

**THE BEST  
LEGI\$LATURE  
MONEY CAN BUY**

*We have the receipts. We demand a refund.*



# THE BEST LEGISLATURE MONEY CAN BUY

In late August, just a few weeks before Florida lawmakers began committee meetings to prepare for the 2022 legislative session, the corporate racing giant NASCAR and one of its top executives gave \$50,000 – plus free race tickets – to Republican leaders in the Florida Senate.

That investment appears to have paid off six months later when the Florida Senate added a \$6 million tax break for NASCAR into a bill during the final week of session. Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis, who has taken \$50,000 from the husband of one of NASCAR's top executives just in the past year, is certain to sign the NASCAR tax break into law.

It was yet another reminder that – for all their performative thundering against “woke” corporations – that Ron DeSantis and his allies in the Legislature's Republican leadership appear to do the bidding of the big corporations that bankroll their campaigns.

Indeed, an analysis of political contributions from the recently concluded 2022 legislative session suggests Florida's Ron DeSantis-dominated Legislature is the best state legislature that money can buy. Though they attempted to distract voters by passing extreme abortion bans, erasing honest history, and attacking gay and transgender Floridians, the DeSantis Legislature spent most of the two-month session supporting tax breaks and other policies that help corporations further pad their profits at the expense of everyday Floridians.

Consider the case of Associated Industries of Florida (AIF), the big-business lobbying group that is one of the biggest donors to Republican leaders in Tallahassee. Records show that AIF's political committees have given more than \$11 million to DeSantis, Senate President Wilton

Simpson, House Speaker Chris Sprowls and the Republican Party of Florida since the 2020 election cycle. And important to note, this does not include the millions more AIF has showered on individual legislators or filtered through dark-money networks.

AIF itself is primarily funded by six of Florida's biggest companies, most of them parts of giant multi-state or multinational conglomerates: Sugar producers Florida Crystals and U.S. Sugar; electric utility Florida Power & Light (FPL); for-profit hospital chain HCA Healthcare; theme-park owner Walt Disney World; and health insurer Florida Blue.<sup>1</sup>

An analysis of legislation passed provides evidence that the DeSantis Legislature handsomely rewarded all six of those corporate goliaths this legislative session.

The sugar companies passed a bill meant to ensure they get enough irrigation water from Lake Okeechobee, even if it means less water to sustain small fishing businesses and the Florida Everglades.<sup>2</sup> FPL passed a bill gutting its competitors in the rooftop solar industry, putting thousands of Floridians at risk of losing their jobs.<sup>3</sup> Disney benefited from tens of millions of dollars in tourism advertising while HCA extended healthcare companies legal immunity from COVID-19 lawsuits.<sup>4</sup> Florida Blue stopped a bill to make health insurers pay for children's hearing aids; the DeSantis Legislature decided to make taxpayers pay for that instead.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The “Voice of Florida Business” is the voice of six Florida businesses. Seeking Rents. April 3, 2022. [Link](#).

<sup>2</sup> SB 2508: Environmental Resources. FlSenate.gov. [Link](#).

<sup>3</sup> CS/CS/HB 741 - Net Metering. MyFloridaHouse.gov. [Link](#).

<sup>4</sup> Florida Chamber racks up wins in the 2022 Legislative Session. Florida Politics. March 15, 2022. [Link](#).

<sup>5</sup> CS/SB 498: Coverage for Hearing Aids for Children. MyFloridaHouse.gov. [Link](#).



And while they addressed the whims of big corporations, DeSantis and legislative leaders ignored the challenges faced by everyday Floridians.

They plowed ahead with plans to hand out \$624 million in tax giveaways to the state's wealthiest companies – many of which are lavish campaign contributors.<sup>6</sup> About half of the money will go to just 100 giant corporations. DeSantis signed the law responsible for these unnecessary corporate giveaways in 2019<sup>7</sup>, and they will be paid out by May 1.

The DeSantis Legislature also killed efforts to slow the soaring costs of rent and to protect tenants from predatory landlords. They once again failed to expand healthcare access for Floridians. They did nothing at all to stem the soaring cost of property insurance or to modernize one of the worst unemployment benefit systems in the nation, one that is utterly rigged against job-seeking Floridians.<sup>8</sup> And they haven't lifted a finger to help vulnerable Floridians who could lose

their healthcare coverage upon the end of the nationwide state of emergency declared because of COVID-19.<sup>9</sup>

The governor also seems willing to exploit the suffering of everyday Floridians for personal political gain. DeSantis and Republican legislative leaders struck a deal to cut Florida's gas tax for one month (which they could afford to do thanks to money provided by the Biden Administration).<sup>10</sup> But while other states issue similar policies immediately, the DeSantis Legislature will force Floridians to wait until October, conveniently when it will be most helpful for DeSantis' re-election campaign.

So everyday Floridians must wait six months for what little help the DeSantis Legislature deigns to give them, while corporations enjoy dozens of giveaways. What follows is a closer look at many of the apparent favors that the DeSantis Legislature did for its corporate donors during the 2022 legislative session.

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6 The DeSantis administration has started sending more than \$600 million to Florida's biggest corporations. Seeking Rents. April 7, 2024. [Link](#).

7 HB 7127 (2019) - Corporate Income Tax. MyFloridaHouse.Gov. [Link](#).

8 Florida, Which Has One of the Lowest Unemployment Payouts in U.S., to End \$300 Additional Benefit. Newsweek. May 24, 2021. [Link](#).

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9 The 'Massive' Task Awaiting State Medicaid Agencies. Route Fifty. March 23, 2022. [Link](#).

