

Capitol Report

May 9, 2014

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END OF SESSION REPORT

The 2014 legislative session was choreographed to avoid controversial issues while blanketing the state with a billion dollars in election-year tax cuts. It was a session that dominates the historic record for the fewest number of bills ever passed. Here is a breakdown of what took place over the 60 day session:

Once again this year the Florida Legislature failed to address the single largest opportunity and problem facing the quality of lives of Floridians: the opportunity to extend affordable healthcare to more than 1 million Floridians and accept the \$51 billion in federal money that, according to multiple reports, would create approximately 122,000 high-paying jobs.

The overriding success of the session belongs to the undocumented students who secured the right to in-state tuition rates at Florida colleges and universities. In an effort spanning 11 years, enough Republicans joined Democratic legislators in supporting the measure that it passed both the House and the Senate. The legislation was a priority for House Speaker Will Weatherford (R-Wesley Chapel), and was guided through the Senate by Senator Jack Latvala (R-Clearwater). Governor Scott withheld comment on the provision, releasing a statement supporting the bill in the final days of session. The governor is expected to sign the measure into law.

We join with our partner organizations, including the Florida Immigration Coalition, in applauding Florida's lawmakers for passing this important legislation. Special thanks to LWVF Immigration Chair Elizabeth Pines and our League members for their enormous influence in making this bill a success!

THE GOOD:

- In-State Tuition for Undocumented Florida Students: allowing children of undocumented parents who have spent at least 3 years in Florida's school system to pay the in-state rate for tuition at colleges and universities. A special thanks to all who worked to made calls, sent emails, and met with legislators in support of this bill. Senator Jack Latvala (R-Clearwater), Representative Jeanette Nuñez (R-Miami) and the League deserve our praise for their work passing this great legislation!
- Environmental Regulatory bill extending water permits for 50 years died. Dubbed the annual "Petronis bad water bill", the companion bill was withdrawn in the Senate after the League spoke in opposition at a stakeholder meeting on the bill. The good news is, with your voices, the bill died.

- Carrying concealed weapons without a permit during mandatory evacuations was sailing through the House, but died in Senate. One of a number of bills that dubbed this session as a “gun rights free-for-all”, the League’s gun safety advocates joined in opposing this dangerous bill, which was also opposed by the Florida Sheriff’s Association.
- Allowing principals to place individuals in schools with concealed weapons died. Another dangerous gun rights bill, another victory by the LWVF advocacy team!
- Indian River Lagoon, Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades receive \$ 167 million for restoration activities. A great year for Lagoon and the Everglades, in an issue that has attracted broad support from our members throughout the years. Special recognition of Martin County LWV and their member Maggy Hurchella for her decades of commitment to restoration. Thank you to Senator Joe Negron (R-Palm City) for his leadership.
- While it was heartening to see some significant funds go towards protection of the Indians River Lagoon and Everglades, it was concerning that the rest of Florida’s outstanding springs received just \$30 million for work on protection measures. While \$30 million is a significant funding allotment to continue some work on springs protection, it is a far cry from the \$360 million in recurring funding that was included in the springs protection legislation that failed to be taken up by the House and would have allowed the state to address the decline of Florida’s network of freshwater springs.

THE BAD:

- Springs Protection died waiting to be heard by the House of Representatives. One of the most watched bills in the 2014 Legislative session, the springs protection bill flew through the Senate with unanimous support in every committee and the full Senate. LWVF Natural Resource Chair Chuck O’Neal, along with NRC committee members and League members throughout the state, championed this legislation every step of the way. Although we were unsuccessful in passing springs legislation in this session, we have been assured by both Chambers’ incoming leaders that the matter will be a priority in 2015. Our highest praise goes to Senators Charlie Dean (R-Inverness) and David Simmons (R-Altamonte Springs) for their leadership moving springs protection legislation through the Senate.
- Online Voter registration failed to make it past committee workshops held in either the House or Senate. The measure would have required Florida to provide online voter registration by 2015. Armed with letters, studies and information supporting the measure, the League worked closely with our elections chair, Charley Williams, to secure passage of this bill. Even though the measure would save Florida tax dollars and increase the ease with which individuals could register to vote, the bill

failed to move forward this session. We look forward to making this happen in 2015!

