



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF FLORIDA

Capitol Report 2010

April 16, 2010

*Ben Wilcox, LWVF
Governmental Consultant
540 Beverly Court
Tallahassee, Fl. 32301*

Overview

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

First, the good news. Governor Charlie Crist has vetoed Senate Bill 6 dealing with teacher pay. This was a victory for the League of Women Voters of Florida and its many allies who contacted the Governor and asked him to veto this bill. The legislation would have based Florida teacher's salaries on the outcomes of their students FCAT scores and end-of-course exams. It would have stripped teachers of pay increases for advanced degrees and National Board Certification. Governor Crist vetoed the bill citing both the content and the method by which it was passed due to the lack of input from teachers, parents and school boards.

Thank you to League members who contacted the Governor regarding this issue!

In other good news, after months of study, Representative Dean Cannon announced that his committee would not be voting on a bill to expand drilling for oil and natural off the Florida coastline. The announcement came at the House Strategic and Economic Planning Council meeting on Friday. The issue now definitely appears to be dead for this year.

Also this week, the Legislature finally revealed the bills we have been expecting that attack the FairDistrictsFlorida constitutional amendments that would reform the redistricting process. Citing the need to "clarify" the amendments, the House Strategic and Economic Planning Council took up and passed PCB SPCSEP 10-01 on Thursday.

The Senate Reapportionment Committee took up and passed its version, Senate Joint Resolution 2288, on Friday. The League voiced its opposition to the bills at each committee hearing. Joining the League were a number of allies including the NAACP who took issue with claims by the amendments supporters that it would help protect minority voting rights.

Essentially this legislation is designed to minimize the impact of the FairDistrictsFlorida constitutional amendments should they be adopted by the voters. The proposed legislation would also have to be adopted by the voters, but it is very misleading and difficult to understand its true intent which is to allow the legislature to continue to draw bizarrely shaped districts for political purposes. The legislature is claiming that one reason they are proposing the legislation is to protect minority voting rights, but in actuality their language would weaken minority voting protections.

This legislation requires a super majority vote in both Houses to pass and the League is urging its members to call or e-mail their Senator and Representatives as soon as possible and urge them to vote against these bills. Please go to <http://www.leg.state.fl.us> and use the "find your legislator" function to find your legislator's contact information.

Also looming in the final weeks of the legislative session is SJR 2550/HJR1399; these bills bring back the voucher issue and infringe on the separation of church and state. The League spoke against the bill in the House; we support the current language in the Florida Constitution that prohibits state funding to parochial schools. If this legislation is passed, the state will be allowed to give tax monies to further education in religious schools. As you know, the Florida Supreme Court ruled that vouchers to private and parochial schools are unconstitutional. The proposed legislation will change the Constitution to allow this practice. The League urges you to contact your legislators and tell them to vote "NO" on these bills.

The bills that would require testing at the middle school level for civics education are ready to be placed on the calendar in the Senate. House Bill 105 has been passed by the House and Senate Bill 1096 will hopefully be debated and voted on by the Senate during the last two weeks of the session. Please call or e-mail the Chair of the Senate Rules Committees and ask him to place HB 105/ SB 1096 on the special order calendar.

Senator Alex Villalobos (305) 222-4160

villalobos.alex.web@flsenate.gov

The so-called Taxpayer Bill of Rights or TABOR legislation was pulled from its scheduled committee of reference last week and now will likely be heard next in the Senate Finance and Tax Committee. Senate Joint Resolution 2420 by Senator Haridopolos would require state government to follow a strict formula for raising and spending funds. It would severely restrict the ability of future legislatures to raise new revenues and meet the state's needs in education, public safety and health care.

The League believes passage of this legislation would be disastrous for Florida. Call or e-mail these committee members and tell them to vote "NO" on SJR 2420.

[Chair: Senator Thad Altman \(R\)](#)

[Vice Chair: Senator Charlie Justice \(D\)](#)

[Senator Michael S. "Mike" Bennett \(R\)](#)

[Senator Jeremy Ring \(D\)](#)

[Senator Ronda Storms \(R\)](#)

Next week, conference committees will continue meeting to try to resolve the differences between the House and Senate on the budget. The Senate has passed a \$69.4 billion budget that includes a major Medicaid restructuring plan. The House version of the budget is \$67.2 billion and it includes a drop in public school spending as well as cuts to public defenders and prosecutors. The two chambers will now negotiate their differences in hopes of reaching an agreement on the budget before the end of the session.

Next week the legislature will have a full slate of committee meetings as well as floor sessions. Please contact your legislators as soon as possible.

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 (marilynwills@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

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF FLORIDA

*540 Beverly Court
Tallahassee, Florida 32301
Email: lwvfl@comcast.net
Fax: (850) 222-4485
Telephone: (850) 224-2545*