

## Budgets, pensions, deregulation on tap at state Capitol today

By RYAN MILLS

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TALLAHASSEE — The Florida Legislature is in for a long day today, as both the House and Senate are slated to debate, and likely vote on, their respective budgets.

Both chambers are also scheduled to debate controversial bills reforming the pension system for state and county workers, and the House is considering a bill that would deregulate 20 Florida industries.

The House has proposed a \$66.5 billion budget, which is down from the current \$70.4 billion budget, but \$600 million more than the budget Gov. Rick Scott proposed in February.

The Senate is debating a \$69.8 billion budget. For the first time, the Senate is proposing taking over the budgeting for some things that had previously been done locally, including water management districts, clerks or courts, and expressway turnpike authorities, according to Florida TaxWatch.

If passed, the two bills would then go into a reconciliation committee to work out their differences.

The House is also slated to debate a pension reform bill that would require state and county employees to begin contributing 3 percent of their pay to their pensions. The Senate is expected to vote on a similar bill today.

Opponents of the plan say the Florida Retirement System is one of the strongest public pensions in the country, and change is unneeded. Supporters say reform is needed to ensure the long-term viability of the plan.

"I'm not going to sugar coat that, it's going to be a net pay cut," said Rep. Matt Caldwell, R-Lehigh Acres.

The House is also slated to debate and vote on a controversial proposal that would deregulate more than 20 different industries in the state, including auto repair shops, movers, hair braiders, dance studios and yacht brokers.

Supporters of the bill say they're trying to eliminate unnecessary red tape, while critics say it will allow scammers and shake-down artists to run rampant in Florida.

“The state often licenses these people so they have something to yank, so if they get complaints that businesses are being out there in an unscrupulous manner, they actually can pull their ticket,” said Rep. Richard Steinberg, D-Miami Beach, during a question-and-answer session on the floor Wednesday. “That is the hammer. We are taking away the hammer for enforcing laws to protect consumers.”



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