



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF FLORIDA

Capitol Report 2011

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Overview

It's April Fool's Day; a fitting end to the fourth week of the 2011 legislative session. It was another extremely busy week with lots of action on issues of concern to the League of Women Voters of Florida. Both the House and the Senate budget plans are starting to take shape with the Senate spending about \$3.2 billion more than the House. The Senate proposes spending \$69.8 billion and would cut fewer state jobs than the House and take less money out of public schools. The House proposal would spend \$66.5 billion and reduce the state workforce by 5,245 jobs compared to the more modest 1,578 jobs that would be eliminated by the Senate plan.

A theme of both budget plans is privatization. The Senate plan would give corporations the chance to run correctional facilities and probation services in 18 counties around the state. Both budgets make deep cuts in health and human services programs. Another similarity: both cut state worker benefits by about the same amount making those cuts almost a certainty when the two chambers try to resolve their differences.

There was also action this week on one of the League's top priorities; the Taxpayer Bill of Rights (TABOR). TABOR was heard in the House Finance and Tax committee after the committee work-shopped it last week. TABOR would place a formula to limit revenue growth in Florida in the state Constitution. The formula is based on the rate of inflation and population growth. In Colorado, the only state that has tried TABOR, the results were disastrous. It forced drastic cuts to education, health, public safety and infrastructure.

The League helped organize a presentation before the committee including testimony from Carol Hedges with the Colorado Fiscal Policy Institute. She described the impact TABOR has had on Colorado's government services, infrastructure and economy since it went into effect in 1992. She said Colorado went from being in the middle of the pack of states in funding for services and infrastructure to dead last. She also said TABOR has made it more difficult for Colorado to recover economically from the recession. Despite her presentation and many others including one from the League, the committee passed the bill on a party-line vote with Democrats on the committee voting against it.

The Senate version of TABOR, Senate Joint Resolution 958, is now in House messages. Now that the House has its version and it is identical to the Senate version, TABOR could potentially come before the full House for final passage as early as next week. The League is working to defeat this legislation. **Please go here:** <http://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Representatives/representatives.aspx> **to find your Representative and urge him or her to vote NO on Senate Joint Resolution 958!**

Also moving quickly in the legislature are separate versions of Medicaid reform legislation. In the House, the two bills addressing Medicaid were passed by the full chamber this week. In the Senate, similar legislation (SB 1972) was approved by the Senate Health Regulation Committee. The bills differ in the details, but both would move the majority of the state's 2.9 million Medicaid clients to HMO-style plans. The two bills differ on how to hold providers accountable, which groups will be put into managed care and when the plans would take effect. The bills will be the subject of negotiation in the coming weeks to work out a compromise between the House and Senate.

In other health related news, bills addressing women's reproductive rights continue to advance. In addition to bills that require women to get an ultrasound and be offered an explanation of it before getting an abortion, now there are bills requiring a discussion of fetal pain between and a doctor and a patient after the 22nd week of pregnancy. Doctors would have to offer to give the unborn fetus anesthesia.

Reform of the way growth is managed in Florida continues to move rapidly in the House and Senate. The bills would essentially "gut" the landmark 1985 Growth Management Act. The House plan, dubbed "The Community Planning Act," would virtually eliminate state growth management oversight for cities and counties, deregulate developers and make it harder for citizens to go to court to block local growth decisions.

Governor Rick Scott and legislative leaders are planning to do away with the Department of Community Affairs this year and shift its growth management duties to some yet-to-be determined state agency. The Senate is developing similar legislation and the League is urging a "No" vote as this moves through the legislature. **Please go here:** <http://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Representatives/representatives.aspx> **to find your Representative and urge him or her to vote NO on House Bill 7129.**

There was good news this week for supporters of Fair Districts amendments 5 and 6. Florida legislative leaders Haridopolos and Cannon resubmitted the anti-gerrymandering amendments for federal approval, but they did it in a way that argues the amendments could harm minority voting rights in Florida. The action means the amendments continue to be a political football despite having been approved by 63 percent of the voters last November.

Last, but certainly not least, there was news in the area of ethics and elections this week. An ethics bill by Senator Mike Fasano which would have raised the penalties by one degree for crimes “committed under color of law” was defeated in the Senate Rules Committee. Under “color of law” means the office of a public employee or official was used to commit the crime. The bill was recommended by the recent statewide grand jury on public corruption.

Also this week, a Senate committee approved an ethics bill by Senator Paula Dockery that forbids state legislators from voting on bills that would affect their personal finances or business prospects. A co-sponsor of the bill, Senator Fasano, added an amendment that allows the Florida Commission on Ethics to initiate investigations into possible abuses of public office. Current law only allows the nine-member panel to act on complaints brought by citizens.

And finally, as an April Fool’s Day present to the League, the House Governmental Operation subcommittee on Friday took up and approved an election overhaul bill which brings back many of the same restrictions on 3rd Party Voter Registration groups that the League successfully challenged in federal court in 2006 through 2009. The 128 page bill was released the day before the early morning committee meeting. The sponsor admits it needs more work, but the committee approved it anyway. It’s a very broad bill encompassing everything from giving the Secretary of State the power to issue directives and advisories to the Supervisors of Elections, voting issues and campaign finance requirements and restrictions on the citizen initiative process.

You can help the League defeat this bad legislation by contacting the members of the State Affairs Committee which will hear the bill next. Please go here: <http://myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Committees/committeesdetail.aspx?SessionId=66&CommitteeId=2589> and ask the members of the committee to vote “No” on House Bill 1355.

Now that the 2011 legislative session is underway, you will be receiving Capitol Report on a weekly basis to keep you apprised of new developments. The League of Women Voters of Florida anticipates a very active session. We will be asking for your help to lobby for and against issues that the League believes are critical. Thank you very much for your support of our lobbying efforts!

League Priority Issues

The LWVF has set four program areas for 2011, including Government, Education, Social Policy and Natural Resources.

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

- **Equitable Taxation:** The League supports tax legislation that 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, provide access for minorities, are compact and, when possible, take local characteristics such as political and geographical boundaries into consideration.
- **Citizen Initiatives:** For the past four sessions, the League has fought against passage of new restrictions on the citizens' 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.

Education: Priorities are Funding, Accountability and Civic Education.

- The League supports legislation that provides for a free public school system with high standards for student achievement and with equality of educational opportunity for all that is financed adequately by the state through an equitable funding formula.

Social Policy: Priority is Health Care.

- The League supports measures to implement Florida health care in a manner consistent with the LWVUS position on health care reform.

Natural Resources: Priorities are resource management, land use, energy, freshwater resources, coastal management, environmental protection, public participation, and agriculture.

Get Involved

Ben Wilcox is the League's professional lobbyist for the 2011 legislative session. We are still looking for folks to participate in the Lobbying Corps, so please contact Marilyn 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 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 information, check out the *Florida Voter* newsletter, available at 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.