



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF FLORIDA

Capitol Report 2012

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Filed by: Ben Wilcox, LWVF Governmental Consultant

Overview

Since September 2011, committee meetings have been taking place in preparation for the 2012 legislative session. The League has several priority issues that are expected to receive attention during the regular session, which begins early on January 10 due to redistricting. Work on some of these issues has already begun during pre-session committee weeks.

The 2012 Legislature looks very much like it did in 2011. The Republican Party continues to have a majority in both chambers. In the Senate, there are 28 Republicans and 12 Democrats. Sen. Audrey Gibson of Jacksonville was elected in October to replace Sen. Tony Hill who resigned earlier this year. In the House, there are 81 Republicans and 39 Democrats. Republicans have enough votes in both chambers to pass constitutional amendments by a 3/5ths vote and to override a veto by the governor with a 2/3rds vote.

Next year will be the second year for Senate President Mike Haridopolos and House Speaker Dean Cannon to lead the Legislature. Earlier this year, Haridopolos abandoned a run for the U.S. Senate seat currently held by Bill Nelson, saying he wanted to focus on presiding over the state Senate. His stated priorities are passage of a bill to compensate a man for a Broward County Sherriff's Office crash that left him paralyzed and passage of an immigration reform bill. Cannon's priorities include passage of a budget, opposition to an expansion in gambling and reform of the higher education system. Both Haridopolos and Cannon are term-limited out of the Legislature next year.

Florida's Republican Gov. Rick Scott is entering his second legislative session. Scott has released a proposed budget that includes increased funding for public schools and cuts in Medicaid spending for Florida hospitals. Scott also wants to continue cutting the state workforce by eliminating 4,500 positions, including 2,800 filled positions. The budget next year will again be difficult because of a projected \$2 billion revenue shortfall. Scott's other priorities next year include reform of the state-backed Citizens Property Insurance Corporation, reform of the higher education system and reform of the Personal Injury Protection program for auto insurance.

The structure of the Legislature has not changed much from last session. Of the 120 House members, roughly a third are in their first term. In the Senate, that number is fewer thanks

in part to the return of some veteran lawmakers from days past including Sens. Jack Latvala and Gwen Margolis.

There have been some shifts in committee membership, but the leaders for the most part remain the same. Senate President Designate Don Gaetz chairs the Senate Reapportionment Committee; Sen. Miguel Diaz de la Portilla chairs the Senate Subcommittee on Ethics and Elections and Sen. John Thrasher chairs the Rules Committee. House Speaker Designate Will Weatherford chairs the House Reapportionment Committee; Rep. Jimmy Patronis chairs the House Governmental Operations Subcommittee (ethics and elections issues) and Rep. Seth McKeel chairs the House State Affairs Committee.

There has been little activity on League priority issues thus far with one exception: redistricting. Over the summer, the Legislature held public hearings on redistricting in 26 locations across the state. Since regular legislative committee meetings began in Tallahassee in September, both the House and Senate Reapportionment Committees have been sifting through the public testimony and analyzing the maps that were submitted by members of the public.

The Senate and House committees have taken different paths leading up to the production of their first proposed drafts of maps. The Senate has devoted separate committee meetings to each region of the state starting in the Florida Panhandle and ending in Southwest Florida. The House committee has focused on analyzing the maps submitted by the public using the “MyDistrictBuilder” website.

During the week of December 5, legislative leaders reached their first deal: Senators will draw Senate maps, and House members will draw House maps. Each chamber will produce its own plan for congressional districts. It sounds like an obvious agreement, but in practice it means House and Senate leaders have a better chance of making their incumbent members happy.

Also that week, both committees got their first real look at draft maps produced by legislative staff. The League has not yet made a formal comment on the draft maps, but you can read an analysis of the draft maps as reported by the St. Petersburg Times at: <http://www.tampabay.com/news/politics/national/proposed-florida-house-redistricting-maps-pit-incumbents-against-each-other/1205107>

And from the Orlando Sentinel at: <http://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/politics/os-house-redistricting-maps-20111206,0,130095.story>

The House of Representatives continues to be part of a lawsuit filed by Congressman Mario Diaz-Balart and Congresswoman Corrine Brown that challenges the constitutionality of Amendment 6 dealing with congressional redistricting. The League has been critical of the House’s use of taxpayer money to challenge an amendment that was put in the Constitution by more than 60% of the voters.

Both the House and Senate seem to be on a course to bring each chamber’s respective maps to the floor for a vote in the first or second week of the legislative session. This could

potentially set the stage for early passage of the maps and an expedited legal review. It's important to keep in mind that whenever the Legislature is in a redistricting session, all issues, including the budget, education, health care and taxes become potential bargaining chips for legislative district lines.

As if the once in a decade redistricting process wasn't enough of a distraction, the Legislature is likely to delve into some big, divisive issues that traditionally mean lots of money in the pockets of the lobbyists who roam the halls of the Capitol. Those issues include the proposed expansion of gambling in the state to allow gigantic "destination resort" casinos in South Florida, immigration reform and auto insurance reform.

While no major election reform legislation has been introduced yet, Sen. Nan Rich has once again filed SB 516, which would expand the list of sites where early voting can be held. She has also sponsored Senate Concurrent Resolution 180, which would ratify the proposed Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Good government issues that may be addressed this year include ethics and the Public Service Commission. Sen. Paula Dockery and Rep. Fred Costello have filed the "Ethical Practices Act of 2012" that would prohibit legislators from voting upon, participating in or attempting to influence the passage of any legislation that would result in their enjoying any special private gain for themselves or their relatives. The bill was a recommendation by the recent Statewide Grand Jury on Public Corruption. Sen. Mike Fasano is sponsoring a good bill (SB 212) that requires Public Service Commission members to abide by the judicial code of conduct while conducting communications and utility rate proceedings. Both bills were filed during the 2011 legislative session but failed to make it out of committee.

As you can see, it's sure to be an interesting and exciting legislative session and one in which the League of Women Voters of Florida will be very active. We will be asking for your help to lobby for and against issues that the League believes are critical. Thank you in advance for your support of our lobbying efforts.

League Priority Issues

The League has set three program areas for the 2012 legislative session, including Government, Education and Social Policy.

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

- **Finance and Taxation:** Support a state fiscal structure that is equitable in its distribution of tax responsibility and responsive to public needs.
- **Reapportionment:** Actively promote and support the reapportionment process.
- **Ethics:** Promote the strengthening of the Florida Commission on Ethics, including the areas of independence, subpoena power and the ability to levy fines and initiate an investigation.

- Election Law: Support greater flexibility in the selection of early voting sites.

Education: Support a free public school system for Florida 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.

- Promote adequate funding of public education with no use of public funding for the expansion of funding of private education through a voucher program.
- Promote the extension of public school testing of student achievement to private schools, charter schools and any institutions that receive state funding.

Social Policy: Secure equal rights and equal opportunity for all. Promote social and economic justice and the health and safety of all Americans.

- Health Care: Support implementation of the federal Health Care Reform Law in Florida, emphasizing access for all and control of costs.
- Immigration: Support the rights of legal immigrants to prevention or reduction of poverty, a minimum basic level of health care at affordable costs, the well-being of children and families and access to free public schools with federal and state financial assistance to communities disproportionately impacted by immigration.

Get Involved!

Ben Wilcox is the League's professional lobbyist for the 2012 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 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