10 GOP Governors Attacked Biden Aid. Now It May Help Them on Election Day. Bloomberg. April 2, 2022. [Link](#).

## A NOTE ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN FINANCE TOTALS USED IN THIS REPORT

*To determine how much money corporations have contributed to Republican leaders in Tallahassee, we compiled all campaign contributions of \$5,000 or more to political committees controlled by Gov. Ron DeSantis (Friends of Ron DeSantis), Senate President Wilton Simpson (Friends of Wilton Simpson, Jobs for Florida, Florida Green PAC, Future Florida) and House Speaker Chris Sprowls (Floridians for Economic Freedom), as well as the Republican Party of Florida, the Florida Republican Senatorial Campaign Committee and the Florida House Republican Campaign Committee, from January 1, 2019 to the end of the 2022 legislative session, on March 14, 2022. All figures cited in this report come from that dataset.*

# TAX AND SPENDING

There was an illuminating moment on the floor of the Florida Senate near the end of the 2022 session.

Republican Sen. Aaron Bean (Fernandina Beach) was boasting about a healthcare budget that included an extra \$59 million for the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD), where there is a heartbreaking backlog of families with special-needs children desperately waiting for help from the state.<sup>1</sup>

The extra \$59 million will help about 1,500 families – from a waitlist of more than 22,000 families. Democrat Senator Annette Taddeo (Miami) asked why we don’t give the agency enough money to serve every family that needs help.

“You’re now seeing a little bit of the challenge of appropriating healthcare money,” Bean responded. “There’s never enough, so we do our best to triage.”

Bean was wrong. Florida has more than enough money to help every family who needs it. But Governor Ron DeSantis and the legislative leaders who follow him made choices that amount to giving that money to corporations instead. Consider the tax and budget policy decisions the Florida Legislature made this session:

💰 The DeSantis Legislature voted down legislation sponsored by Democrat Rep. Angie Nixon (Jacksonville) to close corporate tax loopholes exploited by multinational companies such as Home Depot, Target, eBay and Chevron.<sup>2</sup> The common-sense reform,

<sup>1</sup> Man with Down syndrome, on Florida’s waiting list for help for 16 years, is not alone | Scott Maxwell Commentary. Orlando Sentinel. November 5, 2021. [Link](#).

<sup>2</sup> Florida has a chance to close corporate tax loopholes. Seeking Rents. February 28, 2022. [Link](#).

known as “combined reporting,” would have saved nearly \$500 million a year<sup>3</sup> from the 1 percent of Florida businesses that pay corporate income tax. \$500 million in new recurring state funding would more than fund the current APD waitlist. Republicans instead chose to side with big-business front groups such as the Florida Chamber of Commerce, which has given nearly \$3.5 million to Republican leaders.

💰 The DeSantis Legislature refused to cancel \$624 million<sup>4</sup> in tax refunds for corporations that are to be paid out by May 1st under a law that DeSantis signed in 2019.<sup>5</sup> This is the second round of giant tax giveaways that DeSantis and Tallahassee Republicans have given to the state’s biggest corporations, following \$543 million that were handed out in May 2020 while the pandemic was raging and small businesses shuttered.<sup>6</sup> Though corporations have lobbied for laws that keep their tax payments secret,<sup>7</sup> one of the biggest refunds is expected to go to for-profit hospital operator HCA Healthcare, which has given \$130,000 to Republican leaders.<sup>8</sup>

💰 DeSantis himself refused to hold corporations accountable to a 2019 state law requiring them to provide policymakers with more details about their tax payments. Corporations who ignored the law were supposed to pay fines – but the DeSantis administration simply waived

<sup>3</sup> Florida Policy Institute. An Equitable Tax Code. August 19, 2021. [Link](#).

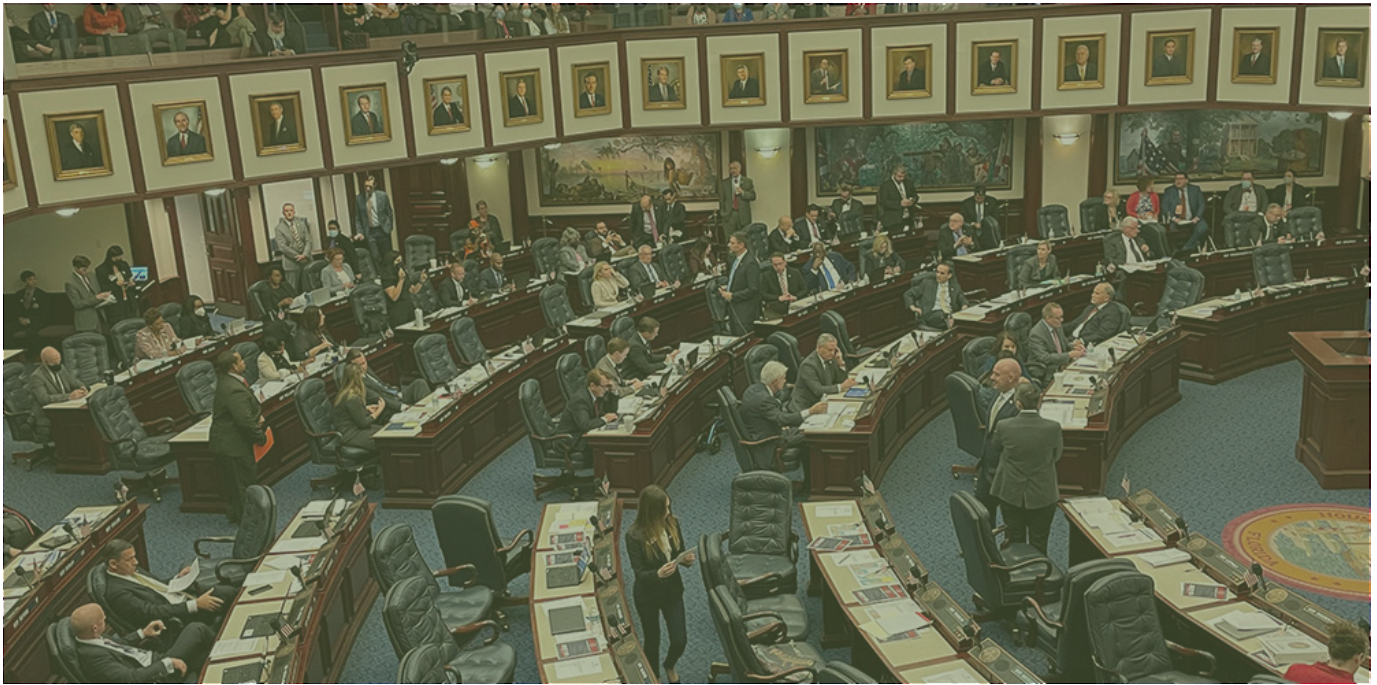
<sup>4</sup> Corporate Income Tax - Supporting Material for Statutory Adjustment. Office of Economic & Demographic Research. January 21, 2022. [Link](#).

