

Florida Legislature

Votes near on budgets about \$1 billion apart

By Arek Sarkissian
Naples Daily News/Tribune Bureau

TALLAHASSEE— With a gap of almost \$1 billion, the House and Senate on Wednesday began discussing their spending plans, which are vastly different from Gov. Rick Scott's requests for \$1 billion in tax cuts and \$250 million in economic incentives to attract business.

The two budgets also show a roughly \$400 million difference in money earmarked for Medicaid, which is partly a difference in how the two chambers have

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addressed a loss in federal funding that hospitals use to treat the poor.

The House and Senate spent Wednesday discussing their budgets. They are expected to vote on their plans Thursday.

The differences, after being approved in their passed budgets, will be discussed during joint legislative conferences in

the coming weeks.

The House's \$79.9 billion plan is \$989 million less than the Senate's \$80.9 billion plan. Both are larger than the \$79.3 billion plan proposed by Scott in November.

Legislators built their budgets on an expected \$654 million surplus. Scott's budget anticipated \$1.6 billion more in revenue.

Scott proposed in November

a plan for \$1 billion in tax cuts made up mostly of an elimination of income tax on manufacturing and retail business worth \$770 million and a \$339 million cut in taxes for commercial leases.

But the two-term governor's plan has not yet completely materialized in the House and Senate spending plans.

The House came close with a \$991 million plan to cut taxes and provide one-time rebates that would be split between two years.

The Senate plan still was

spread over five bills that come to about \$363 million in cuts and rebates still in a committee.

House Finance and Tax Committee Chairman Matt Gaetz, R-Fort Walton Beach, said his plan includes a 1-percentage-point reduction in the commercial lease tax, which could save taxpayers about \$260 million.

Other one-time rebates would include a 10-day back-to-school tax holiday worth \$56 million, a one-day technology tax holiday worth \$23 million, and an

See BUDGETS, 5A

Education | Night of Champions



SCOTT MCINTYRE/STAFF (2)

To applause, China Pierrelus accepts her Champions plaque from Susan McManus during a gathering before the 2016 Night of Champions hosted by Champions for Learning at the Naples Grande Beach Resort on Wednesday. See more photos from the event at naplesnews.com.

Mentors, donors to Collier schools honored

By Melhor Marie Leonor
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Dick Munro has interviewed hundreds of local families who are struggling — listening to their stories and combing through each year's cohort for students who could use a mentor to help them succeed.

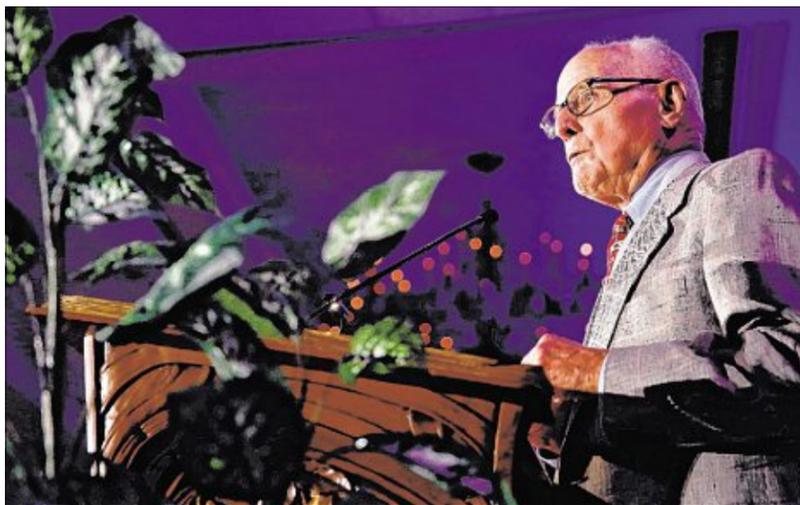
The former media executive and local retiree has spent the last six years volunteering his time with the local education foundation Champions for Learning and was honored Wednesday with its annual Heart of the Apple award for service.

"Some of these kids just need a mentor, people to put their arms around them," Munro, 85, said. "But I know that we all agree that what we do brings us pure joy. We receive much, much more than we ever give."

During its Night of Champions event, Champions for Learning honored Munro and other residents who have donated their time to the organization's push to improve education in Collier County.

One honoree was Gary Personette, who was surprised with the foundation's Mentor of the Year award

See CHAMPIONS, 6A



Dick Munro addresses the crowd after being presented the Heart of the Apple award Wednesday during the Night of Champions event at the Naples Grande Beach Resort.

Collier schools Residents want more say on sites for charters

By Melhor Marie Leonor
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Golden Gate Estates residents at a community meeting protested a charter school they say will be built in the wrong place.

But their frustration was not over the noise the school might bring or the possible traffic jams — but over what residents repeatedly called "a done deal" that didn't include their input.

NANCE'S REQUEST

County Commissioner Tim Nance called the recent gathering "an emotional meeting."

He has asked county staff to explore a possible solution: a temporary moratorium on all new school construction in areas where conditional approval by the county is not needed.

MIGHT AFFECT THREE

The measure wouldn't affect traditional public schools; the Collier County public school district won't need a new school building in the next five to 10 years.

Affected would be any charter schools that plan to build in the county during the moratorium, possibly including three schools now trying to open or ex-

See CHARTERS, 8A

MEETING ABOUT SCHOOL

What: Residents and the developer of Collier Charter Academy will meet for a second time
When: 7 p.m. Thursday
Where: Collier County IFAS Extension Office, 14700 Immokalee Road, Golden Gate Estates

Immokalee's medics stretched thin, so it watches North Collier dispute for answers

In Immokalee, Paul Anderson is watching the excruciating back and forth between Collier County and the North Collier Fire District with more than a passing interest.

