



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®  
OF FLORIDA

## Capitol Report 2011

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### Overview

It's the end of the fifth week and also the halfway point of the 2011 legislative session. There was plenty of action this week on issues of concern to the League of Women Voters of Florida. Both the House and the Senate passed separate versions of a state budget plan on Thursday setting the stage for conference committee negotiations to resolve the differences. The Senate spending plan is about \$3.3 billion more than the House plan. The Senate proposes spending \$69.8 billion and would cut fewer state jobs than the House and take less money from 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 big budget issue yet to be resolved will be health care funding. Both budgets make deep cuts in health and human services programs, but the Senate budget would eliminate funding for drug and hospital expenses in the state's Medically Needy program. That program serves people who don't qualify for Medicaid, but have debilitating medical conditions. The House budget would preserve the program. The Senate also makes deeper cuts than the House in hospital Medicaid rates, cutting them by 10% rather than the 7% cut proposed by the House.

There was no action this week on one of the League's top priorities; the Taxpayer Bill of Rights (TABOR). TABOR was passed last week by the House Finance and Tax Committee and its next hearing will be in the House Appropriations Committee. 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 Senate version of TABOR is still 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/Committees/committeesdetail.aspx?SessionId=66&CommitteeId=2584> to find the members of the House Appropriations Committee and urge them to vote NO on House Joint Resolution 7221!

The House Judiciary Committee this week approved a revised version of House Speaker Dean Cannon's plan to reform the Florida Supreme Court. Opponents still claim the measure is an attempt to pack the panel with new, more conservative justices. Critics also say the plan could be aimed at changing the court's makeup before it reviews legislative redistricting plans next year, a charge Cannon and other supporters dismissed. Under the new proposed constitutional amendment (HJR 7111), the Supreme Court would stay as one, but the seven member panel would add three justices and have a civil and criminal division of five justices each; a change from Cannon's original plan to slit the court outright.

The League views this and other court related proposals this year as a threat to the independence of the judicial branch of government. **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 Joint Resolution Bill 7111.**

Reform of the way growth is managed in Florida slowed this week, but is still poised for passage in the last four weeks of the session. The bills under consideration 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. 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 also no action this week on the massive elections bill (HB 1355) passed last week by the House Governmental Operation Subcommittee. The bill would which bring back many of the same restrictions on 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Voter Registration groups that the League successfully challenged in federal court in 2006 through 2009. 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. It's expected the bill will be rewritten when it makes its next committee stop in the House State Affairs Committee.

And finally this week, the Senate Subcommittee on Ethics and Elections approved an ethics bill that forbids state legislators from voting on bills that would affect their personal finances or business prospects. The League supports this bill, but prefers a similar bill by Senators Paula Dockery and Mike Fasano that also 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.

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 (marilynwillms@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).