<sup>5</sup> HB 7127 - Corporate Income Tax. MyFloridaHouse.gov. 2019. [Link](#).

<sup>6</sup> Florida’s corporations set to pocket \$543.2 million tax refund. Tallahassee Democrat. March 30, 2020. [Link](#).

<sup>7</sup> Sec. 213.053(2)(a), Florida Statutes. [Link](#).

<sup>8</sup> Tax war: HCA and the Department of Revenue. Florida Trend. January 27, 2016. [Link](#).



Florida House of Representatives convened during the 2022 legislative session. Courtesy of Florida Rising.

them. Altogether, Governor DeSantis let corporations skip out on as much as \$255 million of our dollars in penalties.<sup>9</sup>

§ The DeSantis Administration did nothing for months about a Medicaid vendor that was failing to pay claims for services needed by sick children and finally only fined the company after a reporter broke the story.<sup>10</sup> That vendor was a subsidiary of Centene Corp., which has given more than \$1.3 million to Republican leaders.

§ The DeSantis Legislature refused to repeal broken tax breaks that are being abused by corporations such as theme-park giant Universal Studios, which continues to take millions in tax breaks out of a program that is supposed to help low-income neighborhoods that are struggling with high rates of poverty and crime. Democrats Sen. Victor Torres (Kissimmee) and Rep. Anna Eskamani (Orlando) filed legislation to end this corporate exploitation, but Tallahassee Republicans

<sup>9</sup> A bunch of corporations defied the Florida Legislature without consequence. Seeking Rents. January 26, 2022. [Link](#).

<sup>10</sup> Hundreds, maybe thousands, of Florida Medicaid kids at risk of losing care. Barred Owl Press. January 28, 2022. [Link](#).

never gave it a hearing.<sup>11</sup> Universal Studios is owned by cable and entertainment giant Comcast Corp., which has given more than \$1 million to Republican leaders.

§ The DeSantis Legislature even killed bills filed by members of its own party when those bills conflicted with their corporate business agenda. For instance, Republican Rep. Jason Shoaf (Blountstown) filed legislation to let small, financially struggling counties along the Gulf Coast use a small portion of their tourist development taxes to pay police, firefighters and other public-safety workers.<sup>12</sup> But Republican leadership killed the bill, to the benefit of tourism industry lobbyists who have long-demanded hotel taxes be spent entirely on tourism industry subsidies.<sup>13</sup> The bill was opposed by the Florida Restaurant & Lodging Association,<sup>14</sup> which has given more

<sup>11</sup> HB 6041 / SB 1778 - Urban High-Crime Area Job Tax Credit Program. MyFloridaHouse.gov. 2022. [Link](#).

<sup>12</sup> HB 673 - Tourist Development Taxes. MyFloridaHouse.gov. 2022. [Link](#).

<sup>13</sup> How the tourism industry and politicians keep Florida's tax money from being spent where we need it most. Orlando Weekly. August 23, 2013. [Link](#).

<sup>14</sup> 2022 Legislative Report. Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association. [Link](#).



than \$270,000 to Republican leaders.

At a self-congratulatory end-of-session press conference, DeSantis, Simpson and Sprowls all patted themselves on the back for passing a big package of tax cuts that includes a number of helpful tax breaks for consumers – most of which were first suggested by Democrats, such as a tax break for baby diapers that was championed by Sen. Lauren Book (Plantation) and Rep. Anna Eskamani (Orlando).<sup>15</sup>

But DeSantis, Simpson and Sprowls neglected to mention all the special-interest tax breaks they passed for big businesses. Nor did they mention that most of the consumer-focused tax breaks are temporary – but the special-interest business tax breaks are all permanent.

Those tax breaks included:

💰 A \$6 million-a-year sales-tax break on tickets to the Daytona 500 to help subsidize NASCAR – which is owned by the billionaire France family and which has given more than \$200,000 to Republican leaders through various company subsidiaries and family members.

💰 A \$5.8 million-a-year sales-tax break on tickets to Formula One Grand Prix races – a subsidy for Steven Ross, the billionaire owner of the Miami Dolphins and Hard Rock Stadium, which struck a deal last year to host an annual Formula One race every year in Miami. Ross and his companies have given more than \$405,000 to Republican leaders.

💰 A corporate-income tax break for railroads that will cost taxpayers \$6.9 million a year. The single biggest beneficiary of this tax break is expected to be Florida East Coast Railroad, whose companies have given more than \$210,000 to Republican leaders.

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<sup>15</sup> HB 85 / SB 246 - Tax Exemption for Diapers and Incontinence Products. MyFloridaHouse.gov. 2022. [Link](#).

💰 A \$7.5 million-a-year property tax break for a Miami-based salmon-farming company Atlantic Sapphire. The company's lobbyist – former Republican state Sen. Ellyn Bogdanoff, one of the many legislators who have passed through the revolving door between legislating and lobbying – has given at least \$750,000 to legislative leaders through political committees she controls.

💰 A \$300,000-a-year tax break for Florida Power & Light, which is expected to save the company approximately \$3.25 million on a new so-called “green hydrogen” power plant. FPL has given more than \$2.4 million to Republican leaders.

