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## Editorial: Florida Legislature must stop passing the buck to local governments

editorial board

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@Body copy editorial drop cap:An association of Florida mayors has a message for lawmakers: “Stop passing the buck.”

Last week, almost two dozen members of the 170-member Florida League of Mayors took that message to Tallahassee, urging lawmakers to stop efforts to cut the state budget by sending unfunded mandates down to the local level and forcing cities and towns into a worse situation of having to cut services or raise taxes.

The state lawmakers come out looking like good guys and the local elected officials look like bad guys.

Such actions also take funding decisions out of local hands and put them into the hands of distant legislators with nonlocal priorities.

It’s unfair, poor policy and possibly in violation of constitutionally required home rule.

“For state lawmakers, the choice is clear,” said Don Slesnick, mayor of Coral Gables and president of the league. “Do they say ‘the buck stops here’ or do they pass the buck?”

To add to their campaign to keep state hands out of their pockets, the mayors have established a process of evaluating proposed legislation rated from “bad” to “very dangerous.”

Five questions asked as part of the evaluation are:

Does the bill pass the cost of a state responsibility to local taxpayers?

Does the bill limit local communities’ ability to govern themselves?

Does the bill create new mandates that cost local taxpayers money?

Does the bill respect the basic tenets of “home rule?”

Is the negative impact of the bill especially onerous to local taxpayers?

A bill is considered “very dangerous” if it is sweeping in scope, forces millions of dollars in tax increases for local taxpayers and represents a dangerous and unjust seizure of local freedom by the state.

The mayors have put the legislators on notice. They are tired of being forced to come up with funds for state programs and local mandates over which they have no direct control.

The effort by the mayors is just and is in the best interests of taxpayers throughout the state. And, it is not just cities that bear the brunt of unfunded state mandates. Counties are also impacted.

Especially as local governments are facing major budget difficulties and are being forced to cut services and employees to balance their budgets, having the state place additional, unwarranted financial burdens on them is wrong. If state lawmakers continue the practice, they should hear quite directly from their constituents in the voting booths.



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