

OVERVIEW

Legislative Activity to Date

Since October of 2009, committee meetings have been taking place in preparation for the 2010 Legislative Session. The League has several priority issues which are expected to receive attention during this year's regular session which begins March 2. Work on some of these has already begun during pre-session committee weeks.

A special legislative session was held during the first two weeks of December that resulted in the **passage of commuter rail legislation**. There were two weeks of committee meetings in January. There are three weeks of committee meetings scheduled in February. The meetings scheduled for the week of February 8 will focus solely on the budget.

This will be the second year **Senate President Jeff Atwater** and House **Speaker Larry Cretul** will lead the legislature. **Senator Mike Haridopolos** is expected to be elected Senate President next year and this year he chairs the Senate Reapportionment Committee which is working on one of the League's top priorities. **Representative Dean Cannon** is expected to be elected Speaker next year and this year he chairs the House Select Policy Council on Strategic and Economic Planning which is also working on redistricting along with offshore oil and gas drilling.

There have also been some personnel changes that were made necessary by the death of Senator Jim King and the retirement of **Senator Ken Pruitt**. John Thrasher, a former House Speaker, won a special election to fill Senator King's seat and former Representative Joe Negron won election to fill Senator Pruitt's seat. **Senator Thrasher** has been named chair of the Senate Ethics and Elections Committee and also sits on the Reapportionment Committee. **Senator Negron** replaces **Senator Constantine** as chair of the Judiciary Committee.

Much of the talk by legislative leaders in recent weeks has been about the budget. The state is facing another year of declining revenues and the deficit

for 2010 is projected to be \$3.5 billion. Without new sources of revenue, lawmakers will likely have to make further budget cuts and face the grim possibility of state worker lay-offs and program reductions.

There has also been considerable talk around the issue of **oil and gas drilling** off the Florida coast. Representative Cannon, chair of the Select Policy Council on Strategic and Economic Planning, continues to push forward on the drilling issue. The committee held a meeting in January to discuss the pros and cons and hear testimony. Senate President Jeff Atwater is moving more cautiously than the House. He has tasked the staff of the Environmental Preservation and Conservation Committee with the job of doing a "detailed and comprehensive review of the implications of offshore drilling." While Senator Atwater's cautious approach has taken the wind out of the sails of the drilling proponents, next year's Senate President Mike Haridopolos supports offshore drilling so the issue is likely not going away.

There has been little activity on League issues thus far with two exceptions. With the threat and now the reality of **redistricting reform amendments** making the November ballot, committees in both Houses of the Legislature are in full defensive swing. It appears likely that they will take some action to either mount a legal challenge to the amendments or put alternative proposals on the ballot.

The other bill of interest to the League already seeing action involves a proposal to require **civic education testing** at the middle school level. The bill was passed by the Pre K-12 Policy Committee after League testimony in support.

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Quick Links to

League Priority Issues

Equitable Taxation

Redistricting Reform

Citizen Initiatives

Elections

Civic Education

Social Policy

Health Care Reform

Get Involved!

WATCH FOR YOUR CAPITOL REPORT EACH FRIDAY OF THE SESSION FOR NEWS ON PRIORITY ISSUES AND WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP.

FOR FURTHER INFO: The newsletter is available at the LWVF's website: www.TheFloridaVoter.org. For updates on or copies of proposed legislation, call legislative information at 1-800-342-1827 or visit the Florida Online Sunshine homepage at www.leg.state.fl.us.

Ben Wilcox can be contacted at benw@infionline.net.

League Priority Issues

The LWVF has set six program areas for 2010 including Government, Education, Justice, Social Policy, Sustainability and Natural Resources. Under three program areas there are priority subcategories as follows:

Government: Promote an open government that is responsive to the people of the state.

Equitable Taxation

The League supports tax legislation which does not jeopardize local service, addresses infrastructure deficits and removes unfair tax exemptions which affect governments' ability to serve citizens. Several bills have been filed, but so far little action has been taken. It's expected the League will once again be in opposition to the Taxpayer Bill of Rights (TABOR), although the bill has yet to be filed. Other legislation has been filed which the League is monitoring including a review of sales tax exemptions, applying the sales tax to Internet sales and requiring multi-state corporations to pay corporate income tax on profits made in Florida. Governor Crist has also proposed reducing the corporate income tax.