The DeSantis Legislature also stuffed the state budget full of earmarks that help corporate donors. Among the examples:

💰 \$747.1 million to help a housing development in Senate President Wilton Simpson's districts. Most of the money would be spent in support of a new Moffitt Cancer Center research campus, which is being built in a subdivision called “Angeline” that is being developed by homebuilding giant Lennar and Tampa-based developer Metro Development Group. Companies and executives linked to Lennar and Metro Development have given more than \$400,000 to Republican leaders.

💰 \$645 million for a new, 4,500-bed mega prison that is widely expected to be privatized<sup>16</sup> – most likely through The Geo Group, the Boca Raton-based private prison operator that has given more than \$1.8 million to legislative leaders, including \$200,000 to Senate President Wilton Simpson on the day before session began.

💰 \$65 million for a privately owned reservoir being built by Palm Beach Aggregates, a company co-owned by sugar giant Florida Crystals. Palm Beach Aggregates has given

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<sup>16</sup> Private prison investors love the Florida Senate's budget. Seeking Rents. February 24, 2022. [Link](#).

more than \$120,000 to Republican leaders while Florida Crystals has given more than \$460,000.

💰 \$50 million for tourism advertising – a top priority of Walt Disney World, which has given more than \$2.5 million to Republican leaders.

💰 \$35 million to build a new spring-training complex for the Tampa Bay Rays Major League Baseball team. The Rays have given more than \$105,000 to Republican leaders.

💰 \$6 million for a new charter high school in Indiantown that was lobbied for by a developer that is planning an 800-acre, 2,000-home housing development in the area. The developer, the Garcia Cos., has given at least \$55,000 to Republican leaders.

💰 \$4 million for infrastructure upgrades around Airglades Airport, an airport in Hendry County that is being privatized to a consortium co-owned by sugar giant U.S. Sugar Corp., which plans to develop a big swath of its surrounding land holdings. U.S. Sugar has given at least \$1.4 million to Republican leaders.

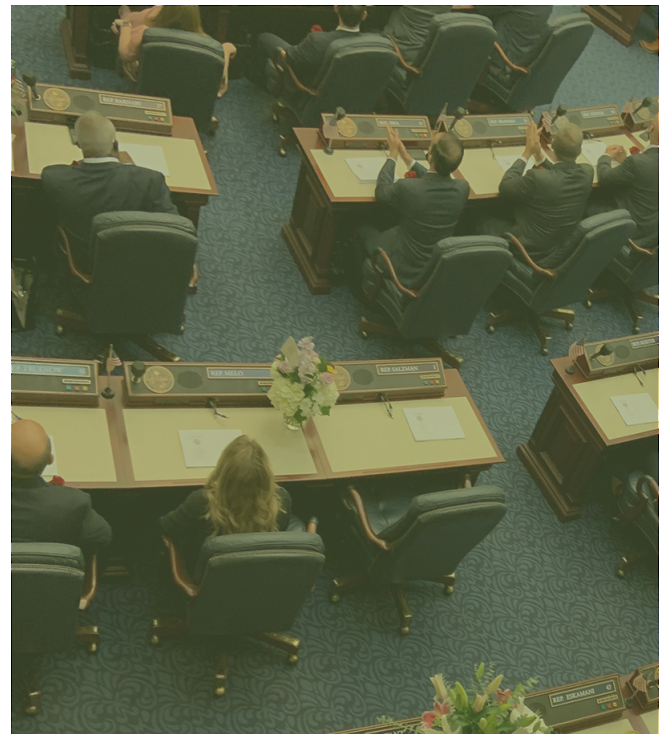
💰 \$2.959 million to build an access road to an industrial park in Columbia County owned by Weyerhaeuser Co., the Seattle-based timber giant that turned a \$2.6 billion profit last year.

💰 \$870,000 for Florida Gulf & Atlantic Railroad, which is owned by global investment giant Macquarie Group – and is one of the companies that also lobbied for the \$6.9 million-a-year corporate tax break for railroad construction.

💰 An estimated \$20 million in the form of higher commissions paid by the Florida Lottery to the grocery stores, gas stations and liquor stores that sell its tickets. This last-minute addition to the state budget could lead

to an extra \$2 million in payments to Publix Supermarkets, the state's largest seller of lottery tickets and a company that has given more than \$670,000 to Republican leaders.<sup>17</sup>

In January 2022, the Institute for Local Self-Reliance surveyed 908 small, independent businesses across the U.S. and asked about the challenges they face and the policies they believe would improve the survival and success of small businesses. Of the five policies cited as most effective included ending subsidies and tax breaks for big businesses.<sup>18</sup> Based on the priorities of the 2022 legislative session, the DeSantis Legislature appears to disagree.



*Florida House of Representatives opening day of legislative session.*

<sup>17</sup> Last-minute legislation could give more money to Publix, 7-Eleven and Circle K — but less to Florida students. Seeking Rents. April 10, 2022. [Link](#).

<sup>18</sup> 2022 Independent Business Survey: Top Challenges and Policy Priorities. Institute for Local Self-Reliance. March 30, 2022. [Link](#).

# HOUSING

There is no more urgent crisis in Florida right now than the lack of affordable housing. Floridians are being forced out of apartments by skyrocketing rents and frozen out of homeownership by soaring prices. The Florida Legislature could have helped this session: Democrat Rep. Angie Nixon (Jacksonville) introduced an amendment that would have prohibited predatory landlords from raising the rent on their tenants by more than 10 percent in a single year.

The DeSantis Legislature refused to even vote on Nixon's measure.<sup>1</sup> This was three months after Democrats had called on Governor DeSantis to declare a housing state of emergency to address price-gouging rent hikes.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Amendment 300015 to HB537 Fees in Lieu of Security Deposits. MyFloridaHouse.gov. February 18, 2022. [Link](#).

<sup>2</sup> Florida Democrats are calling on Gov. DeSantis to declare a state of emergency over affordable housing. WFSU by The News Service of Florida. December 17, 2021. [Link](#).

