

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®

OF FLORIDA

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LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF FLORIDA REJECTS ALL 11 CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS THIS YEAR

This November, Florida voters will see 11 of the most complex, confusing and, in some cases, misleading constitutional amendments proposed in recent memory. Voters will need to make a fundamental decision: "Do I want this in the state Constitution?"

The League of Women Voters of Florida urges voters to give a "thumbs down" to the 11 amendments they will confront on Election Day.

"Our Florida Constitution was crafted as a document that is intended to be difficult to change, and kept sacred for the purpose of identifying the structure of our government," said League President Deirdre Macnab.

Macnab also called attention to some things that all 11 amendments have in common--regardless of the issues they address: all were proposed by the state legislature within the last two years and all were placed on the ballot under new laws that allow the legislature and Attorney General to re-write summaries that do not pass court review. While legislators have steadily made it more difficult for citizen initiatives to be put to voters, they have removed safeguards relating to their own proposals.

According to Macnab, some of these amendments take aim at our fundamental rights, putting core American principles at risk in Florida. They attack the balance of power, right to privacy and separation of church and state. Consider:

- Amendment 5 (State Courts) would tip the balance of power in favor of political branches by giving them greater influence in the selection of judges appointed to serve on Florida's Supreme Court. The measure seeks to undermine the intent of our nonpartisan judicial nominating system by requiring Senate confirmation for all judicial appointments to the high court. According to former State Senator Alex Villalobos, "The major objection is that Amendment 5 puts the nominee back into a political process, with the specter of partisan lawmakers rejecting qualified appointees over ideological issues. Reduced in importance could be the honesty, competency or diligence necessary to be a successful Supreme Court Justice."
- Amendment 6 (Prohibition on Public Funding of Abortions; Construction of Abortion Rights)
 would allow Florida politicians to intrude on personal medical decisions between a woman, her
 family and her doctor. The League says that Amendment 6 is an example of big government at

its worst and could potentially endanger women's lives.

 Amendment 8 (Religious Freedom) is a misnamed amendment that would allow taxpayer funding of religious institutions. It will allow public money to be used for religious indoctrination. Saying 'No' to this amendment will not jeopardize existing funding for some religious groups' social welfare programs, which provide important services, but will continue to ensure that groups do not promote their specific religion at taxpayers' expense.

A number of the amendments (2, 3, 4, 9, 10, 11) put tax limits, exemptions and loopholes in the Constitution. "With the Constitution intentionally hard to change," Macnab stated, "a better place for such tax provisions is regular statutory law, where changing conditions make modification easier. Further, our tax policy needs a level playing field. It's already riddled with loopholes and these amendments cut state revenues drastically."

Reporting on a just-released <u>analysis</u> of Amendment 3 (State Government Revenue Limitation), Robb Gray, Director of State Engagement & Partnerships for the Washington, D.C.-based Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP), said, "Funding for Florida schools, universities, roads and bridges, health programs for children and the elderly, public transit, and a wide range of other public services will fall significantly if voters enact Amendment 3. A similar amendment in Colorado--the only state to have tried it--led to such drastic cuts in public services in Colorado that voters chose to suspend it. Amendment 3 would make Florida a much less attractive place to work and live by undermining the state's ability to fulfill its current responsibilities to its residents and make long-term investments that are fundamental to future prosperity."

Speaking about the CBPP's just-released <u>analysis</u> of Amendment 4 (Property Tax Limitation), Gray said, "Amendment 4 would lock a deeply flawed set of property tax changes into the state's Constitution, leading to tax increases for large numbers of Florida residents, a competitive disadvantage for new and emerging businesses, and significant cuts in local services--while producing little if any economic benefit. Amendment 4 would force local governments to choose between raising taxes on large numbers of year-round Florida homeowners, making deep cuts to local services or some combination of the two."

Summarizing the League's opposition to all amendments, Macnab said, "The Constitution is a governing document, and should be left sacred to that purpose. We urge legislators to use their law-making power, and not weigh citizens down with complicated amendments that do not belong in our state's Constitution. We urge all citizens to give these complex and inappropriate amendments a firm thumbs down"

The League of Women Voters of Florida Education Fund has a complete toolkit to support its voter education campaign, including a Voter Assistance Hotline, 1-855-FL-VOTER (1-855-358-6837), a one-stop website, **BeReadytoVote.org**, a mobile site accessible via smartphone, and a nonpartisan 2012 Election and Voter Guide, available in print in both English and Spanish throughout Florida and online at **BeReadytoVote.org**.

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The League of Women Voters of Florida, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. For more information, please visit the League's website at: www.TheFloridaVoter.org.