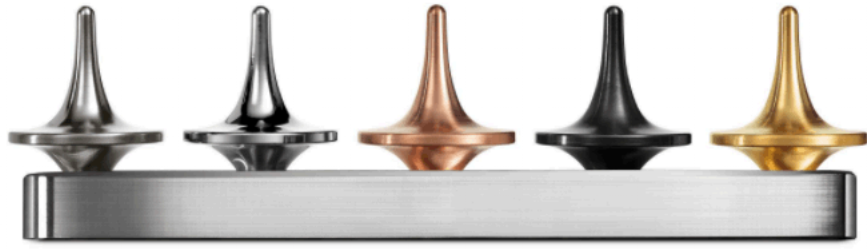


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FLORIDA

After weeks of GOP tension, Florida Legislature passes sweeping illegal immigration bills

The moves attempt to put Florida on the frontlines with Donald Trump on immigration.



"This is the Sunshine State, and today, the light is shining bright," state Senate President Ben Albritton said. | Francis Chung/POLITICO

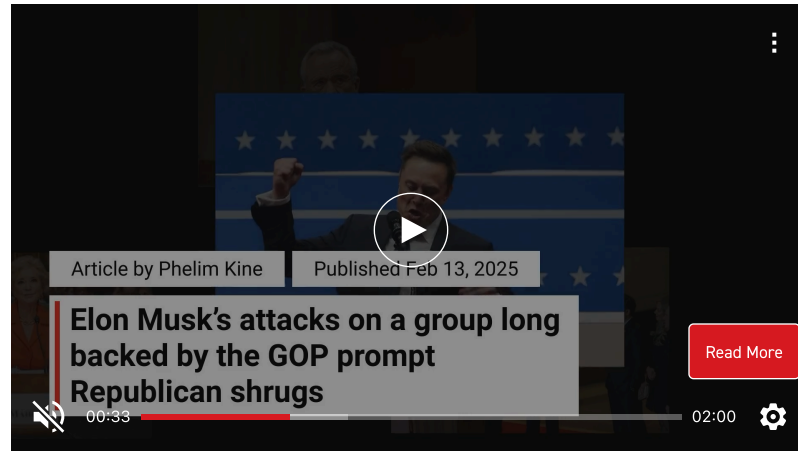
By ISA DOMÍNGUEZ and GARY FINEOUT
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After weeks of fighting among Republicans, Florida's GOP-controlled Legislature swiftly passed sweeping measures Thursday designed to aid President Donald Trump's mass deportations.

The moves attempt to put Florida on the frontlines with Trump, as the White House openly battles with blue states such as New York over immigration. The legislation guarantees the state will spend nearly \$300 million to help state and local authorities detain migrants and then hand them over to federal authorities for deportation.

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In the measure, which Gov. Ron DeSantis signed into law Thursday afternoon, legislators adopted criminal measures that may be tested in the courts — including one that would mandate the death penalty for anyone who has

“We are ahead of the curve on ending the illegal immigration crisis. We didn’t just sit [on] our hands. We got to work, we hashed it out, and we’ve got a great product going forward,” the governor said.

The legislation passed both chambers easily. The main bill that was sponsored by long-time Trump ally state Sen. Joe Gruters (R-Sarasota) passed that chamber by a 27-10 tally and was then approved by the House on a 85-30 vote.

The immigration legislation has gone through different iterations in the span of three weeks. One drastic change is the creation of a State Board of Immigration Enforcement responsible for coordinating with ICE, local law enforcement and the federal government in enforcing immigration laws. It also establishes a State Immigration Enforcement Council to advise the board.

Unlike the TRUMP Act, the bill the Legislature passed in its own previous special session and which was met with intense criticism from the governor and several GOP lawmakers, the new legislation received praise.

“This is the Sunshine State, and today, the light is shining bright,” state Senate President Ben Albritton said.

Concerning the intense public battle on social media between the governor and the Legislature, DeSantis said what happens within state government is “business” and “it’s not personal.”

“I know both Ben and [House Speaker Daniel Perez], they’ve worked hard to get in their positions,” DeSantis said. “They want to leave a mark. They want to leave a legacy of success. And so they’re going to have a good partner with me as governor, as they work through different policies through their respective chambers. But this was, I think, a healthy exercise, and I don’t think you’re going to see any lingering feelings at all, certainly not from me.”

Albritton backed the governor's sentiments and went further, saying the "exercise" has made their "Republican family" stronger.

For state Rep. Mike Caruso (R-Delray Beach), the latest special session offered a "big victory for the government" and "vindication" for himself as the sole GOP House member to vote against the TRUMP Act.

"Millions of Floridians spoke out against the amnesty bill, otherwise known as the TRUMP Act," he told POLITICO.

The measures also repeal a decade-old law that grants in-state tuition to undocumented students who attended a Florida high school.

Senate Democrats called for an amendment that would offer a "glide path" to undocumented students already enrolled in state colleges. It failed 22-14, with four Republicans voting yes.

"I just thought it was petty, and I'm sure that President Trump was not focused on [repealing this law]," Ileana Garcia, one of the GOP senators who voted yes on the amendment, said.

Minority Democratic Leader Jason Pizzo also proposed an amendment that would enforce all employers — not just those with 25 employees or more — to use E-Verify. It was ruled out of order since it "did not meet the call of special session."

"If we're going to be tough on illegal immigration and we're going to stem the tide and curb the crisis, we should be honest with ourselves and require all employers in Florida to use E-Verify," he said.

State Rep. Fentrice Driskell, the House Democratic leader, echoed Pizzo's statement, saying that "The Republicans in Florida want to sound tough on immigration, but they don't actually want to fix it, because if they wanted to fix it they'd be pushing Congress and President Donald Trump to address these issues."

Perez and Albritton mentioned that they would revisit the section on wiring money abroad and the E-Verify statute during the regular session.

"But immigration is a big enough problem to where I don't think we're ever done discussing on how we can fight the crisis of illegal immigration," Perez said.

