Opening Week of 2012 Florida Legislative Session
The 2012 Florida Legislative Session opened on Tuesday, January 10 with the usual fanfare and flowers, and with speeches by Governor Rick Scott, Senate President Mike Haridopolos, and House Speaker Dean Cannon outlining their expectations for the nine week session.

Governor Scott, in his State of the State address, called on the Legislature to increase its funding for education by $1 billion. He said he will not budge on that request and inferred that he would veto a budget without that increase. Of the $1 billion, $190 million accounts for the 31,000 extra pre k-12 students coming into the state’s school systems next year, $224 million restores nonrecurring k-12 funding from the current year, and $220 million offsets an anticipated decline in property tax revenue that would have gone to local school funding. Scott’s budget calls for level funding of the Florida College System.

Senate President Mike Haridopolos in his opening-day speech said that looming events in the economy still could cloud the state revenue for the upcoming fiscal year. He, Senate Budget Chairman J.D. Alexander, and President-designate Don Gaetz are advocating that the Senate delay its budget development exercise until late in the session, in hopes of rosier revenue estimates.

Speaker of the House Dean Cannon came out swinging at higher education in his Opening Day remarks. "We have a higher education system with no clear mission, universities pursuing overlapping agendas despite limited public resources, and our community colleges rapidly transforming themselves into four-year degree institutions," he said. He wants the Legislature to start a serious dialogue on higher education, and look at reform legislation either this year, or more likely next year.

Cannon’s remarks set the stage for the House Education Committee Chairman Bill Proctor to schedule appearances by the presidents of all 11 public universities before his committee to begin the dialogue. The first of those meetings occurred on Friday, with Florida State President Eric Barron and University of Florida President Bernie Machen. The most interesting suggestion to come out of that meeting was for legislators to let them pay for expanding expensive science, technology, engineering and math programs by charging those so-called STEM students higher tuition.

The committee meetings with university presidents continue this week with three sessions scheduled with at least six more presidents.

School Construction Funding
State education officials have told schools, colleges and universities they were suspending approval of new payments for already appropriated construction projects as the state grapples with a shortfall in a trust fund that helps pay for them.

The move is temporary, and is intended to address a looming shortfall in funding for the Public Education Capital Outlay (PECO) until the Legislature intervenes, according to a memo sent Thursday by State University System
State economists on Friday revised forecasts, projecting there would be no money for PECO appropriations over the next two fiscal years, and the trust fund is on track to hit a negative balance by the end of 2012-13. The Legislature will have to address the negative balance, either by shifting money into the trust fund from other sources, or by reclaiming money they have already appropriated that has not been used.

The Department of Education Florida College System staff is currently working to determine how this directive will impact each college and its in-progress and pending construction, renovation and repair projects.

**Federal Update**

Congress returns to work on January 17. The House will begin the second session of the 112th Congress, and the Senate will follow suit one week later. Both chambers will initially work on items that were left unresolved in December, including lapsed individual and corporate tax provisions as well as a symbolic vote in the House against the President’s request to raise the debt ceiling. Otherwise, the normal grind of hearings and other congressional business will begin and increase in intensity in early February.

**C-SPAN Exhibit at WestShore Plaza**

C-SPAN’s *American Presidents: Life Portraits* exhibit is currently on display at Tampa’s WestShore Plaza. In partnership with Bright House Networks, the exhibit is on display from January 9 - February 5, 2012.

Sponsored by C-SPAN and the White House Historical Association, *American Presidents: Life Portraits* is a traveling exhibit that gives visitors a unique look at the 43 men who have been elected president of the United States.

*American Presidents: Life Portraits* is a free exhibit that vividly brings the presidency to life:

- **LISTEN** to audio recordings of presidential speeches and personal reflections from Teddy Roosevelt through Barack Obama.
- **READ** historic newspaper front pages with election results that date from the 1880’s.
- **SEE** original oil paintings of each president by renowned artist Chas Fagan.

**Community and Government Relations Web Page**

Please visit and bookmark this new web page, [http://hccfl.edu/departments/government-affairs.aspx](http://hccfl.edu/departments/government-affairs.aspx). It is an evolving one-stop source for info related to local, state and federal governments.

All issues of the *HCC Legislative Report* will be posted to this page. And links are provided to web sites for Florida’s Governor, Senate and House where much useful and interesting information is available about state government.

If you have questions about these or other legislative issues, please call or email Sally Everett, Director of Community and Government Relations, at 813-253-7560 or severett8@hccfl.edu. Please visit the Government Relations web page at: [http://hccfl.edu/departments/government-affairs.aspx](http://hccfl.edu/departments/government-affairs.aspx)