- State tax dollars were again directed to private religious schools, over the continuous objection of the League. This bill increases funding, increases the household income restrictions for applicants, and still does not require certified teachers in private school classrooms; does not prohibit state dollars from funding private religious schools, and does not require students to take the same standardized tests as required by public school students making it impossible to track private school performance. A special thank you to our Education chairs, Pat Drago and Sue Legg, and all of you who used your voice to expose the pitfalls of this bill. We joined with the Florida Education Association and school boards throughout the state opposing this bad bill. Recognition goes to Representatives Karen Castor Dentel (D-Maitland) and Joe Saunders (D-Orlando) for their efforts to oppose this bill.
- Climate change was absent from the legislative agenda, except to send a message opposing federal limits on greenhouse gas emissions to Washington. With thoughts of LWV member Kathe Thompson, who is marching across America to bring attention to the need for climate action, the League spoke in opposition to this dirty bill that would allow Florida to continue coal-fire electric generation long past federal regulations preventing its use. To the League's climate champions, thank you for your attention to this critical issue.
- More obstacles were created for women needing an abortion. Legislation requiring fetal viability tests were mandated for late term abortions, forcing women to undergo additional testing and restrictions on this very personal decision. The League described this bill as cruel and intrusive in testimony before the legislature.
- Revisions to the Stand Your Ground were heard, however, the legislative outcome was to additionally legalize warning shots rather than address the fear and concern generated by the existing law. Working with Representative Alan Williams (D-Tallahassee), the League argued for dramatic changes to Florida's SYG bill. The bill was killed in its first House committee stop. Stay tuned, we expect to see more efforts to change this dangerous law in future sessions. Gun Safety Leaguers – we'll need you again next session!
- Florida Forever, Florida's once premier land acquisition program, which historically received an average of \$100 million per year under prior administrations, was allocated \$12.5 million in this year's budget, exemplifying the need for passage of the Land and Water Legacy Amendment in November. Your work securing petitions for the Amendment 1 ballot initiative placed the League second, behind Audubon of Florida, in the number of petitions gathered throughout the state. Congratulations to each of you!

THE UGLY:

Medicaid expansion was ignored, in spite of weekly rallies by the League of Women Voters Lobby Corps calling on the Legislature to accept \$51 Billion in federal funding to provide affordable health coverage to 1.2 million uninsured Floridians while generating over 120,000 high paying jobs for the state. Dozens of rallies, meetings with Legislators, press releases and action alerts couldn't move Florida's decision-makers to take up this most critical of all 2014 legislation. Our special thanks goes to Lobby Corps champion, Kathy Winn, and the Tallahassee League for braving cold, rain, heat and sun to keep our message at the forefront throughout the session. Thanks also belong to Senator René Garcia (R-Hialeah) and Representative Amanda Murphy (D-New Port Richey) for sponsoring this important bill, and attending our Capitol Press Conference, moderated by our state President Deirdre Macnab, where area businesspeople spoke as well. Like an elephant in the rotunda, legislators ignored the billions of federal dollars, the 1 million Floridians without health coverage, and their moral responsibility to the civility of our democracy.

THE MOST IMPORTANT MESSAGE OF THE 2014 SESSION:

YOUR PARTICIPATION IN MAKING OUR MESSAGE HEARD CANNOT BE OVERSTATED IN TERMS OF ITS SIGNIFICANCE:

- OVER 150 MEMBERS OF THE LEAGUE TRAVELED TO TALLAHASSEE TO HAVE THEIR VOICES HEARD AT THE CAPITOL. BRAVO TO EACH OF YOU!!!
- THE TALLAHASSEE LOBBY CORPS HELD WEEKLY RALLY'S AT THE CAPITOL, ATTENDED COMMITTEE MEETINGS, MET WITH LEGISLATORS AND PROVIDED TESTIMONY. DEEPEST APPRECIATION TO ALL OF OUR DEDICATED LOBBY CORPS ADVOCATES!!!
- HUNDREDS OF CALLS AND EMAILS FROM OUR LEAGUE MEMBERS ON LEGISLATIVE ACTION ALERTS MOVED OUR MESSAGE. THANK YOU!!!
- DOZENS OF VISITS TO LEGISLATORS BY LEAGUE MEMBERS, BOTH IN HOME DISTRICTS AND THE CAPITOL, BOLSTERED OUR POSITION ON IMPORTANT BILLS!
- AND A FINAL THANK YOU TO OUR COMMITTED LEGISLATIVE ACTION CHAIRS FOR THEIR PERSISTENT REVIEW OF CHANGING BILLS AND GUIDENCE IN PREPARING LWVF POSITION PAPERS AND TESTIMONY!

The following list represents the actions that were taken on the bills the Florida League was fighting for or against during the 2014 Legislative Session:

ENVIRONMENT, ENERGY:

SPRINGS (FAILED): Requires water management districts and DEP to identify certain springs for protection from pollution and excessive water withdrawals. (HB 1313/SB 1576).

ENVIRONMENTAL PERMITTING (FAILED): Pre-empted local governments' ability to protect wetlands, extend water use permits up to 30 years for large developments and up to 50 years for water storage projects. (HB 702/SB 1464).

REGULATION OF CARBON EMISSIONS (PASSED): Urges Congress to direct the United States Environmental Protection Agency to allow Florida to determine its own guidelines, including exemptions, for regulating carbon dioxide emissions from existing fossil-fuel electric generating units. (SM 846)

DEVELOPMENTS OF REGIONAL IMPACT (FAILED): Expanding the exemption for any development within a county from a population of 1 million located within an urban service area to any county with a population of 300,000. (SB 372/HB 241)

SOLAR ENERGY (FAILED): Proposed constitutional amendment allowing tax breaks to businesses that install solar panels. (HB 825, SB 916)

SHARKS (FAILED): Increases penalties for fishermen caught in possession of fins cut off of sharks. (HB 449/SB 540)

ETHICS AND ELECTIONS:

ELECTIONS (FAILED): Creates online voter registration system by 2015 (HB 667/SB 784).

ETHICS (PASSED): Requires lobbyists at water management districts to register and disclose fees, requires ethics training for local officials (SB 846)

RESIDENCY (FAILED): Requires state and local candidates for public office to adhere to new residency requirements. (HB 571/SB 602)

GUNS:

WARNING SHOT (PASSED): Provides “stand your ground” immunity to people who fire a warning shot or threaten force; allows for expunging of court records for those who have charges dropped in “stand your ground” cases (HB 89)

GUNS IN SCHOOLS (FAILED): Enables superintendents or principals to designate school employees who can carry concealed weapons on school campuses. (HB 753/SB 968)

HEALTH CARE:

MEDICAID EXPANSION (FAILED): Accepts \$51 Billion in federal Medicaid expansion funding to establish the Healthy Florida Program extending health care insurance to all Floridians. (HB 869/SB 710)

ABORTION (PASSED): Bans abortions if a doctor has determined a fetus is viable outside of the womb (HB 10470)

FETAL INJURY (PASSED): Makes it a separate crime to kill or injure a fetus at any state of development (HB 59)

HIGHER EDUCATION:

TUITION (PASSED): Allows undocumented students who attended high school in Florida to pay in-state tuition rates at state colleges and universities (HB 851)

PREK-12 EDUCATION:

VOUCHERS (PASSED): Expands the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program by creating scholarships for children from higher-income families and expanding participation in private schools, which do not require certified teachers and direct over 70% of the funding to religious schools.

SAVINGS ACCOUNTS (PASSED): Establishes “personal learning scholarship accounts” which use public education dollars to reimburse the parents of special-needs students for educational expenses if they receive their education outside of the public schools system. (SB 850)

COMMON CORE (FAILED): Blocks Florida from moving forward with the Common Core State Standards. (HB 25/SB 1316)