

South Florida mayors decry mandates from state lawmakers

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Florida mayors don't want state legislators calling the shots for their cities through unfunded mandates and other measures that infringe on their powers of home rule.

Today, the Florida League of Mayors announced its Stop Passing the Buck campaign at the Atlantis Country Club during a discussion attended by 17 South Florida mayors, including West Palm Beach Mayor Lois Frankel and Wellington Mayor Darell Bowen .

Intended to supplement lobbying for cities in Tallahassee, the campaign will use a five-question test to evaluate legislation after it has passed. Goals include raising awareness about possibly burdensome laws before the spring legislative session begins March 2 and giving mayors benchmarks to use in evaluating legislation.

The questions include whether the legislation passes the cost of state responsibilities to local taxpayers, whether it limits local communities' ability to govern themselves and whether it will cost local taxpayers money.

The 170-member Florida mayors 'group also asks whether the legislation respects the principles of home rule for municipalities outlined in the Florida Constitution.

"For state lawmakers, the choice is clear," said Don Slesnick, Coral Gables mayor and president of the Florida League of Mayors. "Do they say 'the buck stops here' or do they pass the buck?"

The mayors group distributed a five-page list of unfunded state mandates, including a law that limits the ability of cities to condemn property to prevent blight and another that requires cities to offer retired employees the same health and hospitalization insurance coverage at the same cost that they offer to active employees.

Slesnick said a law that requires comprehensive plans to be periodically updated passes unnecessary costs onto to cities such as Coral Gables, which is built out.

"They are doing a number of things that not only cost you money but limit your ability to cover the costs," Slesnick said, referring to state legislators. "They catch us coming and going."

Another bill that did not pass in Tallahassee would have dictated how cities run the public participation parts of their meetings, said John Thomas, Florida League of Mayors executive director.

"At the end of the day, it's the big arm of state government dictating what should happen at the city level," Thomas said. "Our hope is that this will lead to more sensitivity to the concerns of local residents."

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