * **HB 477: requires DOH to establish system for registering domestic partnerships**
- * **HM 1459: prohibits military from discriminating based on sexual orientation.**

Legislation helps move us forward

My Fellow Floridians:

Representing your interests in the Florida House of Representatives continues to be a welcomed challenge and a rewarding privilege. I appreciate your vote of confidence and I enjoy serving House District 9— the Capital Area.

As many of you know, while much of the country is recovering from the recession, Florida continues to face many economic hurdles. Therefore, during the 2010 legislative session, my colleagues and I focused much of our attention on economic development and job creation. In addition, we confronted a number of issues important to District 9 including Florida's budget, education, and healthcare of Floridians.

I was pleased to serve on the Health & Family Services Policy Council; the Health Care Regulation Policy Committee; and the Rules & Calendar Council.

Because of the dire financial situation we are facing in our state, my legislative priorities focused on solutions to generate more revenue and create jobs. I was proud to advocate strongly for green jobs such as those created by the film, entertainment and television industry and proudly co-sponsored HB 697 to promote Florida's film and television.

My strategy continues to be one that generates revenue for our state in order to pre-

serve our safety net services for our most vulnerable citizens, safeguard our state employees, and provide sustainable resources for our economy. My work continues to be grounded in the five E's: Energy, Environment, Economic Development, Education, and Excellence for Florida.

I hope you find this legislative update to be a useful source of information on the 2010 session. If you have any questions or would like to discuss any of the issues, please call my office at (850) 488-0965 or send me an email.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to represent you and I look forward to our work in 2011.

Hurricane Season 2010: Don't get caught without a plan

According to a 2010 statewide survey by the Florida Department of Emergency Management, most Florida residents said they are well-prepared for the aftermath of a hurricane or other disaster. However, as the 2010 Hurricane season gets underway, please do not get caught without a plan.

The survey results show people were most likely to say they have emergency lighting, important papers, prescription medicines, battery-powered radios, and adequate gasoline in their cars. They were less likely to say they have sufficient water and ice currently on hand. Preparedness levels were very similar to those reported by

residents in 2006. Age, homeownership, income, and race were more strongly related to preparedness than other factors.

Below are some key considerations in preparing your family's plan.

Expectations about Disaster Relief. Most Floridians believe it is reasonable for agencies and organizations to have



For help getting your family's emergency plan visit www.FloridaDisaster.org

WHAT YOU SHOULD PREPARE:

A three-day supply of non-perishable foods like canned food and other foods that don't need refrigeration

- A flashlight or lantern with enough batteries to last at least three days
- A battery-powered radio with enough batteries to last at least three days
- At least a 3-day supply of all important prescription medicines on hand for all members of the household
- At least 3 gallons of water in containers for each person in the household
- Important papers such as insurance policies, wills, bank account information, and family records in a readily accessible place in case evacuation is necessary
- An outdoor grill and fuel or charcoal for it
- A generator and at least a 3-day supply of fuel for it



Rep. Rehwinkel Vasiliinda debates against the class size reduction amendments.

Hurricane Season 2010 (cont.)

relief supplies available within 48 hours of a hurricane. However, an even larger majority don't actually expect assistance that soon. They expect to be on their own for at least three days. Similar attitudes were expressed in 2006.

Sources of Information. A large majority of residents said they've seen television programs and printed materials about hurricanes and how to prepare for them, but few have seen information in their telephone books or gone to public libraries for hurricane information. Most respondents said they have access to the internet, but few have visited their county or state emergency management agency websites to look up hurricane information. Similar results were found in 2006.

Perceived Vulnerability. Too few residents living in category 1-3 evacuation zones comprehend their vulnerability to category 3 hurricanes, and too many people living inland of the

category 3 evacuation zone believe they are vulnerable. In 2010 fewer inland residents said they would be unsafe, compared to 2006, and more category 1-3 residents said their homes would flood dangerously in 2010 than in 2006. Few coastal residents know the elevation of their homes.

Watches and Warnings. Very few people know the lead times for watches and warnings (about the same as in 2006), and even fewer were aware the lead times are changing in 2010. Many residents expect to make earlier evacuation decisions if lead times are increased.

Obstacles to Evacuation. Fewer than 10% of households have members who need assistance in order to evacuate, and only 6% report having anyone with a medical problem or disability that would require special assistance, similar to 2006 findings. Of those households, only 20% believe they require assistance from

an agency or organization outside their home. Few of those needing assistance are registered with their counties as having special needs. Most people with pets say they plan to take their pets with them to their evacuation destinations, but the number of people citing pets as obstacles to evacuation is down from 2006. Financial costs of evacuation were mentioned as obstacles more often than in 2006.

Mitigation. Most survey respondents said they have some sort of window protection for hurricanes, but most has to be put in place when a storm threatens. The reported amount of window protection was higher in 2010 than in 2006.

