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HOME/NEWS/POLITICS

Senate committee OKs tougher penalties for texting and causing fatal crashes

Tue, Apr 1, 2014 @ 4:48 pm

TALLAHASSEE | A Senate committee Tuesday approved a bill (SB 1078) to toughen penalties for people who cause fatal accidents while texting behind the wheel. The bill, approved by the Senate Communications, Energy and Public Utilities Committee, is based on a texting-while-driving ban that lawmakers passed last year. Drivers who cause fatal accidents while violating the texting-while-driving ban would face second-degree felony charges. Also, the charges could be upgraded to first-degree felonies if the drivers knew accidents occurred and failed to provide information and aid. The bill, sponsored by Sen. Darren Soto, D-Orlando, has been assigned to three other committees before it could reach the Senate floor. The House version (HB 1253) is ready to go to the full House.

TELEMEDICINE BILL MOVES FORWARD

Despite concerns from some lawmakers about out-of-state physicians, a Senate committee Tuesday approved a bill (SB 1646) aimed at increasing the use of telemedicine in Florida. The Senate Communications, Energy and Public Utilities Committee voted 6-2 to approve the bill, sponsored by Sen. Aaron Bean, R-Fernandina Beach. Bean and other backers of expanded telemedicine say it can help provide more access to care, as physicians would provide treatment remotely through the Internet and other telecommunications technology. But the issue also raises numerous questions about issues such as whether physicians who provide care to Florida patients should be licensed in the state. Debate Tuesday involved parts of the bill that would allow out-of-state physicians to provide telemedicine in Florida if they are on the staffs of hospitals that are affiliated with Florida hospitals or are affiliated with health plans authorized to conduct business in Florida. Sen. Dorothy Hukill, R-Port Orange, and Sen. Greg Evers, R-Baker, voted against the bill, questioning how physicians in other states would be held accountable for care provided to Florida residents. "I still think we need to concentrate on the patients, and the bottom line is, these physicians are not licensed in Florida," Hukill said. The bill needs go through two more committees before it can reach the Senate floor.

REPUBLICANS ENTER ORANGE, MIAMI-DADE RACES

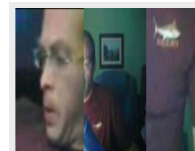
Republican Jesse Phillips, who helped lead unsuccessful efforts to unseat three Florida


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1:57pm

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