Anderson, three years in as the town's fire chief, has a plan to train and equip his firefighters to perform advanced life support in Immokalee for the first time.

But until a legal question pivotal to the North Collier conundrum is set-



BRENT BATTEN

OPINION

tled, it can't happen. So he watches. And waits.

The County Commission declined Tuesday to take up a counteroffer from North Collier that would have extended the

fire district's ability to provide ALS services through its firefighters for another year.

A court likely will have to decide the lingering questions.

Among those questions: ■ Can Collier County, which has a state license allowing it to provide advanced life support, strike an interlocal agreement with other governments allowing them to do the same under county supervision?

■ Or does the other government entity need its own state license?

North Collier fire commissioners and their attorney are of the latter view. One government can't bestow upon another government a power that it doesn't possess, the thinking goes.

The majority of Collier County commissioners and their attorney say interlocal agreements are legal. The county already has several with the likes

of Naples, Marco Island and the Greater Naples Fire District.

Anderson believes the North Collier approach is the correct one.

"Reading the statute, it's clear in my mind," he said.

But if county commissioners won't give Immokalee permission to seek a state license, something they've dug their heels in over in North Collier, Immokalee's plan is just that — a plan.

Perhaps even more so

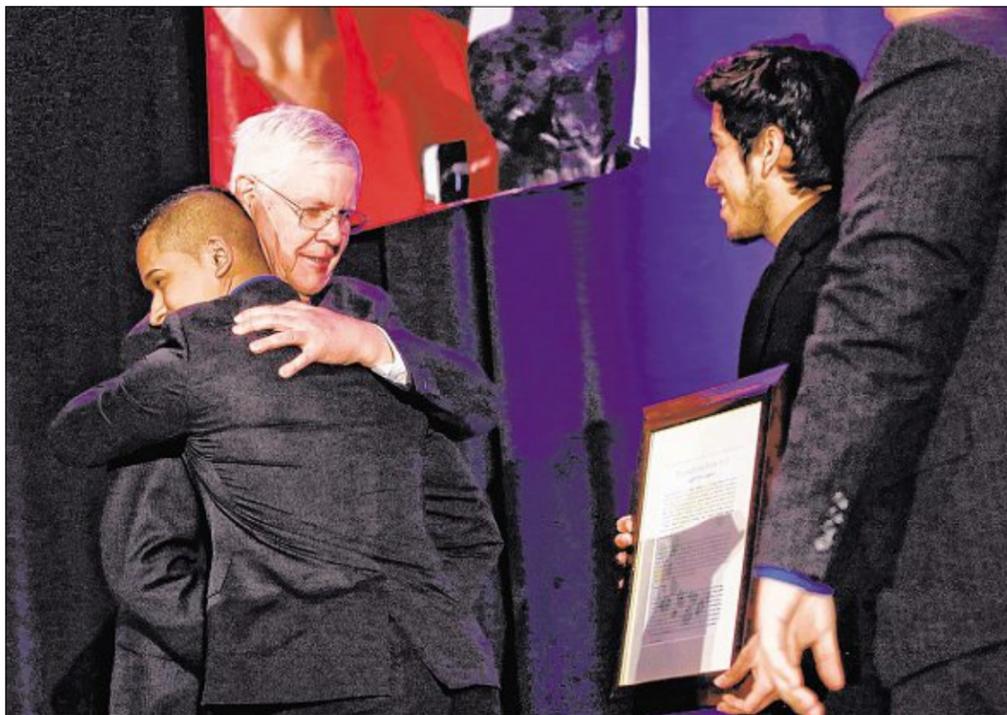
than in North Collier, where hospitals are just minutes away, Immokalee's ambulances are stretched thin. There are two in town and one at Ave Maria.

When one has to take someone to a hospital, it can be gone for two hours or more.

When both Immokalee units are gone and the one in Ave Maria is busy, the town can be without a

See BATTEN, 10A

Gary Personette hugs one of his mentees, Jose Martinez, as he takes the stage to accept the Mentor of the Year award during the 2016 Night of Champions, hosted by Champions for Learning, at the Naples Grande Beach Resort on Wednesday.
SCOTT MCINTYRE/STAFF



CHAMPIONS
from 3A

by three students who say he has made an impact in their lives.

"No other stranger has ever tried to form such a bond with me, and this meant the world to me," said Carlos Justiano, a graduate of Golden Gate High School and a freshman at Florida SouthWestern State College. "Gary pushed me to become a more confident person, to

have goals and have a plan to achieve them."

Misael Tamayo, who soon will graduate from Golden Gate High School, said he is confident in his next steps because Personette will continue as his mentor.

"I feel I have a role model and friend to count on throughout the journey that awaits me," Tamayo said.

Personette said that when he became interested in working with Champions for Learning, he insisted on doing something

one on one with students. Through its mentorship program, Personette and dozens of other mentors meet with their assigned mentees at their school to talk about their education and the future.

"To have some effect on these young men's lives is a real gift," Personette said.

Champions for Learning also recognized the work of Kathy and Bill Avery, Bernardo Barnhart, Sue and Art Bookbinder, Debra Faulk, Suzanne Evans, Jim Hoppensteadt, Mary

Ingram, Maria Jimenez-Lara, Phil McCabe and China Pierrelus.

In different ways, the honorees serve public school students by mentoring, making donations to local schools and holding educational workshops.

"We all know that helping our young people connect to their future is also the future of our community," said Bill Barker, Naples Daily News president and publisher and chairman of the Champions For Learning board.

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