# Capitol Report

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**COUNTDOWN TO END OF SESSION: SEVEN DAYS REMAINING**

## LEGISLATIVE WEEK 8 OVERVIEW:

The League continues to press for an effective springs bill passed, speak out in support of in-state tuition for Florida's undocumented students, call for healthcare expansion for Florida's uninsured and oppose the expansion of tax payer funded private school vouchers.

WE NEED YOUR HELP IN THE FINAL DAYS OF SESSION!

1. Call your State Representative and tell them to:
    a. Support a meaningful Springs Protection Act
    b. Accept the $51 billion in federal dollars to provide affordable health insurance for ALL Floridians
    c. Oppose expansion of private schools with public dollars
2. Call your State Senator and tell them to:
    a. Support in-state tuition for all of Florida's high school graduates
    b. Oppose the expansion of private schools with public dollars
    c. Accept the $51 billion in federal dollars to provide healthcare to Florida's working poor.

**The Legislature is back in session to take final action on the majority of bills that have been working through the committee process. Lawmakers still need to negotiate a 2014-2015 state budget and decide the fate of dozens of bills. All committee meetings were concluded early this week, with action now taking place in the Senate and House chambers. The following is the latest news on where a number of our priority bills stand as we go into the final week of session!**

## SPRINGS PROTECTION BILL IN LIMBO:

The Senate has continued to vote in unanimous support of the springs bill (SB 1576) as it passed through its 4th and final committee meeting this week. The legislation is ready for a vote on the

Senate floor, however, the House has not scheduled its companion springs bill (HB 1313). Senators Simmons and Dean have been steadfast in their efforts to move this important legislation forward. A meeting with House leaders has reportedly been scheduled to seek an agreement allowing the Springs and Aquifer Protection Act to pass this session.

This week, the bill was substantially weakened in hopes of gaining House support. Lost are: the recurring funding level; wastewater treatment nutrient discharge requirements; implementation of best management practices by agricultural producers; and a prohibition on new concentrated animal feed operations and slaughterhouses in springs zones.

In the face of these substantive reductions in protection, opposition continues to be maintained by influential interest groups who have been the driving force behind the gutting of this bill, particularly the Chamber of Commerce and the Associated Industries of Florida. In spite of the weakening of the environmental aspects of the bill, it continues to put in place a number of important provisions:

- Stronger minimum flow and level regulatory standards for Outstanding Florida Springs.
- A process for septic system identification and, if deemed necessary, upgrading or connecting septic systems to a central sewer.
- Prohibitions on new wastewater treatment facilities that do not meet advanced wastewater treatment standards, the spreading or disposal of septage or biosolids, and hazardous waste facilities in spring zones.
- A process for evaluating, ranking and selecting proposed projects to improve water quality and water quantity.
- Local governments in spring zones must adopt fertilizer regulations.

The League of Women Voters continues to work with our legislators, environmental colleagues, staff members and interested citizens to get this legislation moving in the Florida House. Please call your State Representative and ask them to support the Springs and Aquifer Protection Act now.

**IN-STATE TUITION HELD UP BY SENATOR NEGRON:**

Senate Bill 1400, sponsored by Senator Latvala (R-Clearwater), would allow Florida's undocumented students who have graduated from Florida high schools pay in-state tuition rates. The companion bill sailed through the House, championed by Speaker Will Weatherford (R-Wesley Chapel). Movement in the Senate has been much rockier. In a procedural move, Senator Negron (R-Palm City), Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, refused to schedule the bill – the final committee stop before moving to the full Senate.

Senator Latvala attempted to add his bill as an amendment to 4 different education bills being heard by the committee, however, the amendment was ruled out of order on the basis that it was not pertinent to the bills. Senator Latvala, the champion of this legislation on the Senate side, says he has enough votes for the bill to pass if it is allowed to come to a vote. The League has initiated a series of action alerts calling on Senate President Gaetz (R-Destin) to allow the bill to be heard on the Senate floor. Senator Latvala believes the bill will be heard before the end of

session.  While President Gaetz opposes the legislation, the Governor recently announced his support for the measure.

Students from throughout the state traveled to the Capitol this week to advocate for in-state tuition for undocumented residents.  Please call your Senators - and particularly Senate President Don Gaetz, and ask them to support SB 1400.

Students and other activists speak out in the Capitol in support of granting in-state tuition to all of Florida's high school graduates.

**PRIVATE SCHOOL VOUCHER PROVISIONS BACK IN PLAY:**

In the final Senate Committee meeting of the session, private school voucher provisions were amended onto an education bill (SB 1512) sponsored by Senator Keli Stargel (R-Lakeland). Senator Stargel's bill establishes Personalized Spending Accounts for students with disabilities. The voucher language adopted in the Senate differs from the House version in that it does not increase the amount of funding for the program, or the income level of families who can qualify for the program.  However, the revised language does continue to divert public tax dollars to private schools, 78% of which are religious schools.  Private schools accepting public dollars are not required to hire certified teachers, and students are not required to take the same state mandated performance exams as public school students, making it impossible to assess student performance.

On an interesting note, the new Senate voucher language adds a provision prohibiting the use of the tax dollars for lobbying elected officials. In an embarrassment to legislators supporting the bill, Stand Up for Students spokesperson, Doug Tuthill was seen boasting about the organizations lobbying and political contributions in a highly circulated video. Stand Up for Students is one of the largest private school corporations receiving Florida's tax dollars. Please click here to view a video of Tuthill's comments. (Note: To go straight to the pertinent portion of the video, advance the video to 12:50 minutes, although the entire video is worth watching more than once!)

The League is strongly opposed to this unconstitutional diversion of public tax dollars to private schools and asks you to continue calling and emailing your legislators in opposition to SB 1512.

## NEWS CONFERENCE ON ETHICS:

On Wednesday, LWVF Executive Director Jessica Lowe-Minor participated in a news conference on ethics along with Senator Joe Abruzzo (D-Wellington) and Representative Lake Ray (R-Jacksonville). Held on the 4th floor of the Capitol building outside of the Senate Chambers, the conference announced the withdrawal of a bill that the League was opposing (SB 1474), as well as the intention of Sen. Abruzzo and Rep. Ray to work with the LWV and other good government groups to conduct a summit on ethics in August 2014. The purpose of the Summit will be to formulate ethics policies that can be introduced during the 2015 legislative session. Stay tuned for more details in the coming months!

## FLORIDA LEGISLATURE POISED TO REFUSE $51 BILLION:

The League has been advocating for the Legislature to accept the $51 billion in federal dollars available to our state in order to extend healthcare coverage to nearly 1 million Floridians. The Medicaid Expansion bill by Senator René García has not been heard in either chamber despite our persistent urging and press conferences. We will send out an editorial and action alerts later next week for you to help sound the alarm on this critical issue.

## TRACKING LEGISLATIVE ACTIONS:

The following link will take you to the entire list of bills that your League is tracking. You may click on any bill and be taken to the state website where you can learn about the bills, committee stops, as well as members and the legislative process.

**Click here for a list of bills LWVF is tracking this session.**

Every Friday during session you will receive a *Capitol Report* in your inbox. PLEASE SHARE

them with others. They will be brief, provide a progress report on League issues, and let you know WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP!

**Get Involved!**

Debbie Harrison Rumberger is the League's professional lobbyist for the 2014 legislative session. 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 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 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. For more information about the League's advocacy, check out www.TheFloridaVoter.org.