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# TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

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### FLORIDA LEGISLATIVE SESSION FALLOUT



The Florida Capitol is seen on Feb. 18. Florida's legislative session has come to a close, and several bills awaiting Gov. Ron DeSantis' review could shake up the way the city of Tallahassee operates. ALICIA DEVINE/TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

## Session tested free speech, expression rights

Stephany Matat  
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

Although Florida lawmakers didn't successfully negotiate a budget deal in time for the scheduled end of legislative session, they achieved multiple wins for the governor's agenda that simultaneously tested First Amendment bounds.

Gov. Ron DeSantis is term limited, meaning this is his final legislative session after years of placing Florida on the national stage for culture war and parental rights issues.

Florida has led in multiple initiatives questioned or even lambasted by free speech experts, including laws that prohibit teaching critical race theory in schools or offering diversity training in workplaces.

DeSantis has led in higher education reform, with the dismantling of liberal arts programs to remove gender identity and sexual orientation, along with regulating how race is discussed in school.

But the final days of the legislative session pushed out measures near and dear to DeSantis' administration, including anti-DEI policies that would affect rules and ordinances in local governments.

Another measure setting provisions for domestic terrorism hasn't been publicly praised by the governor, although public records show his office was involved in authoring it.

Members of the administration, particularly the state's education commissioner, gained wins on issues like combatting teachers unions with a measure that fully reshaped union certification elections.

DeSantis also succeeded in his goal of protecting consumers from the ever-evolving industry of artificial

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## How will clean-energy, utility laws affect city?

Elena Barrera  
Tallahassee Democrat  
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

Florida's legislative session has come to a close, and several bills awaiting Gov. Ron DeSantis' review could shake up the way the city of Tallahassee operates.

Lawmakers' talk of eliminating property taxes — a major revenue source for Tallahassee and other municipalities — has largely been in the spotlight, but there are two bills targeting city-run utilities and clean energy plans that could also become a reorganizational headache for the city.

The Legislature passed HB 1217, which would prevent local governments from adopting certain net-zero policies, and HB 1451, which would require municipalities to hold meetings before establishing utility services in unincorporated areas or other municipalities.

Calls and texts to request interviews with city officials who could speak on the specific effects these bills might have on the capital city's government went unanswered over the last week. City spokesperson Alison Faris declined to comment in detail, instead replying with a link to a PDF created by the Florida League of Cities that summarizes

"spotlight" bills.

The first 11 bills from this year's session were sent to the governor March 18, but the bills in question weren't among them. Regardless of when they're sent, here's what they say:

### Is this the end of Tallahassee's 100% clean energy plan?

In 2019, Tallahassee city commissioners approved a resolution to run its buildings, fleet vehicles and public buses off electric energy.

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## Congressional District 2 could be key 2026 battleground

James Call  
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

Three Democratic congressional hopefuls have altogether raised more than \$386,000 in their quest to flip a "ruby-red" north Florida district that is being vacated by U.S. Rep. Neal Dunn, R-Panama City.

The campaigns' finances are detailed in Federal Elections Commission reports filed through the end of 2025. Reports for the first quarter of this year will not be available until April 15. All six of the Republican candidates announced after Dunn unexpectedly withdrew in January and none has yet to file a FEC report.

Dunn said it was "time to pass the torch to new conservative leaders." But attorney Yen Bailey, data-technology consultant Nic Zateslo and Amanda Green — a former operations director for a U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) contractor — have other plans.

The trio have been working for

months to claim the 17-county district for Democrats. They've been raising money nationwide and building networks of supporters throughout the district.

The three hope that the 2026 mid-term election will be like the Tea Party

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