



# **NEWS**

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## **Disassembling Florida State Government May Be Easier Thanks to Technology** *Successful Implementation of 2006 “Sunset Act” Will Require Legislative Willpower*

**TALLAHASSEE** — Florida state agencies beware! You will have to prove your worth in order to remain in existence.

In an effort to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of state government, Florida state agencies must participate in “sunset reviews” beginning this year. A new research report by Florida TaxWatch urges the Legislature to commit the time and action necessary to make good decisions that benefit Florida taxpayers.

“Sunset reviews involve a large commitment of time and resources and cannot be effective unless they are done in a cost-effective and consistent manner that stresses benefits received by taxpayers,” said Dominic M. Calabro, Florida TaxWatch President and CEO.

The report by the non-profit, non-partisan watchdog group notes that the Florida Legislature attempted to use the Sunset process in the past, but lacked a sustained commitment. Various states have repealed or deactivated sunset laws due to unfulfilled expectations of cost savings, intensive lobbying, and little political payoff for lawmakers according to the report.

The Florida Government Accountability Act, approved by the 2006 Florida Legislature, outlines the Sunset process, criteria, and schedule for the Legislature to assess whether a state agency or advisory committee should continue to exist. The Act requires the establishment of a Joint Legislative Sunset Advisory Committee that will review each agency’s three-year successes and failures in meeting performance measures.

The Florida TaxWatch report, [“Making Florida’s Latest Government Accountability Law Work for Improved Performance and Taxpayer Value”](#), summarizes the 2006 Florida Government Accountability Act, compares Florida’s new and previous sunset laws, and summarizes government accountability lessons learned.

(More)

In its report, Florida TaxWatch also recommends that the Government Efficiency Task Force conduct a comprehensive review of the Sunset process. This would provide valuable information to the Legislature to determine how well the process is working and whether improvements are needed. TaxWatch urges that they review and identify cost savings, the impact of indirect costs required to perform agency activities, and the need for eliminating activities and/or personnel to achieve agency goals.

The report notes that Florida's new Sunset review process contains a first in the nation provision requiring that agencies develop a way to measure how well they're performing and find a way to compare the costs of their operation with each associated product or service performed.

"This input-output method will show us what we're getting for our hard-earned taxpayer money," said Calabro. "We'll also be able to compare similar activities and their costs among agencies to help determine their efficiency and effectiveness."

John Turcotte, Senior Vice President for Research at Florida TaxWatch, and a former Director of the Legislature's Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA), commented on the new and improved Sunset process. "One good feature of our Sunset law is the requirement for a limited justification review by OPPAGA. The Sunset committee needs an objective information source such as OPPAGA so that the process is not biased by agencies, lobbyists, or program beneficiaries."

The Joint Legislative Sunset Advisory Committee will use reports and other information provided by state agencies and OPPAGA to decide whether to recommend abolishment, continuation, or reorganization of each agency under review according to a pre-determined schedule (*see schedule on the following page*).

In Florida's previous attempts at using the Sunset process, legislative staff performed agency reviews, using a committee by committee approach, in which the same people performed a review of agencies year after year. This proved to be a very ineffective approach.

"There was a previous 1977 law to sunset certain boards, but the savings weren't significant enough to justify the costs," commented Dave Davis, Florida TaxWatch Senior Research Analyst and one of the authors of the report. "The information age makes this kind of review easier on the agencies and the Legislature. It is now easier to compile each agency's record."

An apt description of the new and improved Sunset process would be the disassembling of state government, during which agencies must actually prove that their existence is necessary and should continue. Former Speaker of the House Allan Bense, involved in the establishment of the Florida Government Accountability Act, believed that agencies should do more self-questioning of whether they are fulfilling their missions and doing what the citizens of Florida want them to do.

Information about state agencies will be provided to the 2007 Taxation and Budget Reform Commission as well as the Government Efficiency Task Force. This task force was established by the passage of Amendment #1 (a state planning and budget process constitutional amendment), approved by Florida voters November 7, 2006. The Task Force is required to submit recommendations every four years to improve government performance and reduce costs.

The process of phasing out state agencies is scheduled to begin in July, 2008 and will continue every year until 2015. This process will involve EVERY major state agency, from the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to the Executive Office of the Governor.

## **Schedule of Agency and Advisory Committee Sunset Reviews**

### **Abolished by July 1, 2008**

Statutory responsibilities of the constitutional Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission  
Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services  
Department of Citrus, including the Citrus Commission  
Department of Environmental Protection  
Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles  
Water management districts

### **Abolished by July 1, 2009**

Department of Children and Family Services  
Department of Community Affairs  
Department of Management Services  
Department of State

### **Abolished by July 1, 2010**

Advisory committees for the Florida Community College System  
Advisory committees for the State University System  
Agency for Workforce Innovation  
Department of Education  
Department of the Lottery

### **Abolished by July 1, 2011**

Agency for Health Care Administration  
Agency for Persons with Disabilities  
Department of Elderly Affairs  
Department of Health

### **Abolished by July 1, 2012**

Department of Business and Professional Regulation  
Department of Transportation  
Department of Veterans' Affairs

### **Abolished by July 1, 2013**

Advisory committees for the State Board of Administration  
Department of Financial Services, including the Financial Services Commission  
Department of Revenue

### **Abolished by July 1, 2014**

Department of Corrections  
Department of Juvenile Justice  
Department of Law Enforcement  
Department of Legal Affairs  
Justice Administrative Commission  
Parole Commission

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**Abolished by July 1, 2015**  
Executive Office of the Governor  
Florida Public Service Commission

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**MEDIA AVAILABILITY: Dave Davis and Chuck Hefren, the Florida TaxWatch Senior Research Analysts who co-authored the report, are available for interviews. They can be reached at (850) 222-5052.**

Florida TaxWatch is a statewide, non-profit, non-partisan taxpayer research institute and government watchdog that over its 28 year history has become widely recognized as the watchdog of citizens' hard-earned tax dollars. Our mission is to provide the citizens of Florida and public officials with high quality, independent research and education on government revenues, expenditures, taxation, public policies and programs, and to increase the productivity and accountability of Florida Government. On the web at [www.floridataxwatch.org](http://www.floridataxwatch.org).