

To: Florida Recreation and Park Association

From: Allison S. Carvajal

Date: April 30, 2026

Re: Legislative Report – Special Session D

House Rejects DeSantis Push for AI, Vaccine Bills

The Legislature opened a special session on Tuesday to take on a congressional redistricting plan, but two other issues that Gov. Ron DeSantis had wanted lawmakers to revisit after their failure to pass during the regular session were quickly set aside. House Speaker Daniel Perez, R-Miami, said his chamber remains opposed to expanding vaccine exemptions for K-12 students and a proposal creating new consumer protections related to artificial intelligence. DeSantis criticized the House on social media, writing on X that “voters elected Republicans to protect freedom against both the Big Tech cartel and the medical industrial complex.” While the House declined to act, the Senate also chose not to advance the vaccine exemption proposal, which had passed in the chamber during the regular session. However, senators approved the AI bill (SB 2D) in a 37-1 vote, with Vero Beach GOP Sen. Erin Grall casting the lone dissenting vote. Grall argued an opt-out provision actually “weakens protections for parents” and called it “despicable” that supporters portrayed opponents as “somehow a Jeffrey Epstein sympathizer.” The full Senate also passed a linked public records bill (SB 4D) by a 33-4 vote. Perez said his opposition to broader vaccine exemptions centered on concerns about unvaccinated children attending school during outbreaks of illnesses such as measles and chickenpox, noting that such vaccines have been around for decades. The state has reported 134 confirmed measles cases this year as of April 23, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the fourth-highest total in the nation, and new Department of Health data shows childhood vaccination rates for measles, mumps and rubella have dropped well below the 95% threshold typically associated with herd immunity. The “medical freedom” legislation (SB 6D) sought to allow a “conscience” exemption from certain school vaccine requirements, permit the sale of ivermectin without a prescription, and shield pharmacists and pharmacies from lawsuits arising from the sale of the drug. On AI, Perez said regulation should come from Washington, D.C., rather than state capitals, citing President Donald Trump’s executive order encouraging a federal approach. Incoming House Speaker Rep. Sam Garrison, R-Fleming Island, echoed that view, telling reporters that lawmakers hope and expect Congress will “take the lead and get something passed.” Although he noted that if the federal government fails to act, Florida will. The measure

aimed to establish regulations for AI covering government contracting, data privacy, user awareness, youth protection, and personal image rights. The bill also sought to limit how AI tools could be used in classrooms, mandate parental opt-out options, and bar certain government contracts with foreign-controlled AI providers.

New Members Sworn in to Senate, House

Tampa-area Democrat Bryan Nathan was sworn in as the new senator in the Tampa Bay area District 14 state Senate seat and three new members officially joined the House on Tuesday. Supreme Court Chief Justice Carlos Muñiz administered the oath of office to Nathan, who upset Republican former Rep. Josie Tomkow in a special election last month to fill the seat left vacant by the resignation of Jay Collins, who was appointed lieutenant governor by Gov. Ron DeSantis. The seat will be up for election again in November in the regular election, and Nathan and Tomkow have both said they'll run again. In the House, Republican Rep. Hilary Holley of Polk City, who succeeded Tomkow, Republican Rep. Samantha Scott of Bushnell, and Democrat Rep. Emily Gregory of Jupiter, were sworn in following recent special election wins. Gregory's House District 87 includes President Donald Trump's Florida home, Mar-a-Lago. The seat had previously been held by Republican Mike Caruso, who was appointed Palm Beach County clerk of the circuit court and comptroller. All three House seats will be up for election again in November. One House seat remains vacant: House District 113. Former GOP Rep. Vicki Lopez vacated that seat on Nov. 19, 2025, to join the Miami-Dade County Commission.

Lawmakers Pass Congressional District Map, Lawsuits Promised

The Legislature on Wednesday went along with Gov. Ron DeSantis' push to draw new lines for the state's congressional districts with a final vote to send the governor a map that could boost the number of Republican-majority Florida congressional districts ahead of this year's midterm elections. Lawmakers gave final passage to the bill (HB 1D) just hours after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in a case from Louisiana that states can't, in most cases, intentionally draw districts to maximize the number of racial minorities—so-called majority-minority districts—as a way to ensure minorities can elect a candidate of their choice. DeSantis had expected that ruling and had sent the Legislature a map that the governor's office said no longer takes racial communities into account. The governor had also argued that changes in where in Florida the population is concentrated had created an imbalance in the current districts that needed to be remedied before the next Census. Opponents promised immediate lawsuits, setting up a race for supporters of the plan to get final approval from the courts before election deadlines later this year. Democrats in the Legislature, nearly all of whom voted against the proposal, charged that the real reason for the redraw was political: President Donald Trump's call for Republican governors to redraw maps to bolster GOP chances of flipping or holding seats in November.

A long line of Democrats said the redistricting process was illegal and unconstitutional, asserting DeSantis' office intended to maximize Republican districts, which would violate

the Florida Constitution's Fair Districts amendment, which says "districting plans may not be drawn to favor or disfavor an incumbent or political party." The DeSantis administration has argued, however, that another court ruling finding part of that amendment involving racial gerrymandering unconstitutional means the whole section of the amendment subject to that finding is invalid, including the requirement to avoid drawing lines for partisan gain. The House approved the plan on an 83-28 nearly party line vote on Wednesday before the Senate voted 21-17 in favor. There, four Republicans—Sens. Jennifer Bradley, Ileana Garcia, Erin Grall, and Alexis Calatayud—voted against the measure in addition to all the chamber's Democrats and NPA Sen. Jason Pizzo. Following their votes, both chambers adjourned the special session, though lawmakers will return in the coming weeks for additional work on the budget and a property tax cut proposal.

Dates to Remember

Senate President Albritton and Speaker Perez both released memos announcing Joint Allocations and dates for the Special Session on the Budget, which will begin Tuesday, May 12, and conclude on Friday, May 29.

Conference committees are authorized to meet from Tuesday, May 12 through Friday, May 15. Any unresolved issues will be bumped at that point, allowing legislators to return to their districts. They are expected to reconvene in Tallahassee on Tuesday following Memorial Day for the week to vote on the budget.