



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF FLORIDA

Capitol Report 2012

March 16, 2012

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Overview

The regular 2012 legislative session ended just before midnight a week ago, but lawmakers quickly returned to Tallahassee this week for an extraordinary session on redistricting. In this special edition of Capitol Report, we'll update you on the progress of the redistricting session and provide a final rundown of what passed and what didn't when the handkerchiefs dropped and the regular session adjourned sine die.

The legislature returned to Tallahassee on Wednesday to respond to the decision of the state Supreme Court's decision to throw out the Senate's redistricting maps. The Court found that 8 of the Senate's 40 districts were invalid and did not meet the requirements of the Fair Districts' anti-gerrymandering constitutional amendment five. It also found that the system the Senate used to number the districts was designed to favor incumbents and they ordered the Senate to renumber the districts. The legislature has 15 days to come up with a Senate map that conforms to the Court's ruling.

House members met briefly Wednesday, but will not return until the week of March 26th, leaving the Senate to work on redrawing its plan. The challenge before the Senate is to redraw the 8 districts the Court found invalid, but any changes to those districts are likely to have a ripple effect on the other 32 districts.

As the Senate committee staff began the work of redrawing the districts, the Fair Districts Coalition, including the League of Women Voters of Florida, Common Cause Florida and the Latino advocacy organization La Raza, sent a letter to Committee Chair Don Gaetz. The groups ask that the public be allowed to observe legislative staff as they redraw the map and to be present when staff confers with legislators. Senator Gaetz ignored the request.

Senate leaders have set a schedule for the session that will have the first draft of the revised Senate plan released this Saturday at noon. Member will have till noon on Monday to file any proposed amendments to the plan. The Senate Reapportionment Committee will meet again to consider the plan and any amendments next Tuesday, March 20th. On Thursday the 22nd, the full Senate will meet to consider the committees plan. Once the Senate passes the plan, House members will consider it in a series of meetings designed to have a final plan adopted in time to meet the 15 day deadline.

As the Senate plan was being redrawn in the Capitol, across the street in the Leon County Courthouse a judge listened to arguments over the Congressional district plan. The Fair Districts Coalition is challenging that plan as well and on Friday the judge rejected arguments by the legislature that it is impossible to resolve the case before the impending elections. The judge set a trial date in that case for April 16th.

Now as promised, here's a rundown of the final action on the bills that the League was tracking in the 2012 legislative session.

What Passed

- A \$70 billion no-new-taxes state budget that includes the elimination of 4,400 state jobs, \$300 million in budget cuts to the state's universities and colleges as well as cuts to prisons, health care and social services.
- A fraud-reform plan (HB 119) intended to lower auto insurance premiums which doesn't include a requirement that insurers actually reduce their rates.
- A "modest" renewable energy bill (HB 7117) supported by Agriculture Commissioner Adam Putnam that includes renewable energy incentives that would restore tax exemptions and credits that expired in 2010.
- A bill (HB 1263) that repeals a statewide septic tank inspection program, but still requires inspections in counties that have first magnitude springs.
- A bill (SB 1986) that lifts revenue caps that were placed on the state's water management districts last year and restores oversight of the WMD's from the legislature to the Governor.
- A bill (HB 639) prohibiting water management districts from making cities and counties give away treated or "reclaimed" water.
- **Two** joint resolutions (HJR 93 and HJR 95) asking voters to create a new property tax exemption for the surviving spouse of a military veteran who died while on duty or the spouse of a police officer, firefighter, paramedic or correctional officer killed on duty.
- A joint resolution (HJR 1003) asking voters to increase an exemption for tangible personal property taxes.

What Failed

- A bill (SB 2083) that would have privatized prisons in the southern part of the state.
- The so-called "parent trigger" bill (SB 1718) giving parents the ability to petition to have a failing public school become a charter school.

- An elections bill (HB 1461) that the League supported that resolved a conflict in state election law and retained a protection against voter challenges at the polls.
- A bill (SB 206) that would give citizens a “reasonable” right to speak at meetings of local government and state executive branch bodies.
- A bill (SB 552) that would have barred lawmakers from voting on legislation in which they or a family member have a financial stake.
- A bill (SB 290) that would have imposed a 24-hour waiting period before a woman can have an abortion and restricted ownership of abortion clinics to doctors who specialized in abortion procedures during their residency.
- A bill (HB 1103) raising what’s known as the “high water mark” giving private property owners more control of submerged lands.
- A bill (HB 359) giving legislators and legislative staff “immunity” from having to testify or produce documents in lawsuits.
- A bill (SB 106) enabling American citizens who went to school in Florida, but who are children of undocumented aliens, to attend Florida universities and pay in-state tuition.
- A bill (SB710) allowing up to three destination resort casinos in the state.

As you can see, this was an interesting and exciting legislative session and one in which the League of Women Voters of Florida was very active. We will continue to update you on the progress of the extraordinary session on redistricting. Thank you very much for your support of our lobbying efforts. All in all it was a very good session for the League and your help made all the difference.

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. 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