Week Four of the Florida Legislative Session is shaping up to be a busy one, with the House of Representatives scheduled to approve its maps for the redistricting of House, Senate and Congressional election districts, and its initial Committee review of the entire state budget for 2012-12.

The Florida Senate has already approved its redistricting plan, and when both versions are reconciled, they will go to the Florida Supreme Court for review.

State Budget and Education Funding
The House is moving to approve a budget for the fiscal year 2012-13 at a brisk pace. Early last week, each House budget subcommittee released its ‘chairman’s recommendation’ for the appropriate sections of the state budget. Rep. Marlene O’Toole, chair of the Higher Education Appropriations Subcommittee, recommended a total of $986.8 million for community colleges. This is a 4% reduction from the appropriated amount for the current year. The House recommendation, unlike Governor Scott’s earlier budget recommendation, allows for an 8% increase in tuition. Tuition and this level of state funding would result in a .4% increase in revenue for the Florida College System.

The full House Appropriations Committee took the various subcommittee recommendations and packaged them into the proposed committee bill for the General Appropriations Act (GAA). In that proposal, HCC would receive $44.9 million in state operational funding accompanying conforming bill add $138.8 million in funding for college construction, repair and renovation projects. The House is proposing to temporarily adjust the proportion of the Communication Services Tax which funds Public Education Capital Outlay (PECO) to replenish that fund and allow for the projects it lists to move forward. HCC’s share of the PECO funding would be $1,225,841 for repairs and renovations.

The Senate appears to be about two weeks behind the House in moving its budget through the process. Each subcommittee has not yet received its allocation from the leadership, and many appropriations for this week have already been cancelled.

Florida Virtual Campus
One other noteworthy proposal included in the House Higher Education Appropriations budget documents is the establishment of the Florida Virtual Campus (FVC) which would consolidate the functions of CCLA, FCLA, and the Distance Learning Consortium and permanently transfer their funding to the FVC.

The Florida Virtual Campus (FVC) would also emphasize pursuing students who have “stopped” attending college due to various reasons that may have limited their access to campus to return to the virtual campus to complete their degree. The entire concept is designed to enhance completion. The bill includes a Student Access Pilot Project with UNF, UWF, Valencia College, and Florida State College @ Jacksonville.
HCC at the Capitol
The Association of Florida Colleges is hosting college trustees in Tallahassee this week for the Annual Legislative Conference. The Trustees will attend informative workshops and panels, and be hosted for a reception at the Governor’s Mansion by Governor and Mrs. Rick Scott.

The twenty-eight Presidents of the Florida College System institutions will meet as a group with Governor Scott to discuss college programs and the role they play in economic development activities throughout the state.

Finally, the House Education Committee will hear this week from a panel of seven FCS presidents, including HCC’s Dr. Ken Atwater, in a format similar to that followed by the committee in the last few weeks in appearances by each of the state’s public university presidents. Another 8-president panel will appear before the Education Committee next week as well.

President Obama and Community Colleges
Last week, President Obama gave his annual State of the Union Address to Congress. Part of his plan includes significant investment in education and community colleges. A key portion of the President’s higher-education plan includes funding devoted to community colleges to forge business partnership to train and place two million skilled workers. It is anticipated that the President will provide further details and promote the community college proposal in coming weeks.

Most of these proposals will require Congressional action, but they will also be reflected in the President’s FY 2013 budget plan expected to be released February 13th.

The day after the State of the Union address, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, a member of the president’s cabinet, came to Tallahassee Community College and attended a town hall event with a focus on adult education and the role of workforce training in rebuilding the economy.

Community and Government Relations Web Page
Please visit and bookmark this new web page, 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