

FLORIDA STATE SENATE COMMITTEE APPROVES SCHOOL BUS AD LEGISLATION



A state senate committee in Tallahassee is divided about whether to allow advertising on school buses in the area. The committee narrowly approved a measure that would allow advertising on area school buses, according to Mike Vasilinda. The sponsor of the bill even considers it a dramatic response to the struggling economy. The legislation has cleared the state senate committee, which could turn school buses into rolling billboards. "I like yellow school buses, but I also like other programs," Sen. Bill Montford (Democrat from Tallahassee) said. "I like teacher aides in schools." The state senate committee that voted on the bill was very divided on the issue. "The push of consumerism on our children is, in this context, a step I'm not willing to take," Sen. Lizbeth Benaquisto said. A former first grade teacher made a trip to meet with the state senate committee in an effort to let the air out of the idea. "It's hauling our most precious cargo...We're going to degrade the bus, and it's going to cause accidents and it's going to cause heartache," retired teacher Donna Sanford said. The bill was slated for failure until an opponent of the bill decided to switch their vote to 'yes' so the idea could be kept alive. The critics of the bill fear that the safety messages on the school buses will be replaced with corporate advertisements. Other concerns for opponents of the bill are that drivers might concentrate too much on the advertisements on the buses instead of the flashing red lights. The price for the sale of the advertisements will be determined by the market but there are estimates that medium to large districts could make close to two million dollars in one year. The sponsor of the bill does admit that the idea for it is drastic but he says that schools need options to make money because of declining funding. "We're in a desperate situation," Montford said. "We're in a situation where we either cut programs, cut personnel, or we find other sources of revenue." The legislation also contains restrictions on who could advertise on the buses, but those restrictions are vague. The same state senate committee that voted for the approval of the school bus advertising legislation also approved \$250 million to send under privileged kids to private schools. The senate committee said the money would come from money that would be paid into the state treasury.

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