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### **Negron takes general counsel gig with GEO Group**

TALLAHASSEE — Former Florida Senate President Joe Negron has joined private prison giant GEO Group, a politically powerful company with contracts to run five Florida private prisons. Negron, who officially starts Tuesday, served as Senate president for a two-year period, which ended last week. He was eligible for another term but decided not to seek re-election. The company announced Negron's hire in a Nov. 29 filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission, saying he will bring "decades of legal experience" to the company. "As general counsel, Mr. Negron will oversee GEO's corporate governance, financial and regulatory disclosures and litigation-related matters," Pablo Paez, a company spokesperson, told POLITICO Monday. Negron most recently worked at the Akerman LLP law firm's West Palm Beach office. Negron did not return a request seeking comment. He replaces outgoing general counsel John Bulfin, who gave formal notice Nov. 26 that he was retiring, according to regulatory filings. Bulfin will get a \$1.7 million retirement package. Paez would not discuss Negron's compensation package. Bulfin, who has been general counsel since 2000, received a \$514,077 annual salary and a \$2.5 million overall compensation package, according to SEC filings. Negron long had a political relationship with GEO Group. During the 2016 election cycle, the company gave \$250,000 to the Florida Republican Senatorial Campaign Committee, which coordinates GOP state Senate races. As incoming Senate president, Negron controlled the committee that election cycle. The company also gave more than \$50,000 to Negron's political career since 2013, and \$100,000 in 2016 to the failed congressional bid of his wife, Rebecca, and a super PAC supporting her bid. In the current-year budget, passed while Negron was Senate president, the Legislature included a \$4 million pay boost for companies that operate Florida's seven private prisons. The move received push-back from some, including former state Rep. David Richardson (D-Miami Beach), who said it was the reason he voted against the 2018-19 state budget. "As Senate president, Mr. Negron made sure to take care of his friends at GEO, just as they took care to support his wife's congressional run, related political committees and other initiatives," Richardson told POLITICO in an interview Monday. "It does not surprise me that the GEO leaders have now offered him a big job inside their private prison industrial complex." He also pointed out \$2.9 million that Negron helped secure for the company in last year's budget. The money went to its Continuum of Care, what GEO calls its offender rehab program, which the company has focused on in recent years. The appropriation offered money to expand the program to facilities it operates beyond Jackson County's Graceville Correctional Institution. "All taxpayers should be appalled by the apparent conflicts of interest," Richardson said. The money approved by Florida lawmakers was singled out by Ann Schlarb, president of GEO Care, which oversees the program, in a 2017 earnings call. "As you know, we're very excited about our GEO Continuum of Care program," Schlarb said on the October 2017 call, according to a transcript filed with the SEC. "In Florida, we recently received an additional \$2.9 million in funding from the state legislature to expand the GEO Continuum of Care program to four additional facilities that we manage beyond the initial program GEO has been funding at our Graceville facility in Florida." At the time, Negron said the money was needed to keep the salaries at state private prisons after correctional officers at those facilities received a pay raise the previous year. "We gave a substantial pay increase to employees who work in our prisons," Negron said, as reported by the Tampa Bay Times. "The problem is, it created a wage disparity with the employees of our private prisons that are partners of us as well."