



The Florida Legislative Committee on Intergovernmental Relations facilitates the development of intergovernmental policies and practices.

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Executive Director

**Points of Interest  
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Floridians in State and Local  
Government:**

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# Federal Focus

## Renewable Energy

**O**n October 15, 2007, the U.S. House of Representatives approved a resolution that sets an ambitious goal to expand renewable energy production in the United States over the next two decades.

The *25 by '25 Resolution*, H.CON.RES. 25, expresses the sense of Congress that by the year 2025, at least 25% of the total energy consumed in the United States should come from homegrown renewable sources. Currently, renewable energy sources provide about 6% of the United States' total energy needs. "The *25 by '25 Resolution* is a statement of our national commitment to support the development of renewable energy sources," Agriculture Committee Chairman Collin Peterson said. "I believe that we can

not only meet but exceed the goal of 25% by 2025, but every journey starts with a first step, and this resolution is a very important first step to national energy independence."

"Increased development of renewable energy opens new markets for our nation's producers, provides consumers with a safe, sustainable, environmentally friendly, and renewable source of energy, and decreases our nation's dependency on foreign oil. I commend the House for recognizing the important role American agriculture plays in domestic energy production and I look forward to working with my colleagues and the industry as we work to turn the goal of *25 by '25* into a reality. Working to ensure that the benefits of expanded markets for agricultural products are available to the entire

agriculture sector is a top priority for me and I believe in this sector's ability to provide the market with reliable, sustainable renewable energy sources," said Ranking Member Bob Goodlatte.

A bipartisan group of 72 cosponsors have signed on to support the resolution. The House Agriculture Committee approved the resolution in May and reported it favorably to the House floor.

The resolution recognizes the important role of agriculture-based energy sources, including ethanol and biodiesel in the growing renewable energy industry. It also reinforces the importance of maintaining a safe, abundant, and affordable domestically produced supply of food, feed, and fiber as the nation pursues energy independence.

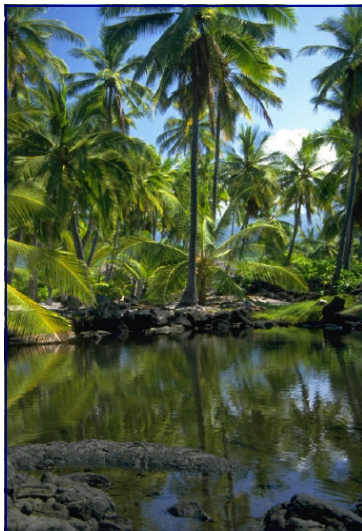
*Courtesy: U.S. House Agriculture Committee*

## Developing Issues—Source: Congressional Quarterly

◇ The U.S. House passed a revised SCHIP bill on October 25—H.R. 3963. To address additional concerns raised by the GOP, the U.S. Senate's Finance Committee is pursuing bipartisan discussions to help frame a veto-proof amended bill;

◇ Members of the U.S. Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee passed the 2007 Farm Bill, the *Food and Energy Security Act*, on October 25. The bill, which passed in the House on July 27, must now be taken up by the full Senate; and

◇ The U.S. Senate blocked consideration of the *Dream Act*, S. 2205. The measure sought to provide legalization opportunities for stipulated children of illegal immigrants who have lived in the U.S. for five years if they arrived prior to age sixteen.



On October 2, U.S. Senators Bill Nelson and Mel Martinez sent a letter to President Bush urging him to drop his WRDA veto threat. “A veto would only slow down the funding of projects that are vital to Everglades restoration,” said Nelson. This bill is critically important to Florida and our environment,” added Martinez.

Source: Office of Senator Bill Nelson

## Everglades Restoration—Courtesy Florida DEP

America’s Everglades is more than just a natural treasure, it is an ecosystem crucial to Florida. Today, about one half of the Everglades has been lost to development, making the projects dedicated to its restoration increasingly more important. These projects will critically impact the quality of life for the seven million residents of South Florida—providing improved flood control for the region, supplying the essential amount of water for restoration and the public, saving more than 60 endangered species native to the Everglades, and protecting the natural plant life for future generations.

The continued restoration of the Everglades requires partnership: a coalition of highly diverse and bipartisan interests who have joined forces to make the restoration happen. The \$10.9 billion *Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan* (CERP) is a 50-50 state-federal partnership. Since 2000, Florida has invested more than \$2 billion and acquired over 200,000

acres of land to restore the Everglades ecosystem. The South Florida Water Management District has taken the lead on the restoration, working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to achieve the plan’s basic tenet of capturing the 1.7 billion gallons of water that goes to the ocean each day because of over-drainage, as well as implementing best management practices and “green” technology to clean pollution from the water. By using these green technologies, the amount of phosphorous entering the Everglades has been cut by as much as 60 percent compared to historical levels.

