

News from Tallahassee

Senate: Scott's duties extend beyond jobs

Pushing back on Gov. Rick Scott's decision to mothball a handful of programs housed within his office, the Florida Senate last week told the governor in no uncertain terms that he has bigger responsibilities than just bringing jobs to the state.

As Senate lawmakers were debating changes to the chamber's budget proposal in preparation for conference, members offered

a series of amendments to restore his programs cut by the governor affecting drug control efforts and adoption services, responsibilities Scott said earlier in his term he doesn't want.

"I commend him for wanting 'Jobs, Jobs, Jobs,' but he has a whole array of things for which he is responsible and for which he must support our efforts that we've had for so many years," said Sen. Evelyn Lynn, R-Ormond Beach.

No one is arguing Scott has not done what he promised during the campaign. Since taking office he has been the state's top marketer, crisscrossing the state and manning the phones to bring businesses to the state.

He's also following through on promises to the sharpen the focus of government in general and his office in particular. In December, Scott informed all four full-time employees working in the governor's Office of Drug Control that they would not be rehired when he took office in January. The move would save approximately \$500,000 in salary and benefits. Likewise, Scott has called for moving the Office of Adoption and Child Protection from his office and transferring its duties to the Department of Children and Families.

On Thursday, Senators voted to overrule the governor on both points by adding amendments to a pair of measures to return the offices to the governor's control.

An amendment Thursday by Sen. Ronda Storms, R-Valrico, said she offered the adoption amendment because foster and adopted children have nowhere else to turn and the governor needs to lead the way "whether he likes it or not."

Storms said DCF is overwhelmed with other child care issues and adoptive children need to have a voice outside the agency looking out for their interests.

"I'm not saying the economy and jobs aren't important," Storms said. "But just like every other working parent, (Scott) has to pay the bills and go to work and take care of the kids. This is taking care of the kids."

Shortly after the Storm's amendment was adopted, Sen. Mike Fasano, R-New Port Richey, offered another to re-

Collier scales back fertilizer law

County proposal now aligns more with state DEP model ordinance

By **Eric Staats**

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Collier County has scaled back a proposed law aimed at preventing water pollution by restricting fertilizer use.

Some 50 communities across Florida have adopted such laws, but Collier is one of the last Southwest Florida governments to regulate how lawns and landscapes can

be kept green.

Environmental groups have faced off with landscapers and golf course operators over the proposed law, including during an at-times heated public meeting earlier this year.

At the center of the debate is another debate over the science that is being used by both sides to justify their positions.

The law has swung from one side to the other, and a compromise doesn't look likely, said Collier County senior environmental specialist Mac Hatcher, who has been taking the law through a series of public reviews.

"There doesn't seem to be much movement," Hatcher said.

The Collier County controversy is playing out as bills move through the state Legislature to prohibit local governments from enacting fertilizer laws that are more restrictive than a model ordinance recommended by the state Department of Environmental Protection.

Critics say the DEP model doesn't go far enough to keep nitrogen and phosphorus in fertilizers from being carried into lakes and canals, where the nutrients fuel harmful algae blooms that can threaten human health and cause fish kills.

Still, Collier's first proposal mir-

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To read Collier County's proposed fertilizer law

rored the state's model ordinance. In the face of criticism of the proposal from Conservancy of Southwest Florida and the Sierra Club, two county advisory boards called for stricter fertilizer limits.

The Environmental Advisory Council and the Collier County Planning Commission called for the law to include a prohibition on fertilizing during the rainy season,

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YMCA Gaynor Child Development Center students Nicolas Vicaria, from left, Miranda King, Temana Hauata and Sian Jose sing an original song titled "NCEF" set to the tune of "You're a Grand Old Flag" during a check presentation by the Naples Children and Education Foundation at the Naples Botanical Garden on Sunday in Naples. Twenty-two Collier County nonprofit organizations received funding at the event as well as three of NCEF's organization's long-term strategic initiatives. **David Albers/Staff**

Investing in kids

HUGS, Lunch Boxes of Love, others get boost from Naples Children and Education Foundation

By **Kelly Farrell**

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For more photos of the event

Thousands more underprivileged Collier County children are likely to blossom thanks to \$8 million awarded to nonprofit organizations at Naples Botanical Gardens on Sunday afternoon.

Naples Children and Education Foundation, founders of the Naples Winter Wine Festival, presented 25 checks to nonprofits, including three grants for long-term strategic initiatives.

The Wine Festival, the nation's most profitable wine auction, with proceeds going to education and children in Collier County, raised \$12 million in late January.

"This is really the fun day for us ... giving out the money," said Anne Welsh McNulty, NCEF's grant chairwoman, as she began assisting in calling the charitable organizations' leaders up to the stage to accept their oversized checks.

The long-term NCEF projects are often collaborations among organizations that fill significant gaps recently identified in children's services — particularly in the areas of early learning, medical and dental health, out-of-school programs, behavioral health and childhood hunger, NCEF officials said.

The largest check of the day was written to Collier Health Under Guided Systems (HUGS), which is a collaboration of several agencies seeking to provide education and early identification of mental health problems. "The HUGS initiative is particularly close to my heart," said McNulty before presenting the check for \$1.05 million.

The collaboration includes the David Lawrence Center, whose director, Dave Schimmel, expressed his gratitude to the many donors for supporting a not very well-known

and stigmatized need for mental health care among youth.

Kathryn Leib-Hunter, executive director of the National Alliance of Mental Illness Collier County chapter, said NCEF gives these children hope.

"Hope is priceless," Leib-Hunter said.

Another of the projects meeting particular needs for hungry children using a mobile food pantry, Lunch Boxes of Love, received \$630,000. The program will also be taking inventory of food storage capacity at 22 Collier organizations identified as distribution outlets focused on children and families. The plan is then to tackle the best way to transport that food.

"The need is as great as ever. There are quite a few more children in Collier County than there were several years ago. Even though we're doing a lot of good things, there's still a lot more to do," said Bob Scott, chairman of

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the NCEF board.

Research indicated the child population in the county grew from about 55,000 in 2005 to more than 80,000 in 2010, according to the University of Florida's Lastinger Center's Child Well-Being in Collier County 2010 study.

The percentage of children eligible for free or reduced lunch at school rose from 48 percent in 2005 to 58 percent in 2010.

These updated statistics became an important factor in choosing where grants would be allocated and the amounts, said spokeswoman Andrea R. Steffy.

The Boys & Girls Club of Collier County remained the top award recipient among individual organizations, receiving \$1 million. The Guadalupe Center of Immokalee, which helps impoverished families in Immokalee, received \$732,000 and the Children's Advocacy Council of Collier County received \$460,000.

The Children's Advocacy Council is first to receive the call when children are the victims of violent crimes, partic-

ularly sexual abuse and injuries to their head, face or neck.

The organization meets state requirements as a child protection team working with the Collier County Sheriff's Office and the Florida Department of Children and Families from the beginning to the end of violent criminal cases. They also help families and communities deal with the atrocity of violent crimes committed amongst their youngest, most defenseless members.

"Not exactly an unfunded mandate, but we're horribly under-funded, horribly," said Children's Advocacy director Jackie Stephens, expressing the need for the grant.

Not all organizations needed contributions in the six or seven digit range.

VisionQuest, which helps treat vision problems in children, received \$61,000.

"A boy said 'I don't understand why the teacher keeps writing on the chalkboard when no one can see it,' " said VisionQuest's director Nancy Jeppesen.

"Thank you ... You help this boy not only to see the chalkboard, but to see the future."