That alone was arguably the single biggest favor the DeSantis Legislature did this session for the corporate landlord lobby – another major source of their campaign funding. For instance, one of the state's biggest apartment developers, The Vestcor Companies of Jacksonville, has given more than \$630,000 to Republican leaders through various companies and executives, while corporate landlords' main lobbying group, the Florida Apartment Association, has given them \$175,000.

But it was also just one of many ways the DeSantis Legislature favored corporate landlords over struggling renters. A coalition of Democratic and Republican legislators together filed a comprehensive package of bills meant to protect tenants from predatory tactics. Legislative leaders killed every single one of them.

Here are the bills they blocked – none of which



Community advocates and lawmakers hold press conference in the State Capitol.



were even given a single hearing:

§ HB6017 by Rep. Anna Eskamani (D-Orlando) / SB 580 by Sen. Victor Torres (D-Kissimmee), which would have repealed a decades-old law that blocks cities and counties from passing local long-term rent-affordability laws.

§ HB1335 by Rep. Angie Nixon (D-Jacksonville) / SB 1776 by Victor Torres (D-Kissimmee), which would protect pregnant women and families from rapid evictions.

§ HB 1587 by Rep. Travaris McCurdy (D-Orlando) / SB 1620 by Sen. Shevrin Jones (D-Miami Gardens), a comprehensive proposal which would have required landlords to give tenants notice further in advance before raising the rent.

§ HB 511 by Rep. Ramon Alexander (D-Tallahassee) / SB 648 by Sen. Janet Cruz (D-Tampa), which would have prohibited credit agencies from penalizing tenants who were evicted during the COVID19 pandemic – a period when so many low-income renters living paycheck-to-paycheck lost their jobs through no fault of their own.

§ HB 819 by Rep. Michael Grieco (D-Miami Beach) / SB 1134 by Sen. Jason Pizzo (D-Miami), which would have required landlords to maintain working air-conditioning in their rental units.

§ HB 1131 by Rep. Vance Aloupis (R-Miami) / SB 1312 by Sen. Ana Maria Rodriguez (R-Miami), which would have allowed evicted Floridians an opportunity to expunge their records.

§ HB 933 by Rep. Geraldine Thompson (D-Windermere) / SB 1934 by Sen. Shevrin Jones (D-Miami Gardens), which would have required landlords to disclose to tenants the presence of toxic mold in their units

§ The DeSantis Legislature also voted down an amendment by Rep. C. Smith (D-Orlando) capping security deposits at one month's rent.<sup>3</sup> There is currently no cap to security deposit amounts in Florida.

The DeSantis Legislature didn't just prevent legislators from both parties from trying to make life better for renters. They actively made life worse for renters – by slashing \$100 million from a fund that supports the construction of affordable-rent apartments around the state.<sup>4</sup>

That \$100 million, which was supposed to help build affordable apartments for all Floridians, will instead go to a new home-buying program with more questions than

<sup>3</sup> Amendment 253473 to HB537 Fees in Lieu of Security Deposits. MyFloridaHouse.Gov. February 18, 2022. [Link](#).

<sup>4</sup> Florida lawmakers divert affordable housing money to 'hometown heroes.' Tampa Bay Times. March 8, 2022. [Link](#).



Floridians advocate for tenant protections during the 2022 legislative session. Courtesy of Florida Rising.

answers surrounding it.<sup>5</sup> The proposal was pushed by the Florida Realtors<sup>6</sup>, the lobbying group for real-estate agents that has given more than \$1.7 million to Republican leaders.

Just like apartment rents and home prices, property insurance premiums are soaring, too. Yet the DeSantis Legislature didn't do a single thing to rein in insurance costs for Floridians.

In fact, the one bill they tried to pass would have made insurance even more expensive for the nearly 1 million policyholders covered by the state-run Citizens Property Insurance Corp. That bill would have forced a 15 percent price increase on Citizens customers.

Democrat Rep. Evan Jenne (Dania Beach) tried to amend the legislation<sup>7</sup> to cut the proposed rate increases nearly in half, but Republicans rejected it on a 71-42 vote,<sup>8</sup> once again siding with insurance companies over their own constituents. Insurance companies such as Heritage Insurance want lawmakers to force Citizens to charge higher prices so they can charge higher prices themselves; Heritage has given more than \$1.2 million to Republican leaders.

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<sup>5</sup> Florida lawmakers raid \$100M from affordable housing fund for program that doesn't exist. Orlando Sentinel. April 4, 2022. [Link](#).

<sup>6</sup> Florida lawmakers fail to tackle property insurance, condo rules, Orlando Sentinel. March 11, 2022. [Link](#).

<sup>7</sup> Amendment 221655 to SB 468 - Insurance. MyFloridaHouse.gov. March 8, 2022. [Link](#).

<sup>8</sup> Amendment 221655 to SB 468 - Insurance Vote. MyFloridaHouse.gov. March 8, 2022. [Link](#).



# HEALTHCARE

**M**ore than a decade after the passage of the Affordable Care Act, Florida remains one of only 12 states that refuse to expand Medicaid to cover adults with incomes of less than 138 percent of poverty level – denying healthcare coverage to nearly 800,000 Floridians.<sup>1</sup> Democrats Rep. Geraldine Thompson (Orlando) and Sen. Annette Taddeo (Miami) filed bills to expand Medicaid; the DeSantis Legislature did not hear them.<sup>2</sup>

But they didn't stop there. They even killed bills that would have required insurance companies to cover the cost of hearing aids for children. The bills were sponsored by Republican legislators but opposed by health insurers – and legislative leaders sided with the health insurers.<sup>3</sup>

The DeSantis Legislature also worked with the insurance industry to kill another pro-consumer – and Republican-sponsored – bill that would have required insurance companies to give Floridians more flexibility to visit out-of-network healthcare providers.<sup>4</sup>

Health insurance giants Florida Blue, UnitedHealth Group and Humana have given Republican leaders approximately \$850,000, \$625,000, and \$465,000, respectively.

