



League of Women Voters of Florida

Capitol Report 2010

March 12, 2010

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Overview

Week two of the 2010 legislative session is over and there has been action on issues that fall under the League's priorities.

There were no redistricting committee meetings this week, but Marilyn Wills and I attended a meeting of coalition partners interested in redistricting and other election issues. The coalition is monitoring several "shell" bills or placeholders. These bills could become alternative redistricting amendments that the legislature would put on the ballot designed to confuse voters and weaken the FairDistrictsFlorida amendments. The shell bills include Senate Bills 2286, 2288, 2682, 2684, 2688, 2690.

The Senate Reapportionment Committee also issued another challenge to newspaper editorial boards that have endorsed the FairDistrictsFlorida amendments to try to draw districts that meet the standards contained in the amendments. No editorial boards have taken them up on the challenge so far.

Marilynn Wills and I also attended a meeting this week of the Coalition for Fair and Comprehensive Tax Reform. The Coalition is planning a press event that will urge legislators to consider looking at new sources of revenue to help reduce the predicted budget deficit of \$3.2 billion. If the legislature is unwilling to look at new sources of revenue, lawmakers will likely have to make further budget cuts.

The Taxpayer Bill of Rights or TABOR bill still has yet to be filed, but the League is monitoring the situation as this legislation would restrict the ability of future legislatures to raise new revenue. The League is prepared to oppose this legislation should it be introduced.

The House Select Policy Council on Strategic and Economic Planning will hold another meeting on Monday to take more testimony on the issue of oil and gas drilling off the coast of Florida. There has been no action on offshore drilling legislation in the Senate although incoming Senate President Mike Haridopolos has filed a drilling bill. Senate bill 2622 would allow drilling no closer than three miles offshore.

In the area of elections, both the Senate and the House held committee meetings this week. The Senate Ethics and Elections Committee took up and passed Senate Bill 880

which is virtually identical to House Bill 1207, a package dealing with campaign financing. The legislation is a mixed bag with some good provisions and some bad. The measure, sponsored by the new Ethics and Elections Committee Chair J.D. Alexander, restores some regulation and reporting requirements for so-called 527 committees. The committees would be required to more openly identify their contributors under the bill, which stops short of reviving some of the tougher regulations on 527's overturned by a federal judge last year. The League supports this provision.

The bill also would re-establish campaign "leadership funds" which were banned in Florida in the early 1990's. Even though these funds are still banned under state law, legislative leaders have been using the political parties to continue the practice. They solicit unlimited contributions and then use the money to fund the campaigns of their supporters within each chamber. Senator Alexander's bill would create "Affiliated Party Committees" which would be a separate campaign fundraising account under the direct control of the leaders in the Senate and the House. The League does not support the re-establishment of these "leadership funds" because it will create a new vehicle for special interests to use campaign contributions to influence public policy. The League would prefer that the legislature close the current loopholes that exist in the state's campaign financing laws.

I spoke against Senate Bill 880 in the Ethics and Elections Committee this week. I also spoke against its counterpart, House Bill 1207, when it was heard in the House Economic Development and Community Affairs Policy Council on Wednesday.

There's a full slate of committee meetings scheduled for next week including another discussion of offshore drilling in the House Council on Strategic and Economic Planning. There are also meetings of the Senate Ethics and Elections Committee and the Senate Reapportionment Committee.

League Priority Issues for 2010

The LWVF has set six program areas for 2010 including Government, Education, Justice, Social Policy, Sustainability and Natural Resources. Under three program areas there are priority subcategories as follows:

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

- **Equitable Taxation** - The League supports tax legislation which 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, that provide access for minorities, are compact and, when possible, take local characteristics such as political and geographical boundaries into consideration.

- Citizen Initiatives – 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.

Social Policy: Priority is Health Care.

Get Involved!

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 through the Internet 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 INFO:** The newsletter is available at the LWVF’s website: <http://www.lwvfla.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.