Despite the great progress that has been made, there is still much more that needs to be done to save the Everglades ecosystem. The Florida Legislature acknowledged this need this spring by passing the 2007 Northern Everglades and Estuaries Protection Program, expanding restoration to the northern Everglades, including Lake Okeechobee and two estuaries, as well as dedicating an additional \$100 mil-

lion annually to restore these areas and extending the Save Our Everglades Trust Fund through 2020.

The U.S. Senate and House of Representatives also recognized the importance of Everglades Restoration by passing the *2007 Water Resources Development Act* (WRDA). The passage of the bill, which is now awaiting President George W. Bush’s signature, will bring a number of critical Florida projects awaiting federal authorization and funding one step closer to implementation. WRDA 2007 will authorize new projects under CERP including the Indian River Lagoon Project, Picayune Strand restoration, and the Site 1 Impoundment Project. In addition, the Act includes necessary language to fund previously authorized projects at today’s costs, including dredging projects and water reuse and supply projects. The deadline for President Bush to sign or veto the bill is November 3.

*This article was submitted by Lauren Aiello, Policy Communications Specialist, Florida Department of Environmental Protection.*

## Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations, and FISA

The U.S. Senate passed the FY 08 Commerce, Justice and Science Appropriations bill by a vote of 75-19 on October 16. Florida Senators Bill Nelson and Mel Martinez voted for the bill, which included \$1 billion in emergency funds for NASA and a Nelson-cosponsored amendment to

restore \$110 million in funding to the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program. That amendment passed by a voice vote.

Also with the support of Senator Nelson, the Senate Select Intelligence Committee passed the *Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act*

*Amendments Act of 2007* (FISA), S. 2248. The Committee’s goal has been to “develop a sound legal framework for intelligence activities.” Statements on this important legislation provided by Senator Nelson and others may be reviewed at:

<http://intelligence.senate.gov/071025/report.pdf>

**VA Leadership**—Source: VA Public Affairs and U.S. House VA Committee

**D**eputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs Gordon H. Mansfield became the Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) on October 1, 2007, following the resignation of Secretary Jim Nicholson. Secretary Nicholson tendered his resignation to President Bush on July 17, 2007.

Mansfield assumed [the position] under the terms of the *Federal Vacancies Reform Act*, where a Deputy Secretary begins to serve as the acting officer immediately and automatically upon the occurrence of the vacancy. Mansfield will serve as Acting Secretary until the next nominee of the President is confirmed by the U.S. Senate.

Appointed by President Bush in November 2003, Deputy Secretary Mansfield served as the chief operating officer for the federal government's second largest department, responsible for a nationwide system of health care services, benefits programs and national cemeteries for America's veterans and their dependents.

He previously served as VA Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Legislative Affairs since August 1, 2001, serving as the legislative advisor to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. He was responsible for VA's Congressional relations and representing VA programs, policies, investigations and legislative agenda to Congress.

Prior to joining VA, Mr. Mansfield served as executive director of the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) since April 1993. Mr. Mansfield served as Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity at the Department of Housing and Urban Development from 1989 to 1993 under President George H. W. Bush's Administration. Prior to 1981, he practiced law in Ocala, Fla.

Following his 1964 enlistment in the Army, Mr. Mansfield served two tours of duty in Vietnam. While serving as company commander with the 101st Airborne Division during his second tour, he was wounded during the Tet

Offensive of 1968 sustaining a spinal cord injury. For his actions while his unit was under fire, he was decorated with the Distinguished Service Cross, the second highest personal decoration for valor in combat.

On October 30, the White House announced that Lt. General James B. Peake (Ret.), M.D., has been nominated by the President to serve as the new Secretary of the VA. A Purple Heart recipient, he is a highly decorated Vietnam veteran who served as a platoon leader with the 101st Airborne Division. Dr. Peake is also a former Army Surgeon General from 2000 to 2004. Should he be confirmed, Dr. Peake will be the first physician and general at the helm of the VA. According to the President, "one of his first tasks will be to continue to implement the recommendations of the *Dole-Shalala Commission on Wounded Veterans*." The next VA Secretary will also be responsible for implementing the provisions of the *Joshua Omvig Veterans Suicide Prevention Act*, H.R. 327, which will mandate a comprehensive suicide prevention strategy within the VA for veterans, if it is signed into law.



