

DIFFERENCE

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There they will begin a 60-day legislative session starting March 3. Currently, they're completing special sessions called by the governor.

Our aim in part is to provide you with a tiny glimpse of each politician that is non-political.

In some cases, you will get that glimpse through the eyes of a hard-working, praise-singing staff member who might be the one to answer the telephone or read the note if you voice an opinion about an issue to your elected official.

In other cases — those who didn't return our telephone calls to their various offices by press time — we'll give you cursory biographical information provided online or in print by the politician himself, or herself.

What do they eat when they're working in Tallahassee? What do their offices look like? What do they like to do in their spare time? What do they read? Where do they live in the capital city?

Politics, as Charles de Gaulle once intoned, is too serious to be left to the politicians. But knowing something about them that is not too serious might prove an advantage, or at least be amusing.

This year, the range of political issues likely to have an impact on your life as a Floridian and a citizen of Lee County is broader than in past years, perhaps — which is all the more reason to voice your opinion. When politicians answer questions in 2009 about the economy, the environment, the infrastructure, or education, the effects will be far-reaching, both in your wallet and on your lifestyle.

So, we're making it easier for you to be the squeaky wheel, and to telephone or write your elected leaders with your opinions.

Will Rogers once said, "There ought to be one day — just one — when there is open season on senators."

Here, armed with an address, a telephone number and a few details about a politician that might or might not be relevant, you'll recognize that every day is open season on senators. And on representatives.

There are a few cursory things to know first.

Florida's House of Representatives includes 120 elected officials. The Senate numbers 40. The Lee County delegation consists of five representatives and three senators. For a bill to pass and become law in Florida, both the house and the senate must approve it.

Committees meet before the legislative session begins in March, so even now your elected leaders are working on issues that concern you. And they're all accessible through their staff members, even if they're out on the golf course or in the fishing boat, or hunkering down to read a bill in their offices.

"Too bad that all the people who really know how to run the country are busy driving taxi cabs and cutting hair," the comedian George Burns once said.

Well, rest easy, George. Now the people who really know how to run things have the telephone numbers of the people who really think they know how to run things. ■

* The following Web site offers information on issues and bills before the House and Senate, on people, and on nearly everything else involving state government: www.myflorida.com (or www.myflorida.org or www.myflorida.gov).

* For a basic biography and photo of each of the 120 state representatives, along with contact information, go here: www.myfloridahouse.gov

* For a basic biography and photo of each of the 40 state senators, along with contact information, go here: www.flsenate.gov

STATE SENATORS in the Lee Delegation

DAVE ARONBERG, Democrat, District 27: parts of Lee, Hendry, Charlotte, Glades and Palm Beach counties.



ARONBERG

Aides and assistants: Christi Fearnley, Kristen Pecisek, Kyle Johnson, Abby Ross.

Fort Myers office: 2120 Main Street, Suite 206, Fort Myers, FL 33901. Telephone: 239-338-2646.

Tallahassee office: 405 Senate Office Building, 404 South Monroe St., Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100. Telephone: 850-487-5356.

District office: 6415 Lake Worth Road, Suite 210, Greenacres, FL 33463. Telephone district wide: 1-877-435-7351

E-mail: aronberg.dave.web@flsenate.gov

Christi Fearnley, legislative assistant:

"I've worked for him for a year, and I worked in the House for a Republican before that. Actually, I'm a Republican working for a Democrat, and I always tell him, he's not bad for a Democrat.

"But I like him because he's fair to everyone.

"I call him the energizer bunny — he can work so hard. He's a late-nighter, he'll go until 1 a.m. or 2 a.m. in the morning, and sometimes he'll call you that late. You learn to ignore those calls; he knows we're not going to answer at 2 a.m. or 3 a.m.

He's always on the move, up here. He works out usually in the afternoon, no matter where he is. And he likes healthy food. "While he's here he has power bars and Acai juice, which we make him regularly — you mix it with water.

During the week in the office we're so busy the days go by fast. We're always scheduling people to see him, we go over the next day's calendar, talk about problems with bills.

"His personality distinguished him. He's well-liked — they all love him up here. As for his reading, I don't know what he reads outside of bills and required reading. He believes he's up here for his constituents, so he devotes all his time to knowing what's going on and what's coming."

MIKE BENNETT



BENNETT

Republican, District 21: parts of Lee, Charlotte, DeSoto, Manatee and Sarasota counties.

Aides and assistants: Jacquie Connell, Cheryl Ennis, Margaret Clark (Secretary), Crystal Fitzgerald.

District office: Wildewood Professional Park, Suite 90, 3653 Cortez Road, West Bradenton, FL 34210. Telephone: 941-727-6349. Statewide: 1-800-500-1239.

Tallahassee office: 306 Senate Office Building, 404 South Monroe St., Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100. Telephone: 850-487-5078.

E-mail: Bennett.mike.web@flsenate.gov

Jacquie Connell, legislative assistant:

"He is great to his staff. He treats his staff wonderfully, so far as taking us to dinner and doing nice things like that.

"Even if he's having a bad day — which he does not do very often up here because

he does not bring his troubles to work — he doesn't take it out on us. Most anybody I know would like to work for him.

"I do his scheduling, where and when he's supposed to be. And one day I messed up something on his calendar, so it made him miss his appointment. He told me to just call them and tell them that he had missed it. I said, 'No it's my fault.'

"He said, 'No, you tell them I missed it — my staff doesn't make mistakes.' So he looks out for us completely. I know people who go through staff regularly, but we don't. I've been with him six years.

