



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®  
OF FLORIDA

## Capitol Report 2011

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### Overview

The Florida legislature is working at a frenetic pace as week eight of the session draws to a close. This week was also a busy one for the League of Women Voters of Florida. Tallahassee League members were present at the Senate Budget Committee meetings on Monday and Tuesday and at a press conference on Thursday to help lobby against the elections bill that the League opposes.

The House and Senate ended their impasse over the budget this week after Senate President Mike Haridopolos and House Speaker Dean Cannon hashed out a deal in private. The deal, which involves the bottom-line sections of the budget, still means cuts for education, health care, transportation, the criminal justice system and state worker pay. The deal does not include the corporate income tax and property tax cuts proposed by Governor Rick Scott, although Scott continues to be confident that the legislature will adopt the cuts.

One reason that legislative leaders were able to reach a budget deal was the introduction on Monday of Speaker Cannon's plan to split the Supreme Court in the Senate Budget Committee. The measure was introduced in the form of an amendment by Senate Budget Chief J.D. Alexander. In return, Speaker Cannon agreed to the budget deal that allowed conference committee negotiations to begin in earnest. Toward the end of the week the negotiations hit another impasse on the \$29 billion health care budget, but legislative leaders are still hopeful the differences can be resolved in time for the scheduled adjournment next Friday.

There was no action this week on one of the League's top priorities; the Taxpayer Bill of Rights (TABOR). The Senate version of TABOR is in House messages. The House version, which is identical, could potentially come before the full House for passage any day between now and the end of session. Please go here to contact your state representative and tell them to vote **"NO" on House Joint Resolution 7221!** <http://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Representatives/representatives.aspx>

The terrible elections bill that was passed by the full House last week continues to move through the Florida Senate. Senate Bill 2086 and House Bill 1355 would make major changes to Florida's election laws. Both bills contain burdensome provisions that would impact the League's ability to carry out one of our core missions; to register voters. The bills set an unrealistic deadline of 48 hours for League members

or other voter registration groups to turn in a completed voter registration form. Missing the deadline means you may be fined.

Other bad provisions contained in the bills include no longer allowing voters who have moved to a different county to change their address when they go to the polls, reducing the time period for early voting, prohibiting giving voters legal advice when they are standing in line to vote and shortening the time period that citizen initiative petitions are valid from 4 to 2 years.

On Monday and Tuesday, the bill was on the agenda of the Senate Budget Committee. League members and other opponents of the bill attended both meetings and filed 37 appearance cards each day to speak or waive time in opposition. When Senate Bill 2086 was finally brought up on Tuesday there was only 30 minutes remaining for the meeting. By the time they came to public comment there was only 3 minutes left. Only one person was allowed to speak before the bill was passed. It was an outrageous abuse of the legislative process.

The League felt so strongly that the Senate leadership should be put on notice concerning the lack of public testimony and legislative debate that we hosted a press conference on Thursday to make that point. The press conference was well-attended and included presentations by the ACLU, college student Erin Murphy, Leon County Elections Supervisor Ion Sancho and Florida PIRG.

Senate Bill 2086 will next be heard by the full Senate. The League believes the bill represents an attempt at partisan voter suppression and is an attack on voter's rights. Please go here to contact your state senator and ask them to vote "NO" on Senate Bill 2086. <http://www.flsenate.gov/Senators/#Senators>

Also this week, the legislature took action on a number of bills dealing with women's reproductive rights. One of the measures would prohibit certain insurance policies and HMO contracts from covering abortions (HB 97). That bill was passed by the House, but then amended by the Senate to allow exceptions when the mother's health is at risk. That bill, as well as HJR 1179 which proposes a constitutional amendment prohibiting public funding of abortions, now must go back to the House for reconsideration. Other bills awaiting action in the Senate would require that all women seeking an abortion have an ultrasound (HB 1127) and place new restrictions on women seeking a third trimester abortion (HB 1397).

The House Redistricting Committees continued to meet this week to hear presentations on redistricting law from George Meros, the special counsel to the committee. Representative Perry Thurston, the designated leader on redistricting for the minority party, continues to attend the meetings although he was left off membership of the committee.

As mentioned earlier, House Speaker Dean Cannon's plan to re-shape the Florida Supreme Court was introduced this week in the Senate Budget committee. On

Thursday it came before the full Senate on second reading and ran into a torrent of criticism from members of both parties. It's questionable whether the Senate leadership can muster the votes to pass the measure. The proposed constitutional amendment would split the high court into two, five-justice divisions, allowing the Governor to appoint 3 new members of the Court, subject to confirmation by the Senate.

Next week is the final week of the 2011 legislative session unless the session is extended. The League of Women Voters of Florida anticipates it will be a very active week. 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](http://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](http://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](http://www.leg.state.fl.us).