Even as they refuse to expand healthcare insurance, the DeSantis Legislature also eliminated the state's "critical care" fund<sup>5</sup>

– which supports hospitals that care for a disproportionate number of low-income Medicaid patients. Eliminating this fund has been a long-term goal of for-profit hospital chain HCA Healthcare Inc., whose own hospitals treat a smaller number of Medicaid patients on a per-location basis.

And the DeSantis Legislature gave HCA and other healthcare companies further legal immunity from COVID-19-related lawsuits – even when their negligence leads to severe harm.<sup>6</sup> This was also a priority for the hospital industry's main lobbying group, the Florida Hospital Association, which has given Republican leaders more than \$832,000.

The DeSantis Legislature also continued stripping rights away from workers, and risking the lives of seniors. HB 1239, which will allow nursing homes to slash the amount of care their residents receive from certified nurses by 20 percent – from a minimum of 2.5 hours per day to just 2 hours per day has already been signed into law.<sup>7</sup> This was a priority issue for the state's for-profit nursing home industry, which wants to replace nurses with cheaper, less qualified and non-union workers.

The nursing home industry's lobbying groups have given more than \$100,000 to Republican leaders. Individual nursing home companies have given much more.

<sup>1</sup> Who Could Medicaid Reach With Expansion in Florida? Kaiser Family Foundation. [Link](#).

<sup>2</sup> HB27 / SB1504 - Eligibility for Medical Assistance and Related Services. 2022. MyFloridaHouse.gov. [Link](#).

<sup>3</sup> SB 498 - Coverage for Hearing Aids for Children. 2022. MyFloridaHouse.gov. [Link](#).

<sup>4</sup> HB 1529 - Applicability of Payments for Nonpreferred Provider Services. 2022.. MyFloridaHouse.gov. [Link](#).

<sup>5</sup> State budget will cut millions from South Florida hospitals that take neediest patients. Miami Herald. March 13, 2022. [Link](#).

<sup>6</sup> SB 7014 – COVID-19-related Claims Against Health Care Providers. 2022. MyFloridaHouse.gov. [Link](#).

<sup>7</sup> DeSantis signs bill that cuts nursing home staffing hours. Orlando Sentinel. April 7, 2022. [Link](#).

# LOCAL POWER

In addition to seemingly buying control of the Florida Legislature, the corporate lobby has actively worked to cut everyday Floridians' access to other sources of power, such as local governments and constitutional amendments.

We saw that again during the 2022 session, when corporations successfully lobbied for the passage of SB 620 – a dangerous piece of legislation that will allow big businesses to sue cities and counties that pass local laws they don't like.

Consider the potential impact on grassroots efforts around the state to protect puppies from animal cruelty. More than 80 cities and counties across the state have enacted laws regulating puppy mills, supported by animal-welfare advocates across the state.

That has upset Petland Inc., the largest retailer of puppy mill dogs.<sup>1</sup> The Ohio-based corporation is one of the companies that lobbied for SB 620, which could force local taxpayers who decide to ban puppy mills to pay Petland for lost profits.

Democrat Rep. Evan Jenne (Dania Beach) tried to exempt local laws to protect animals from SB 620<sup>2</sup> – but the Florida House rejected the suggestion on a 69-46 vote.<sup>3</sup> Petland has donated at least \$200,000 to Republican leaders.

In fact, several amendments introduced by Democrats were rejected by the Governor's legislative allies. Sen. Gary Farmer (Fort

<sup>1</sup> About Petland puppy mill dogs. Humane Society of the United States. [Link](#).

<sup>2</sup> Amendment 773345 to SB620 - Local Business Protection Act. 2022. [Link](#).

<sup>3</sup> Amendment 773345 Vote to SB620 - Local Business Protection Act. 2022. [Link](#).

Lauderdale) filed an amendment<sup>4</sup> to exempt local affordable housing laws, Democrat Rep. Ben Diamond (St. Petersburg) filed an amendment<sup>5</sup> to protect endangered species such as sea turtles, and Rep. Angie Nixon (Jacksonville) filed an amendment<sup>6</sup> to ensure the law can only be used by local businesses, not multinational corporations. All proposals were rejected by legislative leadership.

The DeSantis Legislature also continued to erect obstacles to citizen-led constitutional amendment petition drives, which have in recent years led to victories such as a \$15 minimum wage, medical cannabis, and the restoration of voting rights for returning citizens. This session, the Legislature passed HB 921, which sharply limits the amount of money that constitutional amendment campaigns can raise from out-of-state donors – though those same lawmakers made sure to exempt themselves from these limits so they can continue raising unlimited sums themselves from out-of-state special interests.<sup>7</sup>

The DeSantis Legislature is now even working with corporate lobbyists to limit who can serve in government by passing bills such as SB 1078, which prevent Floridians from running for election to local environmental agencies known as soil-and-water conservation districts – unless they work for an agribusiness or own agricultural land.

One of the companies that lobbied for this

<sup>4</sup> Amendment 623026 to SB620 - Local Business Protection Act. 2022. [Link](#).

<sup>5</sup> Amendment 154251 to SB620 - Local Business Protection Act. 2022. [Link](#).

<sup>6</sup> Amendment 521123 to SB620 - Local Business Protection Act. 2022. [Link](#).

<sup>7</sup> Florida politicians take millions in out-of-state donations, but want to ban them for citizen campaigns | Commentary. Orlando Sentinel. March 8, 2022. [Link](#).



ludicrous bill was one of the state's largest landowners: Lykes Bros.. The company has given more than \$127,000 to Republican leaders.



