



League of Women Voters of Florida

Capitol Report 2010

March 5, 2010

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Overview

Week one of the 2010 legislative session is over and there has been action on issues that fall under the League's priorities.

There was a meeting of the Senate Reapportionment Committee on Tuesday. The committee heard from its staff member John Guthrie who made a show of demonstrating how difficult it is to draw a district that stays within county boundaries. The committee issued a challenge to newspaper editorial boards that have endorsed the FairDistrictsFlorida amendments to try to draw districts that meet the standards contained in the amendments. So far no Editorial Boards have taken them up on the challenge.

It appears increasingly likely that the legislature will attempt to put alternative redistricting amendments on the ballot that will be designed to confuse voters and weaken the FairDistrictsFlorida amendments should they pass. The League is monitoring this very carefully and will be prepared to speak against any such attempt.

There continues to be a lot of talk by the Governor and legislative leaders about the budget. It was a big topic in Governor Crist's state of the state speech on Tuesday. Many legislators are openly skeptical of the Governor's proposed \$69 billion budget because it relies on revenue from the proposed Seminole Gaming Compact. The state is facing another year of declining revenues and the deficit for 2010 is projected to be \$3.5 billion. If the legislature is unwilling to look at new sources of revenue, lawmakers will likely have to make further budget cuts.

There is a meeting next week that the League will attend of the Coalition for Fair and Comprehensive Tax Reform. The Taxpayer Bill of Rights or TABOR bill has yet to be filed, but the League is monitoring the situation as this legislation is dangerous and would tie the hands of future lawmakers to raise new revenue. The League is prepared to oppose this legislation should it be introduced.

The House Select Policy Council on Strategic and Economic Planning held a meeting this week to take more testimony on the issue of oil and gas drilling off the coast of Florida. The Committee Chair, incoming Speaker Representative Dean Cannon, said he continues to support drilling despite a report from the Century Commission released last week that shows drilling off the Florida coast would not lower gas prices. Representative Cannon's counterpart in the Senate, incoming Senate President Mike Haridopolos, filed his drilling

legislation this week. Senate bill 2622 would allow drilling no closer than three miles offshore.

In the area of elections, the House Governmental Affairs Policy Committee passed House Bill 1207, a package dealing with campaign financing. The legislation is a mixed bag with some good provisions and some bad. The measure, by Rep. Seth McKeel of Lakeland, restores some regulation of so-called 527 committees, political funds which spend freely in state campaigns but face few reporting requirements. The committees would be required to more openly identify their contributors under the bill, which stops short of reviving some of the tougher regulations on 527s overturned by a federal judge last year. The League supports this provision.

The bill also would re-establish campaign “leadership funds” which were banned in Florida in the early 1990’s. Incoming House and Senate Republican leaders have advocated renewing these funds amid the financial mismanagement at the Florida Republican Party attributed to former chairman Jim Greer. McKeel’s bill would relax current limits on state party spending in campaigns for leadership funds. Currently, Florida’s political parties can pour no more than \$25,000 into a campaign 28 days before an election. That restriction would be removed for leadership funds. The League does not support the re-establishment of “leadership funds” because it will create a new vehicle for special interests to use campaign contributions to influence public policy. The League would prefer that the legislature close the current loopholes that exist in the state’s campaign financing laws.

There’s a full slate of committee meetings scheduled for next week including a Senate Ethics and Elections Committee meeting on Tuesday. The committee will discuss a yet-to-be seen amendment to a “shell bill.” Shell bills are placeholders that express “intent to revise” election law. House committees are also meeting throughout the week.

League Priority Issues for 2010

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 that affect governments’ ability to serve citizens.
- **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.
- **Citizen Initiatives** – 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.

Education: Priorities are: Funding, Accountability and Civic Education.

Social Policy: Priority is Health Care.

Get Involved!

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

Updates on League legislative issues will be provided on a regular basis through Capitol Report which is published every week during the Session. Important information may also be accessed through the Internet at www.leg.state.fl.us.

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: <http://www.lwvfla.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.