"When he's not working, he likes to fish. He has a very large boat, and he seriously fishes. This past year he went to Alaska. He goes to the Bahamas — he and his wife both seriously fish.

"He also seriously works. He's the first one here in the morning, before 7 a.m., sometimes 6:30 a.m. And he walks to work — they keep a condo near the Capitol. During session his wife keeps the car and takes a little longer to get ready, and she goes and exercises somewhere else.

"We never leave the office before 7 p.m. He takes the early morning to catch up on his reading — on getting and studying other bills, and reading what he needs to absorb.

"He's the only individual I've ever seen who can listen to two or three different people at the same time and be hearing it all. At first, I used to think, 'He's not listening to me.' I've come to learn he hears it all and comprehends it all."

GERARD RICHTER



RICHTOR

Republican, District 37: parts of Lee and Collier counties.

Aides and assistants: Brad Piepenbrink, Becky Kokkinos, Sandra Mum- mert.

Lee County office: 1039 S.E. 9th Pl., Rm. 310, Cape Coral, FL 33990. Tel: 239-

338-2777.

Naples office: Building F, Suite 203, 3301 E. Tamiami Trail, Naples, FL 34112-4961. Telephone: 239-417-6205.

Tallahassee office: 310 Senate Office building, 404 S. Monroe St., Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100. Telephone: 850-487-5124.

E-mail: Richter.gerard.web@flsenate.gov

Brad Piepenbrink, legislative assistant:

"I started with him before Thanksgiving, although I was the student body president at FGCU, and he was my mentor in the leadership program, so I'd known him for two years there.

"He's an amazing person, and I like the story of where he started. He's a banker, and he started as a janitor in a bank in Pennsylvania, then went to Vietnam, then came back and worked his way up.

"He's so down to earth with everybody. It doesn't matter if it's the top politician in Florida or the hostess at a restaurant or the valet, he treats everyone the same.

"When he's in Tallahassee, he doesn't have time to do anything besides what's on the schedule. Since I've been on staff, I haven't seen him even eat anything during the day.

"What is he reading? Well, there are bills and the necessary things he has to read related to those. That alone is quite a bit. If not that, there are reports that come out by analysts, and the local newspapers — there's always a stack of stuff on his desk about a foot high. We filter everything.

"His office is completely covered with pictures of his family. He's a new grandparent, and he carries pictures of his grandson wherever he goes.

"His day starts so early. You're up at 6 a.m., you're in the office by 7 a.m. He walks to the Capitol building uphill from his condo, and downhill in the evening. By 8 a.m. there's a committee meeting, then there's a two- or three-hour break, and then meeting after meeting. It's overwhelming.

"The coolest thing was that his dad was a state representative up in Pennsylv-

nia, and Sen. Richter has a vintage poster of that: at the top it says, 'For President: Dwight Eisenhower. For Vice President: Richard Nixon.' And it lists the state representatives running. This would have been in the 1950s, and it names his dad. Under his father's platform, the issues seem a lot the same as today."

STATE REPRESENTATIVES in the Lee County delegation:

(Note: e-mails may be sent to each representative by going to the following Web site, then clicking on the last name. There, you will find a send e-mail icon. The Web site is: www.myfloridahouse.gov/SECTIONS/Representatives/representatives.aspx

GARY AUBUCHON, Republican, District 74: parts of Lee and Charlotte counties.



AUBUCHON

Legislative assistant, Paige Anne Biaggi.

District secretary, Mathew Visaggio.

Lee County office: 3501 Del Prado Blvd., Suite 305, Cape Coral, FL 33904-7223.

Telephone: 239-344-4900.

Tallahassee telephone: 850-488-7433

Neither Rep. Aubuchon or anyone from his offices in Tallahassee or Cape Coral returned telephone calls by press time. This information comes from his state government Web site.

Mr. Aubuchon is a native Michigander and a graduate of the University of Michigan (1984), where he earned a degree in history. A homebuilder and real estate broker by trade, he is married to Andrea Aubuchon and the father of three children.

He likes basketball, he likes to travel, and he holds a black belt in Hayashi-Ha karate, works with a variety of community organizations and charities, and served as the chairman of the Charlotte County legislative delegation for the last two years.

PAIGE KREEGEL



KREEGEL

Republican, District 72: DeSoto County and parts of Lee and Charlotte counties.

Legislative Assistant: Zachary Burch

District Secretary: Cynthia Beckett

District Office: 410 Taylor St., Punta Gorda, FL

33950-4832. Telephone: 941-575-5820.

Tallahassee telephone: 850-488-9175.

Zachary Burch, legislative aide:

"I've been with him about 14 months. What I like about him is, he's easy going. He tells people exactly what he thinks. He doesn't hold back — he won't tell you just what you want to hear.

"We get here about 7 or 7:30 a.m. each day. Some days we'll be here until 8 or 9 or 10 p.m. Last year when we had a dust up (between Republicans and Democrats), we were here until 3 a.m.

"In the morning, he eats raisin toast with peanut butter and granola bars — he's got his grain, his carbs and his protein, and he knows how important diet and exercise are, because he's a medical doctor. Every day when he leaves the Capitol, he goes to the gym.

"In his office he's got some awards, some pictures painted by local school kids from Lee County, and on his desk he has a Bible, and it's always open to a different verse each day. Today it's Genesis 26, verse 17:27.

"Also in his office is the gavel for the committee he's chairing, it's energy and utilities policy.

"And he has pictures of his wife and kids, and a big medical cabinet where he keeps medical supplies. Whenever anybody's aides or staff get sick, we all come here. I tell people, I spend half my time as aide and the

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