*Floridian watches on as Senate Committee convenes.*

# PUBLIC SAFETY

**W**e already mentioned the DeSantis Legislature's \$645 million for a new, 4,500-bed mega prison that is widely expected to be privatized – most likely through The Geo Group, the Boca Raton-based private prison operator that has given more than \$1.8 million to legislative leaders, including \$200,000 to Senate President Wilton Simpson on the day before session began.

DeSantis and his allies apparently plan to fill this prison as quickly as possible with a slew of new criminal offenses. In particular, SB 1534 aims to throw more Floridians in prison for petty theft. The bill undercuts small reforms in the Florida First Step Act– passed in 2019, the law modernized Florida's theft threshold to better align with national standards and not further criminalize poverty.<sup>1</sup>

That law has now been gutted with the passage of SB 1534, a priority of big box retailers. The Florida Retail Federation, which lobbies on behalf of retailers like Walmart, Target, and Home Depot, contributed \$115,000 to DeSantis and his allies; Walmart donated \$415,000.



*Fourth floor rotunda of State Capitol.*

<sup>1</sup> Florida updates felony theft threshold for first time in more than 30 years. WJHG News Channel 7. July 7, 2019. [Link](#).



# ENVIRONMENT

The Florida Senate was led this year by Senate President Wilton Simpson, who is now running for election as the state's agriculture commissioner and has raised millions of dollars over the years from big agribusinesses involved in the production of sugar, cattle and more. Simpson appeared to reward those agribusinesses this session.

Most notable was SB 2508, which is designed to give sugar growers like Florida Crystals and U.S. Sugar Corp. more control over water stored in Lake Okeechobee, which they rely on to irrigate their crops – but which is also a vital source of water for the fishing businesses that work Florida Bay and for restoring the Florida Everglades.

SB 2508 would also give vast new land-buying powers to Simpson if he is elected agriculture commissioner, which could allow him to further reward his agribusiness donors – companies such as Barron Collier and Collier Enterprises, two of the largest landowners in the state which have given more than \$280,000 to Republicans.

Lawmakers also passed SB 1000, which will allow the citrus industry to use more fertilizer on their land, even if they are in environmentally sensitive water basins that have already been badly polluted by fertilizer-laden runoff. The legislation could also pave the way for other agribusinesses to begin using more fertilizer, too, which could lead to the continued shrinking of seagrass beds – and more manatees starving to death. One of industrial agriculture's main lobbying groups, the Florida Farm Bureau, has given \$95,000 to Republican leaders.

Meanwhile, the DeSantis Legislature took no meaningful action to save Florida's beloved

manatees, which are starving to death in record numbers because pollution is killing off the seagrass beds that manatees rely on for food.<sup>1</sup> They did include \$28 million for manatees in the state budget – but most of that money will go to rescue and rehab programs run by SeaWorld Entertainment Inc. and other zoos and aquariums.<sup>2</sup>

SeaWorld has given at least \$10,000 to Republican leaders.



*Community advocates and lawmakers hold press conference in the State Capitol.*

<sup>1</sup> Florida's governor and Legislature did nothing to stop manatees from starving. Florida Phoenix. March 17, 2022. [Link](#).

<sup>2</sup> For Florida's ailing manatees, state budget includes \$27 million. WMFE. March 22, 2022. [Link](#).

# FLORIDA POWER & LIGHT

**F**inally, a special section for the corporation that arguably has Governor DeSantis and Tallahassee Republicans more under its thumb than any other: utility giant Florida Power & Light.

We already mentioned their outsize influence via the Associated Industries of Florida. Investigative reporting found consultants for FPL were deeply involved in the “ghost candidate” scandal during the 2020 elections, when Republican operatives spent more than half-a-million dollars in dark-money to use sham “independent” candidates as spoilers in three battleground Senate races.<sup>1</sup> With the election of Republican Senators Jason Brodeur (Lake Mary), Ileana Garcia (Miami), and Ana Maria Rodriguez (Miami), the scheme helped Republicans maintain their majority in the 40-member Florida Senate.

Evidence suggests FPL was richly rewarded during the 2022 session.

When we should be expanding access to solar energy, the DeSantis legislature rammed through legislation – initially written by FPL lobbyists<sup>2</sup> – that will make it more expensive for Florida homeowners to have solar panels installed on their roofs, despite warnings that doing so would devastate the fast-growing rooftop solar industry and put tens of thousands of good-paying, clean-energy jobs at risk.<sup>3</sup>

By eliminating a longstanding policy known

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<sup>1</sup> Florida's dark money playbook: How ‘ghost’ candidate scheme revealed secretive political tactics. Orlando Sentinel. December 30, 2021. [Link](#).

<sup>2</sup> Documents show FPL wrote bill to slow rooftop solar's growth by hampering net metering. Miami Herald. December 20, 2021. [Link](#).

<sup>3</sup> Northwest Florida solar companies say new bill will pull the plug on their growing industry. Pensacola News Journal. February 16, 2022. [Link](#).

as “net metering,” HB 741 will allow Florida Power & Light to pay less to homeowners for the electricity they generate from their rooftop solar panels. And it will deter future homeowners from installing rooftop solar panels at all, forcing them to continue buying their electricity from FPL – which generates its power primarily by burning fossil fuels.

In addition, Tallahassee Republicans created a new “pay-to-play” mechanism for FPL when it wants permits to destroy wetlands.

Under a provision in SB 2508, FPL and other utility companies will fund their own positions within the Department of Environmental Protection to run a separate, fast-tracked permitting process for whenever they need Environmental Resource Permits or 404 Wetlands Dredge and Fill Permits. This creates a conflict of interest for state regulators, who are supposed to protect wetlands but will now be funded by companies seeking to destroy those wetlands.

What's more, FPL lobbying helped kill another bill – sponsored by Republicans – that attempted to inject competition into the fast-growing market for electric vehicle charging stations. The bills would have put gas stations and other retail locations that want to install charging stations on an even playing field with monopoly utilities like FPL by prohibiting FPL from using ratepayer funds to pay for charging station construction.<sup>4</sup>

This year, Florida Power & Light also secured state approval for their first rate hike since 2016.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> HB 737 / SB 920 - Electric Vehicle Transportation Electrification Plan. 2022. MyFloridaHouse.gov. [Link](#).





