

Florida's a bleaker place for many. Floridians feel pain of new laws.

Today, Florida is a far less hospitable place to live for government workers, the elderly, the unemployed, women, students and property owners. . . .

(Excerpts from a St Pete Times editorial of July 1, 2011)

. . . A raft of new laws and a shrunken state budget take effect today (July 1). The Republican-led Legislature and Gov. Rick Scott have bragged they cut business regulation, corporate income taxes and property taxes for water management districts.

But many of their decisions also removed citizens' protections, increased regulation on individuals or picked Floridians' pockets. The only real winners are incumbent politicians who voted for these changes and expect campaign contributions from the special interests they served.

Consider just how much is different today:

- State workers face a fifth year without a raise, and 4,500 will no longer have jobs. Those who stay employed and their local government counterparts, including schoolteachers and some police officers, are being forced to pay 3 percent of their income into the state pension fund.
- Parents in the 50,000 poor Florida families who qualify for temporary federal assistance will be forced to pay for drug tests before the family receives an average \$240 a month in benefits. Those who test negative will be reimbursed eventually.
- The 10.6 percent of Florida workers who are out of work will see less unemployment compensation. As the unemployment rate shrinks, those still hunting for jobs will see those benefits cut again.
- A women seeking an abortion will be required to pay for an ultrasound even if she doesn't want one.
- Families whose children qualify for a Bright Futures Lottery Scholarship will have to complete the cumbersome federal financial aid form, FAFSA, before the students can get the award.
- Nursing home residents will likely see smaller staffs to watch over them, as the state rolled back requirements on staffing levels under Medicaid.
- Residents with landline phones will likely see bigger bills, as lawmakers deregulated the industry.
- Property owners can expect another 15 percent increase in their insurance bills, as lawmakers allowed virtually automatic increases for reinsurance costs.
- State university students will once again see 15 percent increases in tuition, while those at state and community colleges will pay 8 percent more.

- Public school students will return in the fall to school districts that have 8 percent less funding per child, a number sure to affect the classroom after four years of stagnant investment. Prekindergarten providers will see a 7 percent cut.

Read the whole at URL <http://www.tampabay.com/opinion/editorials/floridas-a-bleaker-place-for-many/1178143>