From: Ronald Berkman <berkmanr@fiu.edu>
Sent: Saturday, April 04, 2009 10:35 AM
To: Michelle Palacio
Subject: Re: Tensions - Zapata and Cretul

Can you send me Marco Rubio's cell number. I don"t seem to have it in my address book

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From: Michelle Palacio
To: Stephen Sauls; John Rock; Khaleel Seecharan; Ronald Berkman; Modesto Maidique
Sent: Sat Apr 04 09:47:53 2009
Subject: Tensions - Zapata and Cretul

This also has to do with Zapata cutting UF's dental program (foreign dental program he wants to transfer to FIU). Not good.

TALLAHASSEE

Money shortage causing tension among Florida lawmakers

A flare-up between a Miami representative and the Florida House speaker underscores tensions in a year when money is tight.

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BY MARC CAPUTO AND ALEX LEARY

Herald/Times Tallahassee Bureau

TALLAHASSEE -- In a year of little money and mounting tensions, tempers flared anew in the Florida Legislature on Friday when a Miami state representative accused the leader of the Florida House of being ``undemocratic."
At issue: Republican Rep. Juan Zapata's objection to the way House Speaker Larry Cretul quietly overruled him on a series of budget issues. Zapata all but dared Cretul to remove him as chairman of the House Human Services Appropriations Committee.
"If they need a puppet, they've got the wrong dude," Zapata said.
The act of defiance against Cretul was the second such incident in the House this year. And it came two days after two Republican senators faced off in a committee over a bill on clerk of court funding. In both chambers, members have been admonished for using unusually strong language, such as "jerk" and "piss" in committee meetings.
Normally, such matters remain behind the scenes. But this isn't a normal year.

There's so little money that lawmakers won't be able to bring the usual political pork back to their districts -- usually under the term ''member projects'' -- once considered a rite of spring in the Legislature. Instead, legislators are going to raise taxes or fees and cut programs to close a $3 billion deficit.

''People have nothing to lose. And that's a dangerous situation for leadership,'' said Democratic Rep. Ron Saunders, the minority party's budget leader. ``There's not much incentive for people to behave.''

CIGARETTE TAXES

What's more, the House and Senate budgets unveiled Thursday are about $546 million apart. The House is balking at increasing cigarette taxes and a proposed gambling deal with the Seminole Tribe. The House cuts more than $300 million in state worker compensation, while the Senate cuts far less than that.

Zapata is urging House leaders to approve a cigarette tax increase. But he said he's having trouble.

Zapata said of Cretul and his leadership team. ``I've been given a budget where all I have is bad choices to make. But if I'm not allowed to even make those decisions, why should I be the chairman?''

Cretul issued a written statement that took aim at Zapata's claims. Cretul said Zapata erred by shifting $200,000 from a Miami Jackson Memorial Hospital AIDS program to the Miami-based League Against Cancer.

''It is a matter of record that the House would not consider new local ``member'' projects this year -- the state simply doesn't have the money, no matter how meritorious the proposals may be,'' Cretul wrote. ``As Speaker, I have continually reminded our leadership team of these spending constraints.''

SIGN OF UNREST

Zapata called the move ``highly undemocratic''-- and then his committee canceled a plan to privatize Northeast Florida Hospital, an issue that's not a member project. It's being pushed by corrections giant The GEO Group. Cretul reinserted it into the budget late Thursday.

Zapata's move is the second sign of unrest under Cretul, thrust unexpectedly into power when former speaker Ray Sansom stepped down as questions mounted over his ties to a Panhandle college that hired him for a six-figure job.

Last month, Cretul stripped another Miami Republican, Julio Robaina, of his committee chair after Robaina changed a bill that was a priority of the attorney general. That led Robaina to blast Cretul on Univision Radio, calling him ''un dictador'' -- a dictator.

The tension exists in the Senate as well, despite outward appearances of cohesion. Earlier in the month, a tourism budget committee grew unruly when members fought over a campaign finance bill and used salty language.

Then, on Wednesday, former Senate President Ken Pruitt left a committee meeting fuming after his bill was held up in a stalemate with Tampa Sen. Victor Crist, chairman of the Criminal and Civil Justice Appropriations Committee.

CONTROVERSIAL BILL

Crist wanted to rework Pruitt's controversial bill overhauling how court clerks are funded. But Pruitt insisted his bill be moved along untouched. Crist refused to allow an up-or-down vote on the bill for Pruitt -- who spent the past two years as the chamber's boss.

Pruitt got revenge the next day, getting the bill pulled from Crist's committee so it can be heard by the budget committee, bypassing Crist.

Senate President Jeff Atwater cautioned against reading too much into the exchange of the two top Republicans. But, he acknowledged, it has been difficult for some to adjust to the current economic climate where it's tough to even get a bill passed.

''Is there some frustration in that? There probably is,'' he said. ``But I still think it has been healthy for us.''

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