



THE BUZZ

From the staff of the Tampa Bay Times

Scott receives state budget, but most bills haven't reached desk



Steve Bousquet, Times/Herald Tallahassee Bureau

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The Florida House handed the \$77.1 billion budget to Gov. Rick Scott Tuesday, but most bills that passed the Legislature still have not yet reached his desk.

Scott has 15 calendar days to act. His staff has been studying the budget line-by-line as the re-election-minded governor must decide whether to lop hundreds of millions of dollars in hometown spending from the biggest budget in state history or largely leave it as is.

If Scott wields a heavy veto pen and rejects, say, more than \$300 million, it will upset a lot of legislators and send a clear signal that he's concerned about his conservative base and needs to reassure them that he opposes more government spending. (Remember what Scott himself called it: the "It's Your Money Tax Cut Budget").

A light touch will be welcomed by lawmakers but not by fiscal conservatives. Scott also must be consistent in the logic he applies to line items or risk being accused of playing favorites.

Legislators are fiercely protective of their right to allocate tax dollars for projects they think will help their constituents. Senate Rules Chairman John Thrasher, R-St. Augustine, who hopes to bring home bacon to Northeast Florida, predicts a "judicious" Scott will be surgical in his line-item vetoes this time around.

"If you're the person who's promoting it and it's something that's positive for your local area, you're going to be very supportive of that in a year when we have some resources," said Thrasher, chairman of Scott's re-election campaign. "I think he's got to be judicious, and I think he will."

In Scott's first year in office, 2011, he vetoed \$615 million, but about half of that (\$305 million) was spending authority for the Florida Forever land-buying program. The following year he vetoed \$142 million, and last year he vetoed \$368 million from the current \$74.1 billion budget.

"I would anticipate a couple of hundred million dollars in vetoes," Sen. Jack Latvala, R-Clearwater, predicted in the final days of the session, adding with a chuckle: "I'm certainly going to try to make sure that mine are okay."

The list of water, stormwater and drainage projects alone, listed alphabetically from Altha to Zephyrhills, takes up nearly three full pages in the 431-page document. Last year Scott vetoed dozens of similar projects and said

in a veto message: "While some water projects may also contribute to a statewide objective, not all projects demonstrate an ability to contribute to a statewide reinvestment."

Scott also last year vetoed projects because they weren't requested by a state agency, money was steered to specific providers or they were "local in scope, without a clearly demonstrated statewide benefit," as he wrote in a veto message. Applying that logic to the new budget, Scott will need to explain the statewide benefit of these projects: Agenda 2020, City of St. Petersburg, \$975,000; Coral Springs Safety Town, \$250,000; Here's Help Opa-locka, \$500,000; Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) Jacksonville, \$900,000; YMCA Tech Smart Tampa Bay, \$100,000. There are hundreds of similar examples.

Scott signed 58 bills last week, but the flow of legislation to his desk stopped until Tuesday when he received 21 bills in addition to the budget. Lawmakers passed 255 bills subject to his approval and he has acted on 65, leaving 190 pending.

A chart from Online Sunshine provides the numbers in detail. Scott has vowed to veto one bill he hasn't received yet: the one allowing a 75 mph speed limit on interstates, which reached Scott Tuesday, is literally dead on arrival (SB 392).



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