Having a Plan. More than half of Florida residents said they have a definite evacuation plan, which is down slightly from 2006. Age, years lived in Florida, education, and type of housing are the best predictors of having a plan.

Education is Key to Florida's Economy

I believe that improving public education is the first step toward creating high-wage jobs and a quality workforce that the 21st Century economy demands. That's why I had hoped the Legislature would have made greater progress on education reforms and would have invested more in our schools.

I don't think the state budget approved by the Legislature holds education harmless. It increases the average per-student spending by a one

dollar and 22 cents. School officials say their expenses, including insurance, retirement and utilities will outstrip that increase. The budget also allows for university tuition hikes of up to 15 percent, just as it cuts scholarship awards under Bright Futures.

I am particularly disappointed by the Legislature's decision to pass Senate Bill 6, a measure that drew widespread attention and criticism from across the

state for how it would have altered public school teacher benefits. Thankfully, Governor Crist vetoed this bill, which in my view, would have punished our school teachers and harmed education in our state.

Also this session, Governor Crist signed Senate Bill 4, a bipartisan measure that raises education standards and improves accountability and advances some of the reforms touted this year by some members of the

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**Florida Legislature
House of Representatives**



Rep. Michelle Rehwinkel Vasilinda
District 09
1001 The Capitol
402 South Monroe St.
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1300
Phone: (850) 488-0965
Fax: (850) 488-3336
Michelle.Rehwinkel@myfloridahouse.gov

State Budget for 2010-11 could do more for all Floridians

The state budget approved on the final day of the 2010 session includes funding for many important local and statewide projects; but it fails, in my opinion, to meet the needs of Floridians. Therefore, I voted against the \$70.4 billion spending plan, and I have urged Governor Charlie Crist to veto at least portions of the financial package.

The budget makes college more expensive. And I have said that it makes state roads more crowded, doesn't improve health outcomes for all people, and fails to make job creation the top priority.

Granted, it was a huge challenge this year to write a budget. The Legislature began the session facing a \$3 billion shortfall. Thankfully, our state was able to rely upon another \$2.3 billion in federal stimulus money approved last year by President Obama and Congress along with another \$270 million in assistance that Congress is expected to approve. A new gaming compact with the Seminole Indian tribe also helps to balance the budget with a projected \$433 million in revenues for the state.

The budget was projected to lead to the loss of potentially thousands of jobs throughout Florida due to the decision to shift \$160 million from the state's transportation trust fund to other spending. I opposed that decision and was glad to see Governor Crist veto it upon signing the budget into law.

Nonetheless, the budget passed with cuts to a highly successful program that helps new mothers considered at risk for abusing or neglecting their children. A \$10 million cut to the Healthy Families program amounts to more than a third of its budget. Roughly 3,500 of more than 8,700 families are expected to be dropped from the program.

Healthy Start coalitions, which serve at-risk pregnant women and infants, will see a cut of

\$2.6 million. Additionally, contributions to county health departments are cut by \$10.5 million.

In my opinion, the budget doesn't hold education harmless. While it increases the annual per-student funding by \$1.22, school officials say their expenses, including insurance, retirement and utilities will outstrip that increase. In terms of overall school funding, this budget presents the second-worst per student funding level since 2006. What's more, the budget includes whopping new university tuition hikes of up to 15 percent, just as it cuts scholarship awards under the Bright Futures program.

It's also of serious concern to me that funding for nursing homes and hospitals are cut, including a 7-percent reduction in state payments for the care of indigent patients.

In a letter to Governor Crist in May I urged him to use his veto power and strike provisions that would impact our hard-working state employees. This new budget marks a fifth straight year without a general salary increase for the people who protect our most vulnerable and guard our offenders. That is why I asked the Governor to veto:

1. A decrease in the amount of state pays for employee life insurance, resulting in a flat \$25,000 instead of the 1.5 times each worker's salary;
2. An increase in employee copayments for doctor office visits, name-brand prescriptions and emergency room "urgent" care;

3. More than 50% reduction in the interest earned on accumulated DROP benefits from 6.5% to 3.0%;
4. Senior management, Select Exempt, legislative and other non-paying state employees to start paying \$100 a year for single coverage and \$360 a year for family health care insurance.

Fortunately, on the final day before the 2010-2011 state budget could be enacted without signature, Governor Crist issued a veto, killing the conforming bill with this provision in it. FRS D.R.O.P. participants and those getting ready after a long career to enter the DROP were saved from this unfair legislation.

I have continued to push for more equity in pay for government employees and to secure their benefits. Public employees serve Florida in many capacities and deserve respect, appreciation, and dignity, especially through the looming catastrophic oil spill in the Gulf. Their knowledge and expertise in environmental protection, emergency management, disaster recovery, and various other areas critical to our state's mitigation and recovery will help Florida move past this crisis and restore our coastal communities. Florida's public employees are a significant part of the solution to this crisis and we should not be cutting their salaries or benefits. They are also consumers and spend their money right here in Florida helping to sustain our existing local and regional economies.