

AIF: Pro-business legislation got fewer votes

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Associated Industries of Florida said state Senate and House votes in favor of pro-business legislation were down this year.

The business lobby's annual Voting Records Report said the combined score for both chambers is 85.5 percent, revealing a three-point decrease from last year's legislative report of 88.5 percent

"With more than \$6 billion in state budget cuts and a number of key Senate and House seats up for re-election, lawmakers faced unique challenges this past legislative session," AIF President Barney Bishop said in a news release. "However, times of financial uncertainty underscore the importance of supporting Florida's business community and the role it will play in the resurgence of our state's economy."

AIF listed opposition to the freeze on **Citizens Property Insurance Corp.**'s rates, any weakening or repeal of the 2005-06 legal reform laws and any efforts to restructure the state's energy governance in its 2008 Session Priorities report. It listed support for research programs at universities, full funding of alternative water supply programs and tax incentives for existing businesses and research institutions looking to come to Florida.

AIF said the 2008 Voting Records Report is based on thousands of votes cast on business-related bills and amendments. Legislators are scored on committee votes in addition to floor votes, which the group says is crucial because many critical business issues never make it to the floor.

According to the report, overall Senate votes on pro-business legislation were down to 81 percent in 2008 from 85 percent in 2007 -- the lowest since 2003. This year, Sen. Steve Oelrich, R-Gainesville, had the highest score for pro-business initiatives, with a 92 percent voting record. Sen. Mike Haridopolos, R-Melbourne; Sen. Anthony Hill Sr., D-Jacksonville; and Sen. Gary Siplin, D-Orlando, followed closely with a 90 percent record.

The report said the House voted in favor of business measures 90 percent of the time in 2008, down from 92 percent a year ago.

Rep. Dean Cannon, R-Winter Park; Rep. Michael Grant, R-Port Charlotte; Rep. Dorothy Hukill, R-Port Orange; Rep. Pat Patterson, R-DeLand; and Rep. David Rivera, R-Miami, received scores of 95 percent. Rep. Martin Kiar, D-Parkland, had a 93 percent voting record.

AIF said it and its members defeated several bills it considered anti-business, including a bill that would have created changes in Florida's arbitration code, an amendment to legislation that would have allowed for an additional \$2 rental car surcharge for automobiles rented at airports and one that would have increased unjustified employer contributions for unemployment compensation.

"This down trend in legislative support for pro-business legislation can be attributed to a number of outlying factors," Bishop said. "Whether the decrease is associated with a difficult budget year or the need to appease other voting blocks, the bottom-line is AIF will continue to walk the halls and track the votes in order to defend the principles of the free-enterprise system."