**Salute our Veterans on Veterans Day!**

In FY 2005, almost \$9 billion was spent by the federal government on Florida's veterans in direct benefits.

Source: Florida Department of Veterans Affairs

**Mortgage Debt Relief**

**S**enator Nelson is a cosponsor of S. 1394, the *Mortgage Cancellation Relief Act of 2007*. The bill would exempt some homeowners from paying income tax on home loans forgiven after foreclosure or debt forgiveness. Senator Stabenow introduced the bill last May; a similar bill passed the House

on October 4, 2007. Both bills have a bipartisan group of supporters.

Current tax law forces individuals to pay income tax on the amount of cancelled debt when mortgages have been forgiven or foreclosed. The tax code requires a lender who cancels a debt to report that

amount to IRS. This bill would modify the tax code so that the cancelled debt is not reported as taxable income. It is important to note that there is no income tax liability if the debt is cancelled in a bankruptcy proceeding.

*This article was provided courtesy of the Office of Senator Bill Nelson.*

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Florida for Fiscal Year 2004*

[www.floridalcir.gov/reports/  
fedfunds04.pdf](http://www.floridalcir.gov/reports/fedfunds04.pdf)

**Other helpful sites:**

◇ <http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/pomr101707pkg.cfm>

*NPR/Kaiser/Harvard  
Survey: Public Views on  
SCHIP Reauthorization  
Released October 17, 2007*

◇ <http://www.fedspending.org/tutorials.php>

*Explains How to  
Access Data On  
Federal Spending*

# Tax Reduction and Reform Act of 2007

**U**.S. Ways and Means Committee Chairman Charles B. Rangel, D-NY, introduced the *Tax Reduction and Reform Act of 2007* on October 25.

According to the Committee this major legislation was framed with the intent to “reduce taxes on working families and reform tax laws to eliminate loopholes and narrowly-targeted benefits. It would provide relief to more than 90 million working families through a permanent repeal of the individual alternative minimum tax (AMT) and enhancement of other tax benefits, while also significantly improving the competitiveness of American businesses.”

Other provisions include:

◇ *A standard deduction increase*—Married couples filing jointly would be able to take an additional \$850 deduction. Individuals (both single and married filing sep-

arately) would be entitled to an additional \$424 standard deduction and heads of household could take an extra \$625 deduction. The Committee has also indicated that “these amounts will be adjusted for inflation in the future.”

◇ *An earned income credit modification for individuals with no qualifying children*—Currently, individuals with no qualifying children may take an earned income credit equal to 7.65% of their earned income. This bill would increase the number of taxpayers that may qualify for the earned income credit and the earned income credit percentage. The phase-out amount for individuals with no qualifying children would be increased from \$5,280 (the current credit limitation) to \$10,900. The credit percentage would be increased to 15.3% of

earned income;

◇ *An extension of AMT relief for 2007*—Current AMT relief for nonrefundable personal credits and AMT exemption amounts would be extended for one year;

◇ *A limitation on itemized deductions and the phase-out of deductions for personal exemptions*—The limitation on itemized deductions and the phase-out of the deduction for personal exemptions would be restored to levels that existed prior to the enactment of the *Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2001* for individual taxpayers with an adjusted gross income between \$250,000 and \$270,000 or between \$500,000 and \$520,000 for those filing a joint return; and

◇ Restrictions on the use of offshore tax havens.

## Florida Legislative Committee on Intergovernmental Relations

Created in 1977 as the Advisory Council on Intergovernmental Relations and renamed the Florida Legislative Committee on Intergovernmental Relations (LCIR) in 1996, the Committee is statutorily authorized to do the following:

- 1) Serve as a forum for the discussion and study of intergovernmental problems.
- 2) Evaluate the interrelationships among local, regional, state, interstate, and federal agencies in the provision of public services and prepare studies and recommendations to improve organizational structure, operational efficiency, allocation of functional responsibility, and the delivery of service.
- 3) Analyze the structure, functions, revenue requirements and fiscal policies of the state and its political subdivisions.
- 4) Examine proposed and existing federal and state programs.
- 5) Review the research and recommendations of national commissions studying local government relationships and problems.
- 6) Analyze the fiscal impact of new state programs or amendments to existing programs on municipalities and counties.

◇ Section 11.70, F.S.(2006).