<sup>5</sup> Your next Florida Power & Light electric bill is going way up. Here is why and how much. The Palm Beach Post. January 7, 2022. [Link](#).

# THE CORPORATIONS PULLING THE STRINGS

DONOR	WHAT THEY GAVE	WHAT HAPPENED
 <p>ASSOCIATED INDUSTRIES of FLORIDA <i>The Voice of Florida Business Since 1970</i></p> <p><i>Top donors: Florida Crystals, US Sugar, Florida Power &amp; Light, Disney, Florida Blue</i></p>	<p>\$11.6 million</p>	<p>Saved \$624 million in corporate tax refunds to be paid out by May 1.</p>
 <p><i>Top donors: US Sugar, Florida Power, &amp; Light, Publix Supermarkets, Florida Blue</i></p>	<p>\$3.5 million</p>	<p>Blocked efforts to close corporate tax loopholes that cost \$500 million a year</p>
	<p>\$2.4 million</p>	<p>Legislation crushing the competition from rooftop solar</p>
	<p>\$2.5 million</p>	<p>\$50 million for tourism advertising</p>
	<p>\$1.8 million</p>	<p>\$650 million for a new 4,500-bed mega prison that GEO wants to manage</p>
	<p>\$1.7 million</p>	<p>\$100 million for a narrow home-buying program (using money that was supposed to build affordable rental housing for all)</p>



DONOR	WHAT THEY GAVE	WHAT HAPPENED
	\$1.4 million	Legislation giving sugar growers more control over water from Lake Okeechobee
	\$1.4 million	Subsidies for broadband installation in rural areas
	\$1 million	Preserved a \$17 million tax break for itself
	\$850,000	Defeated bills to make insurance companies cover hearing aids for kids
	\$670,000	Higher commissions on sales of Florida Lottery tickets
	\$832,000	More legal immunity from COVID-19-related lawsuits
	\$460,000	Legislation giving sugar growers more control over water from Lake Okeechobee
	\$400,000	\$750 million for roads sewer lines and other infrastructure

DONOR	WHAT THEY GAVE	WHAT HAPPENED
	\$405,000	\$5.8 million-a-year tax break
 <p data-bbox="198 697 678 745"><i>Top donors: Disney, Universal, Darden Restaurants, Marriott</i></p>	\$270,000	Defeated bills to let counties spend hotel taxes on police paramedics and lifeguards
	\$200,000	Legislation that will make it harder for cities and counties to ban puppy mills
	\$200,000	\$6.9 million-a-year tax break
	\$175,000	Defeated bills to protect tenants from predatory landlords
	\$130,000	Elimination of public money for rival hospitals that treat a larger share of Medicaid patients
	\$105,000	\$35 million for a new spring-training facility

# HARD FOUGHT VICTORIES

**A**n analysis of corporate campaign contributions and legislation passed during the 2022 legislative session suggests that Governor DeSantis, Senate President Wilton Simpson and House Speaker Chris Sprowls were running the best Legislature money can buy.

Recent research shows correlation between campaign contributions and legislation passed. Specifically to corporate incentives, a study found that a firm is nearly four times more likely to receive an award, and the award is 63 percent larger, when the firm makes campaign contributions to state politicians.<sup>1</sup>

But not all is lost. Everyday people can win when they organize. Even in the DeSantis Legislature so seemingly beholden to corporate cash, when everyday Floridians expose corporate greed and push back, the corporate lobby can be defeated.

Working together, coalitions of workers, renters, students and advocates were able to stop an attempt by the biggest corporations in the world to permanently cut the state's corporate income tax<sup>2</sup> – a potentially disastrous policy that would have handed out billions of dollars for the top 1 percent of Florida businesses at the expense of funding for everything from preschool to public transit.

Despite the Governor's own opposition to the minimum wage increase amendment<sup>3</sup>, the state budget raised the minimum wage for all state employees to \$15 an hour, a massive

victory workers have been organizing towards for years.<sup>4</sup>

Everyday Floridians stopped the DeSantis Legislature from passing corporate-backed laws that would have slashed wages for government contractors,<sup>5</sup> allowed predatory phony insurance companies and landlords to exploit renters who can't afford security deposits, and permit apartment developers to convert tens of thousands of affordable housing units into high-priced luxury condominiums.<sup>6 7</sup>

These are hard-fought victories. But as this session demonstrated, there is still far more work ahead to ensure state leaders serve everyday people, not corporate donors.

**A Florida where all Floridians can truly be healthy, prosperous and safe.**



*Lawmakers hold impromptu press conference following House session.*

<sup>1</sup> Aobdia, Daniel and Koester, Allison and Petacchi, Reining, The politics of government resource allocation: Evidence from U.S. state government awarded economic incentives. January 21, 2021. [Link](#).

<sup>2</sup> SB 1090 - Corporate Income Tax. 2022. [FlSenate.gov](#). [Link](#).

<sup>3</sup> Gov. Ron DeSantis urges Floridians to shoot down \$15 minimum wage amendment. Florida Politics. November 2, 2020. [Link](#).

<sup>4</sup> Florida Legislature releases proposed \$112 billion budget with big pay raises. Tampa Bay Times. March 10, 2022. [Link](#).

<sup>5</sup> HB 943 / SB 1124 - Preemption of Local Government Wage Mandates. MyFloridaHouse.gov. 2022. [Link](#).

<sup>6</sup> SB 196 - Florida Housing Finance Corporation. MyFloridaHouse.gov. 2022. [Link](#).

<sup>7</sup> An affordable housing developer run by a top Republican donor wrote a bill making it easier to raise rents, records show. Seeking Rents. February 22, 2022. [Link](#).





*Paid for by Florida for All Action, Inc.*