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Redistricting Reform

The League supports single-member election districts that are equal in population, that provide access for minorities, are compact and, when possible, take local characteristics such as political and geographical boundaries into consideration. Committees in both Houses have been meeting to discuss the 2012 cycle of redistricting and the possible effect amendments 5 and 6 would have on the process. FairDistrictsFlorida has said they will make a presentation to the committees in the near future. In the meantime, much of the discussion has centered around the question of whether the amendments would hurt minority representation. It appears likely the legislature will try to attack the amendments in some fashion and the League is prepared to oppose those attacks.

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Citizen Initiatives

For the past four sessions, the League has fought against passage of new restrictions on the citizen's initiative process. As bills addressing citizen initiatives arise; the League will oppose bills that increase the moneyed interests' strangle-hold on the initiative process and the legislative process and, where appropriate, advance the idea of a citizen statutory initiative.

Elections

The League supports legislation that promotes stricter election audits and would give the Supervisors of Elections more flexibility in selecting early voting sites. Several bills have already been filed regarding the early voting issue including SB 828, SB256 and HB 57. Secretary of State Kurt Browning has told the League he is not supporting an expansion of early voting this year.

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Elections bills in the Senate will go through the Committee on Ethics and Elections and Committee Chair Thrasher has filed at least 5 "shell" bills expressing "legislative intent" to revise elections or ethics laws. These bills will be the vehicle for amendments once the Chair decides what he wants to do. In the House, elections bills will go through the Governmental Affairs Policy Committee and the Economic Development and Community Affairs Policy Council.

Education: Priorities are Funding, Accountability and Civic Education.

Civic Education

The League is supporting HB 105 and Senate Bill 1096 which would create the "Justice Sandra Day O'Conner Civics Education Act." It would require an end-of-the-year test on civic education at the middle school level.

Social Policy: Priority is Health Care.

Health Care Reform

The league will continue to work with a coalition of organizations including the Florida Public Interest Research group to promote a health care system that provides access to a basic level of quality care for all Florida residents and controls health care costs.

Get Involved!

Ben Wilcox has been hired by The League to be its professional lobbyist for the 2010 legislative session. He will also coordinate with the volunteer LWV of Tallahassee Lobbying Corps, The State Board and Off-Board Point Persons on priority issues.



We are still looking for folks to participate in the Lobbying Corps so please contact Marilyn Wills (marilynwillms@msn.com) or Rebecca Sager (rsager@music.org) if you are interested.

Additionally, during the interim, LWV volunteers interviewed different members of the House and Senate to learn and understand each member's stance on key issues. An internal database of these interviews gives the League a head start on evaluating legislators' positions on the different issues that will likely come up this Legislative Session. The League would like to thank all of the local Leagues and members that participated in the legislative interview process.

Updates on League legislative issues will be provided on a regular basis through Capitol Report which is published every week during the Session. This issue is a review of important activities to date. And there will be a wrap-up report at the close of session.

Important information may also be accessed through the Internet at www.leg.state.fl.us. League members are encouraged to consult this site for information, including the following:

Committee Information

Depending on what issue you are tracking, there are generally standard committees of reference based on issue. It is a good idea if you want to track an issue that you attempt to identify prior to session the standard committees of reference that deal with that issue. By identifying the committees generally identified with your issue/s you can (1) become familiar with the members of the committee and the committee staff and develop relationships with these folks ahead of time, (2) participate in pre-session

committee meetings where there may be a variety of workshops or special presentations on the issue/s you are concerned about and (3) track activities in these committees more closely as well any efforts to waive the rules and develop new bills or substantially alter existing bills. The names of the Committee Chairs, members and staff of each Committee may be found at the above mentioned legislative website along with contact information.

Committee Projects

Committee staff is assigned projects to work on in-between sessions involving research and recommendations on diverse policy issues. Their reports go on-line once approved for consideration and are then taken up by the assigned Committees for action. They often result in proposed committee bills or bills offered by a committee as a whole as opposed to an individual legislator.

Committee Packets

For each committee meeting a packet is prepared by the staff. These include an agenda, any materials being presented at the committee meeting, any amendments being offered to bills on the agenda, staff analyses on bills on the agenda and more. They are generally available on line or at the document centers on the third floor of each chamber's building the day of and frequently the day before the scheduled committee meeting. As a general rule it is always good to check the document center just before a committee meeting begins for any updated packets. This becomes particularly important as session progresses and nears end.

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Bills

Roughly 2,350 bills have been filed for this Session already. The deadline for filing bills for introduction is March 2, 2010 at noon. However there are ways to get

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around the deadline and new bills may show up past then. Copies of bills are available on the state legislative website along with sponsor information, the committees to which bills have been referred for consideration, any legislative staff analyses that have been done on the bill and any actions taken on the bill with dates and voting records.